

# Rainier Valley Unitarian Universalist Congregation

606 12<sup>th</sup> Ave South, Seattle, WA 98144  
www.rvuuc.org / 206.722.4880

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February 28, 2010

Dear members and friends of Rainier Valley UU Congregation,

RVUUC is currently undergoing a congregational process of looking at some options for making big changes for our future. This was brought on by a majority of the Board and Finance Committee feeling that RVUUC was undergoing a sustainability crisis in terms of volunteer time and money (note, however, that pledge levels and financial picture for next year are really not knowable until we make this decision and after canvass). The congregation has already been scaling back the budget and the committee work significantly during the past two years.

Three ideas for solving these problems emerged from two January meetings attended by many members of the congregation. In February the Board convened an advisory group, which researched the ideas and developed proposals. One option proposes to reinvigorate RVUUC by a restructuring of tasks and resurgence of volunteers. Another seeks to radically simplify RVUUC and to undergo a deep renewal process for a limited time. Yet another idea is to merge RVUUC with Westside UU Congregation. Each proposal has advantages and disadvantages. To help everyone participate in an informed way, here are synopses of each of the ideas and a description of the process we are using to make this momentous decision.

## 1) **Reinvigorate**

This plan retains the full variety, stimulus, and joy of our Sunday Morningsong services and congregational programs, but with new volunteer energy, reduced budget, restructured tasks, and re-examined mission and vision. Certain tasks will be restructured to focus our energy and skill on our core mission, and to better support each other—to help us grow both as individuals and as a community.

## 2) **Renew**

This plan gives RVUUC the time and energy to regroup, so that a core of dedicated members can rebuild relationship, rethink the mission and the means to achieve it, and try out different avenues for expressing our spirituality and our passion for social justice. Lay-led weekly activities would vary but include common elements such as singing, reading, worship, and a shared meal.

## 3) **Merge with Westside UU Congregation**

This plan allows RVUUC members and friends to become part of a thriving community of UUs while retaining our identity and traditions as a geographic subgroup within that community. As members of a larger congregation with more resources, we will have access to a full menu of services and activities. Each of us can put our energies into the activities we are most passionate about, while feeling secure in the knowledge that other needs of the

church are being taken care of. WSUU has expressed enthusiasm for welcoming the special gifts and people RVUUC could bring to a merger. In joining together, we strengthen both communities.

The Board would like to express its deep appreciation to the individuals who stepped forward to serve on the advisory task force and develop these proposals, including Rosemary Adang, Craig Anderson, Linda Anderson, Liz Berggren, John Britt, Dick Burkhart, Lee Eddy, Steve Graves, Andrea Keating, Mona Lee, Lisa Maynard, Joe Nabbefeld, Mel Warn, and Mike Wold.

### **Defining the Process and Timeline**

Now that the task force and Board have developed three possible plans, please stay active in the process, which is described as follows:

Step #1: Detailed copies of the proposals are included with this package, being mailed to all members and posted on the RVUUC website. More hard copies will be available in the foyer after each Sunday service. Please study the proposals carefully.

Step #2: Task force members will be available at a special table during potluck each Sunday through March 14 to answer questions about the proposals. Ask for clarification, make sure you understand all three proposals, and give feedback. Your concerns will be presented to the whole advisory task force for further research.

Step #3: If the Board needs further congregational input, they will distribute surveys to be completed by March 21. The Board will inform the congregation of the survey results by March 28.

Step #4: A Congregational Meeting will be held April 11 to decide upon the path RVUUC will follow into its future. This will be perhaps the most crucial congregational meeting we have ever held. Be sure to come. With total respect for the opinions of others, express your own preferences, help us reach consensus, or cast your vote.

This process will not be easy. But we are confident that our congregation will work well together with love and deep respect for one another.

In faith,

RVUUC Board of Trustees:

Mona Lee (President)  
Linda Anderson (Vice-President)  
Liz Berggren (Secretary)  
Andrea Keating (Treasurer)  
Rosemary Adang

**“Reinvigorating a Progressive UU Community”**  
**A Plan for Continuing RVUUC in SE Seattle**  
**With Weekly Sunday Morningsong Services**

RVUUC fulfills an important mission in Seattle. A gentleman visiting from Alaska stated that mission very simply, “It’s a lot like Sitka UU Fellowship, a small and comfortable liberal faith community where you can pitch in and get to know everyone.” People seeking an urban fellowship have found quality worship experiences, a first-rate program for children, excellent music, and many opportunities to network for justice. We strive to welcome and value people from many backgrounds and give them diverse opportunities to grow and find meaning.

Reinvigorating this community is not really about money. A solid majority is eager to continue and a number of them, both new and old, are now offering their energy and skills to make this happen. Below we outline Phase I of the plan, achieving **\$11,500 in cost reductions without any program reductions**.

Phase I has focused where there are easy savings or key individuals have indicated they are ready to hand off their tasks. New volunteers are identified below for these tasks, sometimes after restructuring. This fully maintains inspiring Sunday services, vibrant programs in RE and music, and basic administrative services and community outreach. If major donors stick with RVUUC, there is even the possibility of having a part-time minister, not to preach, but to do RE and help with membership and pastoral care or other Board priorities.

Phase II of the plan, now beginning, is focusing on identifying new leadership, such as committee chairs and Board members. This will involve the simplification or restructuring of some tasks in order to support each other to grow both individually and as a spiritual community.

Phase III of the plan will be a congregational process to re-examine our mission and envision our future, to be the primary focus of the new Board. Phase III also includes on-going fine-tuning or restructuring of tasks, as needed.

**PROGRAM COST SAVINGS (\$8300)**

Eva Foster has volunteered to teach the RE program beginning in the fall during Sarah Ortnor’s planned sabbatical (Eva has professional experience). No change in child care. Savings of **\$5700**.

Mona Lee has volunteered to take over the portion of Janet Kidder’s work involving scheduling speakers for the Services & Celebrations Committee (Mona has done this before). Lee Eddy will help. Janet would continue as music coordinator and choir director (no change). Savings of **\$2000**.

Develop five more services a year ourselves in lieu of paid speakers. We could invite volunteer UU speakers from other churches or from the community at large (only travel expenses paid). We could also have more lay-organized experiential services such as meditation, walks, Quaker-style worship, etc. Savings of **\$600**.

**ADMINISTRATIVE SAVINGS (\$3200)**

Less funds for building supplies and furnishings will be needed after the first year at the Pearl Warren building. Savings of **\$300**.

Mona Lee has volunteered to maintain the website (she does something similar for her neighborhood) with assistance from Dick Burkhart. See details below of how enhanced website usage would save on newsletter printing and postage costs. Savings of **\$600**.

Reduce the bookkeeping budget by having the treasurer do check writing and reports (often easier to just do it than coordinate with the bookkeeper), volunteered by Dick Burkhart. The bookkeeper would continue to do payroll and tax functions. Paul Pemberton has volunteered to assist with deposits and check requests. Savings of **\$1620**.

Reduction in dues to PNWD and UUA because we have culled the membership roles. Savings of **\$670**.

**This totals \$11,500 in budget savings, without any reduction in program, out of our current \$21,000 program budget and \$31,000 administrative budget, based on \$44,000 in pledges and \$8000 in fundraising. This reduced budget would be based on \$35,000 in pledges and \$5500 in plate, fundraising, etc.**

### **MINISTERIAL OPTION**

If pledging and fundraising were to continue near current levels, there is an amazing possibility: we could even afford a part time minister, not to preach, but to work with the congregation, especially the children and the Board. This could be a community-type minister who is effective at working with kids and adults. We would pay this minister for 8 to 10 hours a week to do the job of the RE teacher and work with membership and pastoral care or other Board priorities. \$11,000 would pay for a one-fifth to one-quarter time position.

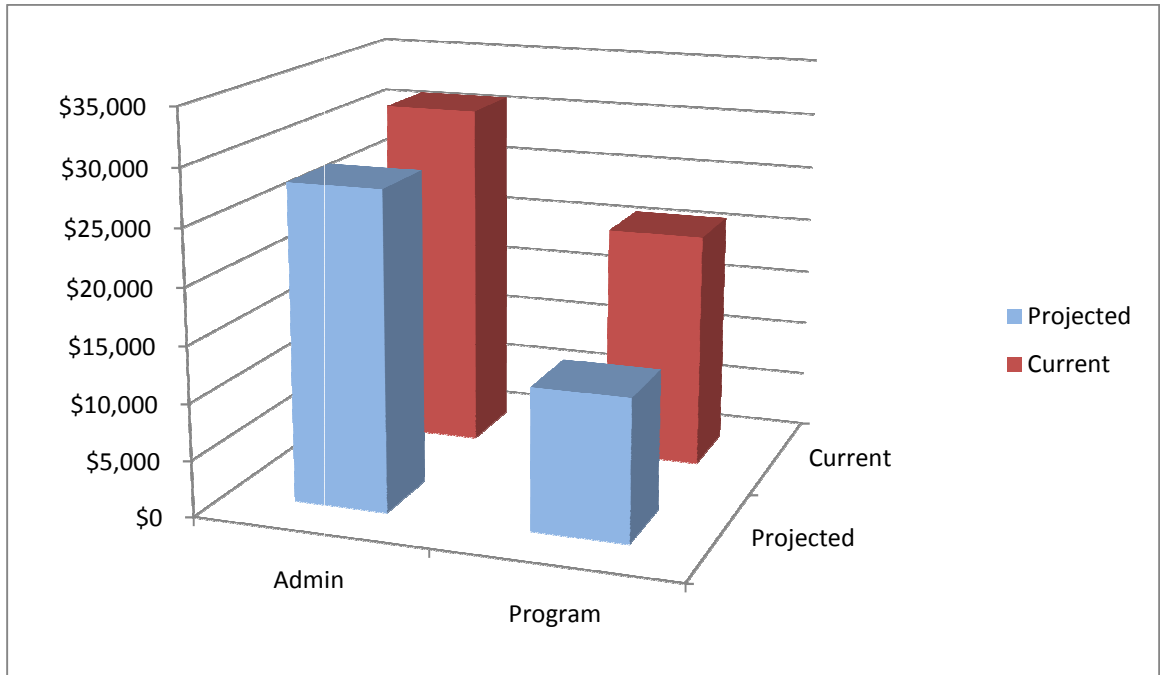
### **VOLUNTEER ENERGY**

Rick Meyers will continue to help with repairs and maintenance of the building. Andrea Keating will help with fundraising. Lee Eddy is observing Sunday operations, seeking ways to make things run more smoothly. We are starting to work on other positions (Phase II of the plan), such as committee chairs and Board members, including further restructuring to make positions easier and more rewarding. One recommendation from the PNWD workshop: Keep the Board small and focused on strategic issues (where we're headed and how to get there = Phase III), not committee affairs, unless special assistance is needed or requested.

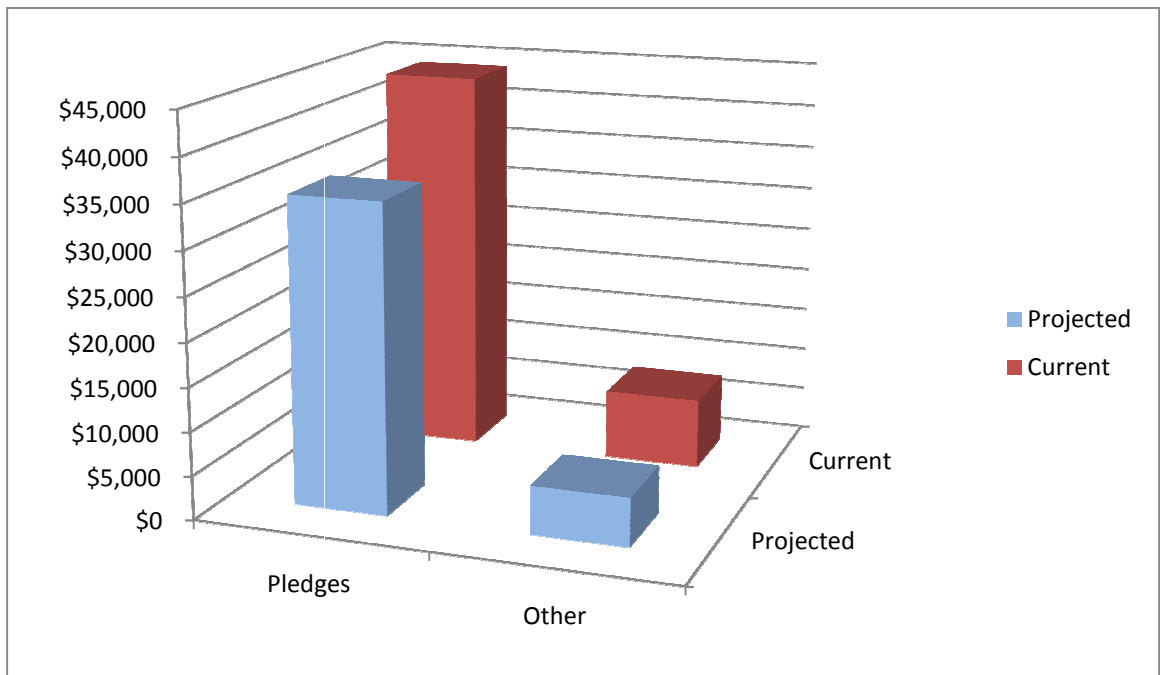
Suggestion: Have a combined canvass and membership committee, so that these two functions can be led by two people who are able to work together. These two functions often overlap, but the way tasks are scheduled is often complementary. Both the canvass and membership chairs have to be in touch with new and old members so they can support one another.

Develop a website to work with a one-page newsletter that has links to separate web pages for the Board and each committee or function. Committee chairs could themselves post new articles or information on their page. Printed copies of each webpage could be posted in the foyer on Sundays for people who don't have computers and a few could be mailed. Short, weekly emails would contain links to newly updated web pages.

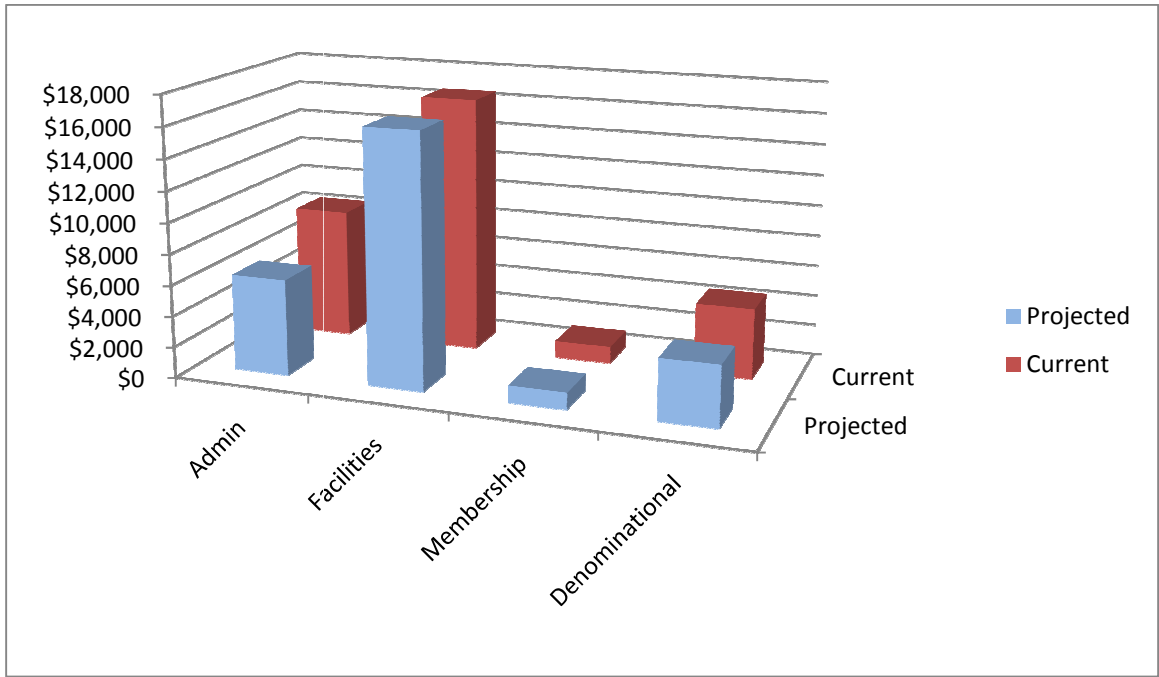
### Expenses, Current and As Projected with “Reinvigorating” Proposal



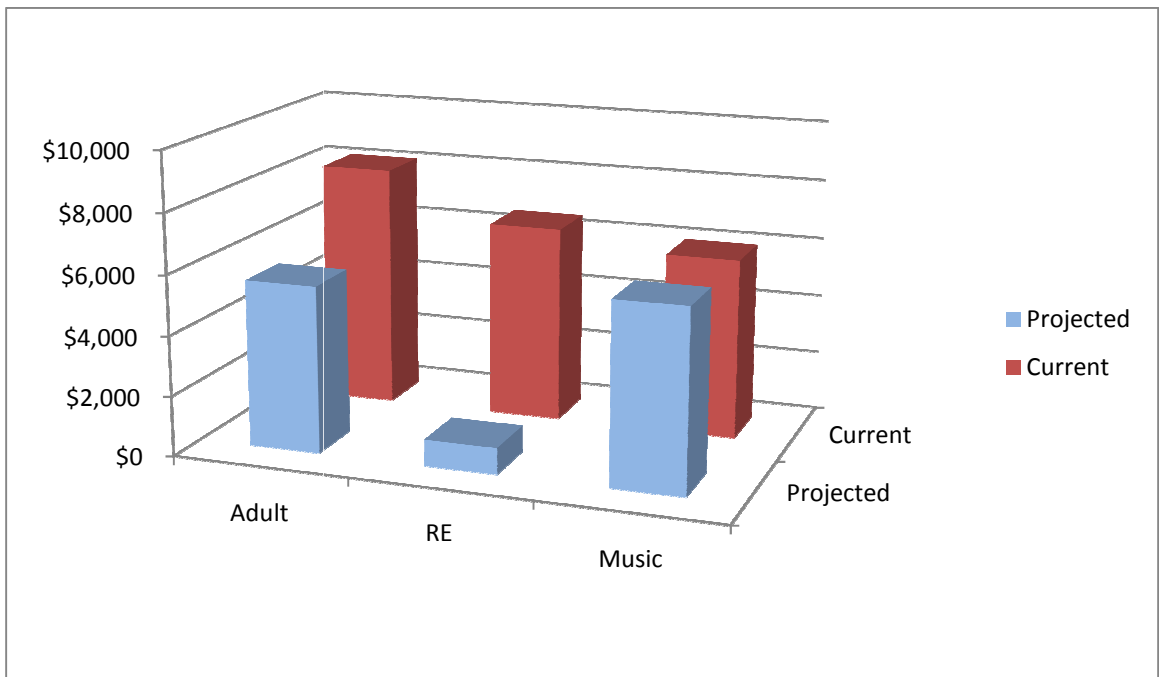
### Income, Current and As Projected with “Reinvigorating” Proposal



**Administrative Budget, Current and As Projected with “Reinvigorating” Proposal**



**Program Budget, Current and As Projected with “Reinvigorating” Proposal**



## “Renewal” Alternative

The Renewal Alternative addresses the fundamental problems facing RVUUC: a loss of direction followed by a long-term decline in volunteer energy and, more recently, funding.

**Goal:** To give RVUUC the time and energy to regroup, by cutting back on expenditure of money and energy, so that a core can build relationship, rethink the mission and the means to achieve it, and try out different avenues for expressing our spirituality and our passion for social justice.

### Assumptions:

- (1) The process would require at least a year.
- (2) The number of participants on any particular Sunday (or other meeting day) could fit in a large house or medium-sized classroom.
- (3) The UUA would allow us to suspend our activities as a full-service congregation until we had worked out a plan for renewal. This is a question that would require some research.
- (4) A critical mass of leaders (at least eight) would commit for a year to take responsibility for seeing the process through.
- (5) We would not actively seek visitors or new members during the process, but would maintain a website and/or a simple newsletter (possibly on email) to maintain communication during the period of reassessment.
- (6) As the process proceeded, we would use the inherent flexibility of this alternative to change or expand the plans set out below.

### Setting:

Spaces would be free or low-cost, requiring minimal setup. We would likely not always meet in the same place. Free spaces could include homes; a room at a neighborhood library; or a community meeting room at a friendly church. Slightly more expensive spaces could include a classroom at Seattle U or other venue. Choice of space would depend on the number attending; we would likely be “cozy.”

There are advantages to both public and private spaces. Meeting in a home could create a more relaxed and intimate atmosphere that would facilitate discussion. Meeting in a classroom or library makes it easier for new people to come, and would generally provide more space to spread out.

### Program:

The program would center around weekly activities. Each week would include certain common elements, which would be lay-led and informal, a way of bonding and worshipping together rather than a “professional” service. An example of a typical month might be:

*Every week:* singing, readings, simple worship, sharing of food and drink.

*Week 1* – Listening to each others’ stories.

*Week 2* – A structured conversation about RVUUC’s mission, evaluating how well we’d met it, and discussing what else could be done or how the mission should change.

*Week 3* – A worship service focusing on some form of spirituality.

*Week 4* – A “field trip” to get to know another religious organization; to participate in a social justice activity; or to work with a community group.

### Religious Education:

Everyone on the committee expressed an interest in fitting religious education and children’s activities into the program, including paying for a teacher (which would be a major expense for this alternative). No one at the meeting was a parent with kids in the current RE program, so we didn’t feel able to assess whether this alternative could realistically provide a program that would meet parents’ and kids’ needs.

### Budget:

Minimal. Possible expenses could include ~ \$300/month for a space on some of the meeting weeks; the cost of an RE teacher for the children on non-field trip weeks; and simple supplies for potlucks and beverages and snacks, if we wanted to do those as common expenses.

In addition, the possibility of setting up a savings fund for future use was discussed – this would depend on the hopes and expectations of the people involved.

### Compatibility with Other Alternatives:

This alternative would be compatible with the idea of a merger with Westside UUC, as long as there was space for a Rainier Valley group to continue to meet, with the understanding that at some point the Rainier Valley group might try to form a fellowship again.

Because part of the point of the alternative is to provide a time for reflection and rethinking the congregation, the “Reinvigorating” proposal is not compatible with this plan.

## Merging with Westside UU Congregation

This plan allows RVUUC members and friends to become part of a thriving community of UUs while retaining our identity and traditions as a geographic subgroup within that community. As members of a larger congregation with more resources, we will have access to a full menu of services and activities. Each of us can put our energies into the activities we are most passionate about, while feeling secure in the knowledge that other needs of the church are being taken care of. WSUU has expressed enthusiasm for welcoming the special gifts and people RVUUC could bring to a merger. In joining together, we strengthen both communities.

## Research Report on Westside UU Congregation

Linda Anderson, John Britt, and Lisa Maynard met with Rev. Peg Morgan and WSUU Board President Paula van Haagen on Feb 14, 2010. Peg and Paula were welcoming and eager to talk with us. They had each gone to our website ahead of the meeting and had read the February Board column about our current situation. They offered that they were willing to come meet with a larger group, or with the whole congregation.

### **Westside UU Congregation's mission:**

*We are committed to being a caring community that celebrates and respects the diversity of individuals. We strive to nourish our spiritual, intellectual, and ethical growth; take personal and collective action to promote social justice; and inspire and encourage each other to live the values we share as Unitarian Universalists.*

Some facts about WSUU:

- \* 149 adult members and ~80 children
- \* 95 pledging units
- \* Annual budget is ~\$226,000 (not all from pledges)

**Location/Building** – WSUU is about to buy a building (foreclosed Baptist church at 7141 California Ave SW). Building is under contract; inspections have been done. Expect to take possession on March 31. Building is 13,000 square feet, on three levels. Sanctuary seats 250. Cost of building is \$1,025,000. Asking their congregants for ~\$1 million in payments and pledges to pay the down payment (half of total); address accessibility issues (mainly adding an elevator), moving, and repairs; and cover the first three years of the mortgage (UUA loan). Peg and Paula seemed confident that the money was there. They need to grow from about 150 to about 200 in order to support the building, but WSUU has been growing, and it is thought that congregations often grow when they get a building.

**Ministry** – WSUU has a minister (Peg Morgan) who provides pastoral care and offers sermon about two times a month. WSUU was founded as a humanist congregation and has a strong tradition of wanting a variety of speakers; the committee that oversees services strives to have a minister speak on two Sundays, and a lay speaker, guest speaker, or participatory or children's service on the other two Sundays. Peg attends even when she is not speaking, to greet people and provide pastoral care. They have Sunday services all year long – Peg emphasized the importance of meeting in summer to serve people who need the congregation. She has been at WSUU for eight years.

**Children's Program** – Children go to age-level classes three Sundays a month, and on the other Sunday they do some kind of service together as a multi-age group. WSUU offers OWL for several age groups.

**Clusters** – WSUU draws from 19 ZIP codes and uses “clusters” (geographic groups) to help people feel connected. Clusters are encouraged to hold events and/or get together at least several times a year. There are 9 clusters now, and Peg suggested that folks from RVUUC could be a 10<sup>th</sup> cluster and could meet as often as we liked to support each other and keep our sense of community.

**Social Justice / Community Service** – WSUU was founded as a daughter church of University Unitarian in the 1960s. Roots of WSUU are social-justice oriented, including sit-ins in bank offices to protest redlining of neighborhoods. They have been involved lately in Habitat for Humanity, organizing protests against Ref. 71, participating in Standing on the Side of Love campaign, and more. One Sunday a month the collection plate money is given to a nonprofit organization (congregants suggest the organizations). The middle and high school age kids go to the Orion shelter one Sunday a month to serve a meal. The brochure about the capital campaign for the building emphasizes that they want a place to serve the community as well as the congregation.

**Program** – Adult religious exploration brochure for spring 2010 lists programs on laughter, Buddhism, UU history and ideas, craft circle, spiritual study group, faith journey exploration for newcomers, book club, covenant groups, OWL. They have a music director who commutes from Whidbey Island; choir doesn’t have as many people as they would like.

**Fellowship** – WSUU offers “soup lunches” after service one Sunday a month. Some congregants make and donate soup; people pay \$5 (or \$10 per family) for lunch as a fundraiser for various things. This happens the same Sunday each month as the newcomer orientation, which is held afterward.

**Transportation** – The new building has a small parking lot (~25 spaces). It is on the route #22 line, which offers service once per hour on Sunday mornings. Also near the #54 (runs every half hour on Sundays). No emphasis on carpooling at WSUU at the moment.

**Openness to RV** – Peg and Paula were very welcoming. We had purposely decided not to introduce the word “merger” because we couldn’t say how many might come over, and we also felt like we were so much smaller that it might not be the right word. Peg and Paula did use that word, however, along with “meshing” and “integrating.” Peg brought up that there would need to be some kind of honoring/welcoming events or activities. Paula pointed out that they need to grow by about 50 members to really support the new building, so a number of us joining would help them a lot. They seemed especially interested in RVUUC’s energy around social justice, music, and the multi-class effort.

<b>ISSUES WE RAISED</b>	<b>WSUU RESPONSES</b>
We are concerned that for some people WSUU is too far away and not easily reached, especially for those who don't drive or have a car.	WSUU has members from 19 ZIP codes. Location is accessible by bus. RV cluster could organize carpools.
We love our lay-led and participatory services.	WSUU has two non-minister services each month; RV folks could help create some.
We love our weekly potluck because it builds community and helps provide a meal for people who might need one.	WSUU has once-a-month "soup lunch" (fundraiser). New building has a full kitchen and Peg and Paula seemed open to the idea of having potluck lunches sometimes after services.
We are a congregation that has intentionally welcomed working class members and friends (different from UU norm).	Peg and Paula acknowledged that WSUU may be more "UU traditional" in this respect and welcomed the idea of folks from RV reprising the "class on class" that was offered a few years ago.
We love our Chalice Palace.	Peg and Paula welcomed the idea of folks from RV organizing such an event.
We love our marimba band.	There is plenty of storage in the new building for marimbas. There was some talk of the marimba band perhaps playing at their canvass event on Apr 10 if the scheduling worked out.
We love our music in general.	Peg and Paula had heard great things about our music program and were excited to think of being joined by singers and instrumentalists. They implied that the WSUU music program hadn't yet taken off as they would like.

**Some advantages of deciding to formally merge (as opposed to informally joining, or trickling over)**

- RVUUC's history becomes part of WSUU's history (even if, as under the "renewal" proposal, a group goes on to revive a Rainier Valley fellowship), rather than being eventually lost over time.
- We could be ceremonially welcomed in a way that may heal some of the grief of closing RVUUC's doors (for now).
- We could establish a process or some kind of representation to help RVUUC and WSUU work out any tensions that emerge.
- RVUUC's assets (physical assets like chairs, dishes, and worship supplies, as well as money) become part of WSUU, reducing the chance of conflict about what happens with these.
- There is less chance of a divisive dynamic where a few individuals claim to be the "real" RVUUC, even as many members drop away or join WSUU.

**Compatibility with other proposals**

- Merging with WSUU is compatible with the "Renewal" proposal, in which the congregation scales way back in order to regroup, build relationship, and rethink the mission. Members could attend Sunday services and participate in the life of the WSUU community while also meeting regularly as a "cluster" to renew the RVUUC community, considering and perhaps working toward spinning off as an independent entity again later.
- Merging with WSUU is not compatible with the "Reinvigorating" proposal because both emphasize a full program of Sunday morning services and have overlapping administrative and program needs.