Trinity Episcopal Church in Midtown Community Asset-Mapping Report

35TH ANNIVERSARY
PARTNERS FOR SACRED PLACES
1989 – 2024

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THANK YOU

Partners for Sacred Places would like to express our immense gratitude for the partnership of Trinity Episcopal Church in Midtown, Houston, TX and especially the Asset- Mapping team throughout the planning process. Partners' findings and recommendations are a result of the collaborative, enthusiastic, and dedicated team members. We hope that our report may be inspiring and meaningful for Trinity Midtown in its current and future efforts to steward its magnificent facilities for both congregational and community benefit.

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BACKGROUND

Trinity Episcopal Church (Trinity Midtown) is an historic and well-known congregation in the Midtown neighborhood of Houston. The vitality of the community remains strong, despite the challenges of in-person attendance following the COVID-19 pandemic and cultural shifts around church membership. To meet these challenges, Trinity Midtown contracted with Partners for Sacred Places to explore **new building stewardship strategies** that would explore the potential of the church's campus and inform new mission and capital improvement initiatives by inviting community perspectives into a collaborative visioning process for the church's campus.

In December of 2024, Partners helped facilitate an **Asset-Mapping event** to invite community collaboration on the potential uses of the facilities and property. Participants represented a wide range of constituencies professions, and perspectives in the neighborhood of Midtown and wider Houston. Participants toured the facilities and then engaged in a dynamic, collaborative process to inventory all the assets available to Trinity Midtown and the surrounding community and then connect them in new ways. .

OBJECTIVES

- **Understanding of needs and opportunities in the surrounding community:** Discover the immediate and long-term needs of Trinity Midtown's neighbors and the larger Midtown community – specifically the "gaps" in service that Trinity Midtown's facilities could address. This will inform strategies for space-sharing and programming partnerships and will help to inform any renovations and capital improvements for the facilities.
- **(Re)introduce Trinity Midtown as a Community Collaborator and Partner:** The church buildings are a physical landmark in the neighborhood, and its members are involved in the life and leadership of Midtown. Trinity wants to pursue opportunities that raise its profile as a collaborative neighbor and a public asset.
- **Discover Potential Uses of the Campus and Buildings:** Identifying potential uses of the buildings and grounds that align with the congregation's own mission and priorities will result in a list of key improvements that will ensure a capital project results in increased community collaboration and use.
- **Practicality and Potential:** It will be important for Trinity Midtown to pursue actions that can be implemented quickly and easily as well as identifying needs and opportunities that will take longer, and require more preparation, to realize. This will be an important balance to strike as the church considers opportunities for its entire city block.

ASSET-MAPPING FINDINGS

Participants generated over 30 ideas for the use of Trinity's facilities and property that would meet community needs and desires for Midtown, Downtown, and wider Houston. These ideas were “built” using assets that the participants identified; these assets represent the resources that Trinity has or has access to by virtue of being connected to the individuals and organizations represented at the event and by being a part of the Houston community. Participants were also invited to indicate which ideas most excited them as leaders and stakeholders in Midtown – those ideas that they saw as having the most potential for positive impact.

Partners transcribed all assets and ideas generated at the event, as well as knowledge of conversations during the tours and within each small group, has organized these ideas into broader community priorities for the evolution of Trinity’s campus – the programs it could host, the groups it could benefit, and the renovation/development of the campus to support desired activities, events, and community initiatives.

ASSET-MAPPING FINDINGS

Increase Access to Social Services via Existing Partnerships

By far, the most popular idea trend was the potential for Trinity Midtown to use their facilities as an access point for various health and social service programs in the neighborhood, particularly for those folks already participating in the Lord of the Streets breakfast program and evening sandwich and prayer service. Health and social service organizations often look for opportunities to expand their services, but do not have the financial capacity to invest in additional physical space. Trinity Midtown could serve as a vital access point for needed services by hosting other organizations in the church's space alongside its feeding and other outreach programs.

- **Host "pop-up" service clinics**: With so many meals served every week, there are many opportunities for service providers to offer guests needed services. This could include benefits enrollment, legal aid clinics, case management, substance abuse treatment referrals, etc. Trinity could establish a rotating calendar of service clinics to offer regular opportunities for the guests to engage with the services.
- **Develop a long-term partnership with a specific service provider**: Trinity Midtown has office/classroom space that could host a satellite office of an organization that can provide specific and extensive support to the guests of the meals programs. This partner could provide programming and services on a regular and frequent basis, making the church a "hub" of services in the Midtown area.
- **Strengthen outreach and services to serve immigrants, migrants, and refugees:** In addition to those experiencing homelessness, the expansion of services and outreach to recently arrived migrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees was also identified as an opportunity for expansion of Trinity's impact. Trinity could work with advocacy and service groups in the city to provide services that build off the meals programs.

ASSET-MAPPING FINDINGS *Expand*

Programming for Children and Youth

The variety and flexibility of Trinity Midtown's spaces inspired participants to imagine opportunities for the church to support children, youth, and their families. Participants also noted the increased residential development in Midtown, which shows no signs of slowing. It is expected that the number of families with children and youth will increase significantly over the next few years.

- **Offer After-School Arts Programming:** There are many students in Houston who need engagement and supervision, and the demand for after-school programming will increase. The MATCH, Ensemble, and Trinity's relationship with musicians and music instructors all create the opportunity to host after-school arts programming in the church. This could be a youth theater, individual music instructors, or even visual art classes.
- **Host an Urban "Summer Camp":** Trinity's existing youth ministry space, its many classrooms, green space, and easy access via public transportation, inspired the idea for a summer camp experience for children and youth who do not have access to camp in a traditional setting. Partnering with Rice, HCC, the public school system, existing arts partners, as well as a myriad of local youth-focused organizations would bring in expert support. This could be a camp experience focused on a particular type of activity or education area (e.g., music) or on specific groups of children/youth (e.g., newly arrived refugees, those experiencing housing insecurity, etc.).
- **Expand Childcare Support in Midtown**: Trinity's facilities, with an outfitted nursery and classrooms for children's education, would easily support childcare in many ways. Childcare and enrichment could be provided to organizations using the building for programs and events (e.g., during a concert or ESL class). Trinity may find a childcare provider partner who could assist in upgrading the space for regular daycare programming.

ASSET-MAPPING FINDINGS

Enhance Arts & Culture in Midtown

Participants easily recognized Trinity Midtown's immense potential to offer space as a venue for arts and cultural events. Each small group generated ideas related to the use of the facilities as an arts and cultural venue, indicating a strong desire for the expansion of this kind of programming in the neighborhood.

- **Partner with Theater and Music Groups for Rehearsal and Instruction Space**: While the church building has obvious potential for concerts and performances, many local arts groups are in more desperate need of spaces to rehearse and to teach. Trinity Midtown has flexible spaces that could accommodate various sizes of groups for teaching, table-reads, rehearsals, or student recitals, , making it a potential "one stop shop" for performing artists and arts groups that do not have their own space. A particularly good match for Trinity may be music instructors who need space to provide lessons to individual or groups of students as well as recital venues.
- **Partner with the Ensemble and MATCH**: Every group discussed the opportunities that Trinity Midtown's close proximity to the MATCH and Ensemble created. Trinity has ample space to host receptions, pre/post gatherings, and other supplemental programming that the MATCH and Ensemble cannot host alongside their various performances. These organizations might also be interested in programming shows that correspond to the arts events at Trinity Midtown (e.g., Jazzfest). The church could also offer additional space to the organizations if they are looking for additional rehearsal and instruction space at different times of the year.
- **Provide Arts Engagement to Meals Guests:** The arts can be a powerful healing and transformative force in people's lives, and they can be inaccessible to people who are marginalized and underserved. Trinity could host arts groups and organizations that are interested in working with the constituencies that regularly participate in the LOTS and sandwich program; this could be visual, creative, or performing arts.

ASSET-MAPPING FINDINGS

Live into the Church's Role as Community "Third Space"

Participants easily saw the potential for Trinity to leverage its facilities and location to increase the well-being and connectedness of the wider Midtown community. Several ideas focused on the church as a place where local community groups and neighbors could gather both formally and informally. This points to a lack of "third space" in Midtown and wider Houston that Trinity could fill in a number of ways.

- **Host a Regular Farmer's Market:** There are few (if any) regularly scheduled Farmers' Markets in Midtown, downtown, or the Third Ward. Farmers markets have become community gathering places as well as crucial access points for fresh produce, locally-sourced food, and opportunities for small culinary businesses. Trinity's green space and parking lot would provide the physical space for a successful market and the increasing number of residents in the neighborhood would appreciate a market as a community asset.
- **Offer Affordable Meeting and Event Space:** There is a dearth of available meeting space in Midtown. Offering space for meetings, classes, and small gatherings would increase the church's profile as a community space in Midtown. The kitchen and hall would be accessible and affordable event space that local non-profit organizations could utilize for their fundraising galas, conferences, and other special events. The Public Library and Chamber of Commerce would be key partners in promoting the church for community meeting space.

- **Host Local Clubs, Hobbyists, and Enthusiasts:** The attractive space in the hall, chapel, classroom, and garden space (as well as ample parking) would make Trinity a popular gathering space for gardeners, craftspeople and makers (e.g. quilting groups), or other enthusiasts of various hobbies. The space could be used for instruction, exhibition, workshops, or fundraising events.

ASSET-MAPPING FINDINGS

Other Promising Ideas

Some ideas emerged during the event that Partners believes are valuable starting points for new programming and initiatives in the congregation and among community stakeholders but were not part of stronger trends of thought and or were not ”fleshed out” with several associated assets. Although these were not as detailed as the other idea trends, Partners believes that they have strong potential to raise Trinity’s profile as a community and civic asset and align with the congregation’s mission priorities and legacy.

- **Increase Collaboration with the City of Houston:** Midtown and Downtown Houston are evolving as developers, restauranteurs, and entertainment entities continue to expand their presence in these neighborhoods. This creates a window of opportunity for Trinity to leverage its sizeable real estate and longstanding presence in the Midtown neighborhood to work with City Council and local departments to play a more active role in Midtown’s development and growth.
- **Leverage Property for Financial Sustainability:** Parishioners and community members saw significant potential for the church to rent out its space to vendors, community-serving organizations, and for life-celebration events. The hall with commercial-grade kitchen is an especially attractive venue, as is the chapel, garden, and lawn outside the Bering House. Better and more strategic promotion of the activities and services that Trinity hosts would also lead to external grant funding of capital improvements.
- **Capitalize on Local Tourism:** Participants saw potential for Trinity to provide programs and services during some popular events in Houston, such as the rodeo. There could be needs for parking, respite, and supporting services during these events; Trinity could serve as a staging area, a drop-off/pick-up point, cooling center, or a space for families with small children to “take a break” from crowds. Trinity might also provide a venue for events and programming that are a part of city-wide festivals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Asset-Mapping participants were very engaged in the activity and were excited about the ideas generated. To maintain the momentum of the Asset-Mapping event and to strengthen relationships with the participants' organizations, Trinity Midtown should follow up individually with each participant about the Asset-Mapping event. These conversations should include overall impressions of the activity, the idea that most excited them, and how they would be willing and able to bring that idea to fruition.

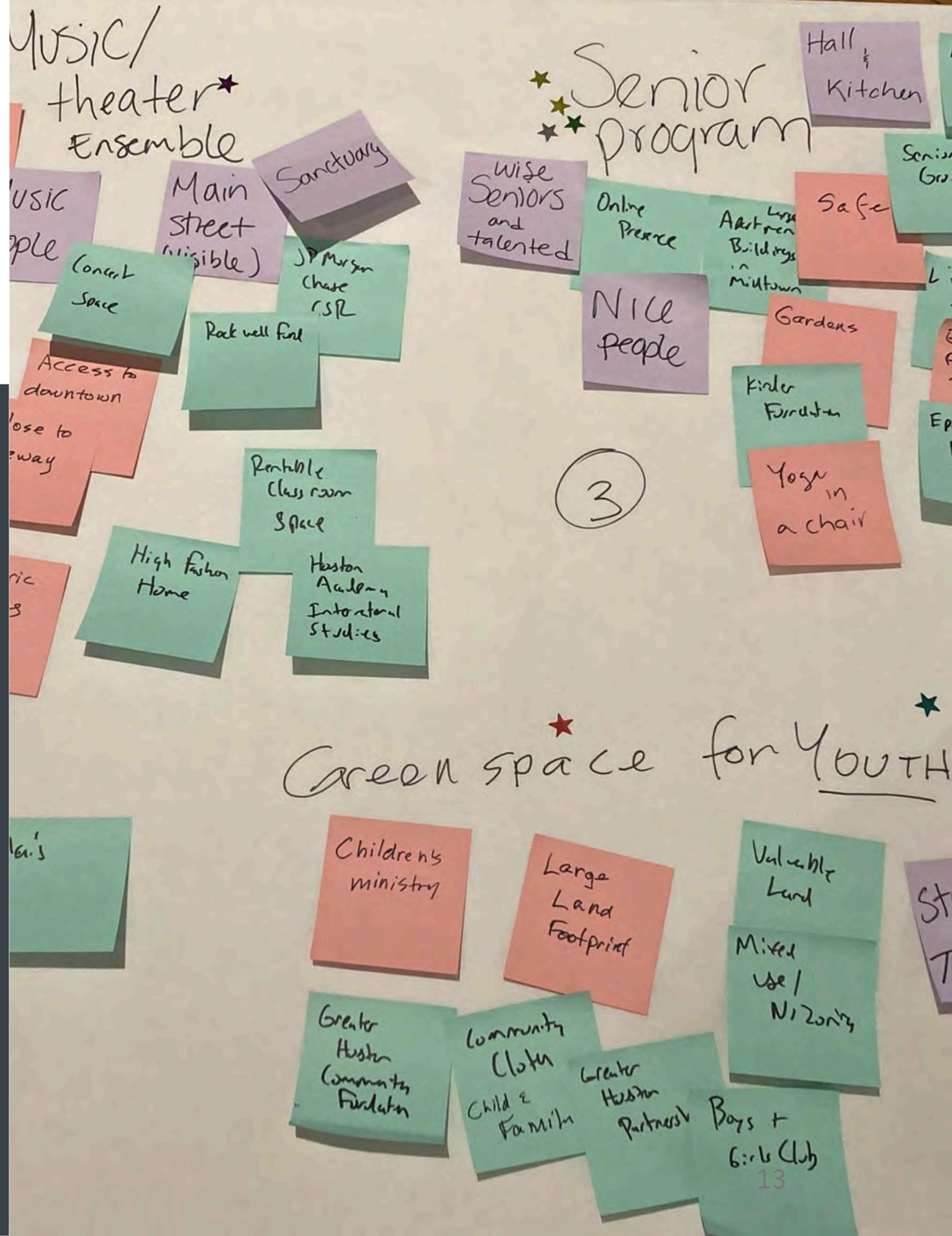
Partners for Sacred Places always recommends that congregations share the results and findings of Asset-Mapping events with all the participants. The church can either share the full report with the participants or follow up with bulleted findings and recommendations. This would affirm that Trinity Midtown wishes to continue conversation and collaboration with these community groups and their representatives. As these relationships continue to strengthen, the participating groups will reach out to Trinity with opportunities that their organizations might want the church to be involved with. These conversations should be continued, with regular updates to participants, especially those who become new/stronger friends of Trinity Midtown.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Discern Key Priorities for Trinity and Identify Actionable Steps for Initiatives
After following up with Asset-Mapping participants and sharing this report with the Vestry and wider congregation, Trinity will need to gather diverse input from the congregation and broaden the conversation about potential initiatives that the parish could pursue. The parish should consider the broader community priorities and identify which best match the congregation's mission, values, legacy, and (most importantly) capacity. The priorities that best resonate with and inspire the congregation are those that Trinity should pursue, starting with the initial ideas that came out of the Asset-Mapping event associated with those priorities.

Trinity should identify and empower teams that are interested in developing and implementing some of the ideas generated during the Asset-Mapping events. Some of these teams may already exist within Trinity's current structure of (e.g., an outreach committee), and some may need to be newly formed. These teams should collaborate with community members that participated in the Asset-Mapping event and self-identified as willing to donate their time and energy to the initiative.

For each of the community priorities, Partners has identified some initial "next steps" should Trinity discern that the parish should pursue them:



ACTIONABLE STEPS

Expand Access to Social Services via Existing Partnerships

Host human and social service pop-ups: Capitalizing on the popularity of the meal programs, Trinity should look to expand and strengthen its network of local service providers who could offer additional services to the shelter guests and other unhoused folks in Midtown. This could include legal clinics, medical clinics, referral for mental health treatment, enrollment in job training programs, or housing assistance. Having these service providers on hand lowers barriers to access needed support services for a vulnerable population and would increase Trinity's profile among congregations and social service agencies in Midtown and greater Houston.

Invite recovery and other support groups into the building. Many substance abuse, recovery, and support groups are seeking to provide community-based care. The church's space may be well-leveraged as a place to host group sessions, which could be for a variety of specific populations (teens, seniors, queer folks, etc.). Outreach to local providers and advocacy organizations (which could be facilitated by existing recovery group leaders) would lead to more specific ideas and opportunities that need space to provide essential services. Trinity might also reach out to organizations that focus on substance abuse/recovery to explore the possibility of providing on-site services in a location that already serves folks in re cov er y.

ACTIONABLE STEPS *Offer Programming for Children and Youth*

Bring together arts partners with educational institutions: Educators and youth workers often have the best understanding of extracurricular "gaps" for students, which will be valuable information for Trinity (and its Arts partners) to identify after-school programming opportunities. Conversations with local schoolteachers and counselors would help identify program opportunities that are attractive, accessible, and beneficial for children and youth in the Midtown/Downtown area. Trinity should also invite music instructors and choir/theater directors to look at the building and identify opportunities for lessons, recitals, etc.

Begin conversations with urban youth advocacy and enrichment organizations: Strengthening relationships with organizations that provide youth programming in Houston's urban centers would be the first step in hosting a summer camp or other enrichment programming at Trinity Midtown. Trinity should cast a wide net, starting conversations with organizations that serve youth in general but also those organizations that focus on specific youth populations (e.g., refugee youth, homeless youth, queer youth). These organizations should be invited to the church for a tour of the facilities and explicit conversation about how the space could benefit their summer programming or create opportunities for new programming.

ACTIONABLE STEPS *Offer Programming for Children and Youth*

Explore opportunities for childcare partnerships: Licensed childcare providers require specific amenities in the physical locations of care; Trinity should invite a subject matter expert that the church already knows to come and walk through the facilities with an eye for these amenities. This expert could be a longstanding childcare organization, childcare advocacy group, or the appropriate office from the city. The goal of these conversations would be to identify which kind of childcare the facilities can host as is and what additional upgrades and renovations may be needed to provide other forms of childcare. Trinity should also begin conversations with the MATCH, Ensemble, and existing ministry partners (LOTS, IMGH) to discuss childcare support that the church's facilities might provide (e.g., childcare while parents are at a performance next door).

ACTIONABLE STEPS

Enhance Arts & Culture in Midtown

Engage with local musicians and music educators. Trinity should invite music educators and music enrichment groups to tour the space and identify opportunities for the church to host lessons, rehearsals, and recitals in its space. Many music educators are also professional musicians and greater familiarity with Trinity and its facilities would increase the church's profile as a venue for concerts and performances of amateur and professional groups.

Start conversations with the MATCH and Ensemble: Trinity should sit down with the leadership and staff of both organizations and discuss how the facilities might support the success of their programs and performances. This could include using performance spaces in the church (sanctuary, chapel, potentially expanded green space) as well as spaces that couldserve as rehearsal, office, and instruction space. These organizations may also have relationships with other groups looking for space and could make direct connections.

Explore possibilities to offer arts programming to meals guests: Trinity should reach out to art therapists and groups that work with the constituencies that benefit from the meals programs. A good starting point might be HueMan:Shelterproject, whose work will be located in the Midtown neighborhood. Theater Under the Stars' new Public Works program, which includes intentional outreach to folks experiencing homelessness. This kind of partnership would be an intersection of two of the church's mission priorities and lead to greater use of the facilities. Partnership might also lead to new capital grant opportunities that would directly benefit program participants.

ACTIONABLE STEPS

Enhance Arts & Culture in Midtown

Prioritize recruitment for regular arts programming: In addition to the summer JazzFest, Trinity should convene meetings with local arts groups with the explicit purpose of programming the sanctuary, the chapel, and potentially the green space for performances, rehearsals, and educational programs related to the arts. Trinity should also explore its members' professional and personal networks to establish connections with visual artists who may see possibilities for art installations in the facilities on the green space. The more the facilities are used for the arts, the more artists and arts groups it will attract.

ACTIONABLE STEPS *Live into the Church's Role as Community "Third Space"*

Begin conversations with food security organizations and existing farmers markets. Trinity should identify potential partners and advocates to explore the idea of a farmers market on the church's property. This would include organizations that focus on community access to fresh produce, urban farmers, and coordinators of existing farmers markets (e.g., the East End Farmers Market or Blackwood Skyfarmers Market) to learn more about possible opportunities and demand.

Collaborate with existing community partners to host social events. The church has a list of community partners who use the building or who the parish has partnered with; these events would be focused on inviting the wider neighborhood into the church to become more familiar with the partners, the building, and the congregation. Hosting a volunteer appreciation event or a benefit concert for the Lord of the Streets shelter program or partnering with Ensemble and/or the MATCH to put on a fundraising gala.

Promote Trinity's space to local, informal "brokers." The Chamber of Commerce and Public Library are often the first touchpoints for organizations and groups looking for space – Trinity should reach out to the nearest library branches, the Greater Houston Partnership, East End Chamber of Commerce, and others to take tour of the facilities and discuss the opportunities they see for specific groups and organizations that they are in contact with.

ACTIONABLE STEPS
Other Promising Ideas

Initiate conversation with City government leaders and departments. As Trinity discerns which community priorities it would like to pursue, an immediate next step would be to identify the key players in Houston City Council and the city's various municipal departments who could generate support for corresponding initiatives. Trinity should invite these officials and leaders to the church for a dedicated tour and conversation to discuss how the church, and the city, might work together on shared priorities for Midtown and Downtown.

Get involved with existing community events. There were a few events mentioned during the Asset-Mapping event that are already Houston institutions and that Trinity could support or leverage. These include as potential family support station, respite station, venue for programming, or park-and-go site. Trinity should reach out to the organizers of Mid Main First Thursday Block Party, the March Madness Music Festival, and Houston Pride to see what opportunities the facilities could provide for programming and support of these large events. Trinity should also reach out to shuttle services contracted by the Houston Rodeo.

Initiate conversations with residential developers. As the number of residential housing units continues to increase in the Midtown neighborhood, Trinity should develop relationships with local developers who will have the best sense of the demographics for new residents. Conversations should include how Trinity's facilities might be utilized for recreation or "third space" uses that might be attractive to new residents based on their projected age and household structure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen Space-Sharing Policies and Practices

Trinity Midtown will need to implement robust space-sharing policies and cultivate a practice of routinely sharing their building with others.

- **Reevaluate staffing needs:** As Trinity explores more community partnerships that invite programs and events into the church facilities, Trinity will need to dedicate more personnel resources to the recruitment, management, and negotiation of space-sharing partnerships. This might include increased hours for cleaning staff, additional administrative hours for coordination of space-users, and liaising with new and existing partners. *Additional staff costs can (and should) be built into the space-use fee structure.*

- **Update space-use fee structure:** As a rule of thumb, congregations can "rent" space to another non-profit organization if they do not make a "profit" off the arrangement (i.e., the cost of space- use can be directly tied to specific expenses such as utilities, staffing, etc.). There are also usually ways to amend agreements to cover the tax that the state would level for the church renting out to for-profit groups or to fee for service groups. This fee schedule may incorporate factors such as mission alignment or "in kind" services in place of financial compensation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen Space-Sharing Policies and Practices

Trinity Midtown will need to implement robust space-sharing policies and cultivate a practice of routinely sharing their building with others.

- **Consolidate congregational storage and usage of individual spaces by the congregation.** In preparation for offering more of its space to local community organizations, Trinity should inventory the activities and storage that will need dedicated space in the church, and then “claim” the spaces that make the most sense to host those activities and items. Trinity should try to consolidate storage and congregational life activities into as few dedicated spaces as possible and develop a schedule that shows what other spaces may be shared between congregational activities and community activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Incorporate Learnings into Trinity Midtown's Capital Improvement Plans

After following up with the activities that currently, or could, happen in Trinity Midtown's facilities on its property reflect the church's mission and vision for itself and the community of Midtown. Similarly, improvements to, and preservation of, the property have the potential to benefit not just Trinity Midtown, but the entire community. The church should pay special attention to how its property can be intentionally used to increase its impact and promote its legacy in Midtown and greater Houston. Some key considerations would be:

- **Segmenting and securing access points in the church building:** Depending on the number and type of space-use partners that the church has within the church building, Trinity Midtown will need to explore opportunities to ensure external users' direct and secure access to the spaces they need. For instance, a children's theater group may prefer/need to have secure access to prevent wandering strangers from entering the space while in session. *It will be important to balance security with hospitality so that Trinity can live into its identity as a community space while also keeping the people who rely on the building safe.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

Incorporate Learnings into Trinity Midtown's Capital Improvement Plans

- **Improving accessibility and "flow" in the facilities:** The church building has many different entrances, but only one that is accessible. The available classroom and office spaces that Trinity would like to offer for exclusive use by an external partner would currently require the partner to walk through much of the space used for congregational life and programming. *Improving accessibility and "traffic flow" within the church will increase the facilities' attractiveness and usability by many external entities.*
- **Exploring the opportunities of an expanded green space:** There was no discussion at the Asset-Mapping event of opportunities to improve and leverage the Bering House as additional facility space, but much discussion of the potential that expanded green space could provide. *Trinity should look at what facility improvements (to the church buildings) and landscape design possibilities would exist with the house's deconstruction.*

APPENDIX

Read the list of Assets and Ideas from the event

View Asset-Mapping Event Photos

Access Space-Sharing Resources