

First Unitarian Society of Westchester in Hastings Hit Hard by Storm; Determined to Recover

In an effort to keep you all informed of our efforts to recover from the damage to our building caused by the “late season nor’easter” of April 15 and 16, here’s a status report. (Our local stream overflowed and backed up. The floodwaters were 7 feet above ground level, and 15 inches deep on the main floor of our building – sanctuary, offices, and classrooms.

Rescue costs: \$50,000

The initial cleanup was done mostly through volunteer efforts. Rental of dumpsters, portable toilets, and miscellaneous cleaning supplies cost about \$1500. We had the building sanitized and had anti-mold application. Cost \$6500. Our largest cost has been the cleanup of the oil spill caused when the tank supplying oil to our boiler was torn from the building, dripping oil into the ground below. The damage was limited because our tank was in a containment tank, but nevertheless has been costly. The work is performed to Department of Health and EPA standards and is being done by an environmental contractor. Our costs at present are expected to reach about \$43,000.

Repair: \$23,300 so far

We purchased new computers at a cost of \$2000. Repairs to the phone system, alarm system, and electrical system cost \$2400. The piano moving, storage, return, and tuning cost about \$800 and was covered by a donation. We have installed new carpet in the meeting room, foyer and hall, and room 2. It is of recycled material. Cost \$7000. The flooring in the administrator’s office and the minister’s study is bamboo, in part donated by GreenStreet Construction and owner Rob Politzer. GreenStreet has donated time, skill, materials, and support throughout this disaster time. Cost for some materials \$2000.

We are almost through with repairing and repainting the walls of the meeting room and classrooms and hallways. Baseboards still need to be replaced. Cost approximately \$7500 so far. We replaced the back steps, torn from the building by the storm. Cost \$2400. We have not yet replaced the oil tank, repaired the boiler, repaired the kitchen floor, or replaced furnishings or RE supplies and curriculum. We will also need to put in topsoil and reseed the damaged lawn.

Recovery: ?????

The storm recovery fund has received donations of \$23,000 from various members and friends, including other congregations. Additional contributions would go a long way toward supporting our repairs.

Our insurance claims have been denied and we are in the process of appealing that decision.

New York does not seem to have coverage for such spills under the Superfund Program or any other grant program. Anyone knowing of grant opportunities or funds to cover environmental clean-up, please contact us with the information.

The process of applying for assistance from FEMA has been completed. We are not eligible for a grant; only households are, but we have been offered a loan from the Small Business

Administration. The finance committee is determining the feasibility of repaying the loan and having a lien on our property, or self-funding through offering bonds to members of the congregation. The finance committee is also considering requesting a \$10 per month donation per member to cover costs for the near term until repairs are done and finances more secure.

The drainage system in our neighborhood (and throughout the county) needs to be investigated to protect us in future storms and to help us plan for the future. Connections need to be made and maintained with Town, County, and State agencies to draw attention to our situation and demand assessment and action. A task force for this issue is in formation.

The efforts and dedication of those individuals whose time, talent, and treasure have brought us to this point is very much appreciated. Many of us need to take time away from this situation. Our brains are fried, our thoughts are scrambled, we need to coddle our minds for a while in order to hatch anything productive for the coming year. Some of the questions can wait for answers. Others need constant monitoring by newly energized volunteers. We are requesting support from a new tier of volunteers in our membership. Your community needs you.

Submitted by
Susan Greenberg, President