



## September Session Notes

The Session met on September 21 and discussed the following:

- We began our meeting discussing the finances of the Church and possible sources of income with a few members from the Buildings and Grounds committee and the Finance committee. We consistently run a deficit budget, so each year we count on receiving money that is not pledged. Those moneys come from additional member donations, drawing down from the Endowment Fund, bequests, and the like. We are happy to say that we have not had to draw down from our Endowment Fund so far in 2023, but we are running an overall deficit in operations. The fact that we run a deficit budget is a factor in considering the second offer made by Archtop Fiber, LLC, an internet fiber optic company.



parking when we have large events. The number of parking spaces lost would depend on where the building is placed on the back lot, and that is part of what Archtop would be investigating in this first phase.

The proposal is for an easement of a portion of our property to them. The Rev. Cameron spoke with a lawyer who has done work for Albany Presbytery to get information on the proposal and to get further information on easements. The attorney explained that an easement is a sale that places a forever commitment on that property. The purchaser has the right to do whatever they like with that property, including selling it to someone else. Losing control over the property is a concern that was raised by the Session, as we would be tying the hands of future generations of our church and affecting the legacy of our church. It was suggested if we move forward with exploring this offer that we have legal representation to see if we are able to negotiate limitations on the terms of the easement, including the time the land is out of our control (does it have to be the 40 years suggested) and whether we would have any say in a future sale. The attorney also suggested that we ask Archtop to cover attorney fees, and pointed out that in New York State, any sale of religious property has to go before the presbytery, as well as the state's Attorney General or a court for approval.

Archtop originally approached us in June about investigating a potential easement that would allow for a structure on church property; they have suggested a minimum of 40 years. Their original offer was to pay us \$5,000. After John Griffin spoke with their representative, the offer increased to \$10,000, which was the proposal the Session reviewed last month. The Session rejected that proposal, and the offer is now increased to \$20,000 plus free phone and internet services.

Archtop's written proposal states the size of the land parcel on which the building would sit would be 35' x 55' though their representative said it could be as small as 25' x 25'. They sent us a photo of a current site which is enclosed by chain link fence with barbed wire on top (last month we incorrectly said razor wire on top). One of the concerns raised when Session reviewed this proposal last month was the look of such a site. In this second proposal, Archtop has said they are willing to work with us to build the site without barbed wire, and to provide privacy fencing around their structure along with landscaping to better conceal the site. Another concern mentioned is losing some of our overflow

At this point, what is being asked is if our church will sign a Letter of Intent to allow Archtop "to investigate the suitability for use for the placement of telecommunications facilities." This Letter of Intent does not obligate Archtop or our church to proceed with the project. As mentioned above, they are offering us \$20,000 for the land, along with free phone and internet service. Our 2023 budget estimates it will cost us just over \$2,000 for phone and internet this year.

*(continued on Page 6)*



## September Session Notes *(continued from page 5)*

- The Buildings and Grounds and Finance Committee unanimously recommended that the Session sign the updated Letter of Intent because the Letter of Intent does not bind either party. It was also suggested that we have some conversations with the whole congregation to hear more questions and other feedback. The Session voted to approve signing the Letter of Intent with a vote of five in favor and one against.
- We discussed the upcoming BBQ on October 4 from 4-6 pm. Online or phone orders are being taken – invite your friends and neighbors! The New Salem Firehouse will provide traffic cones and help on New Scotland Road in managing the traffic flow during the BBQ.
  - We are happy to report that our end-of-summer matching challenge was a great success! Three anonymous donors offered to match up to \$4,800 for all giving between August 20 and September 4. Members and friends stepped up with \$8,287.34 in giving, so we got all \$4,800 of the matching money. Thanks to everyone for supporting our church!!
  - We are expecting details on the steeple project any day now. The Deacons have identified memorial monies that families have agreed could go to that project. We have already received some money from the members without us asking them to support a fund drive for this special project. We are looking into contacting Neil Breslin to see if there may be some State funding for an historical building project like this one. Once we know what our monetary goal is for the steeple project, the Church will initiate a fund-raising drive. Stay tuned!
  - Mardell was our representative at the last Presbytery meeting and she reported back that our own Reverend Cameron was elected to serve on Albany Presbytery's Committee on Ministers and Congregations. We are looking for a delegate to represent us at the next meeting in Mayfield, Thursday, November 16.
  - The Earth Care Team, headed up by Holly Stefaniak for our church, is hosting two events. October 14, 10-3:00, will be a family event hosted at the Kelly Adirondack Center in Niskayuna. Lunch, nature trails, and children's activities will be available. Then, on November 4, at 5:00 p.m., Delmar Presbyterian Church is hosting a dinner and climate game. See page 3 for details on both events.
  - We have been asked to host the now annual Community Thanksgiving Service, Sunday, November 19 at 7:00 pm. Volunteers will be needed to be readers and to host a small fellowship afterwards. Please see the Rev. Cameron or Bonnie O'Shea if you're interested.
  - Our current bylaws require 9 elders to serve on the Session, and we began discussing whether we should reduce that number. Any change to the bylaws requires approval by the congregation, so this is just a beginning of the conversation.
  - The pastor reported she continues to coordinate a weekly Zoom meeting for Albany Presbytery Clergy, and she is taking a class called "Beyond Plastics" from Bennington College.
- The next Session meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 26, 5:30 p.m. by Zoom.