

VISION FOR RED CEDAR FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE (2006)

Meetinghouses in both England and the Delaware Valley tended to be simple rectangular buildings, with massive stone walls and plain white shutters.

Double doors...were sheltered beneath a projecting hood.

A striking feature of Quaker meetinghouses was the intensity of their illumination. Interiors were very bright. Windows were large, numerous, and set high in the walls. Interior walls and ceilings were frequently “whitened” for additional effect. Quakers preferred to worship in a room that was suffused with light—a symbol of their beliefs, and a sharp contrast with the gloom of Anglican churches and especially Puritan meetinghouses which were sometimes so dark that ministers complained they were unable to read their sermons. Inside the meetinghouse, all “vain” and “needless” furniture was ruthlessly stripped away. Quakers had no need for pulpits and altars...

– David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*

As we move forward in building a meetinghouse on the lot we have purchased in Old Town, we hold in mind the **Quaker testimonies** that are part of our history and our heritage. We seek a place of simple beauty that, as historic Quaker meetinghouses do, will reflect our historical testimonies of **simplicity, equality, and right stewardship of resources**. The outward structure should project quiet and calm, should appear welcoming to all and be in harmony with nature. In accord with the SLUP agreement, it should be in keeping with the architectural style of Old Town. In interior space, we expect that our main meeting room will be plain and unadorned, but filled with light. Accessibility to our building and its rooms cannot be compromised.

Like most Quaker meetings, our community is relatively small (about 40 households) and our collective financial resources are modest. Our commitment to a suitable meetinghouse, however, is strong, and we are prepared to begin with a conservative budget but with a realistic hope for a more optimistic one. Our members have expressed a strong desire to build a meetinghouse sooner rather than later. We recognize that this could mean, in the short run, settling for a structure that is less than ideal, so the structure should be designed and built with possible future improvements and additions in mind. We are also willing and able to carry out some work ourselves. We will remain flexible as we plan our space and will continue to seek Divine Guidance, trusting as Quakers have always done, that a way will open.

Space, Facilities, and Features

We envision a fully accessible structure. We do not want to seal off options prematurely, but based on the geo-tech study done in 2004, we expect this will probably be a two-level building (main story and a full basement).

Beyond that, we can identify several essential wants and needs.

1. We attach high priority to **energy efficiency and related environmental concerns**. Materials should be chosen for durability, low maintenance with non-toxic finishes and cleaning agents, and minimal allergenicity.
2. A **large meeting room** that would comfortably seat 50-75 people (arranged in a squared circle, empty at center) and possibly 150-200 if rearranged to some linear seating arrangement for other events. The area of this room should be at least 900 square feet, and as big as 1200 square feet. [A design feature that allows us to open/extend this basic space up to 1500 square feet for some special occasions would be welcome.] This room will be used for our silent worship, and we must be able to ensure that it is **very**

quiet (though not necessarily “soundproof.”). Ideally, it should have many windows that provide **good natural light**. There should be some entry hallway or foyer (w/coat area) before the meeting room itself so it can be entered quietly, not directly from the outside.

This room will be the center of our meetinghouse, and a survey of our members and attenders pointed to three broad areas of interest and concern regarding design:

- *Facilitating Gathered Worship*. This category included the need for simplicity, light, quietness, facing benches, high ceilings, and openness in the room used for Meeting for Worship.
- *Overall Impression*. The overall impression for the meeting room is of simplicity and natural light, a connection to nature, a warm and welcoming atmosphere, a sense of coziness and shelter, use of natural materials (wood floors), possible low built-in bookshelves (min 100, but likely up to 200 linear feet) in the meeting room, provision for physical comfort, and with the typical arrangement of seats (possibly a combination of plain wooden benches and chairs) in a hollow circle or square.
- *Practical considerations* included energy efficiency, use of natural lighting, full accessibility, acoustics, air circulation, and design and construction allowing for expansion in the future.

3. **Multi-purpose large open space in the lower level for First Day School groups** (with dividers or moveable bookshelves and/or other storage units for materials to variously divide the space) **and also for potluck fellowship**. This should not feel like a dark, low-ceiling basement, but should have sufficiently high ceilings to allow near-ceiling windows to bring in natural light, and with soundproofing between floors so noise would not pass up to Meeting Room. It should have direct access to outside play area.

3. **Full accessibility** in the rooms and between floors. We anticipate an elevator.

4. One **small room** with comfortable soft chairs for the teen group which could double as an office with storage for archives (min 50 cu feet of archive boxes plus four-drawer lateral file case), a small committee meeting room, or a private space. Possibly a second small room (ideally also on the ground floor) for a nursery, doubling for above uses as well.

5. A **kitchen in the lower level**. Appliances might be modest, residential ones at first rather than commercial but if so, should be amenable to eventual upgrades.

6. Two **restrooms** on the first floor and possibly an additional one in the lower level (all accessible).

7. Enough **storage** inside for folding tables, chairs, peace signs, and outside (shed?) for lawn equipment.

8. Attention to **site plan**: Welcoming from the street. As much room as possible in rear left for trees and plantings, garden, socializing, and meditation. A fenced play area placed where noise would not disturb the worship and be away from any contaminated soil. Parking spaces just as needed to meet applicable zoning requirements. Walkway to rented parking spaces behind Goldenrod.

Would be nice, but not essential right away.

- In addition to the play area, the grounds in back should include a patio for picnics and socializing, a child-friendly garden free of poisonous and delicate plants and with space for the children to grow herbs and vegetables, and a secluded meditation spot.
- A gas fireplace (or stove?) in the Meeting room with a nearby reading nook/corner.
- Good air circulation/cooling/heating—or the possibility of renovations to achieve these effects.

In general, overall square footage is not as important as the ability to satisfy our various needs.