

# Trinity College

## Final Report<sup>1</sup> on the Initial Phases of the Community Planning Process, January – April 2015 200 Constitution Plaza

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### I. Introduction

This memorandum summarizes our work in support of Trinity College's interest in conducting an open and inclusive process to determine how best to use the recently purchased building in Downtown Hartford at 200 Constitution Plaza.

In our proposal dated January 8, 2015, we suggested three separate phases to accomplish the anticipated work. However, as we got underway, it became clear that collapsing tasks proposed for Phases 1 and 2, to include consultations with stakeholders within the Trinity community at the outset, would allow us to accelerate the work and move more directly to getting the desired input for on-going deliberation and decision-making. Compressing the two proposed phases involved supporting the President's communication with the entire Trinity community and preparing for and holding meetings with four internal constituencies, namely trustees, faculty, staff, and students.

The meetings were held after we completed a full tour of the building at 200 Constitution Plaza and were briefed by Paul Mutone, Vice President for Finance & Operations and Treasurer, on the building's condition, proposed immediate improvements, possibilities about prospective tenants, and the substantial amount of public and private investments already in place in the vicinity of the building.

### II. Findings

As envisioned by Trinity College, 200 Constitution Plaza is much **more than a building**: this property, over time, will become Trinity's Downtown Campus. The downtown location has the potential to **broaden the experience** of Trinity students –allowing them more extensive opportunities to know their City well and to navigate its rich social and multi-cultural context. Several people have noted that Trinity's first location was downtown, and that this new building provides an opportunity for the College to return to its roots.

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<sup>1</sup> Final report was shortened from the original length.

Three broad sets of findings emerged from six meetings held with Trinity trustees, faculty, staff, and students.

**1) 200 Constitution Plaza complements Trinity's academic mission by broadening the experience** of Trinity students and expanding its curricular offerings by:

- Providing **students** with a **foothold in downtown**; making more convenient their pursuit of internships, and providing other reasons to venture into the heart of the Hartford business community;
- Creating **opportunities for innovative projects and ideas** to flourish; and
- Facilitating broader **collaboration** with other colleges and universities, cultural institutions and the business community.

**2) 200 Constitution Plaza provides opportunities to strengthen Trinity's commitment to civic engagement.**

- The Downtown Campus will further **strengthen Trinity's significant commitment and investment in Hartford.**
- This investment also serves as a **reminder to the greater Hartford** community of the College's impressive set of **initiatives and financial support** to ongoing Hartford programs and activities
- The mural in Mather Hall captures the College's close connections to the City: **"The heart of Trinity is Hartford."**
- Bringing students and faculty downtown is **not without challenges**, including transportation, travel time, security and safety, reluctance of faculty to teach downtown, and competition for resources with existing programs and needs at Trinity.

**3) 200 Constitution Plaza raises a number of financial considerations.**

- The building is in **very good overall condition** and is equipped with many types of spaces that can support Trinity's likely uses.
- The purchase represents a **sound and fiscally prudent business opportunity.** Investment activity in Downtown Hartford is impressive and all signs are pointing to a major resurgence of this area.
- The building must be **financially self-supporting** within three to five years so that it does not burden Trinity's operating budget.
- Leasing a substantial portion of the building is an immediate priority. This should be accomplished parallel to the process of deciding Trinity's uses of an initial portion of the space and the conditions necessary to support Trinity's activities in the new building.

- Modest repairs and improvements will be needed in the short-term (prior to occupancy), but **no** immediate **major renovations**, construction, or space re-configurations are anticipated.

### III. Trinity Community Input:

#### Suggested Uses for 200 Constitution Plaza

At the start of each of our meetings with trustees, faculty/staff, and students we described the **specific criteria for the future use of the building that had been** identified by Joanne Berger-Sweeney and her cabinet. In short, 200 Constitutional Plaza must:

- 1) **enhance** the educational mission and community orientation of Trinity over time;
- 2) **generate** significant revenues with a goal of offsetting most, if not all, of the building's operating costs; The building's **financial sustainability is critical** to its short and long term success. For the foreseeable future, the expectation is that Trinity will be leasing out a large portion of the building;
- 3) and, in addition, **tenants** occupying the building should be **compatible** with Trinity's occupancy; they should be "good neighbors" to Trinity's uses of the building.

The following summarizes comments from individual trustees, faculty, staff and students with whom we met; those we received via the open link<sup>2</sup>; and email communications to Stefanie Chambers that were directed to us. The faculty/staff meetings, combined, attracted over 70 participants; however, we note that only a handful were faculty members. And, of those, nearly all were from arts/music departments. The two meetings with students included approximately 15 students; the majority were urban studies or political science majors but students majoring in biology, chemistry, art history, international studies, among others, were also present. More than twenty-five trustees participated in discussions about the use of the building.

As Joanne Berger-Sweeney noted in our meeting with the trustees: "The only limitations of the building are the limitations of our imagination."

#### Programmatic Suggestions

- All Trinity students should be required to take a course downtown; this could be in the form of a freshman seminar. One person coined the phrase: "The path to a Trinity degree goes through 200 Constitution Plaza."

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<sup>2</sup> We have been impressed by the level of interest in response to President Berger-Sweeney's letter to the Trinity community of February 19, 2015, as represented in the open link (<http://commons.trincoll.edu/comment/200-constitution-plaa/>).

As of April 10, 2015, there were 24 messages posted, with about half identifying themselves as alumni. All but 3, by our count, were very enthusiastic about the purchase of the building; most provided constructive and thoughtful suggestions for Trinity and community uses.

- Re-locate graduate studies programs or courses
- Re-locate undergraduate Cities program
- Introduce a conference center for use by Trinity and for renting to others
- Expand the Center for Urban and Global Studies, perhaps with a focus on the Caribbean
- Introduce a new Center for Immigrant and Refugee Studies<sup>3</sup>
- Introduce a new Center for Micro-lending
- Provide an art gallery for undergraduate exhibitions
- Provide a satellite location for arts/performance groups to rehearse and perform, and to invite a broader audience.
- Provide formal or informal space for collaborating with nearby colleges/universities
- Environmental sustainability should be a priority when changes are made to the physical structure

### **Courses or Training Workshops**

- Business oriented classes for both Trinity undergraduates and continuing education students
- Training location to prepare students for internships and community learning

### **Other Types of Meeting/Office Space for Trinity Community**

- A meeting place for students—formal and informal—to feel “at home” downtown; alternative study space
- Office space for students doing internships downtown
- Office space for Emeriti faculty
- Space for alumni interactions, formal and informal
- Parent-student-faculty meeting space
- Space for various types of career development and counseling activities

### **Other Possible Uses for Trinity community**

- housing for upper class undergraduates, perhaps engaged in internships downtown, or recent graduates working downtown
- senior assisted living or long-term care residence
- incubator for innovative business opportunities
- café or other type of lunch/snack/coffee
- electronic link to library; and quiet library work space
- venue for large dinners
- astronomy observatory
- recording studio (also open to broader Hartford community)
- squash court(s)

### **Possible Uses by Broader Hartford Community**

- space for art, music, theater performances

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<sup>3</sup> A preliminary proposal for such a center was drafted by Professor Janet Bauer, March 2015.

- “welcome” space for new immigrants, as well as other functions for this community
- use of Plaza in front of the building for a variety of community functions
- annual science fair; restaurant/dining event with food samples provided
- locus of archival material on the history of Hartford
- a Magnet School
- an inter-university consortium to promote shared intellectual interests and activities

#### **IV. Highlighting Student Interests**

Our two meetings with students on April 9, 2015 revealed a high level of enthusiasm and interest in 200 Constitution Plaza and in the likely benefits that would accrue to Trinity students; only one student raised specific reservations. However, by the end of the meeting, he indicated that he was feeling much better about the project and substantially reassured. Trinity should use the building to create stronger links to Hartford so that students better understand the opportunities that Hartford offers, would be the most compelling priority.

Many students who attended the meetings were already connected to the greater Hartford community, having done internships downtown or participated in classes with an urban focus and field component. These students were eager to help figure out a way for the new building to become a “deliberate destination” downtown, thereby creating another magnet for Trinity students, in addition to the pull of West Hartford’s shops, restaurants and entertainment options.

Several students felt that first year orientation should include an introduction to 200 Constitution Plaza, with a focus on downtown opportunities. They suggested that orientation could be a continuous process throughout the first year, with a variety of specific events held downtown.

Many students concurred that holding first year seminars (in whole or in part) at 200 Constitution Plaza would require students to travel downtown. This would result in students learning, from the outset of their time at Trinity, how to navigate Downtown Hartford; they would almost certainly become more comfortable in that environment and be more likely to take advantage of its urban qualities. Although many Trinity students express an interest in multiculturalism and global issues and, indeed, many head to large cities after graduation, most have not ventured into Downtown Hartford to experience its cultural offerings, encounter its people, or enjoy the fine food and entertainment available.

Students offered the following specific suggestions for Trinity-based uses for 200 Constitution Plaza.

- Innovation lab; center for entrepreneurship, possibly in collaboration with UCONN’s Business School.

- Rehearsal space for music, dance, theater productions. They report that there is inadequate space on campus for these activities.
- Coffee shop café, perhaps with music on the weekends.
- An annual internship event, with students presenting their work through poster displays or other means; other Trinity students would be invited and would get a sense of the opportunities available in Hartford.
- A venue for alumni and other corporate, government or nonprofit employees to speak, in formal or informal settings; a great space for networking and recruitment.
- Center for Community Development, similar to Eastern Connecticut University's initiative in Willimantic.
- Create a partnership with the Wadsworth Atheneum and explore opportunities for collaboration.
- New wet lab space to enable more students to do projects, take specific lab-based courses.

## **V. Major Concerns and Questions**

### **Transportation**

- Transportation between the main campus and downtown needs a close look. Who will analyze the existing and possible new transportation options for providing attractive and accessible services? As would be expected, ease in getting from campus to Downtown is a major concern articulated by students. Although many students own cars, they cite the cost of parking as a deterrent to driving there. Travel time is a real problem unless an expeditious route is found in appropriate vehicles and with a frequent schedule.
- On demand vehicles (such as Uber) should be considered.

### **Costs**

- How quickly and to what extent will rents be able to cover operating expenses? That will determine whether it was a good purchase or not.

### **Logistics**

- There appears to be relatively little interest in teaching downtown, due to the amount of time to get there and back to the main campus.

### **Safety and Security**

- How will Trinity secure its space in the new building?
- Who will have access to the Trinity space and at what times of day/evening?
- Will security concerns require that Trinity have a stand-alone space in the building?
- Who else should be brought into the discussion to address Trinity's own needs and those of its prospective tenants?

### **Issues Related to General Use of Building**

- It appears that Trinity has the in-house capacity to determine whether additional assessments of building condition can be done internally or whether external assistance will be needed.
- There may be a need for additional professional expertise, such as an outside architectural firm to produce conceptual drawings; an engineering firm to assess the environmental condition of the building; a financial consultant to develop detailed construction and operating budgets; and/or a real estate broker and lawyer to help market leased space and to draft rental contracts.
- Paul Mutone and others are well aware of the need to comply with environmental and other codes, such as Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

### **Questions Specifically Related to Trinity's Uses of Building**

- Who will decide how the Trinity space at 200 Constitution Plaza will be used?
- How much space and which areas of the building should be reserved for Trinity for its downtown activities in the first few years?

### **Questions Specifically Related to Non-Trinity Uses of Building**

- How much space and which areas of the building should be leased to outside tenants?
- Who will be responsible for Trinity's leasing activity? Can this be accomplished by Trinity staff or by brokers with oversight from Trinity staff?
- What types of leases should be offered?
- What level of cost will tenant improvements require; how will they affect Trinity's net income?

## **VI: Recommendations**

### **Process**

- a. We understand that Paul Mutone and Jason Rojas will share responsibility for coordinating the work associated with occupancy and use of 200 Constitution Plaza. We assume that Paul will continue to be the lead person for construction, finance and the leasing process. There is a need for someone else to assume a similar level of leadership and responsibility for Trinity's use of its portion of the building, to advise the President, and to manage the many issues that will arise in implementing the decisions about how the space will be utilized. Will Jason 's other responsibilities allow him to fulfill those tasks? It may be necessary to hire a part or full-time employee whose sole role is to coordinate the many tasks related to the building (e.g., leasing, renovations, Trinity programming, transportation and public relations).
- b. We understand that a new committee is in the process of being set up to continue to get feedback and provide information to key constituents. We understand that this trustee/faculty/staff/student/city representative committee will assess pros/cons and feasibility of the various Trinity uses of

the building. This committee will be an important link between the Trinity community and Joanne Berger-Sweeney.

- c. Deliberate how best to continue to communicate with faculty to hear their interests in 200 Constitution Plaza. In view of the very limited number of faculty members who attended the meetings with us, what would be the best way to continue addressing faculty questions?
- d. Continue to use electronic media for communicating with the entire Trinity community, including the open link blog and email, as Trinity makes decisions about tenants and uses.
- e. Arrange individual meetings with leaders of other local colleges/universities and with leaders in the business community to lay the groundwork for establishing Trinity's downtown presence.
- f. Prior to the end of spring term classes, send out another letter to the Trinity community updating them on meetings held, progress to date, and next steps.
- g. Develop a timeline that will indicate when key milestones for both the leasing process and Trinity's decision on uses are likely to be achieved.

### **Building Repairs and Leasing**

- a. There is a need to estimate the start-up costs for a Trinity presence in the building.
- b. The Trinity team will want to stay in close touch with the City's Planning Department to be sure that the building complies with applicable zoning; that parking associated with the building is adequate; and any other issues related to Trinity's ability to occupy the building or rent to other entities.
- c. Hire additional professional help, as needed.
- d. Analyze Trinity's current expenditures in Hartford. What cash and in-kind contributions are being made and what are the demonstrated outcomes? Where is Trinity getting the "most bang for the buck?" Should any of these programs have a place in the new building?
- e. How can the many contributions that Trinity is already making in Hartford be better communicated to the Trinity and Hartford communities? How can the revitalization of 200 Constitution Plaza be seen as a continuation and a strengthening of this already significant set of commitments?
- f. Finalize the plan for pre-leasing construction needs and complete renovations as soon as possible.
- g. Work closely with the city on issues related to permitting, zoning, and parking.
- h. Lease up to 4½ floors as soon as possible. Ideally, lease terms will vary from 1-5 years.

### **Transportation and Safety/Security**

- a. Review and analyze existing and potential service levels, travel times and costs of the following, as well as other options for enhancing accessibility between the main Trinity campus and the new downtown campus that may be identified, including:

\* UPass program that already offers discounted rides to students;

- \* expanding Trinity's existing downtown weekend shuttle;
  - \* expanding the city-run DASH shuttle to include a stop at the main campus; and
  - \* the potential role of collaborating with other university-run shuttles operated by St. Joseph's and the University of Hartford.
  - \* on demand taxi or bus service perhaps modeled after Uber or Lyft.
- b. Design the necessary safety and security measures as soon as possible.
  - c. Implement the transportation and safety/security strategies that are likely to be most effective for the early stage uses of the building.

## **Final Note**

It has been a pleasure assisting the Trinity community in its initial exploration of what it seeks to achieve and some of the possible prospective uses at 200 Constitution Plaza. We continue to feel that the purchase of this building, while responding to a unique opportunity, was a fiscally prudent move that has the potential for providing numerous benefits to Trinity and to the wider Hartford community.

We are delighted that the planning process is farther along than had been anticipated at this point. The lines of communication have been set up and the Trinity community has been brought into the process. Although a number of questions and issues remain to be resolved, there seems to be relatively little opposition to Trinity's purchase and anticipated occupancy of 200 Constitution Plaza. Based on our many conversations, we believe that the dominant feelings on the Trinity campus range from real enthusiasm to cautious optimism.