



Congregational Church of San Mateo

Description of Proposed Project - December 1, 2011 (updated version)

Accessibility Improvements and Memorial Garden

The Congregational Church of San Mateo (CCSM) was founded in 1863 and is located on a California Mission Revival style campus at 225 Tilton Avenue. The sanctuary, at the northeast corner of San Mateo Drive and Tilton Avenue, was built in 1931 and was extended closer to San Mateo Drive in 1955. While city-approved infrastructure improvements were completed on much of the campus in 2004, the sanctuary has had relatively few changes since being extended in 1955. The proposed project is focused on two main objectives related to the sanctuary area of the campus:

- 1) ADA-compliant accessibility and visibility improvements to the sanctuary.
- 2) Creation of a memorial garden, including labyrinth and columbarium, north of sanctuary.

Given its original design and different main floor elevations, handicap access to and from the sanctuary is extremely limited. Wheelchair access is relegated to a covered outdoor wooden ramp on the north side of the sanctuary. This ramp leads to a side aisle door at the front of the sanctuary (west end), while other worshippers enter from the main entrances and narthex in the back (east end of sanctuary). To access restrooms, offices, meeting rooms and the social hall, you must exit this same door and re-enter in another location.

To address this problem, the narthex will be expanded underneath the balcony, to accommodate an indoor ramp that connects the sanctuary with the restroom/office hallway and main entrances to the church. This expansion will also result in the removal of four pews in the back of the church, reducing seating capacity. With the addition of the narthex ramp, wheelchair access to the sanctuary will be easily available from all directions (Tilton, parking lot, restroom/office hallway, meeting rooms and social hall). The wider narthex will provide a less congested welcoming space for use before and after services. It includes glass separation to the sanctuary, resulting in a lighter, more inviting and open entrance to the church. With improved visibility to the chancel, the narthex can double as an infant room or for overflow seating, when needed.

Inside the sanctuary, a lift will be installed at the west end of the south side aisle (directly left of the current pulpit) to provide accessibility from the nave to the chancel. Currently there is a 21-inch difference between these two elevations. Our design plan includes raising the chancel an additional nine inches, to 30 inches, and removing the current physical separation (built-in pulpit, lectern, hardwood rood screens) between the two spaces. These changes, along with new chancel lighting, will improve visibility of worship leaders, choir members, children's moments, performances and concerts for all attendees. Additional space will be provided for wheelchairs at various locations through the sanctuary (front, mid-center aisle, rear).

Every effort has been made in the proposed design to retain the historic look and feel of the sanctuary. The removal of the tall wooden altar panel will expose three refurbished stained glass windows that face San Mateo Drive, restoring the west wall of the chancel to its original design. As part of this project, two exterior changes are proposed to the sanctuary. It is our intent that all exterior changes also be compatible and complementary to the California Mission Revival architecture of our campus.

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Exterior change # 1 is a small 230 SF addition planned on the south side of the sanctuary, facing Tilton Avenue, to accommodate the proposed lift and chancel storage. Its scale is in keeping with the proportions of the building, reminiscent of a small side chapel. The addition is designed to echo the octagon shape of the chancel walls facing San Mateo Drive and includes cut-out features which complement the design of the existing side windows.



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Exterior change # 2 is a small 59 SF enclosure of the current wheelchair access entrance on the north side of the sanctuary. The roofline and actual footprint of this space will remain as it is today. This modified entrance, which includes a bay window and small vestibule, will connect to a more permanent outdoor covered ramp that will lead from the front of the sanctuary to the restroom/office hallway and proposed Memorial Garden.



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Exterior change # 3 is the proposed Memorial Garden to be located immediately north of the sanctuary adjacent to neighboring Pilgrim Plaza. This space currently includes two heritage oak trees, a stucco wall and wooden gate facing San Mateo Drive, a metal storage shed, blacktopped area and basketball hoop. The design proposes replacement of the stucco wall and gate approximately 30 feet closer to San Mateo Drive, removal of the storage shed and blacktop, preservation of the heritage oak trees, and the addition of an enclosed, secure and well-lit garden with fountain, seating areas, labyrinth and columbarium. Access will be limited from both San Mateo Drive and the church parking lot (all current parking spaces will be maintained) and in accordance with city code. The new wall enclosures and gate facing San Mateo Drive will be similar in design to the existing wall and gate. Due to its proposed height for privacy and security of the columbarium, the current arch above the gate will not be replicated.

