Accessibility Working Group
Agenda and Minutes, December 10 Meeting
After Church, in the nursery

Present: Numa Haase, Amy Chorey, Paula Gills, Sam Clark, Mary Alice Bisbee, Fran Dodd, Dustin Rand, Karin Nissen, Malcolm FitzPatrick, Paul Ohlson, Bill Pelton, Tina Ruth
Next Meeting: January 18th, after church.
Results or decisions are in italic below

Announcements:

1. New Railing at pulpit
2. We meet with living lighter, garden committee, RE and property committee Jan 11 for a Charette about the outdoor space on school street.
3. Karin has connected us with Mike Charron at VCIL to help us. Details haven't been sorted out.
4. Fran Dodd is developing an area for our minutes, designs, and other postings on our church website. This will make our work much easier going forward.
5. New locks and levers should be in soon.

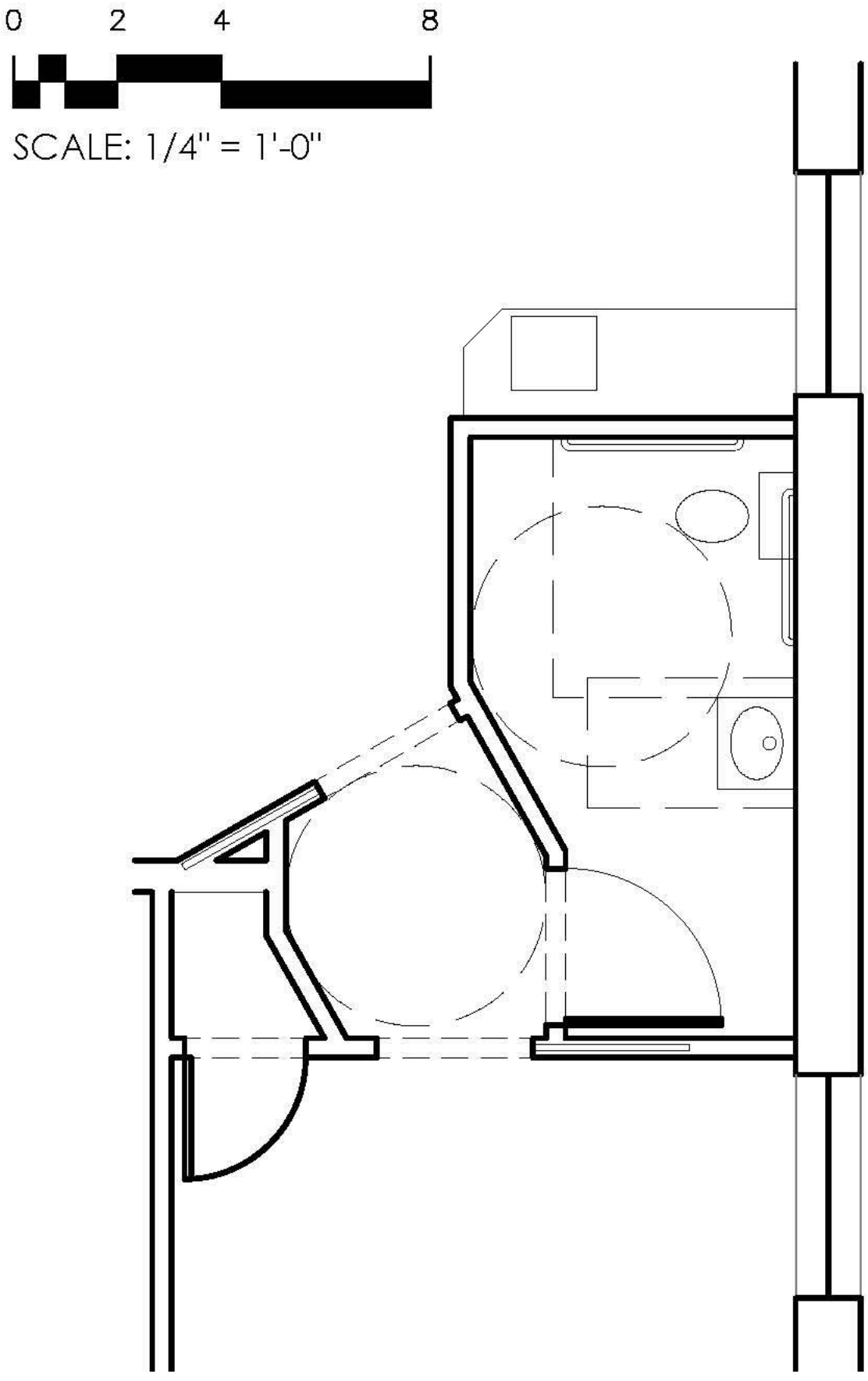
Discussions:

1. Paul Ohlson: Paul suggested we divide accessibility projects into phases. This will make it easier to plan, gain support for, and raise funds for this work. Presenting the task as a single huge undertaking makes it harder for people to imagine accomplishing it. Also, if we accomplish a few manageable projects, we build support for more ambitious and difficult goals. He also expressed support for the bathroom project and thinks money may well be found for it in the near future.

The committee was in support of these points. Sam will prepare a plan for phases, based on our report from last year, to present to the committee. If possible, we'll sort that out via email before the next meeting.

2. Though our committee has gone on record in favor of

locating a new accessible bathroom in the large closet off the Vestry, we want to fully explore other options. Amy presented two studies of possible improvements to bathroom layout #2, addressing concerns about privacy, traffic flow, and separation of the bathroom from food activities. Based on a suggestion by Malcolm, she will make another version with more open space in the hallway and other improvements.

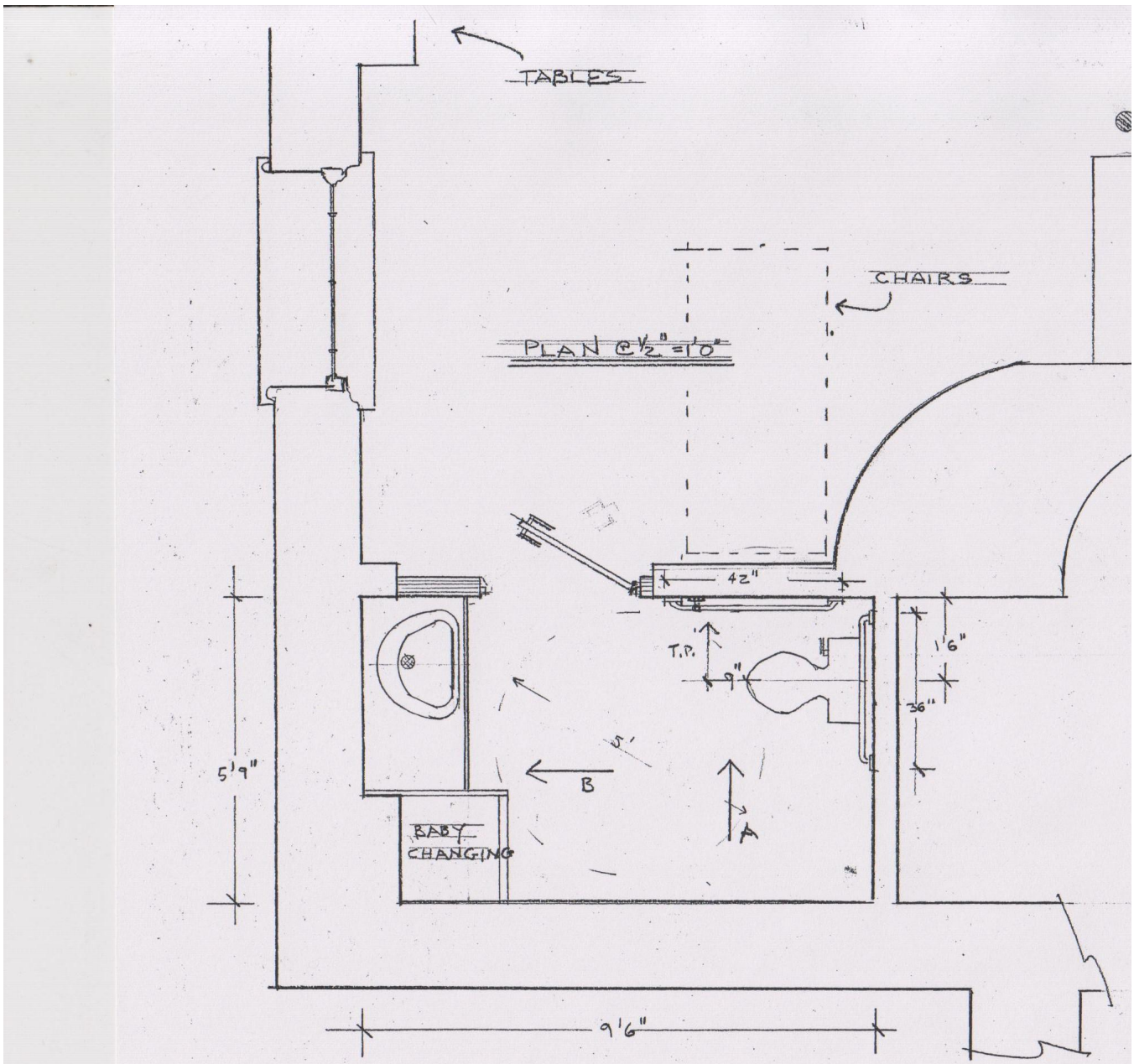

0
2
4
8
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"

Improved layouts, bathroom location #2

3. Sam presented a more detailed version of the preferred plan which locates the bathroom in the large closet off the vestry (School Street side). Though there continues to be support for this proposal, ongoing concerns included:

- possible congestion around the bathroom entrance
- finding alternative storage sites for items stored there (which Amy inventoried)
- a desire to see if locating the bathroom in the other coat closet would have any advantages.

Sam will make a plan for the other coat closet and circulate it before the next meeting. We need to find alternate or better storage for items on Amy's inventory, and study the overall storage issue a bit. We don't yet have a plan to get this work done, but it should be completed before our next meeting. A storage loft in the bathroom could house some items. We won't be ready with a firm proposal to present to the ET on January 5.



CHAIRS : 34" X 69" ; TABLES : 32" X 8'6"

4. Bettie Barnes has been working on a signage project for the inside of the church. Perhaps someone would like a three hour project to bring this to completion, it would be great. *Because of time constraints, we did not get to this item.*

5. Begin discussions on Hidden and Invisible Disabilities. (Liz Benjamin is going join us on this but was not available today). Paula outlined ideas about how to approach this subject with the congregation, based on the section of last year's Accessibility Report, which Paula wrote (see below for this excerpt). It was clear that this was a long-term project with many elements. A good starting point would be to distribute and promote the sections on Disability Etiquette on pages 3-9 from the document "Accessibility Information for Unitarian Universalist churches", (see UCM website for a copy). Portions of this document could be inserted in the order of service. We should connect this effort to the 150th anniversary celebration, and emphasize its importance to our church mission of welcoming all. *It was agreed that this subject would be the main agenda item of our next meeting. Since we're dividing into two teams, we won't do it that way.*

Excerpt from the section of last year's report that covers hidden and invisible disabilities.

So--what can our church--any church--do to meet this unique challenge to fulfill our mission in truly welcoming all?

SURVEY the congregation without identifiers to attempt to assess what types/numbers of "invisible" disabilities exist.

CREATE an atmosphere where people feel comfortable talking with someone about their disability--this could be a designated and trained person in the Lay Pastoral Care Network.

EDUCATE staff, membership and friends. Local agencies can provide programs and training. We may want to start with the least understood and most feared impairment of mental illness.

SPONSOR disability events and programs in the community and internally. An example could be a tutoring program for local students with learning disabilities.

INVITE people with these disabilities to speak to the congregation--both people from inside and outside the congregation--perhaps by having a disability

awareness service.
REPRINT AND DISTRIBUTE the “Disability Etiquette” section of Accessibility Information for Unitarian-Universalist Churches to all staff, members and friends and hold a series of discussion groups to deepen awareness and understanding.
It is human nature to avoid or fear what we do not know, but ignorance should not be a reason for failure to provide access to our church. How can we truly “welcome all” if we allow barriers to full participation for people with hidden disabilities to exist without at least an attempt to address them?
(Paula Gills)