A Grounds for the Greater Good: Evoking the Spirit of the Meeting House

All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church West Brattleboro, VT



My Motivations

Background and Future:

Democratic Design and the importance of Place Easing Inevitable Change Water and the West Creating Spaces for Connection and Contemplation



The Process

Orientation Isolated Analysis Developing Comprehensive Comprehension Conceptual Design Getting Feedback Scaling In and Finalizing Design Alternatives



Designing for a Forward-Thinking Community



Increased accessibility to the building Reduced impact of snow + stormwater Activated outdoor spaces

Community Foundations

Environmental Stewardship



Honoring Historical Legacy



Creating Space for Community





Off of Route 9 as you reach the West Brattleboro Village Center, nestled between residential and rural residential areas

Context

10-acres include two right-of-way parcels Tucked on the northern slope of a hill of glacial till characteristic of this part of Southern Vermont







Trash receptacle in front of current ADA entrance

ADA Lot + Fire Lane

2 ADA entrances

accessible to all

entrance was

but wish the main

Accessibility • Water Mitigation • Outdoor Space

Snow piles off roof and falls into main walkway



Lower lot becomes dangerously icy in the winter

Main Lot



Deep rills in lot a driving/ walking hazard

Sediment buildup in the swale below main walkway and clogs culvert

Rethink main lawn as a place for services: amphitheater, maple, and lowmaintenance planting design



Memorial trees and stone benches an appreciated facet of landscape



Few spaces to gather, always requires setup and takedown

Resurrect trails for increased use of forest







Interested in space for walking, meditation

Circulation

<u>Forest</u>

Edge currently acts as a **barrier** to circulation

Proximity to neighbors more apparent in some places – important when considering future forest circulation

<u>Parking</u>

Primary users of building spread throughout week, parking lot **usually less than half full**

Lot edges **undefined and circulation** is informal - could park 60 cars under current pattern, but possibly up to 80 if done so efficiently

ADA space

Limited to small portion of property because of slope

8 feet of elevation change from main entrance to bottom of lot

14-15 feet of elevation change from bottom of lot (N) to the top (S)









Accessibility • Water Mitigation • Outdoor Space

DRIVEWAY



<= 2.0000
2.0000 - 5.0000
5.0000 - 8.0000
8.0000 - 10.0000
10.0000 - 15.0000
15.0000 - 25.0000
25.0000 - 33.0000
> 33.0000

- \longleftarrow direction of flow
- ← most intense flow

concentrated permeable space

Drainage

Property minimally affected by upslope water

Important to consider downslope neighbors

Steepest slopes seem linked to edges of current impermeable space

Active erosion on northwest corner where stormwater is directed from building and lot

Soils and Erosive Slope





Brook at the base of western slope considered a **Highest Priority Surface Water and Riparian Area**. Is part of the Whetstone Brook Watershed that leads to the Connecticut River

Well-draining, fine sandy loam expanses most of the property... but there is a hard pan layer ~2 feet deep on the steep western slope

Unclear the **extent of hardpan on east side** of property and proximity to bedrock

Redirecting water off the west side further upslope may result in **same erosion problem over time**













Lots of **downed trees** - may help give shape to gathering space/a consideration when siting

Invasive growth -aesthetic displeasure/ecological concern along forested edges, wetter areas. Introduced species growing in southeastern forest

Central **Norway Maple** makes main lawn more inviting but is spreading into forest

Diseased trees in western forest (A) – some pose a future threat to building and power lines





Vegetation



Design #1: Easy Adaptation

ADA parking | 3-5 spots Trash and compost | Secure area under fire escape stairs

Main lawn stormwater | Install spreader, added vegetation in central lawn area Lot runoff | Redirect to central island and eastern forest Ice/snow mitigation | Paved, crowned walkway berm, tall pines thinned to provide more opportunity for snow melt

Pine island | Walking/sitting edible, perennial garden and small gathering space

Main lawn | Developing amphitheater space to seat 50 Norway Maple | Shaded platform underneath Forest Management | Remove diseased hemlocks along power line



added vegetation to reduce stormwater runoff amphitheater and platform under Norway maple





Design #2: Access Forward

ADA parking | 5-6 spots

Trash and compost | Bump out north of the fire lane

ADA main entrance | Boardwalk/ramp through main lawn area Main lawn stormwater | Redirect pipe to northern slope, install river rock swales and central water infiltration feature and vegetation to redirect water away from building and ramp and reduce run off

Lot runoff | Downsize parking lot to 50 to shrink impermeable space, most water redirected to planted infiltration basins to the east

Ice/snow mitigation | Most tall pines removed, regrade main Iawn area for water/snow to move away from building Forest | Acccessible trails and gathering spaces to the north and east

Main lawn | Accessible main gathering space at the top of the main lawn, stormwater management area doubles as an accessible small gathering space/sitting area

Forest Management | Remove diseased hemlocks along power line







Design #3: Eco Retreat

ADA parking | 2-4 spots

Trash and compostBump out east of fire laneMain lawnVegetated infiltration basin gardenIce/snow mitigationSolar overhang to extendsnowfall away from main walk, all pinesremoved

Lot runoff | Downsize parking lot to 45-50 spots shrink impermeable space, east rain garden catchment

Slope Stabilization | Bioengineered NW slope stabilization and streambank restoration

Forest | Extensive trails and forest gathering spaces to the north and east, observation deck style platform off steep west slope and multipurpose gazebo in east forest for solitude/small gatherings

Main Lawn | Midstory trees planted to shield building from sun to the south and east, edible, perennial, shade-providing garden sitting area above main lawn, developing amphitheater space to seat 50

Norway Maple | Remove to create a platform feature area Forest Management | Remove diseased hemlocks along power line, selectively thin SW forest in phases of hemlock, beech to proactively promote succession









Remaining Quandaries

- How far into the future would the community like to consider? Does forest management and riparian protection fall within their goals as a Green Sanctuary Congregation?
- What aesthetics do they find suitable for the front of their iconic building?
- What is the extent of the hard pan and what limitations might it pose on grading and stormwater designs?
- What is the rate of erosion on the northwest slope, does it pose a future hazard to the building, and does the community have an obligation to stabilize it?

