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Expansion planned at Unitarian Universalist Church in Mt. Lebanon

By Harry Funk



Architectural rendering by Rothschild Doyno Collaborative showing the church's interior

Mt. Lebanon Commission is expected to vote April 12 on a conditional use request for the partial demolition and expansion of Unitarian Universalist Church of the South Hills.

Commissioners conducted a public hearing on the request Monday, following the municipal planning board's February recommendation for approval of the request.

The church, which was founded in 1965, has occupied a former residence at 1240 Washington Road since 1971 and had an addition built in 1994.

Members want to increase the capacity of the building's main

room, which at 99 seats is "too small to accommodate our entire congregation in one meeting," Peg Hart, chairwoman of the church's New Home Committee, said. "We're looking for a building that is more welcoming, more energy-efficient and more handicapped-accessible."

Ken Doyno, president of Strip District-based architectural firm Rothschild Doyno Collaborative, provided specifics about the addition's design. The current two-story wing, he said, will be demolished and replaced by a single story with high ceilings.

"Facing Washington Road, we will maintain the eave line and

the master roof shape so that appearance from Washington Road will be similar, albeit a little bit closer to the right-hand property side," Doyno explained. "That allows us to put a larger sanctuary space behind that, within the zoning and deed-restriction envelope of the site and allow us to create a larger main gathering space."

Plans call for 200 seats and 53 parking spaces, a combination that meets the requirements in the municipal zoning code of one space for every four people included in the building's capacity, Doyno said.

"We're also maintaining the existing landscaping and lighting poles, really to keep a very low level of light on the site and not be obtrusive to neighbors in that setting," he told commissioners.

The latest plans have been modified from ones previously submitted, Doyno said, to reflect discussions with members of the municipal historic preservation board, who expressed interest in the building maintaining as much of its architectural character as possible.

The church, which also is known as Sunnyhill because of the street next to it, is in a residential district and is granted a conditional use as a place of worship. The demolition-construction project is expected to begin May 31, according to the church's website.