

# WELCOME CENTER REMODEL PROJECT

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After worship on Sunday, July 14th, 2024, Session held a forum in Fellowship Hall to present our vision for a new Welcome Center. Thank you to all those who attended. The presentation sparked some good questions and discussion.

Overall the feedback has been very positive about the Welcome Center project. This project will enhance our physical building to reflect our values of being an open and welcoming church to the community. Our webpage says “Welcome to First Presbyterian Church in Lincoln, Nebraska. We are so glad you are here!...” We want people who enter our building to feel that same sentiment. Today, when someone enters through the east entrance, they see stairs leading to a cramped hallway, with closed doors on either side. The Welcome Center project will change that experience. Upon entering a visitor sees a well-lit, open space that will guide them into the building and a friendly face to welcome them and help them find what they need.

Some people expressed concern about the proposed replacement of the chairlift in the east entrance with a ramp. During the presentation, it was mentioned that the lift is loud, difficult to operate, claustrophobic, and unreliable. There are a couple of additional reasons why Session feels a ramp is a better option than lift. One reason is that there are ongoing costs associated with the lift. There are periodic inspections and repairs. But one of the most important reasons for opting for a ramp is safety. Should a fire break out the lift is automatically shut down. This is especially an issue if this happens on a weekday when the sanctuary is locked, because if someone can't negotiate stairs, then the only other way out (other than someone carrying them down the stairs) is by the ramp at the opposite end of the building by the church office. Similarly, if there is a medical emergency, a ramp in the east entrance would provide a safe exit option and can better accommodate gurneys.

A request was also made to look at options that would not involve removing walls. One major goal of the project is to ease the bottleneck that happens, even with small gatherings, in the triangle from the sanctuary, parlor door, and fire door that leads to the East Entrance. In addition to being a hindrance to movement, in case of an emergency that area poses a risk to people exiting the building or emergency responders entering the building. The Session had talked about this previously and felt that shifts to the walls were a reasonable avenue to pursue.

A couple of people asked if there would be a congregational vote on this project. It was mentioned that the congregation had voted for the remodel of the Chancel and the new roof. In the Presbyterian system of government, the congregation elects the session to make major decisions. The congregation would only vote if we need to mortgage property to pay for the project, or if we need to access the principle of the foundation funds, which is required by the Foundation bylaws. That is what the congregation would have voted on for those previous projects. Session does not anticipate that the Welcome Center project would require such funding, so no congregational vote is required or allowed, however, the Session is committed to continuing these conversations to learn what congregation members think before a final decision is made.

What are the next steps? The Session is working with the architects to finalize the plans so that we can better determine the financial requirements for the project.

- The Session

