



Dear PSNE Trustees,

As many of you are aware, Westminster has been enduring the struggle that many churches of our size are experiencing in the current era: decrease in membership and pledged income alongside an increase in expenses to care for the building and staff our ministry dreams. Throughout my tenure at Westminster we have taken steps to mitigate our budget shortfall in various ways: experimental and innovative ministries, shifting the structure of our boards, staff and worship and more. Some of these experiments were met with resistance and some were met with success, but ultimately we continue to see a gap between our income and our expenses.

If you look through the Discernment Timeline attached, you will see the variety of resources, ideas and strategies we have used throughout the years to revitalize our ministry. We have had the gift of generous donors and wise volunteers, as well as an endowment left to us by the founders of our congregation; We have been blessed with a strong and dedicated staff and creative leadership. All these gifts from God have helped us arrive at our present moment.

We are deeply grateful for the action of the trustees in 2024 to engage with Vandersall and Flourish in Place to support Westminster's understanding of our property assets and our path forward. Since receiving their feedback in November of 2024, Westminster created two working groups to delve more deeply into: 1) Finding an "anchor tenant" to take responsibility for a significant portion of the building (Our Rental Prospect Team) and 2) Investigating the possibility of using a portion of our property for affordable housing (Our Housing Development Team.)

Both of these teams have had positive movement. The Rental Prospect Team has worked with the West Hartford YMCA to prepare to host a summer camp in our building this summer (2026). Unfortunately, the process of zoning permits delayed advertisement of the camp, and the camp did not get enough sign-ups to move forward to host the full-day camp. However, the ground has been laid to deepen and strengthen our relationship with the YMCA and we hope to continue to grow that partnership.

The Housing Development Team has also progressed significantly over the last 18 months. This group read pieces of the book "Gone for Good", edited by Mark Elsdon, and worked with contacts through the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance to learn more about the landscape of Affordable Housing in Connecticut. We have also been blessed by the wisdom and experience of one of our members, Pam Torsiello, who recently retired from a career in real estate development and financing. Pam's expertise has been invaluable as we have moved through this process.

As you can see from the timeline, at the beginning of 2026, Westminster was awarded a grant from the Housing Ministries of New England which enabled us to hire a real estate development consultant (Liz Torres of Housing Smarts) and an architect, Kathy Dorgan, both with extensive experience in developing affordable housing and/or converting spaces for diverse or different uses, including housing. Liz and Kathy came highly recommended and have been well received by our congregation and our session and leadership.

The Rev. Julie Emery | Minister / Head of Staff

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At this point, the Session has seen design options, has given some feedback, and continues to ask hard questions about next steps. We are still hopeful that we can keep our ministry in our current church building while sharing our space with an anchor tenant. We are **also** discerning whether God is calling us to use the gift of our property to help house our neighbors in need.

There are still important items needed for us to properly discern the way forward. We need a full audit of our building to properly plan for future maintenance and the life of foundational items such as our roof, boiler, etc. We need to begin work with an engineer to assess the viability of any conversion of space that might be needed. We need to continue our work with Liz and Kathy to help us through this process. At this point, we have spent the 25K grant on our work with Liz and Kathy. While this grant is renewable, we will not have a chance to re-apply for the grant until October. We want to build on our current momentum and continue our process without a pause for the summer. It is estimated that we need \$60k to continue our pre-development process.

We have had conversations with PILP and understand that if we move forward with developing housing on the property, there are wonderful resources to tap into. We are also exploring the resources available through the Presbyterian Foundation. Still, we feel that support from PSNE is needed to get us through this discernment process and to a decision.

We would love to speak with the Trustees more about all that we have learned. We are also willing to document our process as much as possible to help other congregations in their own work and movement. We pray that God's wisdom continues to guide us, and the trustees, as we seek to share God's grace and love in our community.

With hope and faith,

Rev. Julie Emery