

**Why subdividing and sale is not better than owner risk for 98 or 99 years, including operating, tax, claims, and other landlord risk.**

The following represents a synthesis of perspectives and insights drawn from a series of discussions held over the past year concerning the lease versus sale of the SUMC property located at 1200 Main Street and serves as a reflection of the sentiment prevalent within the congregation.

It is important to keep in mind that the existing SUMC building, while on parcel one of land, has two distinct building zones: the front (sanctuary) is zoned commercial, and the back (educational/program wing and parking) is zoned residential.

1. SUMC retains ownership and ultimate control. If sold, future generations cannot get it back or have a say in its use.
2. We retain program space for worship and mission, Sunday School, Scouting, refreshment/reception space for parishioners after funerals, weddings, etc.
3. The lease allows flexibility in facing either future growth or ensuring a place for a smaller church, while relieving us of the financial burden of the current building configuration.
4. The lease enables us to engage in the major mission of easing the severe affordable housing shortage in Stratford and still continue our feeding mission, thrift shop, etc.

According to the United Way of Coastal Connecticut, 45% of Stratford households have incomes below the cost of living, *i.e.*, below the ALICE threshold (ALICE = Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed).

5. We have for years had a friendly, reciprocal agreement with the owners of the medical building next door by which we have shared parking. That building has now been sold. The new developer has obtained zoning approval to build a mixed use commercial & residential building that will require that they reclaim exclusive use of their parking area.

If we were to sell the back lot, we would lose all of our back parking. We would be left with only the parking along the 2 sides of the sanctuary, making us seriously out of compliance with the zoning requirements for a sanctuary of our size and capacity. A ground lease enables us to stipulate sufficient parking for our present and future needs. We also lose most of our program, education, outreach, and storage space. In other words, we shall end up with very little meaningful space other than the sanctuary itself.

6. Under the ground lease proposal, we have significant space in the lessee's building for programs, education, kitchen, etc. A sale would require us to completely reconfigure the present offices, chapel, narthex and hallways of the sanctuary building to encompass church offices, additional bathrooms, meeting space, and storage. Any financial gain from a sale would be negligible. Also, the demolition and subsequent reconstruction would make meaningful programming, except for worship, almost impossible for such a long period of time that membership and current expenses would suffer irreparable loss.

7. Psychologically, it will probably be much harder to garner congregational support for a sale than a long-term lease.

Pat Naylor worded the situation well in the Minutes of the January 31, 2024 Building Committee meeting:

“The proposal that had been shared with the congregation included a 99-year lease, not a sale. A Purchase Agreement may make it more difficult to get the congregation’s approval. A lease preserves the property intact, a sale does not. Once the property is sold, SUMC does not have any leverage or control over the property. The benefit we are getting with the lease is program space and the possibility to carry out our mission, activities, and fellowship... CHP will own the new building and manage it, and SUMC will own the land.”