Abstract white lines of varying lengths and angles intersecting on a black background, creating a complex geometric pattern in the upper left quadrant.

FROM BURDEN TO
BLESSING: CREATIVE
AND FAITHFUL
APPROACHES TO
OUR SACRED SPACES

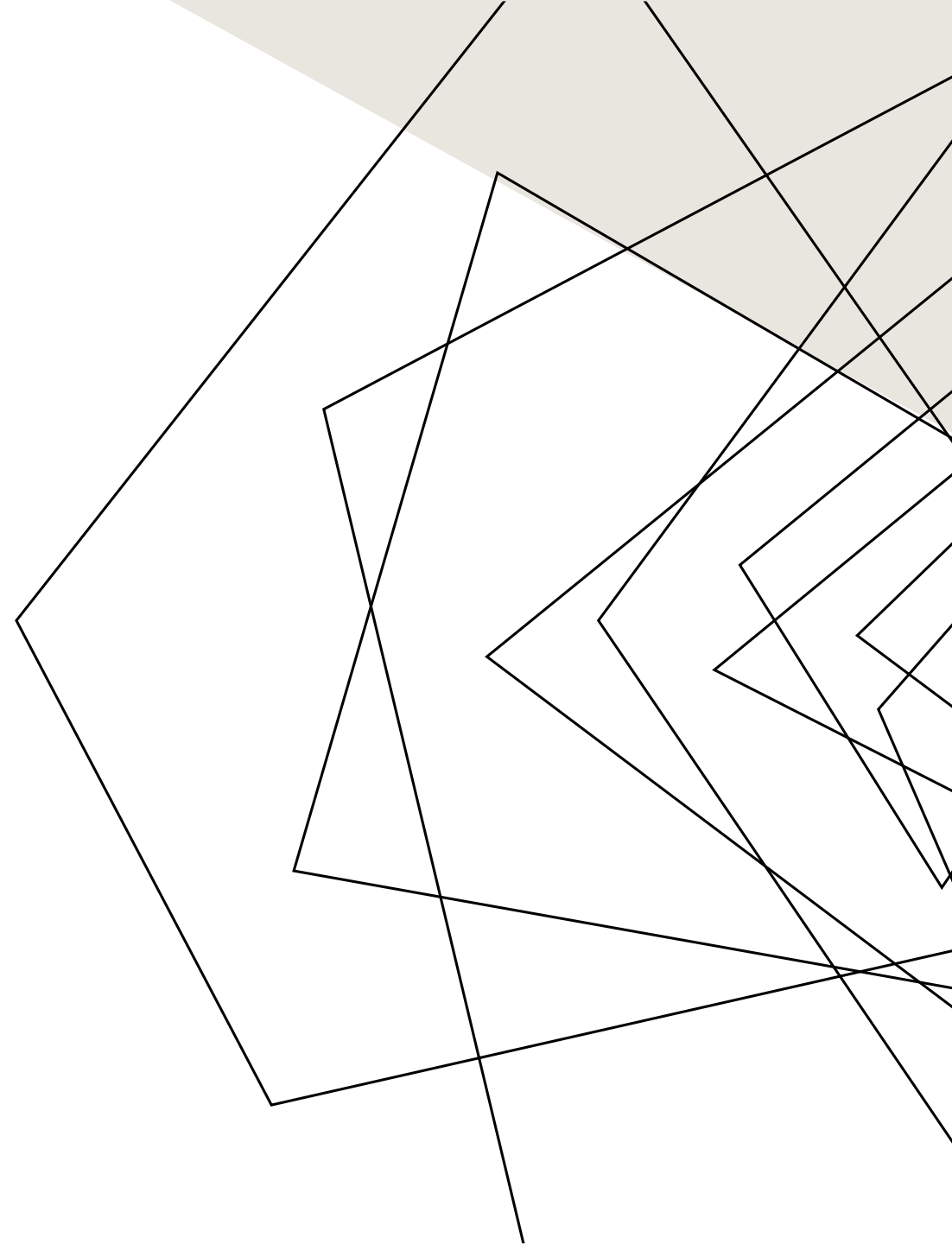
REV. JOY FENTON-JONES

Ordained in the UCC (2023)

Serve First Christian Church (DOC/UCC),
Pilgrim UCC, 915 N Main Project, East Ohio
Conference (UMC)

Family: Will, John, Morgan, Xander, Declan

Highest commitments: healthy theology,
ecumenism, neighborhood focus/specificity



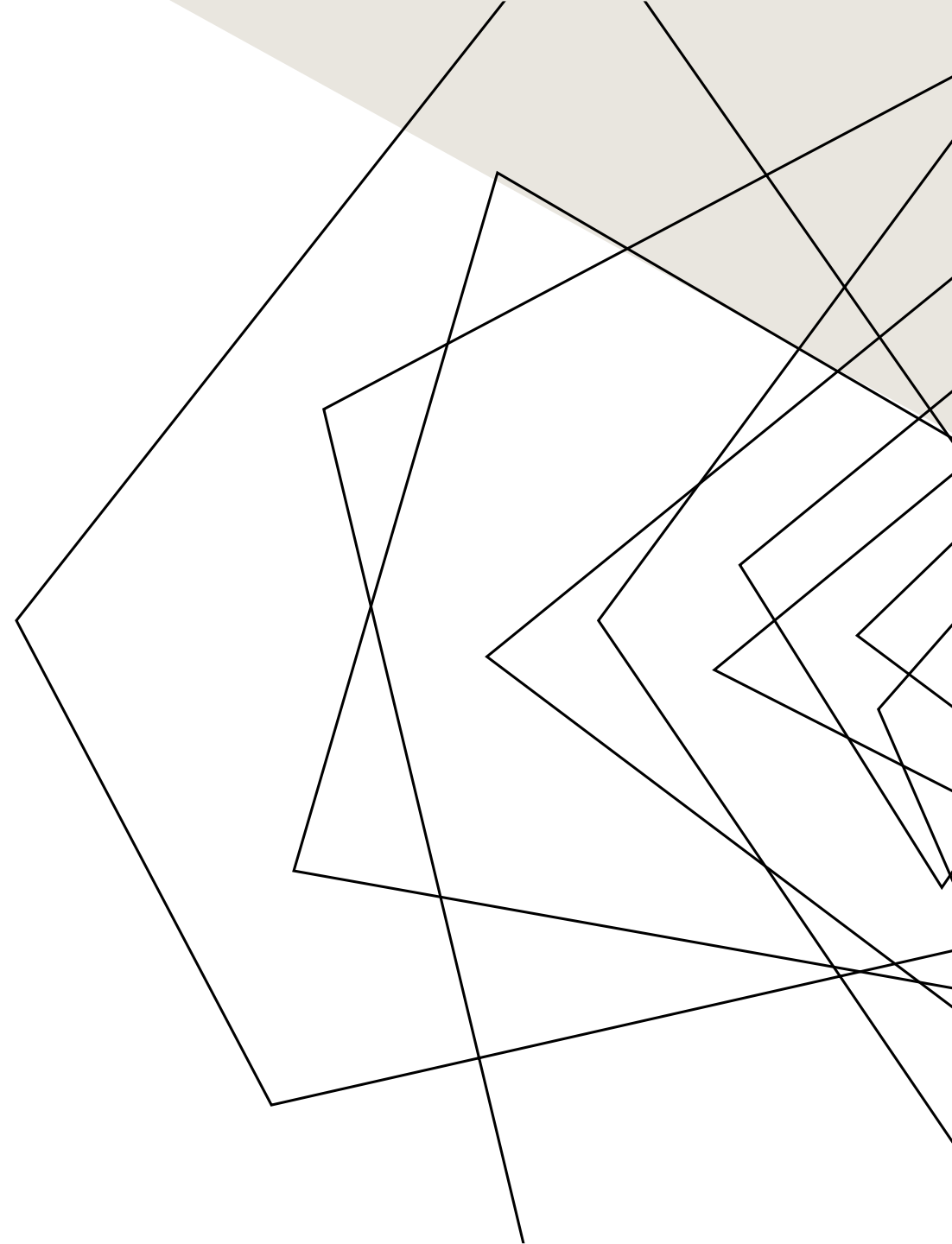
FROM BURDEN TO BLESSING

Real estate (home) ownership is the primary way individuals and families build wealth

(There are some big challenges with this!)

In the Church, we have often taken an even less helpful view of building ownership

Our buildings are our primary assets, in neighborhoods that BOTH need us AND have a lot to offer



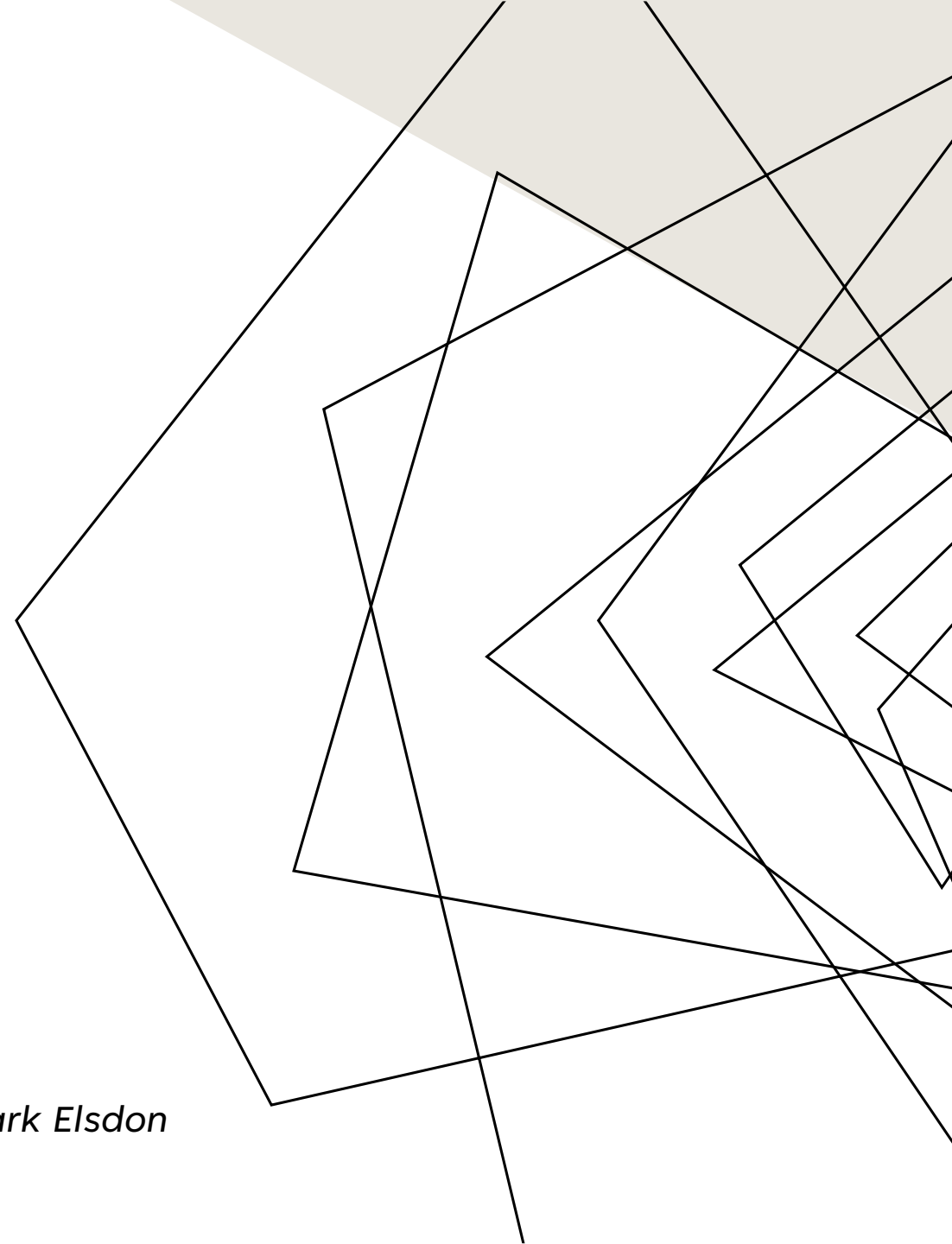
THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

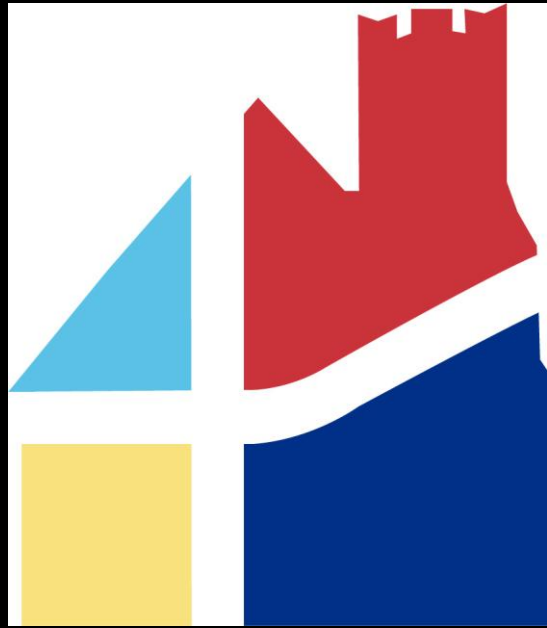
Experts predict as many as 100,000 church closures over the next 10-20 years*

We have a housing shortage in the US on the order of ~2 million units

If, conservatively, we put an average of 20 units in every one of those buildings (or on the property) = 2 million units

**Gone for Good, ed. Mark Elsdon*





HARBOR & BRIDGE COMMUNITY CENTER







Outstanding pastoral leadership (Matt Whisenhunt, LLP); skilled at community networking and deeply committed to the city of Cleveland.

Growing partnership with UCC and DOC neighbor churches; cooperative parish model.

Matt is working on converting the old parsonage into recovery housing.

We are in the process of acquiring additional property in the neighborhood (retail and housing) and adding additional staff. [Good time to discuss risk and the potential benefits of taking a debt position.]



MEMPHIS & PEARL PROJECT









Secured capital through ARPA dollars, Brownfields, county and city grant funds, and a stable first position lender.

Incorporates both an active UM congregation and a former UCC building, so it has positive ecumenical resonance.

This project has every potential to break ground early in 2026.

Acknowledge absence of UCC presence.





THE
NEHEMIAH MISSION
OF CLEVELAND



REBUILDING HOPE
ONE RELATIONSHIP AT A TIME



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[Home](#)

[Return to top](#)

[illegible]

**BASEMENT FLOOR
PLAN**

A-100

© 2004 Blackwell Publishing Ltd *Journal of Internal Medicine* 255: 101–107

UNIT TOTALS

Basement:

- Studio Unit: 519 SF
- Economy Unit: 403 SF
- Economy Unit: 403 SF
- Economy Unit: 346 SF

1st Floor:

- Studio Unit: 500 SF
- Studio Unit: 500 SF
- Studio Unit: 511 SF
- Studio Unit: 447 SF
- Studio Unit: 447 SF
- Economy Unit: 430 SF
- Economy Unit: 345 SF
- Economy Unit: 350 SF
- Economy Unit: 350 SF
- Economy Unit: 908 SF

2nd Floor:

- 1 BR w/ Den Unit: 701 SF
- 2 BR w/ Loft Unit: 1100 SF
- Loft Unit: 768 Sf
- Loft Unit: 734 SF
- Loft Unit: 800 SF
- Studio Unit: 563 SF
- Studio Unit: 453 SF
- Studio Unit: 453 SF
- Economy Unit: 343 SF
- Economy Unit: 343 SF

We obtained architectural drawings (\$10K) and community support from our current councilperson, the Community Development Corporation (CDC), and resettlement agencies.

Built positive connection to Refugee Services Collaborative (RSC) and potential funders.

Board ultimately decided NOT to move forward with a \$2.5-3.5M development that would convert the aged building into 12-24 units of housing.

The image shows the interior of a church, split by a diagonal line. The left side is a solid black background with white geometric lines in the top-left corner. The right side is a photograph of the church's interior, showing rows of wooden pews, a balcony with more pews, and a large stained-glass window. The text "CORY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH" is written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters on the black background.

CORY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

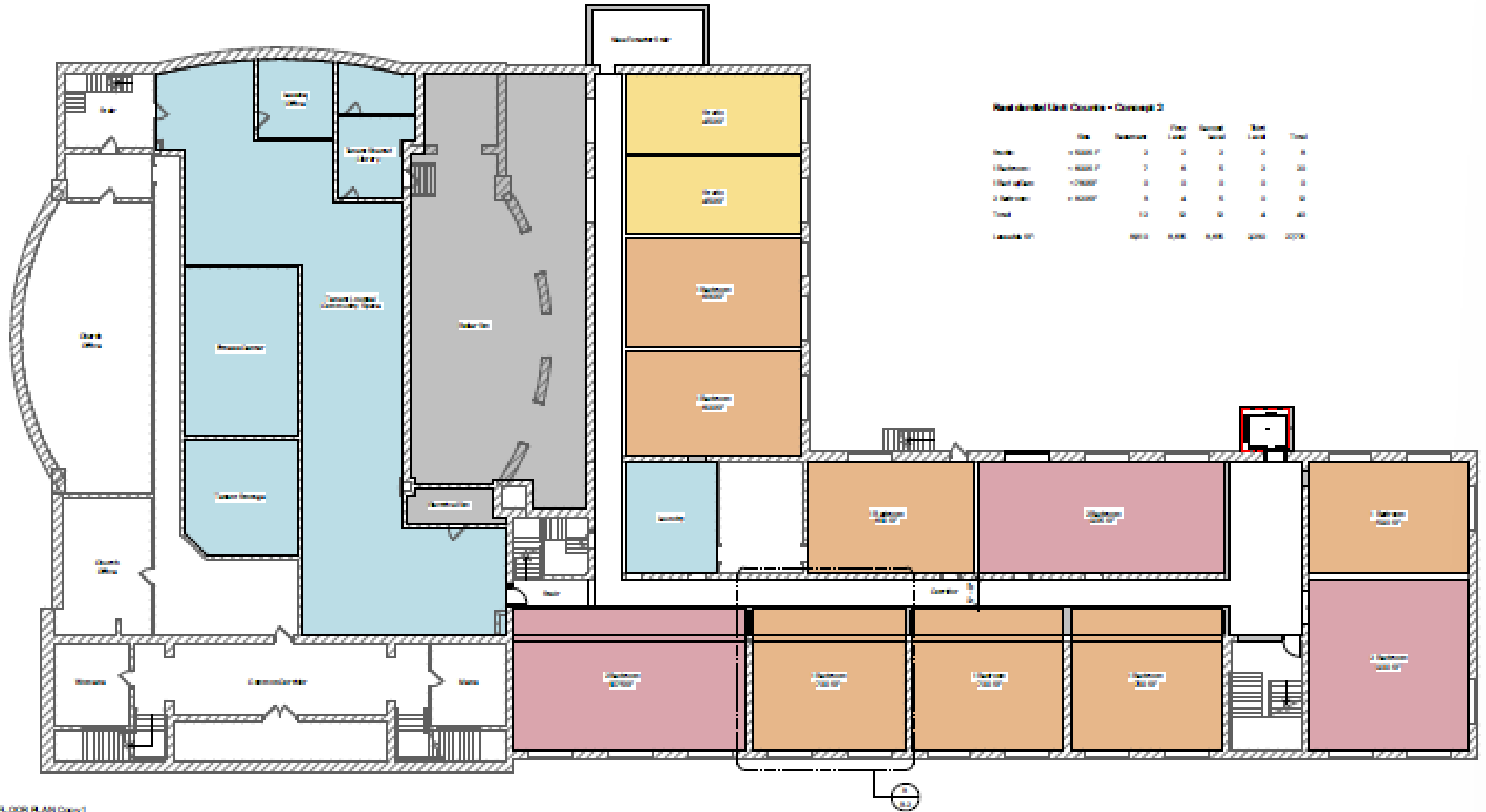


רבו ל"י בכוד שטו השתדור ל"ו בהדרת קרש

MOSES ISAIAH JEREMIAH EZEKIEL AMOS ISAIAS NEHEMIAH JEREMIAH DANIEL







101 - BASEMENT LEVEL - FLOOR PLAN Copy1
1" = 10'-0"

Cleveland Restoration Society completed an existing conditions report as well as a full window study.

National Park Service grant did nearly \$1M in exterior improvements.

Have architectural drawings (\$10K) showing several potential creative reuses.

The leadership of Cory recently voted to move forward with a development consultant (Tipping Point) to begin community listening, raise capital, and initiate a design process (\$90K, 8 months). Funded through a UMC urban church grant.

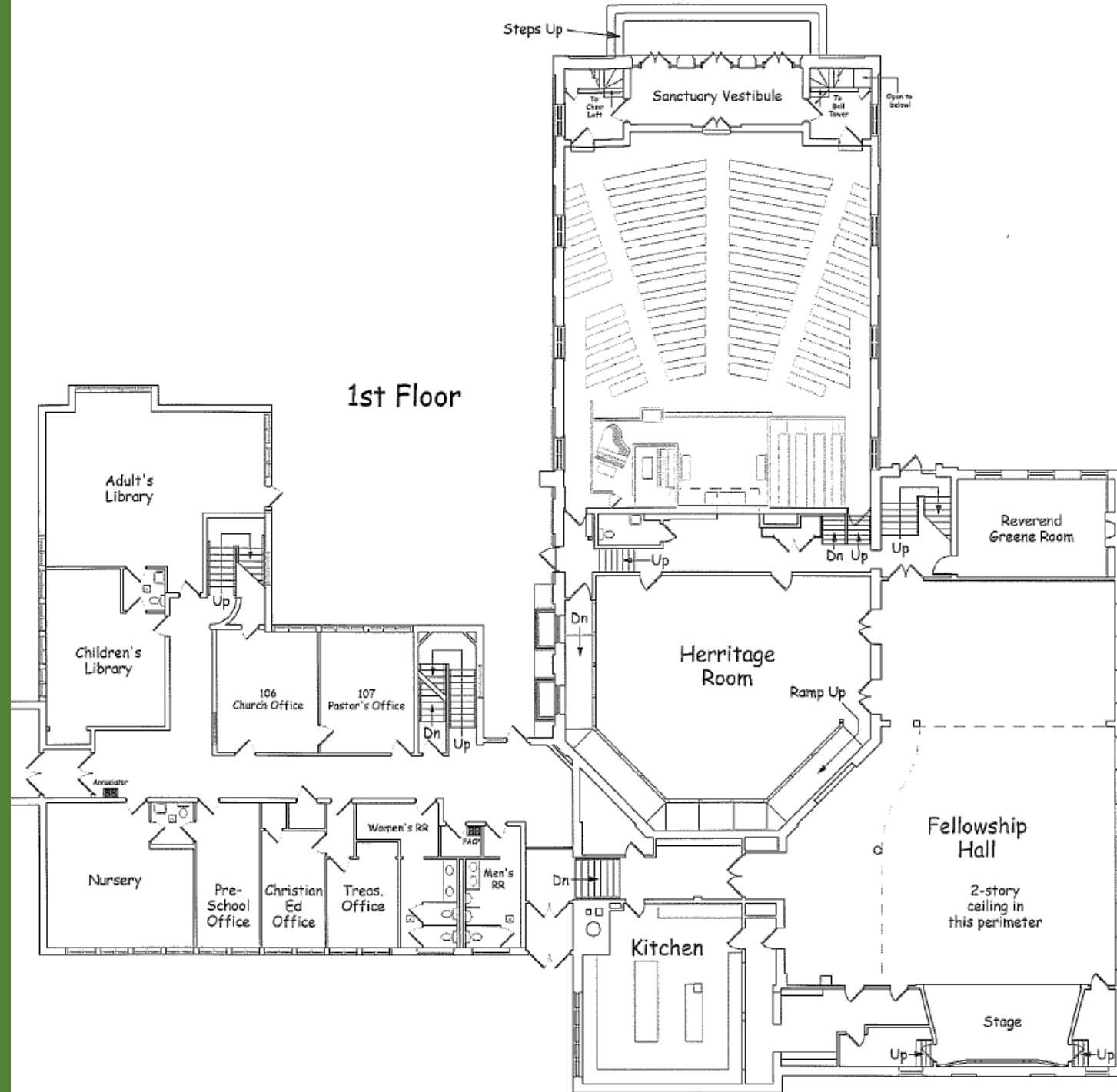
PILGRIM UNITED
CHURCH OF
CHRIST





THE
PILGRIM
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
FOUNDED 1834
WORSHIP 10:00 AM
CHURCH SCHOOL 9:00 AM

THE
PILGRIM
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
PILGRIM CUBSCOUT PACK 3188
LIVE/GOLD BANQUET 6 PM
CELEBRATING PENTECOST
WWW.PILGRIMCF.ORG

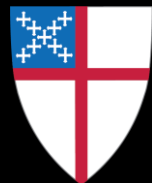


Recently concluded a feasibility study period at the end of June 2025.

After a year-long MOU with two local developers who specialize in small-scale historic building renovations, they determined the market was not favorable to move forward at this time.

We intend to move forward with a new RFP process.

Working toward a creative deal structure that would enable the UCC to retain a measure of ownership or equity in the building.



S Q U A R E

C H U R C H

Live
Play
Thrive





We own ~4 acres and 3 buildings (~150,000 square feet) outright.

We have signed an MOU across the 3 congregations (4 denominations), developed bylaws, and seated the board of a new, ecumenical 501c3 organization.

Shared worship, ChurchFest, city tree lighting, farmer's market, car show.

Have several excellent partners who are excited about this project. Also have strong partnership from the City of Cuyahoga Falls, particularly the Economic Development Office and Parks & Rec.

Development Team has voted to accept a proposal for a planning/creative process that will result in architectural drawings, elevations, and renderings (cost: \$38K).

Legal/Admin Team

Don Baird (FCC)
Jacob Davis (First UMC)
Matt Dickinson (FCC)
Dale Gilbert (First UMC)
Becky Higgins (First UMC)
Jim Kimble (First UMC)
Wes Lacy (St. John's)
Gary Medkeff (FCC)
Greta Myers (St. John's)
Carolyn Stroud (First UMC)

Development Team

Sue Bremkamp (St. John's)
Tony Crasi (First UMC)
John Hogan (FCC)
Ed Jesson (First UMC)
Eric Kinaitis (St. John's)
Suzanne Silvey (FCC)
Connie Swain (FCC)
Don Waggoner (FCC)

Program Team

Steve Anderson (FCC)
Patty Giunto (FCC)
Hal Hendricks (St. John's)
Pam Kimble (First UMC)
Kim Krueger (St. John's)
Ed Pancoast (First UMC)
Val Riedthaler (First UMC)
Donna Stockman (FCC)

Prayer Team

Janet Dodson (First UMC)
Kim Kerr (First UMC)
Jerry Killian (First UMC)
Leeanne Lloyd (First UMC)
Patty Summers (FCC)
Janet Thomas (FCC)
Brad Wilson (FCC)
Fr. Alan Cowart (St. John's)

Church Square Board

Don Baird (FCC)
Eric Kinaitis (St. John's)
Sr. Karoline Kramer (St. John's)
Gary Medkeff (FCC)
Keith Walker (First UMC)
Kim Yoak (First UMC)

The board also includes one clergy person from each congregation.

Collaboration, Partnership, Trust, Shared Risk,
Mutually Realized Blessing!!





TRINITY
United Church of Christ
TO ERR IS HUMAN

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Little Saints
BASKETBALL
SKILLS CLINIC FOR GRADES K-3
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www.UnitedChristianLeague.com

EXIT

Code of Conduct
Respect the Coach
Respect your Opponent
Respect the Rules
Respect the Game
Respect the Referee
Respect your teammates
Respect yourself

Code of Conduct
Respect the Coach
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Respect the Rules
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Respect the Referee
Respect your teammates
Respect yourself











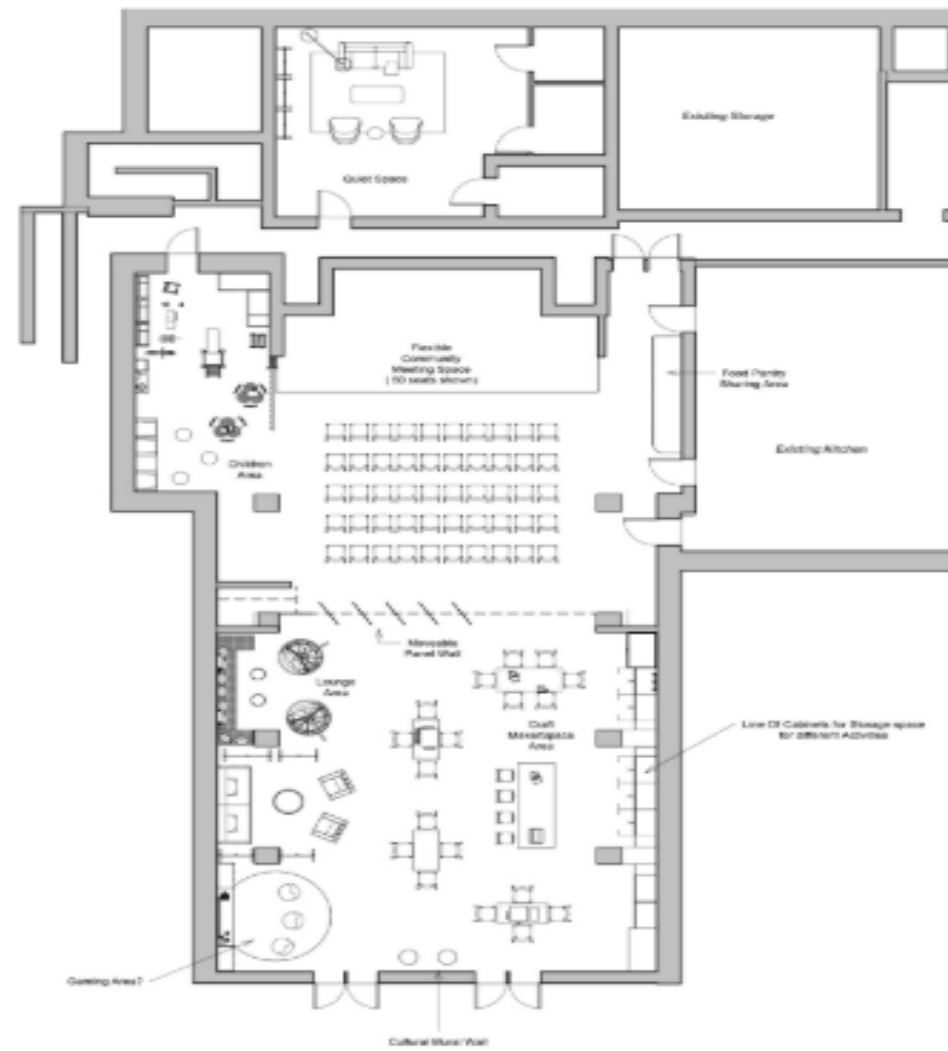
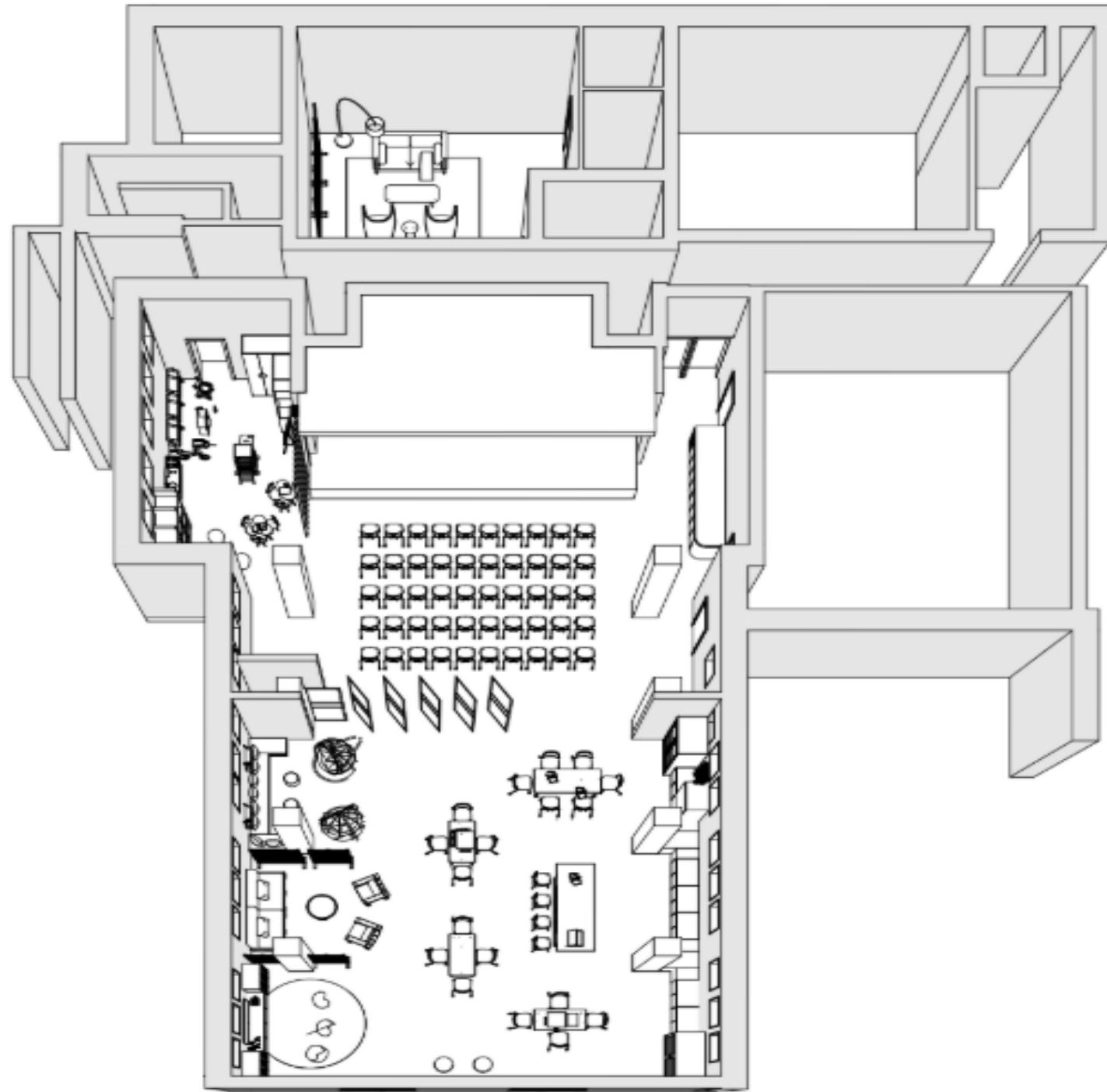
Have been gifted a beautiful church building in North Hill, Akron. Created a new non-profit organization.

Investing \$300K+ in capital improvements in order to secure two anchor tenants by the end of 2025.
[Another good point to talk about risk/debt.]

Have been upgrading bathrooms and other common spaces; secured several smaller tenant/partners.

Won a \$100K research grant from Kent State to support our community listening efforts in the neighborhood.





Floor Plan



Craft/Makers Space



Lounge Area



Gaming Area and Craft/Makers Space

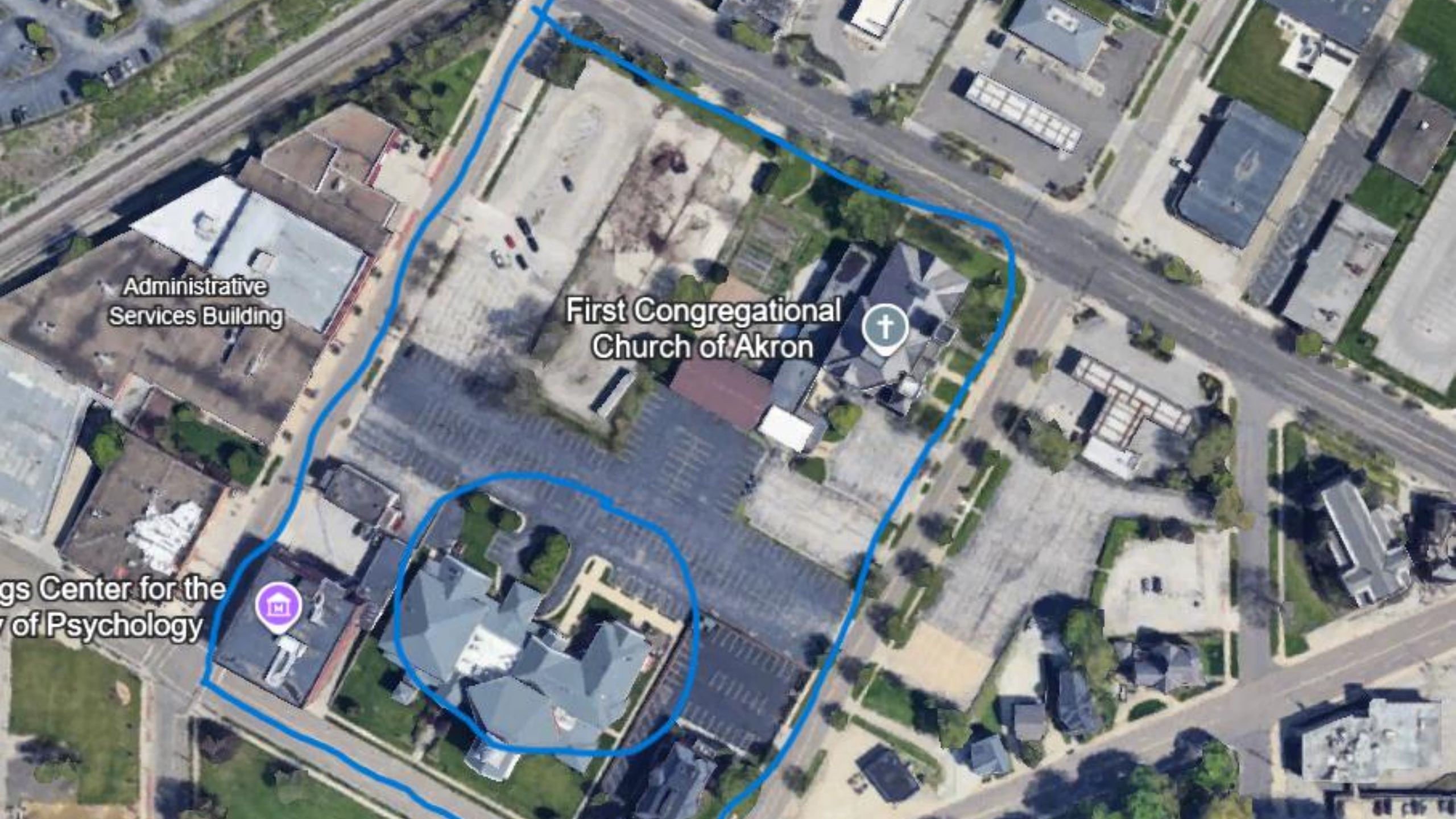


Children's Space

FIRST UNITED
METHODIST
CHURCH (AKRON)







Administrative
Services Building

This is a satellite map of an urban area. A large blue outline encompasses a central region containing several buildings and a parking lot. Within this region, a smaller blue circle highlights a specific building. To the left of the main area, there is a building with a purple icon. To the right, there is a building with a white cross icon. The map shows streets, parking lots, and various types of buildings.

First Congregational
Church of Akron

gs Center for the
of Psychology


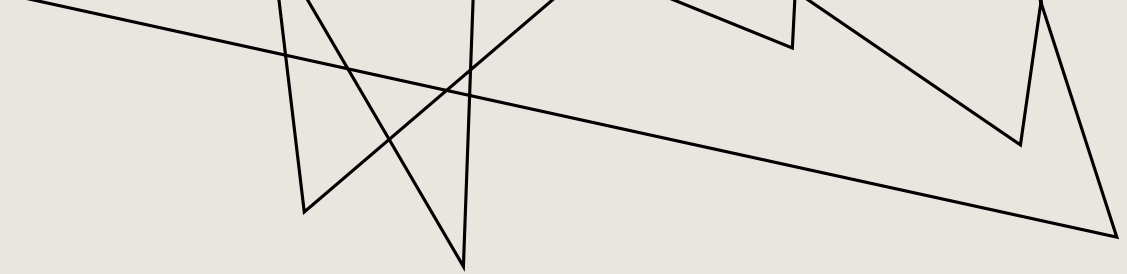
First UMC has been on a path to closure.

First Congregational Church (UCC) of Akron is next door; stable congregation with a large endowment and ministry presence in Akron.


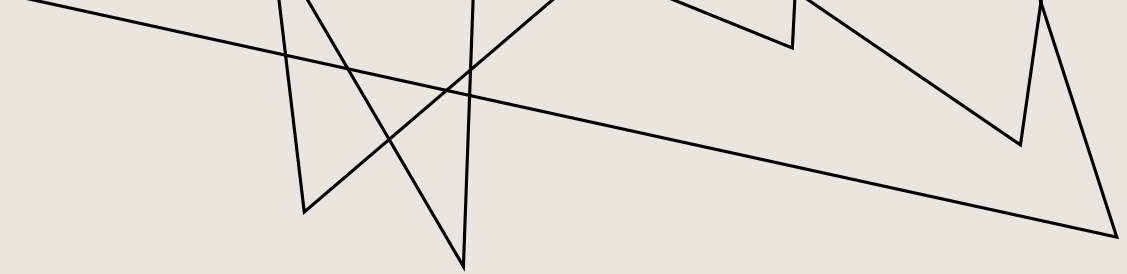
FCC has an existing CDC (“Living the Legacy”) and is open to receiving the property through ongoing relationship and ecumenical collaboration.

Have secured several anchor tenants; working toward sustainability in the next 12-18 months.

Has been a considerable labor of love (energy, \$) on the part of the remaining First UMC congregation.



❖ FIND YOUR
NEIGHBORHOOD
PARTNERS
(NOT THE NEAREST
CHURCH OF THE SAME
DENOMINATION)




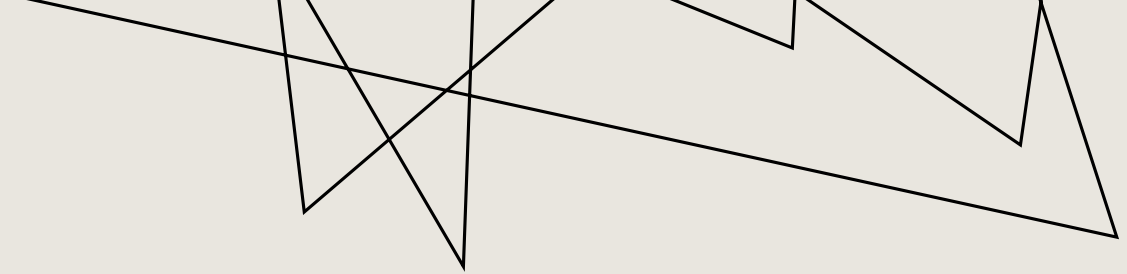
❖ ASK YOUR PARTNERS
ABOUT THEIR HOPES
AND DREAMS FOR THE
COMMUNITY.
(DO NOT ASK THEM TO
SOLVE YOUR BUILDING
PROBLEMS.)




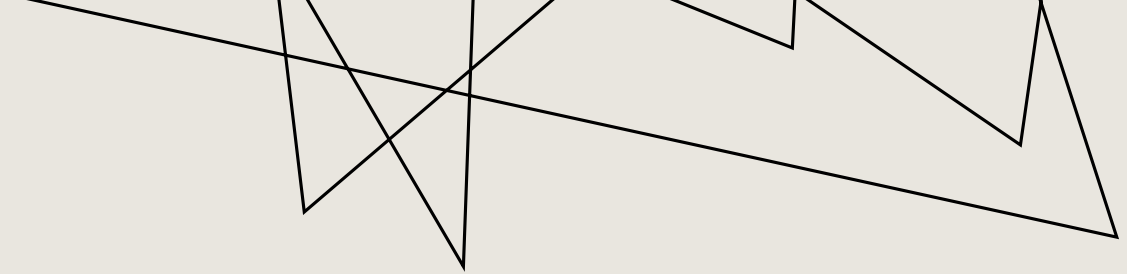
❖ ON A RELATED NOTE:
NO ONE WANTS TO
FUND A PROBLEM.

PEOPLE WANT TO
FUND A VISION.





❖ LEARN WHAT IT
MEANS TO
PARTICIPATE IN THE
MARKET RATHER
THAN AVOID IT



❖ **THINK LIKE A
DEVELOPER: COZY UP
TO CONCEPTS LIKE
RISK, REVENUE,
SUSTAINABILITY, AND
HEALTHY DEBT**

Abstract geometric lines in the top right corner, consisting of several intersecting black lines forming a complex, star-like pattern.

WHAT DOES THIS
BUILDING “WANT” TO BE?

Abstract geometric lines on the left side, consisting of several intersecting white lines forming a complex, star-like pattern.

WHAT DOES THE
“MARKET” SAY?

HOW ARE YOU GOING TO
PAY FOR IT?



WHAT DOES THIS BUILDING “WANT” TO BE?



What are key characteristics of the space(s)?

Where is the plumbing? Electrical?

What does it “feel” like?

Get help ideating from architect/interior designers! It’s ok to pay a little!

Experiment with mix-and-match uses; compare to costs of ownership/upkeep.



WHAT DOES THE “MARKET” SAY?



Who are your partners?

What are they dreaming about?

What does your neighborhood need or lack?

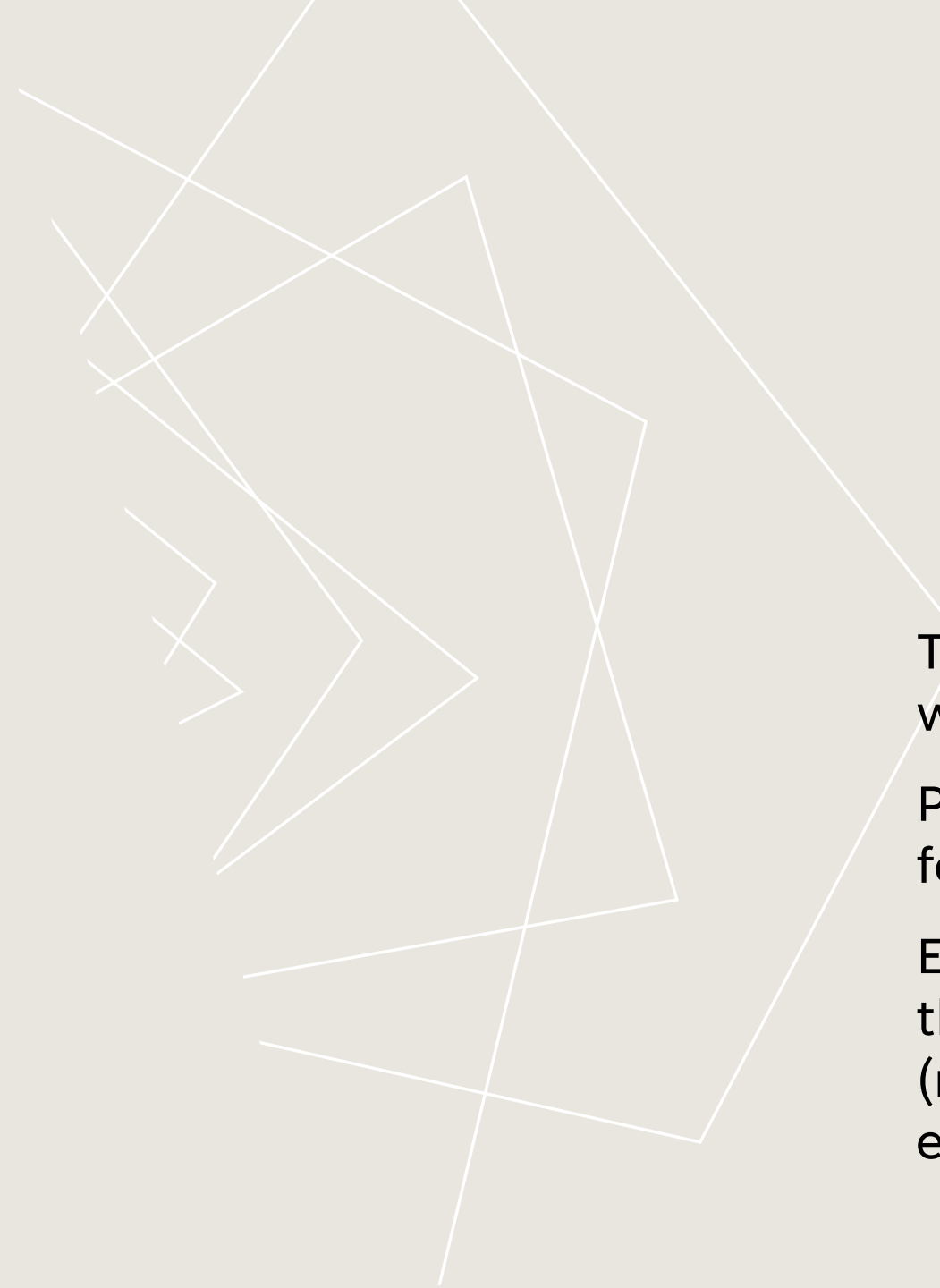
What use(s) might drive revenue?

What does your city/CDC want to see?

What modifications might bridge the gap
between core values and sustainability?



HOW ARE YOU GOING TO PAY FOR IT?



Think like a developer: if it drives revenue, it's worth considering debt/risk.

Public funding sources: city, county, statewide faith-based initiative funding, LIHTC, TIF.

Explore partnership with local developers through a variety of ownership structures (master lease, ground lease, seller financing, equity structure, etc).

There is no single “right”
answer for every building.
Believe in what is possible.
Stay calm.
Keep at it. ❤️

An abstract graphic consisting of several thin, white, irregular lines that intersect to form a series of overlapping, angular shapes. These shapes resemble stylized, overlapping polygons or a complex network of lines, creating a sense of depth and movement. The lines are set against a solid black background.

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION & YOUR CASE STUDIES