

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: River Road Unitarian Church

Other names/site number: River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation [current name],
M: 35-214

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 6301 River Road

City or town: Bethesda State: MD County: Montgomery

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide ___ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___A ___B ___C ___D

<p>_____ Signature of certifying official/Title:</p> <p>_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	<p>_____ Date</p>
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Name of Property

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County and State

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ___ entered in the National Register
- ___ determined eligible for the National Register
- ___ determined not eligible for the National Register
- ___ removed from the National Register
- ___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
-

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Site

Structure

Object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Religion/Religious Facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Religion/Religious Facility

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Modern Movement

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: brick, stucco, glass

Narrative Description

Summary

River Road Unitarian Church (RRUC) is located at 6301 River Road in Bethesda, Maryland.¹ The property is 4.46 acres and is located at the northwest corner of River Road and Whittier Boulevard, with the entrance on Whittier. The church lot is surrounded by the residential development of Kenwood Park, a community of detached houses. The church buildings are set back from the abutting roads, well screened by trees and shrubs. The land slopes up from Whittier about 20 feet with the buildings at the highest point of the parcel.

There are two linked buildings at the high point of the site. The larger original was designed by the prominent mid-century modern architecture firm of Keyes, Lethbridge and Condon. Completed in 1965, it is split-level with a two-story classroom and office wing on the north and a perpendicular sanctuary and related spaces on the south. The two sections join at a “bell” tower above a central stairway. The tower provides a strong vertical focus for the otherwise horizontal structure. Sloping roofs are prominent.

The second building, with a fellowship hall, meeting rooms, and classrooms, was designed by the firm of MTFFA and completed in 2008. The design concept was to complement the original church. On the exterior, white walls, identical roof slopes, similar windows, including clerestory, all show the effort at similarity. Inside, the fellowship hall uses similar steel beam construction with similar wood ceiling.

The 1965 church won four architectural awards, including the biennial national AIA honor award as one of the dozen best buildings of the period 1961-65. This building merits inclusion in the National Register because it is such an outstanding example of mid-century modern architecture. The 2008 MTFFA building, while built outside of the period of significance, does not detract from the integrity of the site because it successfully carries forward the design concepts of the original.

¹ The historic name of the property is River Road Unitarian Church (RRUC) while the current name of the property is River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation (RRUUC).

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Mid-century modern is distinguished from the other contemporary styles of minimalism and brutalism by its emphasis on natural materials for a warm and earthy feel. Wood, brick, and stone are used on the exterior and interior, integrated through large areas of glass. The building and site retain a high degree of integrity.

Narrative Description

The building axis is southeast to northwest, but, for convenience of description, Keyes, Lethbridge and Condon described the main entrance, looking down toward Whittier, as facing east. This methodology for describing the building will be used in this narrative.

Site Description

RRUC is at the northwest corner of River Road and Whittier Boulevard. The site is a rectangle of 4.46 acres, roughly 310 X 630 ft. The narrow side (east) is along Whittier, which provides the entrance. The south boundary is River Road, a four-lane highway, largely screened from the church view by trees. The north boundary is the rear yards of detached houses. To the west are the playing fields of Whitman High School.

The site slopes up 20 feet up from Whittier to the high point of the site about halfway from the parcel line. The location of the buildings on high ground serves practical and symbolic purposes. The location in a wooded area serves to keep prominent the desired connection to nature. The site was originally heavily wooded and remains largely so. A landscape consultant was retained to work with Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon, which is reflected in the landscape plan (Figure 1). In a recent aerial photo, the tree canopy hides most of the parking and driveway (Figure 2).

East of the Church (Front)

On the slope between Whittier and the building are two parking lots, at different elevations, parallel to Whittier. The parking lots are separated from the street and each other by wooded spaces. The parking lots are accessed by two driveways which meet at the church entrance. The driveways are asphalt, but the parking spaces are the original gravel, which absorbs more rainfall.

An important new feature from 2020 is the eight-foot-wide flagstone, wood, and deck board path from Whittier to the entrance plaza. As it climbs the slope, it has small changes in direction to offer varied views of the trees and of the church buildings. It is an important visual and safety element for the site. Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon designed a simple path, which was constructed with woodchips several months after the building opened. However, the woodchip path was unstable in bad weather and lighting with underground wiring was unreliable. Eventually, funding was found for a proper replacement and the new path is a fine improvement. A 2023 land and labor acknowledgement sign sits at the entrance to the walk. The walkway does not detract from the integrity of the property.

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The plaza in front of the main entrance is a pebbled concrete that matches the original. Replacement was required because of surface deterioration. The only visible change is the addition of a ramp for disability access. The main entrance is recessed into the sanctuary wing with a window wall facing a plaza. From the plaza, there is a flight of steps to an entrance to the offices on the upper level.

South of the Church

To the south of the church is the 2008 MFTA-designed fellowship hall, connected to the church via a glassed bridge. A driveway passes beneath the bridge.

West of the Church (Rear)

In the rear of the church, there are steps and a concrete walkway from the southside driveway to the classroom area used on weekdays for a daycare operation.

To the west of the sanctuary is a memorial garden with a water feature of natural stone and a semi-circular seating area. It was built in the 1980's, but it is a continuation of the original program to enhance opportunities to engage with nature. Adjacent to the garden are three sloped tables with memorial name plates, a 21st century addition. Although consistent with the original building, the memorial garden does not contribute to the significance of the site. Another feature is a playground at the west end of the classroom wing. Neither the memorial garden nor the playground interfere with the integrity of the property.

West of a small lawn and the memorial garden is a wooded area with a small stream. This area was protected by a Montgomery County Conservation easement when the fellowship hall was completed in 2008. This area is unchanged except for unpaved paths to allow pedestrian access to the natural landscape. It is now planted with trees and herbaceous plants that are native to Montgomery County.

North of the Church

To the north of the church, there is a patio adjacent to the office and classroom wing on the building's north side. There is a wooded buffer between the site and the rear yards of the residential properties to the north.

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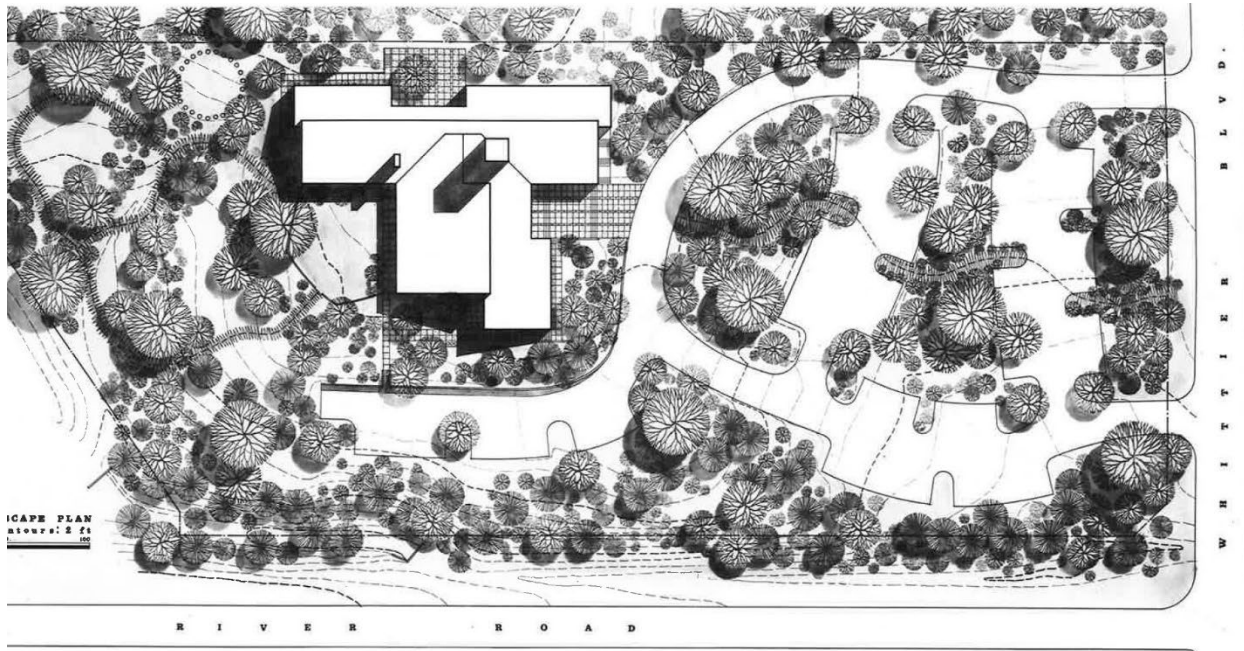


Figure 1: Site & Landscape Plan (Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon, 1965, RRUUC Archives)

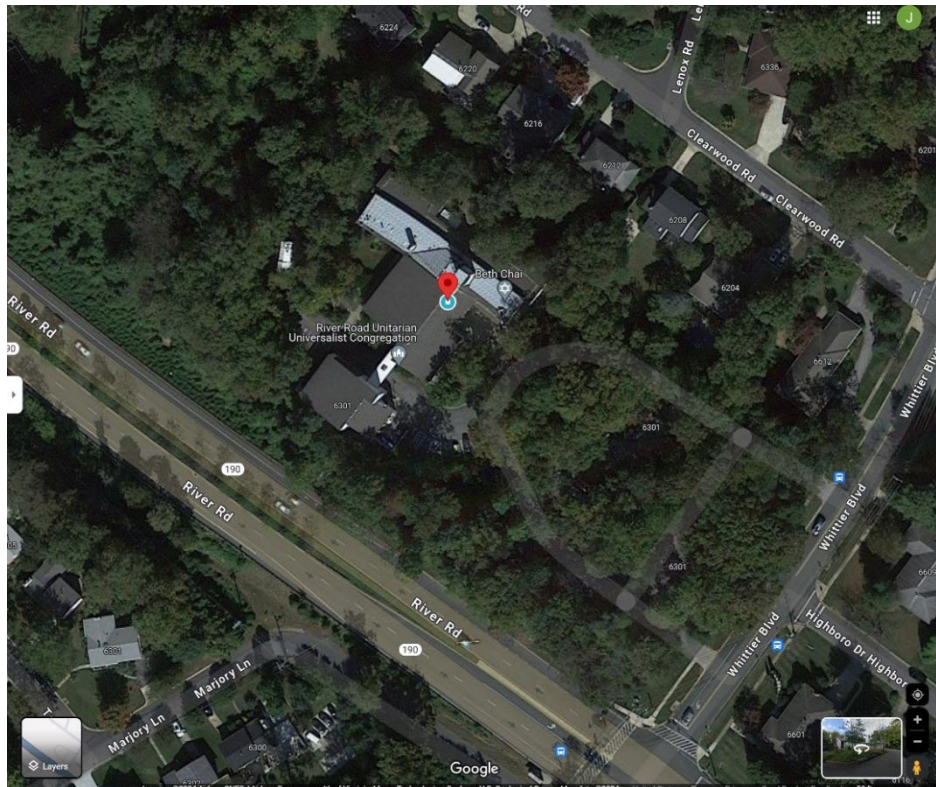


Figure 2: Aerial photo (Google Maps 2023)

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River Road Unitarian Church (1965)

Exterior

The building is comprised of differing planes and roof slopes, and is T-shaped, with the north part of the building containing a classroom and office wing and the south part of the building containing the sanctuary and its related spaces. The exterior walls are white-painted brick with large areas of glass. Originally, the roof shingles were cedar shakes, but time and practicality led to composite shingles. Recently, solar panels were added to save electricity and to demonstrate environmental concern. The bell tower (that does not include a bell) is an important vertical element.

The building's east façade features a large, glass-walled entrance that is recessed from the rest of this façade. The entrance is emphasized with two-story tall columns. The southern, ground level portion of this façade is unfenestrated except for a single entryway. The clerestory windows on this elevation were originally shaded with vertical wood boards. However, the wood deteriorated. When the windows were replaced with double-pane glass, the boards were removed, and shading was provided on the interior with motorized screens.

The southern elevation consists of two blocks. The eastern block projects more than the western block. Neither have any openings, however there is an entryway on the west elevation of the eastern block.

The west elevation is marked by a wall of glass panes and a series of glass French doors that enter into the sanctuary. The same columns that mark the east façade entrance are also found here.

The south elevation of the west side of the classroom and office wing has three bays and is two stories tall. The bays are separated by the same, white-painted brick columns featured on the sanctuary's west elevation. Each bay contains a window wall of five windows on both the first floor and the second floor.

The west elevation of this wing has a projecting block on the north side, the south elevation of which features an entrance and stairs from the second floor to the ground. The west elevation's of each of the blocks have no fenestration.

The north elevation of this wing is broken up into three parts. The western part mirrors the southern elevation of this wing with three bays of five single pane windows. There is a fourth bay with no fenestration between this part of the elevation and the center part. The center part consists of a recessed entrance made of glass panes with two glass French doors. A patio enhances this entrance. The eastern part of this elevation consists of five bays with window walls that echo the other elevations of this wing.

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The east elevation of the classroom and office wing has two blocks, the northern most projects and the southern elevation of this projection contains a single entrance. The southern elevation of the wing faces the entrance patio and consists of three bays with window walls on the second floor.

Interior

Many of the design features are from the original building scope designated by the congregation and reflect the Unitarian value system. Behind the east entrance window wall is a foyer with a high ceiling. The foyer floor was originally pebbled concrete but is now rectangular terrazzo tiles. The foyer connects with the stairway to the north and the anteroom to the south. It does not lead directly to the sanctuary; the entrance is around the corner.

The sanctuary, entered from the anteroom or stair hall, has a tall, sloped, wood paneled ceiling. Steel beams, partially clad in wood, are connected with non-structural purlins. The purlins add complexity and visual interest to the ceiling. There is a balcony along the east wall beneath the row of large clerestory windows. The west wall is a glass wall with French doors looking out to a lawn and trees. The north and south walls are painted brick, carefully laid to create texture that shows prominently in angled sunlight through the clerestory windows. The wood chandeliers and the similar dais were designed by Keyes, Lethbridge and Condon and complement the architecture. The floor is standard oak boards. The oak and cane chairs, also original, move easily to open the floor for various uses as called for in the original design. The low stage on the south wall is reached by three wide steps and a ramp, which is a later addition.

Along the southern portion of the east wall, there is access to the anteroom or lounge. This access can be restricted through the use of sliding wood doors, which are an original feature. The purposeful manipulation of space was specifically called for in the building program. Washrooms replace the original kitchen. A newer kitchen was constructed as a part of the 2008 fellowship hall. A coat room and storage space reduced the original size of this anteroom. The original skylights, hardly visible from outside, were removed in the reconfiguration of this space.

The open stairway on the north side of the foyer leads to the two levels of classrooms and offices and has easy steps of slate. This stairway also leads to the sanctuary balcony. The adjacent elevator was added in 1997.

The classroom and office wing on the north side of the building features a large and interesting room, on the second level, that has a ceiling similar to the sanctuary and a balcony with a row of clerestory windows. At floor level, the north wall along the corridor is glass, with two French doors. The exterior wall of the corridor at this location is also glass and opens out to the north patio. The glass wall design on either side of the hallway reinforces the relationship the interior spaces have with the outdoor spaces. This room has a fireplace along its west wall, as called for in the church's original scope of work.

Interior renovations to add air conditioning, sprinklers, double-pane glass, and replace some wood at the windows have not altered the original appearance or the integrity of the building.

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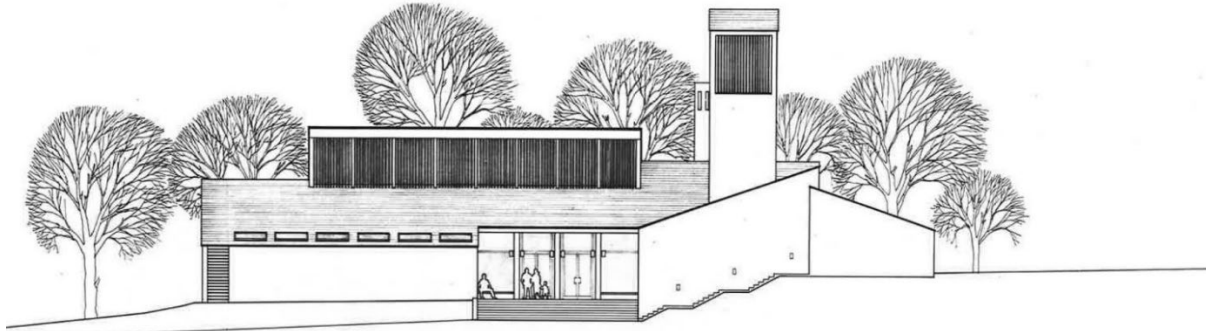


Figure 3: Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon's design of the east façade (RRUUC Archives).

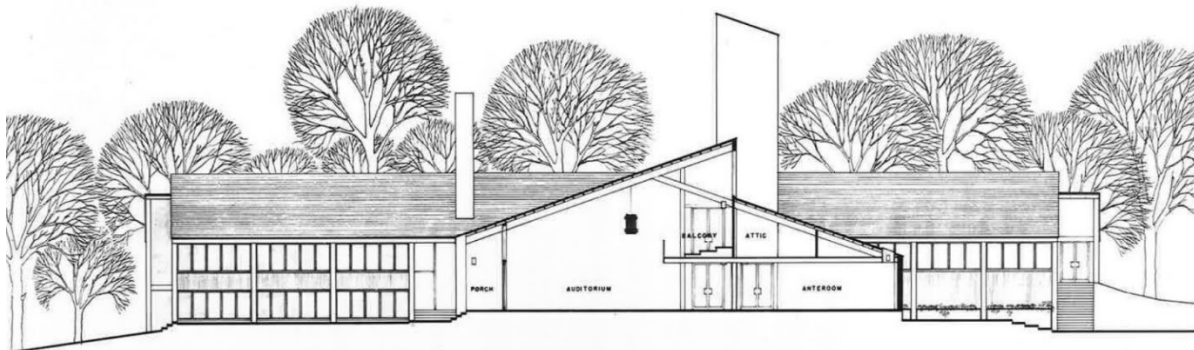


Figure 4: Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon's design of the south elevation (RRUUC Archives).

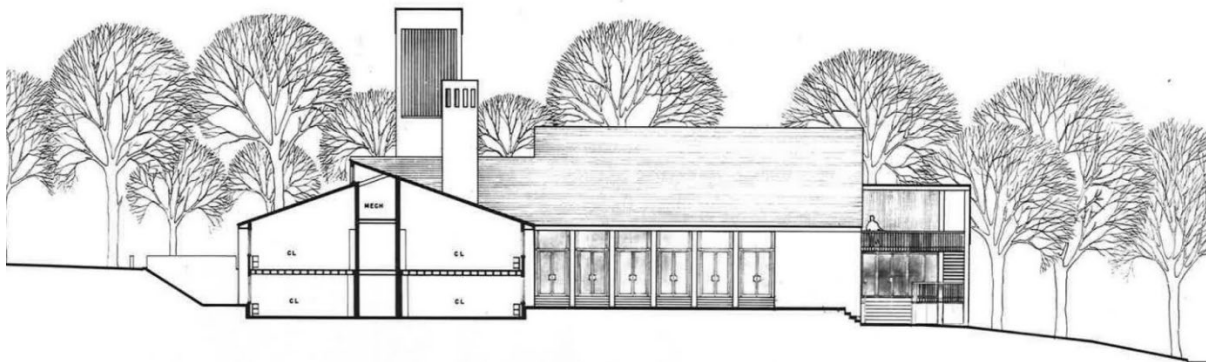


Figure 5: Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon's design of the west (rear) elevation (RRUUC Archives).

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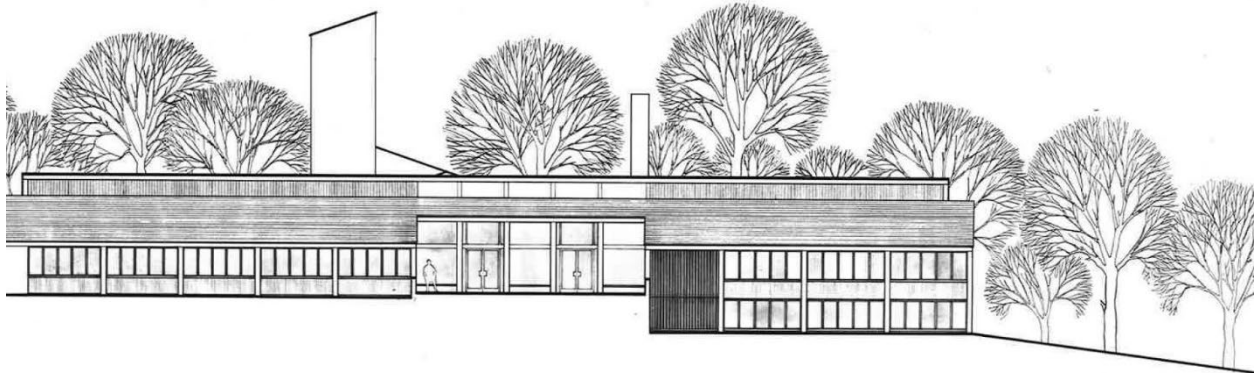


Figure 6: Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon's design of the north elevation (RRUUC Archives).



Figure 7: East Elevation, 1965 (RRUUC Archives).

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Figure 8: South Elevation, 1965 (RRUUC Archives).

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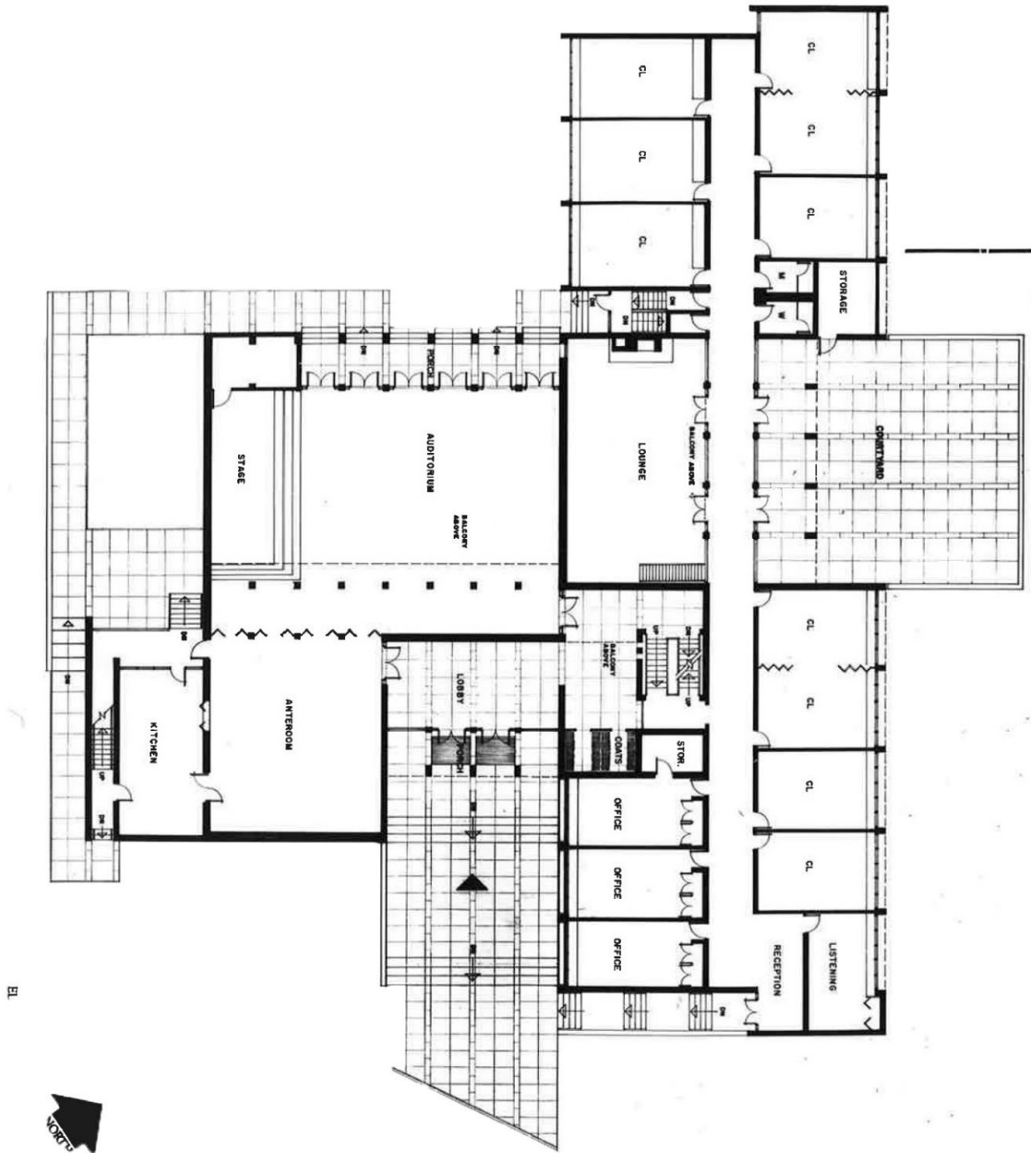


Figure 9: Main Floor Plan as designed by Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon (RRUUC Archives).

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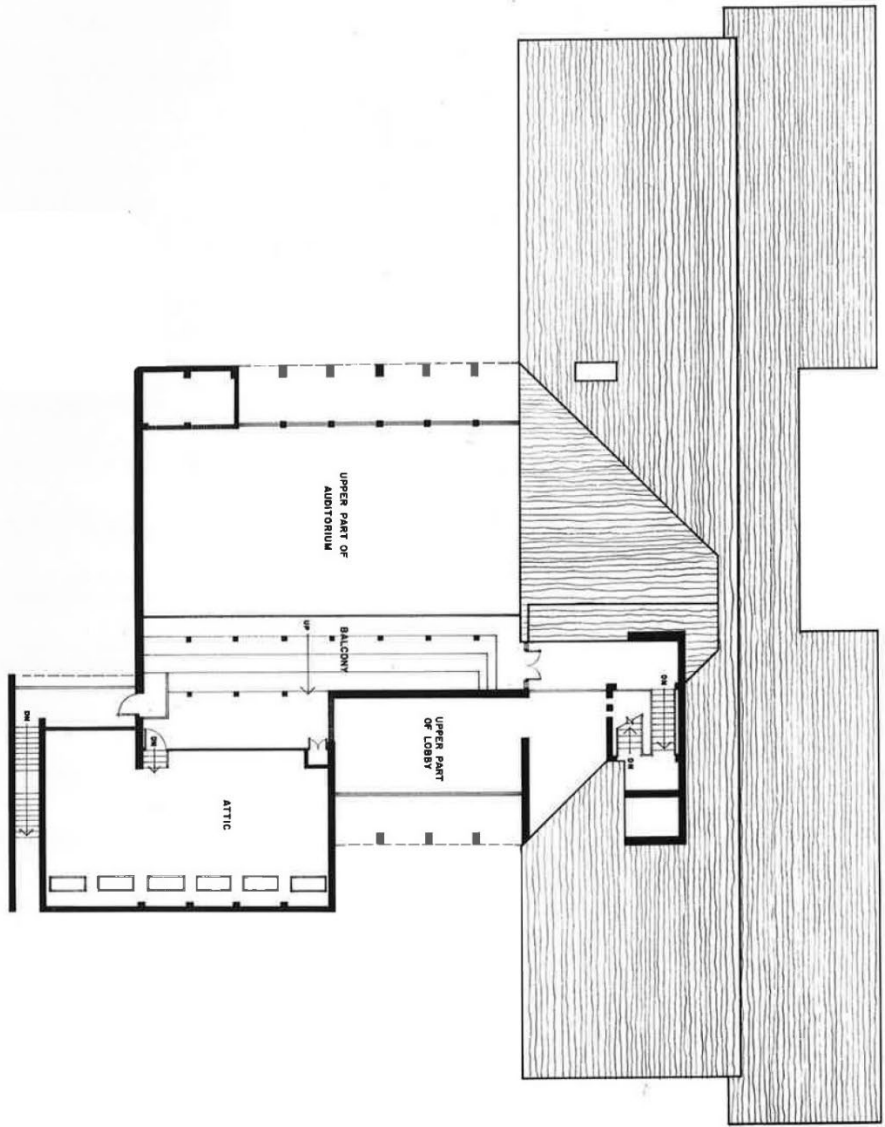


Figure 10: Balcony Floor Plan as designed by Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon (RRUUC Archives).

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Figure 11: Sanctuary interior, facing south, 1965 (RRUUC Archives).

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Figure 12: North view of bell tower stairway from foyer, 1965 (Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon; RRUUC Archives).

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2008 MFTA-Designed Fellowship Hall

Exterior Description

The fellowship hall has two levels. The upper level is the main floor, on the same level as the original building's sanctuary. The building has the same white paint, but over stucco rather than brick. Under the stucco, the walls are concrete block filled with foam for superior insulation. The two buildings are connected by a glass-walled bridge with a roof. As in both buildings, the steel structure of the bridge is on display. Roof slopes are the same and the east-facing clerestory windows match those on the original building. The main floor on the west side has a window wall like the sanctuary. The east and west sides have tall columns that mimic the the columns on both sides of the original church. The east wall has vertically-accented wood panels similar to those under the office windows at the entry plaza. Keeping the existing driveway, now between the buildings and under the glass bridge, was a fire marshal requirement.

Interior Description

The main level of the building houses the fellowship hall, the kitchen, and a central foyer, where the bridge attaches. The fellowship hall has a high, sloped ceiling like the sanctuary, with similar wood ceiling, exposed steel structure, and purlins. The fellowship hall and foyer are carpeted to reduce noise to the classrooms and meeting rooms on the lower level. There is an elevator and stairs, and the lower level has washrooms, classrooms, and meeting rooms.

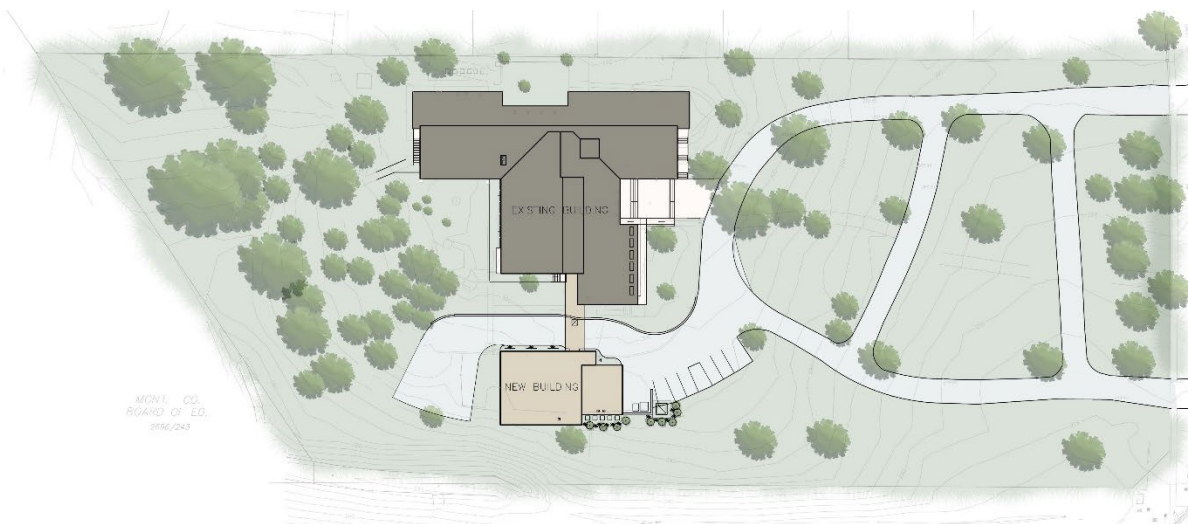


Figure 13: MFTA's Site Plan (RRUUC Archives).

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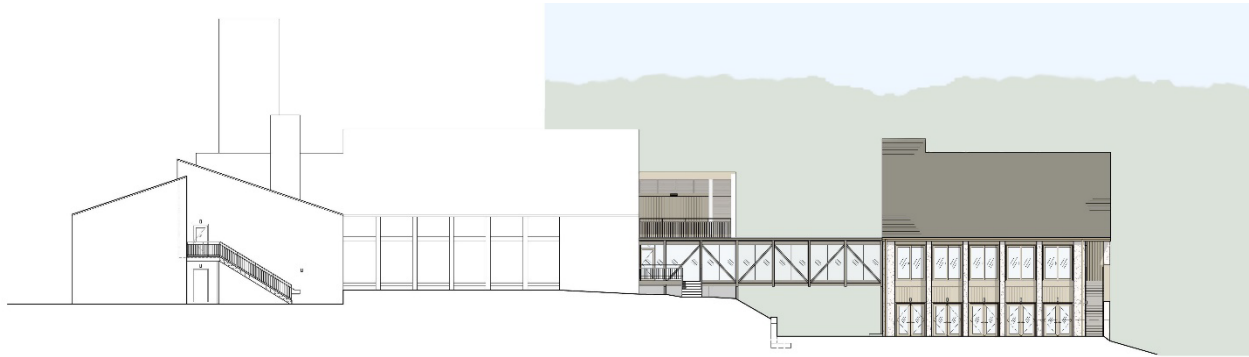


Figure 14: MTFA’s Design of the West (Rear) Elevation (RRUUC Archives).



Figure 15: View from River Road, Fellowship Hall building in foreground with 1965 church in background (MTFA, 2008, RRUUC Archives).

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Figure 16: MTFA's Floor Plans (RRUUC Archives).

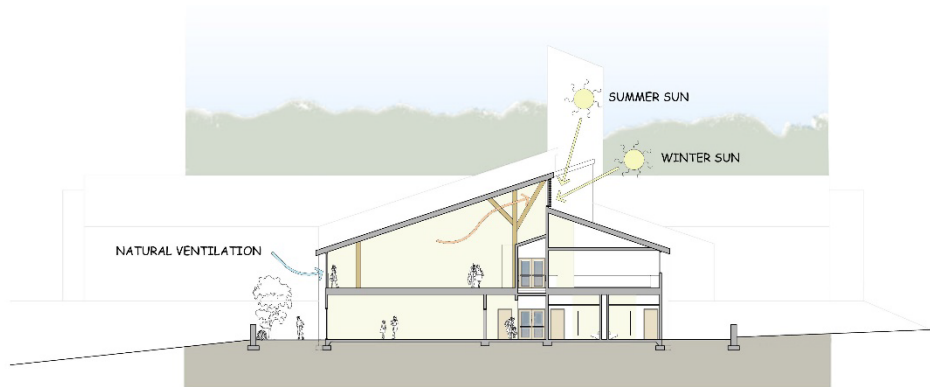


Figure 17: MTFA's Section Plan (RRUUC Archives).

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1964-65

Significant Dates

1965 original building completed

2008 addition completed

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon (Architect – 1965 Church)

Furman Builders (General Contractor – 1965 Church)

Lester A. Collins (Landscape Architect – 1965 Site Plan)

Robert A. Weiss (Structural Engineer – 1965 Church)

Kluckhuhn & McDavid Co. (Mechanical Engineer – 1965 Church)

Apex Decorating Co. (Paint Contractor – 1965 Church)

MFTA Architecture (Architect - 2003 Fellowship Hall & Glass Bridge)

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

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Summary

River Road Unitarian Church (RRUC) was one of many suburban churches built in the Washington, D.C. region to respond to rapid population growth following World War II. Many other churches were modern in design, but none received the level of architectural praise given to River Road. Its four awards are a unique tribute to its architectural design; the American Institute of Architects (AIA) recognized it as one of the dozen best buildings completed in 1961-65 by architects practicing in the U.S.

River Road Unitarian Church is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria C for architecture. The period of significance of 1964-1965 includes the period of construction. It is eligible at the local level as an excellent example of Modern Movement architecture that was specifically designed by the architecture firm of Keyes, Lethbridge and Condon to reflect the principles of the Unitarian faith and the specific needs of the congregation. RRUC meets Criteria Consideration A for properties owned by a religious institution or used for a religious purpose as its primary significance is derived from its architectural design.

The congregation has retained integrity in its interior and exterior appearance for nearly 60 years, which itself is a tribute to the design concept and execution. When additional space was needed by 2004, an addition that mirrored the original in its design was built and connected to the original church by a glass bridge. They fit together with complimentary roof shapes and slopes, clerestory windows, and color. While the addition is non-contributing, it does not detract from the integrity of the property. The harmony of all construction elements with each other and with the site promotes the integrity of RRUC.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Modernism, Nature, and the Unitarian Faith

In the 1920s, during the tenure of Samuel A. Eliot as president of the American Unitarian Association (AUA), there was a period of architectural conservatism for new Unitarian church construction. Local congregations, in an effort to express stability, chose revivalist styles for their new church buildings; such is the case with All Souls Church in Washington, D.C. and the First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles.²

The first action of change occurred in 1934 when the Third Unitarian Church of Chicago planned to build a new church after their previous building burned down. They applied for a loan from the AUA for the new construction, which was denied when the congregation refused a loan mandate to build a Colonial Revival style building. Instead, the congregation commissioned Paul Schweikher, an architect whose work had been exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, to design their building. Schweikher's design adapted one of the generic plans used by the

² Borys, *American Unitarian Churches*, page 111.

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AUA, choosing materials that were economical and modern.³ The largest deviations from the mandated Colonial Revival style were in the finishes and fenestration. The use of plain brick walls, windows arranged in gridded fields of differing scales, painted plywood panels for the ceiling, and sanded and oiled lumber for railings and trim both displayed an interest in diversification of style and economical construction for the Depression era construction campaign.⁴

The design of churches remained mostly within the framework of traditional revival designs until the building boom following World War II. Modern architecture became attractive to new congregations as a way to reflect their personal identity. In this way, it was left to the congregation, with their architect's help, to design a church specifically for the congregation's needs.⁵ As Ann Marie Borys states, "Architectural modernism seemed practically tailor-made for a progressive, liberal religion."⁶

Modernism's characteristics included clean lines, expression of structure, minimal decoration, and generous use of glass. The style stood out in its more domestic scale and its warmth through use of natural materials including wood, stone, and brick.

When Unitarian congregations were searching for sites on which to build their new churches, there was a special preference given to those sites that could provide a sense of seclusion apart from 'adverse' urban conditions. Some sites were chosen as a clearing, while others were wooded; both options provided congregations with the flexibility to use both indoor and outdoor spaces to meet their needs.⁷

The presence of trees within the landscape of the church was something most congregations found to be spiritual. The seclusion afforded by tree cover creates a sense of separation from everyday life. Such was the case for River Road Unitarian Church. The verticality of the building's design and the sectional offset fit into the wooded site, while the terraced parking areas are sensitive to the site's topography. Access to the outdoors from the major interior areas promotes the spiritual values placed on nature.⁸

Modernism in Unitarian Architecture in Montgomery County

The Modern Movement represented a new age in building design where architects were no longer acknowledging past classical styles, but instead establishing functional and minimalist design that aligned with new lifestyles and technologies. The philosophy specifically called for an integration of building with its setting. Nationally, this work was led by masters in the craft

³ Borys, page 118.

⁴ Borys, page 119-120.

⁵ Borys, page 121-122.

⁶ Borys, page 122.

⁷ Borys, page 133-134.

⁸ Borys, page 138, 140.

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such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Marcel Breuer, and Charles Moore. On the local level, skilled practitioners included Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon, Deigert & Yerkes, and Charles Goodman.⁹

The rise of modernism was concurrent with national post-World War II building booms. Montgomery County was one of the fastest growing suburban counties in the nation due to its proximity to the nation's capital and its undeveloped farmland.¹⁰ Designed tract housing soon proliferated the Montgomery County landscape.¹¹ The building boom not only included residential properties, but also included religious facilities. In general, there was a rise of religious activity in the post-war decades brought on by war-related anxieties; the soon-following Cold War crisis reaffirmed the growth of the nation's churches. Unitarian congregations were outgrowing their churches; new congregations were eager to build churches that reflected their values, and modernism helped them do so.¹²

Cedar Lane Unitarian Church (MIHP No. M:31-72), was born out of All Souls Church in Washington, D.C., which had reached capacity. The new congregation's church was designed by nationally prominent architect Pietro Belluschi through a collaboration with the local firm of Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon.¹³ It was designed in 1953 and built for the congregation in 1958. It has an organic nature with wood siding and window muntins and a cedar shingle roof. The building was praised by the *AIA Guide to the Architecture of Washington, D.C.* of 1974 for its siting, natural landscaping, and simple materials.¹⁴ Cedar Lane Unitarian Church is representative of the early postwar modernism in the county from 1945-1955.

The middle period of modernism for Montgomery County is from 1955-1965, when churches became increasingly diverse in style. This period is known for the A-frame design; the steeply pitched roof served as a steeple form representing the reach towards heaven.¹⁵

Through the following period of modern architecture in Montgomery County, designs became bolder and more inventive and building forms became more complex. Roof forms became more creative, as did manipulation of natural light on interiors.¹⁶ Religious facility architects became more inventive and began to favor complex massings, steering away from the traditional gable front roof forms.¹⁷ River Road Unitarian Church, although born out of the Cedar Lane Unitarian Church congregation, is more representative of this later period in modernism design within Montgomery County.

A Building for its Time

⁹ Kelly, Clare Lise, *Montgomery Modern: Modern Architecture in Montgomery County, Maryland, 1930-1979*, page 11.

¹⁰ Kelly, *Montgomery Modern*, Page 8.

¹¹ Kelly, *Montgomery Modern*, page 79.

¹² Borys, page 154-155.

¹³ Kelly, *Montgomery Modern*, page 79.

¹⁴ Kelly, *Montgomery Modern*, page 81.

¹⁵ Kelly, *Montgomery Modern*, page 150.

¹⁶ Kelly, *Montgomery Modern*, page 156.

¹⁷ Kelly, *Montgomery Modern*, page 162.

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When Cedar Lane Unitarian Church was built in 1958, demand from church members with children was so high that later that year, a committee was appointed to form a new congregation in the Bethesda/Chevy Chase area. Edmund Bennett, a highly accomplished home builder in the D.C. region who had an excellent working relationship with the firm of Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon,¹⁸ was a member of that committee. The committee approached a local builder who was preparing to develop a new subdivision in Bethesda, later known as Kenwood Park. Knowing that the church in the neighborhood would be attractive to potential home buyers (and that the tract would be difficult for home building), he offered a 4.66-acre parcel at the corner of River Road and Whittier Boulevard at an attractive price. In July 1960, the congregation approved the purchase of the land for a total of \$55,920.¹⁹

In April 1962, the congregation authorized a building program, ideas for the new building were gathered from congregants, and the Board of Trustees signed a contract with Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon. Architectural themes were guided by Unitarian principles including diversity and freedom of the mind and spirit. In addition to other aspects, it was important that the church be flexible with space to accommodate different uses, which was a hallmark with Unitarian church design.²⁰

Unitarian churches symbolized their multifunctionality by downplaying the traditional focus on the entrance to the sanctuary. There would often be a lobby offering a choice of options to which a person could travel, including sanctuary or fellowship hall, classrooms, and offices. At RRUC, this concept so thoroughly adhered to that the sanctuary entrance is not even visible in the entry hall; it is around a corner.

In a summary of the building proposal, Dale A. Wright, Chairman of the building committee, noted:

“The proposed church building provides an auditorium for adult worship services and other activities which, with a seating capacity of over 500, will provide for the church's needs for the indefinite future. In addition, the church will contain a lounge, 3 offices, kitchen and 16 classrooms for the church school. The total estimated cost of the building, including furnishings and substantial on-site parking, is about \$357,000.”²¹

In November 1962, the River Road Building Committee recommended a program of requirements for the new church building. This detailed set of requirements is significant in demonstrating the congregation's careful engagement in the project, commitment to Unitarian values, and commitment to contemporary design with flexible space and cost containment.²² Along with the program, the Building Committee proposed Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon as architect. Both were approved by the congregation in December 1962.

¹⁸ Gournay and Sies, “Multiple Property Documentation Form: Subdivisions built by Edmund Bennett and designed by Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon in Montgomery County, Maryland, 1956-1973.”

¹⁹ Zenzen, Joan M. “A History of River Road Unitarian Church,” page 1-2.

²⁰ Zenzen, Joan M. “A History of River Road Unitarian Church,” page 2-3.

²¹ “River Road Unitarian Church Summary of Building Proposal.” April 1964.

²² This entire document is found in Appendix A under “Additional Documentation.”

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The groundbreaking ceremony for the church occurred on June 14, 1964. The construction cost totaled \$535,000. The congregation's affinity for the natural beauty of the site produced a conflict during construction. Ribbons were placed around trees for their preservation; but builders preferred to clear the site to make construction easier. The preservation of the wooden character of the site later helped it achieve architectural recognition. The congregation was also in conflict over the construction of the bell tower; some argued it was not necessary, but others argued that it gave the building a visual completeness. The tower construction was made possible through an anonymous \$5,000 gift. The building was dedicated on October 17, 1965, and the congregation moved into it in September of that year.²³

The Architect

Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon was a leading modernist firm in the Washington, D.C. region. Arthur Keyes and Donald Lethbridge were partners in the firm of Keyes, Smith, Satterlee & Lethbridge from 1951 to 1956. They formed Keyes & Lethbridge from 1956 to 1958 at which point David Condon became a partner. Each of the three partners individually achieved the rank of AIA fellow. In 1972, Colden Florance became a partner; the firm is now known as the Smith Group.²⁴

The firm of Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon designed residential neighborhoods in Washington, D.C. (Tiber Island, 1961-1963), Virginia (Holmes Run and Pine Spring, 1951-1954), and Maryland (Carderock Springs, 1962-1967, and New Mark Commons, 1967-1973).²⁵ In Montgomery County, they designed the Cedar Lane Unitarian Church in association with Pietro Belluschi and the River Road Unitarian Church (the subject of this nomination). They were also hired by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission to design the Bethesda Youth Center (1961, 4506 Walsh Street, Bethesda, converted to a writing center and playhouse) and the Wheaton Youth Center (1963, demolished). They also designed the Twinbrook Library in Montgomery County (1975, 202 Meadow Hall Drive, Rockville).

National and Local Recognition

In 1965, RRUC was described in the AIA's *Guide to the Architecture of Washington, D.C.*: "This serene building for worship displays, inside and out, a remarkably bold and consistently appropriate use of natural wood and painted brick in both theme and variation, completely clothing the shell which is, in itself, a direct expression of the manipulation of interior space and light. The wooded character of the site has been preserved by the grading of drives and parking bays, an instance where trees clearly take precedence over cars."²⁶ Between 1965 and 1966, the building received four architectural awards. These multiple awards testify to exceptional design and execution of the Montgomery County Unitarian modernist church.

²³ Zenzen, Joan M. "A History of River Road Unitarian Church," page 3.

²⁴ Kelly, *Montgomery Modern*, page 188.

²⁵ All neighborhoods mentioned except for Pine Spring are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

²⁶ Kelly, *Montgomery Modern*, page 162.

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The first award, the Award for Excellence in Architecture, was given by the Washington Board of Trade in November 1965. The Washington Board of Trade was a leader in stimulating excellence in the design of buildings through its annual design contest. Mr. Henry L. Kempfoefner, F.A.I.A., Dean of the School of Design of North Carolina State University, was Chairman of the Jury of Awards and was the principal speaker at the luncheon for Awards for Excellence in Architecture of the Metropolitan Board of Trade on November 23, 1965. In his remarks, he noted:

“I want to say just a few words about the general excellence of the architecture being produced in the Washington area today. The Jury thought that especially two buildings, the new German Embassy on Reservoir Road by West German Architect Egon Eiermann, and the River Road Unitarian Church in Bethesda by Keyes, Lethbridge and Condon, were most outstanding in fulfilling the requirements set by their clients. Both buildings do much more than solve the functional, technical, and formal needs of the programs. As brilliant expressions of the total building needs, they are both superb examples of the finest work by architects of talent and capability. Both buildings sympathize with their environments, as the awards program required.

They complement their environment and enrich it, but they do more than that. They satisfy the psychological and humane needs of the program... The architectural expressions of both buildings from within and without satisfy the humane and the spiritual needs of those who use them.

The Jury, in searching their own experiences as spectators of architecture, thought that the church had satisfied one of the most difficult problems of modern architecture -- the achievement of a satisfactory spiritual atmosphere for a house of meditation and worship as a place of reverence, serenity, and inspiration. It accommodates the spiritual and humane needs of man in his search for a totally satisfactory religious edifice.”²⁷

The written report of the Jury of Awards discussed the German Chancery and then stated the following about the River Road Unitarian Church:

“The River Road Unitarian Church in Bethesda by Architects Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon was also a unanimous choice of the Jury. A long period of time was spent by the jury in and around this handsome church, principally in admiration for the fine proportions, excellent detailing, general restraint, and the most reverent ecclesiastical expression achieved in the totality of the design. The Jury admired the position in which the structure has been placed on its site and the way in which it contributes to the general tone of its neighborhood. There is a fine and sensitive understanding, particularly in the interior, of the nature of wood as a building material. All jurors expressed an interest in going back for an extended visit to this outstanding building.”²⁸

²⁷ Washington Board of Trade, Twenty-Third Biennial Awards for Excellence in Architecture, November 1965.

²⁸ Washington Board of Trade, Twenty-Third Biennial Awards for Excellence in Architecture, November 1965.

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The second award, the Oliver Owen Kuhn Cup, was awarded by the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chamber of Commerce in January 1966. This award was made by the Board of Directors in January each year for the erection of the most outstanding permanent improvement to the Bethesda-Chevy Chase area. It was announced in January for a project completed in the preceding year. This Cup was awarded every year from 1928 to 1991. Other award buildings of the 1960's were a 1963 YMCA, 1964 Air Rights Building, 1967 Barlow Building, and the 1968 National Institutes of Health.²⁹

The third award, the American Institute of Architects Award of Merit, was awarded in June of 1966. In their June 28, 1966, press release, they noted:

“Architects of 12 significant buildings today received the nation's highest professional recognition for architectural excellence - Honor Awards of The American Institute of Architects. The Awards were presented at a special ceremony as part of the AIA's 98th annual convention which opened here yesterday. The award-winning projects were selected from among 380 entries by a jury of five prominent architects. They include an international airport, an office building, a complex of quality shops and restaurants, a sanctuary for display of rare manuscripts, an urban renewal residential project, a utility's central service facility and an industrial-warehousing-distribution headquarters. There are also two churches and three college buildings.

The awards were presented by Morris Ketchum, Jr. FAIA of New York City, national AIA president. The winning projects were selected by a jury made up of David N. Yerkes FAIA of Washington D.C., chairman; Robert G. Cerny FAIA of Minneapolis, O'Neil Ford FAIA of San Antonio, George T. Rockrise FAIA of San Francisco and Benjamin Thompson AIA of Cambridge, Mass. Projects eligible for submission included any executed in the United States or abroad, and completed after January 1, 1961, by registered architects practicing professionally in the United States.”³⁰

In the *AIA Journal*, the jury commented:

“A handsomely unpretentious building which expresses the Unitarian philosophy with clarity and vigor. In contrast with so many contemporary churches, this one does not strain for dramatic effect. Instead, it achieves crisp simplicity and effortless variety, and its rapport with its wooded site is thoroughly pleasing. Viewed from any position, the relationship of forms is delightful.”³¹

In the same article, the architects stated:

²⁹ Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chamber of Commerce, Newsletter, January 1966. This information on the Chamber award was discovered with the help of the Greater Bethesda Chamber of Commerce [current name] and the Bethesda Historical Society.

³⁰ American Institute of Architects, Press Release of June 28, 1966.

³¹ *AIA Journal*, “1966 AIA Honor Awards,” July 1966, page 50.

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“The design of a contemporary Unitarian church presented two principal challenges: the creation of an atmosphere of spiritual reverence without embodying any of the elements of traditional symbolism, and the combination of this quality with a forthright expression of intellectual honesty and humility.

We have tried to achieve the atmosphere of reverence by qualities of space and light, and forthrightness of expression by the use of natural materials and a consistent system of structure and detail.

Materials, both inside and out, are painted brick in a warm off-white, wood (principally oak and fir) and exposed steel finished in a bunt umber color. The hardware is oiled bronze, and some of the light fixtures were designed by the architect.

Every effort was made to preserve the quality of the site, a wooded knoll in a suburban Washington community. The required parking bays were dispersed among the existing contours of the land, and a landscape plan was developed to restore most of the disturbed portions of the grounds to a natural condition through the informal planting of native trees and shrubs.”³²

The fourth award was given by the Potomac Valley Chapter of the AIA in November 1966 and was called the “First Award.” There were three First Awards. The jury noted:

“Admirable siting and relationship of building contour to terrain, a simple and pleasing relationship of form and materials with excellent handling of landscaping and parking facilities.”³³

³² *AIA Journal*, “1966 AIA Honor Awards,” July 1966, page 50.

³³ *Potomac Valley Architect: Biennial Competition for Awards in Architecture*, November-December 1966, page 15.

River Road Unitarian Church
Name of Property

Montgomery County, MD
County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

AIA Journal, "1966 AIA Honor Awards," July 1966. Accessed August 9, 2024.
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Washington Board of Trade, "Twenty-Third Biennial Awards for Excellence in Architecture," published November 1965.

Zenzen, Joan M. "A History of River Road Unitarian Church: In Commemoration of its Fortieth Anniversary." River Road Unitarian Universalist Church. Accessed July 9, 2024.
<https://www.rruuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/RRUC-40th-anniv-history.pdf>.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

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_____ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
_____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: RRUUC Archives

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): M: 35-214

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 4.46 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 38.976370 | Longitude: -77.126930 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

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- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The property is located at 6301 River Road, Bethesda Maryland 20817 and is described as Plat 6878, Parcel A, Kenwood Park.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The 4.46-acre parcel is the original parcel on which River Road Unitarian Church was constructed, and includes the significant historic resource associated with this nomination.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title:

John A Hansman

organization: River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation

street & number: 8300 Burdette Rd, Apt A-549

city or town: Bethesda state: MD zip code: 20817

e-mail johnhansman10@gmail.com

telephone: 301 968 4760

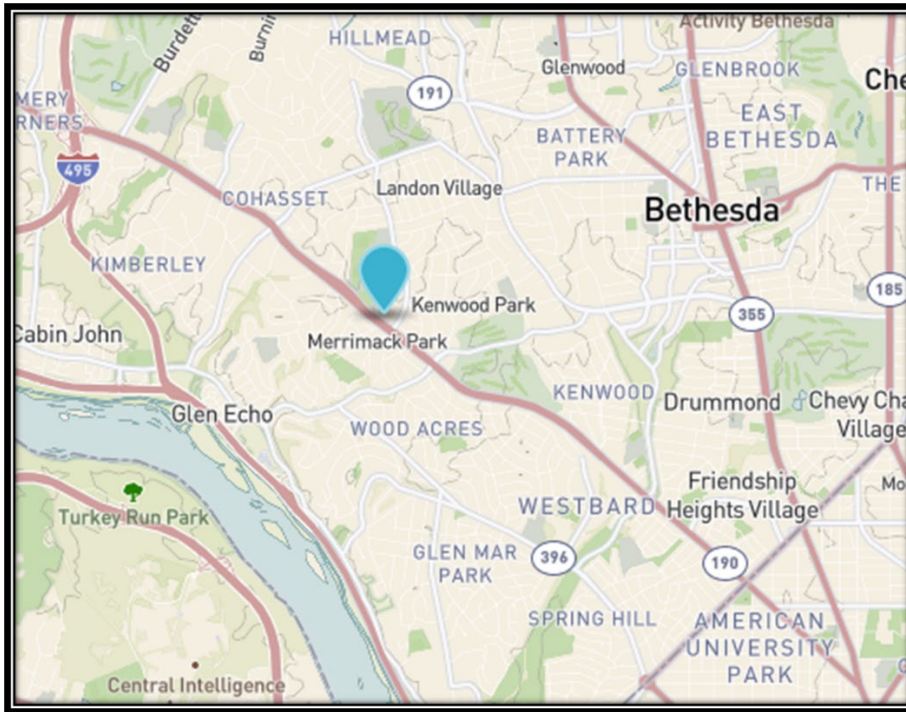
date: February 2024

Additional Documentation

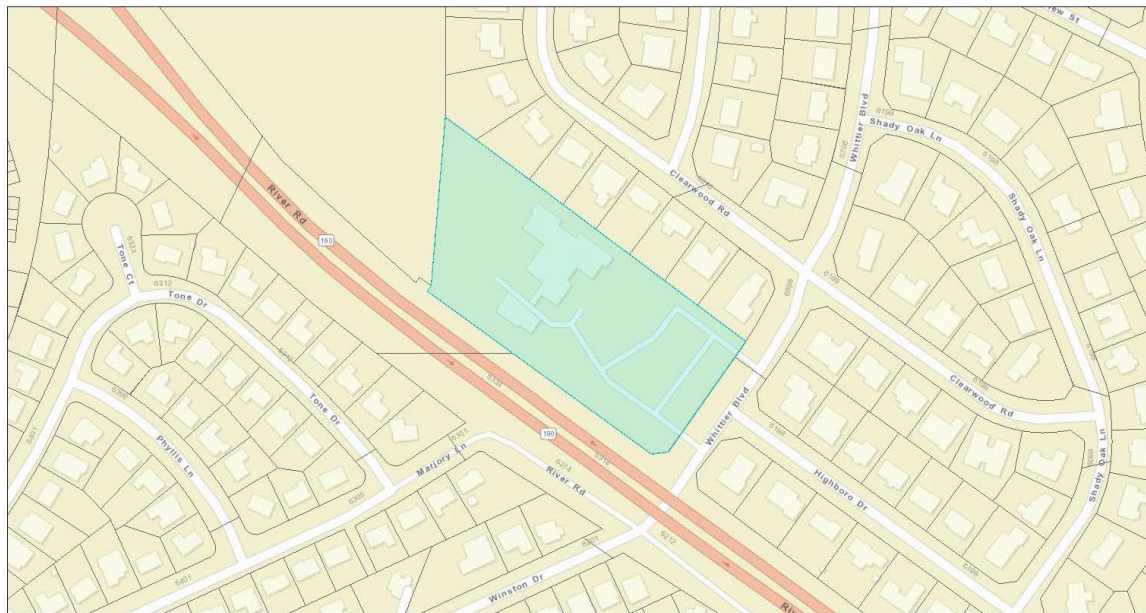
Maps

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USGS Locational Map



April 1, 2024

MD MAP, MDP, SDAT, Fairfax County, VA, Montgomery County, MD, MNCPPC, VTA, Esri, HERE, Garmin, INCREMENT P, NOAA, USGS

Made by: Maryland Historical Trust
MDP

Map indicating parcel boundaries. Maryland Historical Trust, March 2024.

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Photo Log

Name of Property: River Road Unitarian Church

City or Vicinity: Bethesda

County: Montgomery

State: Maryland

Photographer: John Hansman (2, 3, 6, 10-13, 20, 21), Joe Saliunas (1, 7, 14, 17, 25, 28),
Grace Davenport (4, 5, 8, 9, 15, 16, 18, 19, 22-24, 26, 27)

Date Photographed: June 2023 (7), September 2023 (1, 28), December 2023 (2, 14, 17),
January 2024 (3-6, 8, 9, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 22-27), April 2024 (10-12, 20, 21)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0001

East façade of River Road Unitarian Church (left) and south elevation of eastern section of
classroom and office wing (right) (Saliunas September 2023)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0002

East façade showing recessed entrance, tower, and classroom wing on right (Hansman December
2023)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0003

Southern portion of east façade, 2008 Fellowship Hall in background (Hansman January 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0004

East façade showing end of original building on right, glass bridge, and 2008 MFTA building on
left (Davenport January 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0005

East elevation of MFTA building on left, glass bridge on right (Davenport January 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0006

West elevation of MFTA building; glass bridge and original building on left (Hansman January
2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0007

Northeast view of memorial garden on the west side of the original church (Saliunas June 2023)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0008

West elevation of sanctuary (Davenport January 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0009

South elevation of the classroom and office wing (Davenport January 2024)

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MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0010
West elevation of the classroom and office wing (Hansman April 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0011
Patio on the north side of the classroom and office wing (Hansman April 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0012
Patio on the north side of the classroom and office wing, view from interior hallway facing north (Hansman April 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0013
South view of entrance foyer with the sanctuary doors at right (Hansman January 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0014
Interior of sanctuary, view southwest from gallery (Saliunas December 2023)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0015
Interior of sanctuary, view south from gallery (Davenport January 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0016
South view of gallery (Davenport January 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0017
North view of sanctuary (Saliunas December 2023)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0018
East interior wall of sanctuary beneath gallery showing wooden partition walls on left that slide along the track in the floor (Davenport January 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0019
Northwest view from anteroom of sanctuary on left and entrance foyer on right (Davenport January 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0020
West view of classroom and office wing hallway. The fireside room is on the left, north patio on the right (Hansman April 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0021
West view of fireside room (Hansman April 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0022
Northeast view of glass bridge interior from 2008 MFTA building (Davenport January 2024)

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MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0023
Northwest view of glass bridge interior from 2008 MFTA building (Davenport January 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0024
Northwest view of fellowship hall, interior of MFTA building (Davenport January 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0025
South view from top floor of 2008 Fellowship Hall, facing stairs (Saliunas January 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0026
South view of wooded parking lot (Davenport January 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0027
East view of new walkway from lower parking lot (Davenport January 2024)

MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0028
West view of the east façade from the top of the new walkway (Saliunas September 2023)

Photos



MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0001
East façade of River Road Unitarian Church (left) and south elevation of eastern section of classroom and office wing (right) (Saliunas September 2023)

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Name of Property

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MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0002
East façade showing recessed entrance, tower, and classroom wing on right (Hansman December 2023)



MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0003
Southern portion of east façade, 2008 Fellowship Hall in background (Hansman January 2024)

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MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0004
East façade showing end of original building on right, glass bridge, and 2008 MFTA building on left (Davenport January 2024)



MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0005
East elevation of MFTA building on left, glass bridge on right (Davenport January 2024)

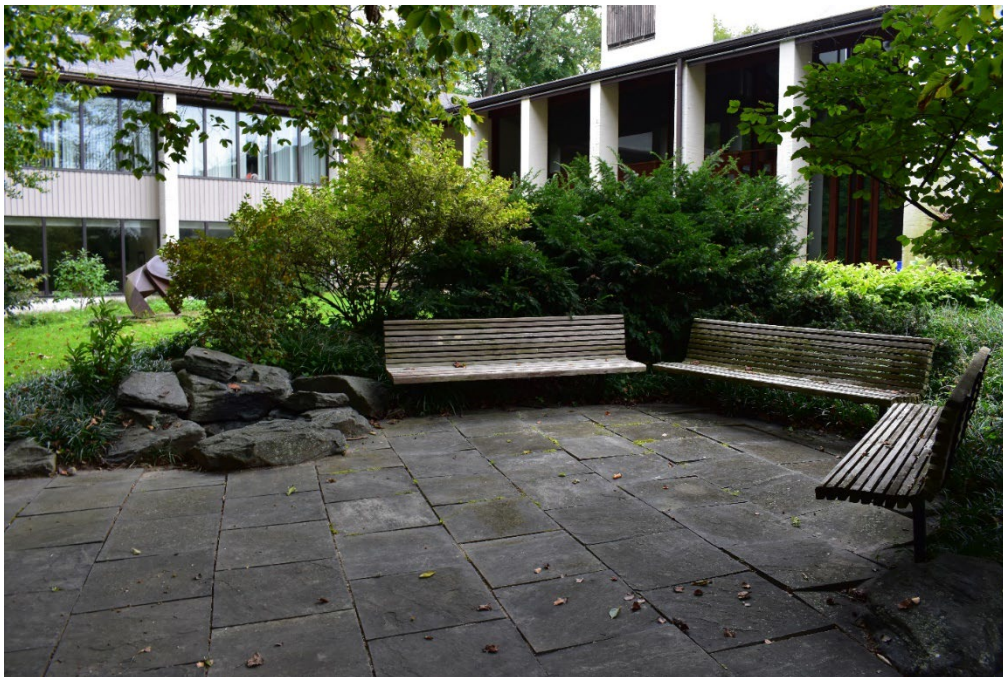
River Road Unitarian Church
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MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0006

West elevation of MFTA building; glass bridge and original building on left (Hansman January 2024)



MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0007

Northeast view of memorial garden on the west side of the original church (Saliunas June 2023)

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MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0008
West elevation of sanctuary (Davenport January 2024)



MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0009
South elevation of the classroom and office wing (Davenport January 2024)

River Road Unitarian Church
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MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0010
West elevation of the classroom and office wing (Hansman April 2024)

River Road Unitarian Church
Name of Property

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MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0011
Patio on the north side of the classroom and office wing (Hansman April 2024)

River Road Unitarian Church
Name of Property

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MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0012
Patio on the north side of the classroom and office wing, view from interior hallway facing north
(Hansman April 2024)



MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0013
South view of entrance foyer with the sanctuary doors at right (Hansman January 2024)

River Road Unitarian Church
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MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0014
Interior of sanctuary, view southwest from gallery (Saliunas December 2023)



MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0015
Interior of sanctuary, view south from gallery (Davenport January 2024)

River Road Unitarian Church
Name of Property

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MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0016
South view of gallery (Davenport January 2024)

River Road Unitarian Church
Name of Property

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MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0017
North view of sanctuary (Saliunas December 2023)

River Road Unitarian Church
Name of Property

Montgomery County, MD
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MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0018
East interior wall of sanctuary beneath gallery showing wooden partition walls on left that slide along the track in the floor (Davenport January 2024)

River Road Unitarian Church
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MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0019
Northwest view from anteroom of sanctuary on left and entrance foyer on right (Davenport January 2024)



MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0020
West view of classroom and office wing hallway. The fireside room is on the left, north patio on the right (Hansman April 2024)

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Name of Property

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MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0021
West view of fireside room (Hansman April 2024)

River Road Unitarian Church
Name of Property

Montgomery County, MD
County and State



MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0022
Northeast view of glass bridge interior from 2008 MFTA building (Davenport January 2024)

River Road Unitarian Church
Name of Property

Montgomery County, MD
County and State



MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0023
Northwest view of glass bridge interior from 2008 MFTA building (Davenport January 2024)

River Road Unitarian Church
Name of Property

Montgomery County, MD
County and State



MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0024
Northwest view of fellowship hall, interior of MFTA building (Davenport January 2024)

River Road Unitarian Church
Name of Property

Montgomery County, MD
County and State



MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0025
South view from top floor of 2008 Fellowship Hall, facing stairs (Saliunas January 2024)

River Road Unitarian Church
Name of Property

Montgomery County, MD
County and State



MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0026
South view of wooded parking lot (Davenport January 2024)

River Road Unitarian Church
Name of Property

Montgomery County, MD
County and State



MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0027
East view of new walkway from lower parking lot (Davenport January 2024)

River Road Unitarian Church
Name of Property

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MD_Montgomery County_River Road Unitarian Church_0028
West view of the east façade from the top of the new walkway (Saliunas September 2023)

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APPENDIX A

The Building Committee's Program of Building Requirements 11-20-1962

This building program for the River Road Unitarian Church is for the development of the church's property on River Road and the construction of appropriate buildings to meet the congregation's immediate and long-range needs for functional and economical yet attractive and inspiring facilities for adult worship, for social and community activities, and for our children to learn about religion and life by study and play.

Religious Significance

Our church shall be designed to contribute to and reflect the warmth of love, the lift of the human spirit in moments of exaltation, and the integrity of the intelligence engaged in the search for truth. Our church shall symbolize the attitudes and aspirations of our congregation.

Because we are a unity in diversity, imposing no dogma but believing in the freedom of mind and spirit, our church may incorporate materials and aesthetic qualities which create a unity of effect.

Because we are dedicated to the brotherhood of man, our church shall have a universal quality.

Because we have a concern for people and an openness to the world, our church shall be warm and inviting rather than cold and forbidding,

Because we are a religious community, our church shall not have an institutional character; it shall be a place where we can grow as a religious fellowship and as religious persons.

Because we use our heritage creatively, our church shall be a creative and artistic, yet honest and simple, combination of modern and traditional materials and design concepts in a contemporary structure.

Because we are lovers of beauty, both in human works and in nature, our church shall be beautiful rather than sensational or bizarre, and it shall achieve an integration of building with terrain and interior space with surrounding nature,

Because our church is not an end in itself, it shall be designed to provide an appropriate and functional setting for the activities of our congregation.

General Considerations

Our church shall be designed to be economical both in terms of initial construction costs and annual maintenance expenses. To this end, the architect shall give full consideration consistent with aesthetic values to the use of all materials currently available and to modern construction

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methods. In addition to complying with the building code and other legal requirements, our building shall be designed with particular attention to matters of fire safety. The church design may provide for two-floor buildings provided that every classroom or office that might be located on the lower level shall be at approximately grade level on at least one side of the room.

Our church shall be designed to provide for maximum flexibility of space and genuine adaptability of all areas to multiple uses wherever possible. Our church shall be designed on the basis of two separate periods for Sunday morning worship services and religious education classes.

The building design shall provide for the initial church structure described herein and the possible later construction in one or more stages of the future additions subsequently described. The initial structure is to be completed for occupancy in the fall of 1964 and is intended to provide for our space requirements at the time of occupancy and for at least a few years after the building is occupied. The complete design is intended to provide for construction of such future additions as may be required for a membership of 500 adults, which the congregation considers to be an optimum size. This size is felt *to* be large enough *to* provide the facilities needed without undue expense to the individual member and yet small enough for feelings of unity and fellowship within the congregation.

The church may consist of one or more building units but shall be so designed that all units or buildings blend together into an integrated whole rather than appearing as a group of essentially separate and unrelated units. It is vital that the design provide a complete and satisfying structure at the completion of each stage of construction.

Site Planning

Our church design shall provide for a minimum disturbance of the existing terrain and the preservation of major trees except where removal is required for the building and parking and driveway areas.

The site plan shall provide for conveniently located and inviting outdoor areas for recreation and study by children's groups. Consideration shall be given in planning the site, consistent with available space and terrain, to providing appropriate and attractive areas for adult worship services and social activities.

Driveway and parking areas shall be made as inconspicuous as possible in both location and surfacing and as separate as practicable from areas provided for outdoor activities.

A complete landscape plan shall be developed concurrently and in conjunction with the architect's drawings. The landscape plan shall provide for some landscaping around the initial church building at the time of its construction and shall provide for further landscaping from time to time.

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The site plan shall include provision for parking for a total of 150 cars ultimately, with parking areas for about 100 cars to be completed with the initial church building. Driveways shall be provided to connect the parking areas with Whittier Boulevard and to provide for egress from parking areas for cars leaving the first service and simultaneous ingress for cars arriving for the second service. Driveways shall also be planned, if practicable, to permit cars to drive sufficiently close to the building so that adults and children can be dropped off at the appropriate entrances with minimum exposure to inclement weather.

In view of the fact that the viewpoint of the congregation may change as to the optimum size of the congregation and the desirability of a fixed-pew auditorium, the site plan shall include provision for possible construction at some indefinite future date of a fixed-pew auditorium seating up to 500 people.

Multi-Purpose Auditorium and Anteroom

The initial structure shall include a multi-purpose auditorium and related anteroom for adult worship and social activities. This auditorium shall be designed to provide for those activities normally contemplated for a church sanctuary and fellowship hall in a completely satisfactory manner for an indefinite future period.

The multi-purpose auditorium shall be a place of simple dignity, providing a view of the natural beauty of the site. In addition to expressing the religious philosophy of the congregation, the auditorium shall be designed to inspire lofty thoughts, provide emotional satisfaction, and give the impression of spaciousness without loss of human scale. The auditorium shall be designed for formal worship services which are primarily speaker-orientated and be suitable for congregational meetings, meetings of other groups, weddings and funerals. The auditorium shall also be suitable for various social functions both by the congregation and the public, such as dinners, dances and receptions. (In the event that a fixed-pew auditorium were constructed at some indefinite future time, the multi-purpose auditorium would continue to be used for adult social activities.)

The anteroom shall be designed to be an area sufficiently separate from the multi-purpose auditorium to be used for coffee hour after Sunday services, wedding receptions, display purposes, and library, but sufficiently related to the auditorium so as to be useful for overflow seating for Sunday services or meetings and for accommodation of larger numbers for social activities such as dinners and dances.

Consideration shall be given to design of the anteroom for use as a stage for skits and limited theatrical productions in conjunction with the auditorium. (Initially, when the church is first occupied and before the membership of 500 adults is reached, part of the auditorium may be set off by movable screens for such use as might be appropriate in this interim period for coffee hour or display purposes.)

The auditorium shall seat for services and meetings approximately 260 adults (including the choir) in movable chairs or pews which can be conveniently stored. The anteroom should seat

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about 90 adults in similarly portable but not necessarily identical seating. The auditorium and anteroom together shall seat about 250 for church dinners. It is contemplated that the auditorium would be about 2600 square feet and the anteroom about 900 square feet.

The seating arrangement should place the congregation as close to the pulpit as possible. There is no limitation upon the arrangement of seating except that there shall not be a central pulpit (like a central stage in an arena theater). The pulpit needs to be elevated only so much as is necessary for comfortable speaker-congregation visibility and hearing. The design shall provide for a pulpit that can be removed or screened from the auditorium for social activities. Provision shall be made for comfortable seating for the minister (and occasionally several others) so placed as to be near the pulpit but separate and apart from the congregation. Flower arrangements for Sunday services will be placed at an appropriate location near the pulpit.

The auditorium shall be designed to provide space for a choir which may vary in size from twenty to forty members. The location of the choir shall be determined primarily by acoustical considerations but it shall be so placed that it is not a primary focus of vision or so that it distracts attention from the pulpit. A piano will be required initially to accompany the choir and shall be placed near the choir so that the pianist can follow the choir director. Space shall be provided for the later addition of an electronic organ. The organ console shall be so placed as to be near the choir so that the organist can follow the choir director and shall be so located that it can be screened from the auditorium for social activities.

It is vital that the auditorium be designed to provide good acoustics for the speaker, the choir, pianist or organist, and recorded music. Competent consulting acoustical engineering services shall be provided.

Combination Lounge and Worship

The initial church building shall include a lounge which will be a most important center of church activities and will take the place of the church parlor of more orthodox churches. This room will be the center of church activities during the week and will be used as a casual informal meeting place for small groups (Trustees, committees) and as a meeting place for the Alliance, Social Action group, bridge group, possible men's group, and similar organizations.

On Sunday morning this room will serve as a worship room for the School of Religion until the Children's Chapel contemplated for a future addition is constructed and perhaps thereafter. The lounge will serve as the meeting place for Liberal Religious Youth and for various youth group activities until the Youth Recreation Room provided in a future addition is constructed. The lounge will also be used for a 15- minute choir rehearsal immediately prior to each Sunday morning service and perhaps *at* other times. A piano will be required in the lounge.

The lounge shall be a warm and inviting room conducive to informal adult and youth activities and shall also provide a simple but dignified chapel atmosphere for School of Religion worship

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services. A fireplace shall be considered for this room. The lounge shall seat approximately 100 adults and shall be about 1000 square feet in area.

This Program of Building Requirements extended over an additional six pages of utilitarian subjects: office space, equipment and storage, classrooms, hvac, kitchen, etc. Finally, it addressed the entrance and cost.

Entrance Area

If at all feasible, the building design shall provide an entrance area to the auditorium and anteroom (and perhaps the administrative area) separate and apart from the anteroom. The entrance area shall provide cloakroom facilities, a bulletin board, and space for a table to be used for handing out name tags. A public telephone and a refrigerated drinking fountain shall be provided in a location accessible to the auditorium, anteroom and lounge.

Cost

The total cost of the Building shall not exceed \$310,000. This amount includes the complete cost of construction of the initial church building and the related parking, driveways, landscaping, all fixtures and equipment (including built-in cabinets, etc., but excluding furniture), and the architect's fees. The cost of land (including street paving and survey), movable furniture, and a contingency allowance total \$90,000, bringing the total cost of the building program to \$400,000.

APPENDIX B

The MTFA Addition of 2008

In June 2000, the congregation approved a Building Planning Group [BPG] to carry forward previous studies and to prepare a detailed plan for renovation and expansion. The work of this task force was defined in this approval:

The plan should identify necessary repair and remodeling necessary to improve the appearance and functionality of the building

The plan should, at a minimum, include the creation of additional classroom, office and multipurpose space to conform to the program plan within the budget constraints identified below.

The task force should seek to develop a plan with an estimated cost of approximately \$3.5 million for repair and remodeling plus expansion.

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The task force should consult extensively with the program planning effort, other interested groups and the congregation as a whole in developing the plan.

The task force should consider the environmental impact of any changes to the building, seeking to minimize the overall impact of our facility on the environment.

The task force should also ensure that any planned expansion meets and is fully consistent with the high aesthetic appeal of our current facility.

The task force should obtain qualified professional input (such as architectural and engineering) necessary to prepare the plan as authorized by the coordinating committee.

The task force should aim to present a plan to the Board by May 1, 2001. The plan should include architectural renderings sufficient to obtain reasonably firm cost estimates. The task force may present options early in the process so that one option may be fully developed by the deadline.

The BPG prepared its own restatement of guiding principles:

To involve as many members and friends of RRUC as possible and to build broad consensus into every step.

Any changes to the building must satisfy the immediate and long-range program requirements of the church.

We will strive to maintain the sense of beauty, warmth, simplicity and inspiration captured by the church founders in their original design.

The BPG solicited proposals from architectural firms. Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon did not offer a proposal because the key partners had retired and the firm no longer existed in its earlier form. MTFFA was selected, as described by Sally Watts, former co-chair of the BPG, because:

Substantial experience with other churches,
A thoughtful plan for and commitment to engaging the congregation in priorities and options,
And excellent references from other clients.

MTFA explored with the congregation several options. The capital fund drive of 2003 raised \$2 million and a mortgage of about \$1 million looked feasible. The \$3 million target cost, to include renovations, required that the new addition would be limited to the basics. By February, 2004, MTFFA and the BPG had decided on a separate building, linked by a glass bridge to the main building.

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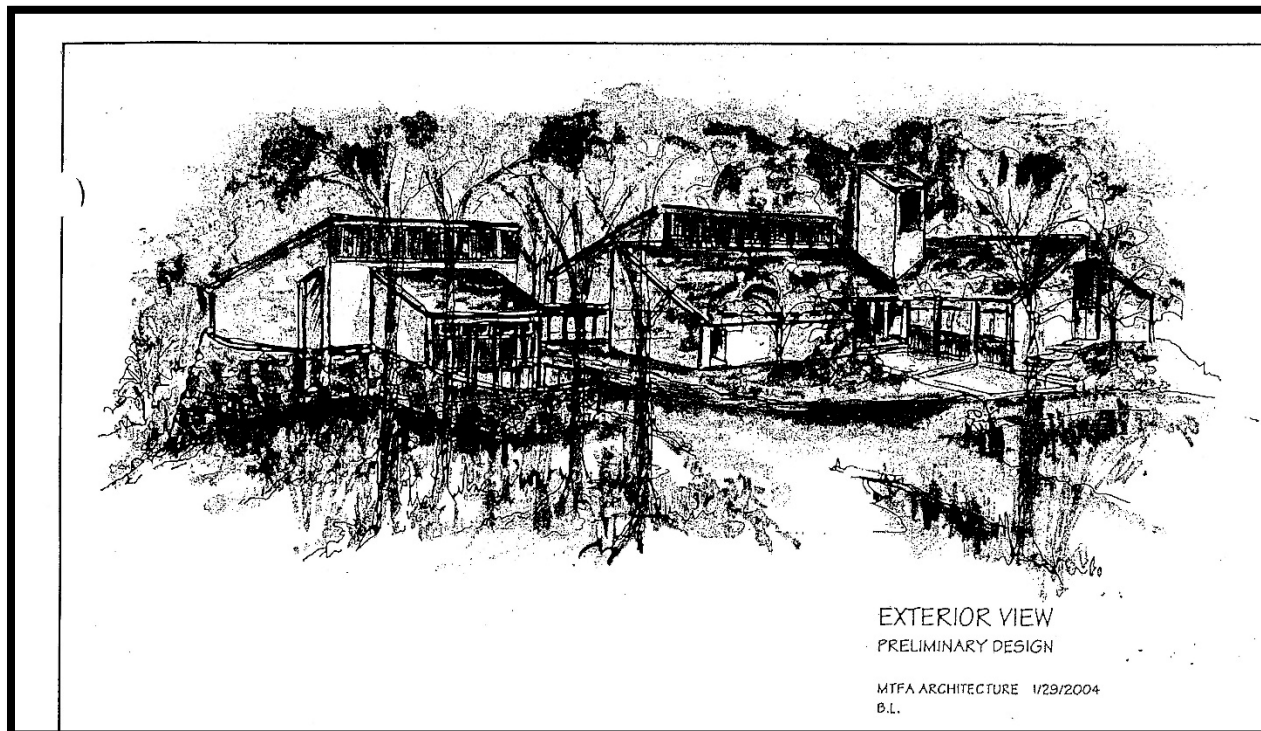


Figure 18: MFTA's Preliminary design (RRUUC Archives).

The following text accompanied the drawing:

In order for a design to be viable. it must ...

- >- Be esthetically respectful of our existing buildings architecture and be compelling enough to capture the collective imagination of the congregation,
- >- Accommodate our established top priorities with clear room for refinement/embellishment to better meet our requirements/desires for the spaces to be provided,
- >- And be "in the box" with respect to cost, schedule, and technical risk.

The "Bridge" conceptual design does all of these things very well.

What the "Bridge" conceptual design is . . .

- >- The bridge conceptual design complements the lines, form, scale, and structure of the current building. It will look like it belongs.
- >- The bridge conceptual design accommodates all the established top priorities ... a new fellowship hall, additional flexible classrooms/meeting space, a new more functional kitchen, as well as allowing for many other practical/functional improvements of the raw space.
- >- The bridge conceptual design is within our agreed costing guidelines.
- >- The bridge conceptual design is can be built on a reasonable schedule without requiring

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the relocation of the congregation.

>- The bridge conceptual design is the most technically conservative of all conceptual designs we have evaluated. There is essentially no risk to the existing structure and no unusual or extraordinary conditions associated with the proposed new structure.

What the "Bridge" conceptual design is not

>- The bridge conceptual design is not a daring articulation of 21st century architecture, rather it is a sound esthetic compromise.

>- The bridge conceptual design does not meet all of our desirements, or for that matter all of the requirements we have identified, rather it is a practical and pragmatic compromise which accommodates our top/key priorities and then some.

>- The bridge conceptual design does not push the envelope on cost, rather it is intentionally conservative to both reflect fiscal prudence insisted on by the congregation and allow the necessary margins to see that what is built is built as it should be.

>- The bridge conceptual design does not compromise the use of the existing building during the construction process, rather it succeeds in almost doing the opposite.

>- The bridge conceptual design is not a contracting nightmare, rather it is straight forward construction which can be accomplished at minimum risk. The cost of the bridge is trivial compared to the cost risk associated with any attempt to attach a material addition to the existing structure.

The bottom line is this ...

>- The bridge conceptual design is offered as a credible end point to the conceptual design process that clearly has the characteristics worthy of being developed into a final design for our project.

>- The Building Planning Group voted unanimously in favor of the bridge conceptual design. The Board agreed unanimously to bring the concept to the congregation for a vote.

On February 29, 2004, the congregation voted strongly to proceed with the project.

Ten years later, In January 2024, the MTFa principal architect, Jim Clark, was asked to reflect on his experience with the River Road project. He responded:

1. What attracted you/MTFA to put in a proposal for this project?

My partner, Michael Foster, FAIA, and I developed an expertise in designing church facilities when we worked together at Cooper-Lecky Architects starting in the mid 1980's, and we were both interested in fine tuning our approach to church facilities. I joined Mike at MTFa Architecture in 2000, and our vision was to work on projects that shaped peoples' lives, with an emphasis on culture and community. This project worked hand-in-hand with our vision. We were also eager to work on a master plan for a site that had an award-winning modernist building, and we were interested in understanding more about the Unitarian Church. At about the same time, we hired Brian Vassallo who had served as an intern in my prior firm. Brian's

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architectural thesis was religiously based, and he was a key member of our team who is also attracted to church design. Brian is now a principal at MTFA.

2. What were your initial thoughts on designing the addition?

When we worked on the design of the addition, we wanted to preserve the existing building, especially as it relates to proportion, scale and detail. Design drivers also included establishing a spiritual connection to the natural landscape, creating a flexible multi-use space, and using of natural materials that were in keeping with the original building.

3. How did you come up with the design of a separate building with a glass bridge?

We looked at many different options for adding more program space to the site, and the bridge solution emerged as the preferred option. This design solution for the addition maintains the integrity of the original building by creating a separate new structure and connecting the two with a glass bridge over an existing driveway. The new and the existing building are unified in form by reflecting the modular scale, proportion and shape of the existing structure inside and outside the new building. The forms of the new and the old play together as you move around the site. They create a dynamic composition that looks original and intentional. While physically separated, the two buildings are visually united.

4. What constraints/challenges did you have to contend with?

The challenge was to maintain the wooded site while adding to the existing building, and connecting lightly on the side of the original building with a bridge emerged as the best solution. The budget was tight, and separating the new from the old saved cost by minimizing the impact to the existing building. The fire marshal initially objected to the bridge, as its clearance prevented one of the largest fire trucks to circumnavigate the site. The compromise was to add more fire protection to the existing building.

James P. Clark, FAIA, LEED AP BD+C
Principal, MTFA Architecture