

Child Care Visioning Team Proposal

February 26, 2023

Team name: Child Care Visioning Team (originally Day Care)

Church Member Input:

Original Charge / Scope: Our Visioning team was charged with looking at how First Congregational Church Burlington could address the lack of adequate child care in Burlington. Proceeds from the sale of the Ronald McDonald House give us the opportunity to consider new programs. In addition, our congregation recognized that our large facility is extremely underutilized Monday through Friday. Other Visioning teams are also considering how to use this money and our building to best serve our community.

There has been a huge effort, statewide (indeed, nationwide), to recognize child care as a profession, and the name change away from day care to child care, has been part of that effort. Raising licensing standards and pay and a recognition of the science of early childhood have all been part of a long-term, comprehensive effort. We propose that First Church support this effort. We will use the term “Child Care” in this proposal, instead of Day Care.

Our charge from the congregation is to research the feasibility of operating a child care center or supporting existing programs to serve those in our community who can ill afford that service today, to include immigrant or refugee populations. The following is the distillation of the six detailed suggestions provided by members of the congregation:

Looking at the six suggestions, we see many commonalities. They include the perceived need for more child care in center-city Burlington, making use of an underutilized space, enhancing the public perception of First Church, and the potential to attract more families to the church. Some respondents wished to see us lease space to an established child care provider, while others thought we should run a child care center ourselves, requiring *“a significant hands-on commitment by the congregation”* and *“providing endless service opportunities for church members, including legal and business talents.”* In either case, they say that a child care program should not be intended to provide income to First Church. Some individual comments include use of *“ground floor classrooms / kitchen space”* and *“convert the space east of the Memorial Garden into a playground.”* As for whom we would serve, we read *“I would like to establish childcare for all children from all races and creeds,”* *“...serving working parents with affordable child care,”* and *“focus (on) single mothers.”*

What would success look like? Respondents were asked to answer this question. Answers included *“a fully licensed, insured, functioning daycare... within two years,”* *“providing multiple support services to expand childcare services,”* and *“economic equity for women and academic equity for economically challenged children.”*

With whom might we partner? Respondents were also asked to answer this question. Answers included the YMCA, Let’s Grow Kids, King Street Center, Department for Children and Families, Sarah Holbrook Center, and *“available city, local and state funds.”*

Our Child Care Team's Research and Recommendations:

Research: Members of our team visited several existing child care programs in the area, including Pine Forest Children's Center, Ohavi Zedek Full Circle Preschool, Robin's Nest Children's Center, the YMCA (all in Burlington) plus ONE Arts Community School in Colchester and Children's Preschool and Enrichment Center (housed in Essex Junction Congregational Church).

We also consulted extensively with Rebecca Reese, City of Burlington Early Learning Initiative (ELI) Manager and with Didi Harris, Senior Programs Manager at Let's Grow Kids. They both visited our facility several times, accompanied on one visit by state licensing authorities and the Fire Marshall. We were assured that our facilities meet all required standards, with some modifications.

Rebecca Reese, City of Burlington Early Learning Initiative (ELI) Manager, gave us a profile of possible funding sources, including:

- City of Burlington Capacity Grants (ELI funding for capital improvements, furniture, non-consumable supplies, etc.).
- State of Vermont Capacity Grants (administered through Let's Grow Kids, for the same start-up expenses as ELI, plus start-up salaries).
- Child care tuition / operating funding (through State of Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program and ELI First Steps Scholarship Program).

We met at the church with Christina Goodwin, Executive Director at Pine Forest Children's Center and Joe Giallanella, a member of the Board of Directors at Pine Forest. They were impressed by the size and quality of the spaces they saw here, and indicated that they would be eager to run a program at First Church. We also met with Robin's Nest Children's Center, who expressed interest in establishing a program in our building. We ascertained that there is significant interest, but have made no commitment to any potential providers.

Ann Vivian and Doug Viehmann, architects at Guillot Vivian Viehmann Architects (and church members generous with their time!) provided sketch floor plans (attached) as well as rough estimates of the costs to renovate our church building to make a child care possible. Estimated costs are included below.

KEY FINDINGS:

Greatest need is for infant and toddler care: A primary take-away from our conversations with child care professionals is that the age group with greatest need for care is infant and toddlers. It is more expensive to run such a program than one for older children as the teacher-to-child ratio is higher with younger children.

Cost of care is too high: Many families simply cannot afford child care. We also learned that many families' income is just a tad too high for tuition assistance, or that a parent who can at last get a job because they find affordable child care then puts their family income over the threshold for tuition aid.

Staffing is insufficient: Some providers told us they could offer spaces to more children if more staff was available. But low wages, the high cost of living in the Burlington area, and the requirement for staff training mean that people are leaving the field or not entering in the first place. Let's Grow Kids is actively lobbying the State of Vermont to help with this problem.

Seven Days Newspaper (February 8, 2023) published an extensive discussion of the cost of child care for parents and the low wages. Among their findings:

“For five days a week of childcare at Turtle Island (Children’s Center in Montpelier), families pay between \$1,350 and \$1,500 a month — in line with other Vermont childcare centers — but staff members, some with master's degrees, earn \$14.50 to \$21 an hour, wages so low that a number of them are eligible for food stamps.”

It's clear to us that child care educators shoulder the burden of the discrepancy between what they earn and what the parents pay because they are dedicated to the work; it certainly is not profitable.

Competitive quality of space: From visits to existing child care programs, and particularly from comments from those who visited the building, we know that the spaces available at First Church are of higher quality than many.

PROPOSAL: After thorough research, we unanimously recommend the following to the congregation:

After consulting with all of the above professionals, our Child Care team agreed that we would best serve the community by leasing space to an established nonprofit child care provider. We came to this recommendation based on the experience of other church-housed programs. To start our own program with employees and / or volunteers from First Church would be an enormous hurdle to clear. Established programs know all about funding and operating child care programs, and a program here could benefit from economies of scale, including use of their established accounting, legal, and other professionals. Which is not to say that our child care partner program might not welcome volunteers, but each one must undergo an extensive background check to work with children, and would have to be approved by our partner provider program. Our respondents also mentioned the potential for professional assistance; that would again be up to our partner provider.

The overall revisioning effort was undertaken in large part by the availability of funds from the sale of the Ronald McDonald house, a major First Church mission effort. Most members believe that much if not all of those funds should continue to support our mission activities. The Ronald McDonald funds would be used in two ways:

1. Paying for the cost of necessary renovations and fit-up of the child care space (less any available grants).
2. Establish an annual budget item that provides funds for student scholarships and scholarships for educators’ further education and / or stipends to increase their income. These funds could be directed to our partner program and / or other area providers. Also, our proposal calls for the selected center to pay the same rent as their competition, yet we do not want to profit from their presence with us, so our net income (after expenses like insurance, utilities, etc.) would provide more ongoing funds for these scholarships. This budget would be overseen by a newly established church body, which would also be responsible for interfacing with our tenant center’s management.

Recommendation: If the church should decide to support a child care program in our building, we would lease the space to an established nonprofit child care provider, with a proven track record. The

lease agreement with the child care provider would grant them exclusive use of their space. To that end, we will prepare a Request For Proposals to be sent out to a number of existing Child Care providers. We recommend two possible space options as described below. We believe that the ultimate selection should be decided in conjunction with our partner child care provider and with consideration for the space needs of other vision team proposals. With either option, a toddler play area could be established within the fenced area by the Buell Street entrance. When weather prevents use of the Buell Street play area and the church is not open to the public (JUMP, AA, Possibility Shop, etc.), children and teachers could possibly use the chapel as a play area.

OPTION ONE: We would use the space behind and below the pulpit (currently the teen room and the office of our Faith Formation Director), to provide care for about 16 infants and toddlers

The space would be remodeled as follows: A new door would be built facing Buell Street with a new sidewalk and an “at grade” entrance to those rooms, providing for handicap accessibility. A new accessible bathroom would be built, using the existing plumbing from an old bathroom which was removed several years ago. A new mini-kitchen would be built, and walls reoriented. Access to the Midway would be maintained through the existing stairway, with a secure door installed, allowing parents and children to access the space via either the Midway door or the new Buell Street entrance. The teen room and the office of the Faith Formation Director would be moved to a comparable space within the church, to be determined in consultation with youth and faith formation staff, with Trustee approval. Funds are included in our budget to renovate this space. PROS of this space; it would have a dedicated access to Buell Street for them alone; it would be adjacent to the Buell Street playground; if the child care program were to leave, we would have a desirable space for another church program, or space to lease to another tenant.

OPTION TWO: We would use the two existing Sunday School rooms on the first floor, at the back of the Education Wing, (including the existing bathrooms and the hall between the classrooms) to provide care for about 20 infants and toddlers. Our child care for Sunday Services (and other Church events) would be moved into two spaces; the Stone Room and a new space created with moveable partitions in a corner of the Chapel. On Sundays, or any time the provider is not operating, the two rooms would be locked and the existing hallway and restrooms accessible to all. The space would be remodeled as follows: Secure doors with pin pad access would be added in the center hall, just past the kitchen, to provide a secure space for our partner program. Because the current first-floor bathrooms will be part of the child care’s dedicated space, we would build an accessible restroom for staff and visitor use in the front of the Education Wing (location TBD, in consultation with the Building Team). PROS of this space; it is an existing at-grade space with existing bathrooms; it would serve about four more children than Option One; the Sunday School could be easily moved, while Option One would require more extensive remodeling of another space for the youth / teens and office of the Faith Formation Director. We are aware that any change of use to any existing church spaces will have an impact on current programming and staff. We do not recommend these relocations lightly, but feel that either of these recommendations would fulfill our mission to serve the community, as per the input from the congregation. Our budget includes funds to facilitate these moves.

Estimated cost to renovate either space: \$250,000, less at least \$50,000 we would likely secure through grants, for a total set-up cost to the church of no more than \$200,000. We have received strong signals from Let’s Grow Kids and the City of Burlington’s Early Learning Initiative (ELI) that they will help us secure grants of at least \$50,000, perhaps significantly more, but they can make no commitments until a

provider is chosen. For this proposal, we are using the lower figure, with hopes of receiving more. Either the Church or our partner provider could apply for the grants.

Local and state codes require that care for small children can take place only on a ground floor, so we could not consider using second floor space.

Who would we serve? We want to serve our greater church community by living out our Christian commitment to provide substantial assistance to others. The detailed answer for how to accomplish this would be best crafted in consultation with the child care provider we choose, for they know both the needs and ways to meet those needs. Our intent is to serve the underserved, including low-income families, single parents, new Americans, children from all races and creeds, including a percentage receiving scholarships. We have learned that several successful local programs include families with a wide range of incomes, including some who pay more than the full cost of their child's tuition.

One other option considered:

We also looked at providing funds to support an existing child care program in Burlington, either through scholarships for children or funds to increase the pay for child care teachers. We ultimately decided against this idea as our *primary* initiative because it would not add to the number of spaces available in Burlington (which is a high priority for our team), nor it would not make use of the unused space in our building (which we heard from the congregation was important). As described above, we might provide scholarships and educator support to the greater community as well as supporting our in-house child care program. Although a lower priority, we would also not have the "pride of place" that would come from hosting child care in the Church.

Breakdown of cost:

Church member and architect Ann Vivian provided rough estimates for both spaces, the cost of which was very similar for either space, and included a generous inflation / contingency amount. If our proposal is adopted by the congregation, we will secure bids from no less than three contractors. We believe it is premature to "get into the weeds" of the budget until we have chosen a space, talked with our partner provider, and revisited needs with city and state licensors.

Grants: We have received strong signals from Let's Grow Kids and the City of Burlington's Early Learning Initiative (ELI) that they will help us secure grants of at least \$50,000, perhaps as much as \$100,000, but they can make no commitments until a provider is chosen, who would then apply for the grants.

Timeframe: At best, fall 2023. More likely 2024.

Measures of Success:

- Make more child care spaces available in Burlington.
- Providing high quality, licensed child care to families who otherwise could not afford it.
- Allowing parents to work, who have been hindered from doing so by the high cost of child care.
- Using the church facility that has been handed down to us by previous generations to better serve our community.
- Providing a livable wage to the teachers.

- Giving children a solid foundation so that they may move up through the educational system, through a professional yet affordable child care program, focusing on the underserved community in and around Burlington.

Total cost: Renovating the space would cost approximately \$200,000 or hopefully less, depending on the success of grant applications.

The amount of ongoing spending by the Church to support the child care program would be up to the congregation. Since we suggest charging market rate rent to the selected program, we would have a net income after expenses that should be used to fund student scholarships and staff support, which could go to our partner program and / or other providers. Additional funds from the Ronald McDonald House sale could be used as well, at the congregation's discretion.

Respectfully submitted,

The Child Care Team:

Julie Cadwallader Staub _____

Elizabeth Emmett _____

Linda Elrick _____

John Floyd _____

Betsy Freeman _____

Dianne Griffiths _____

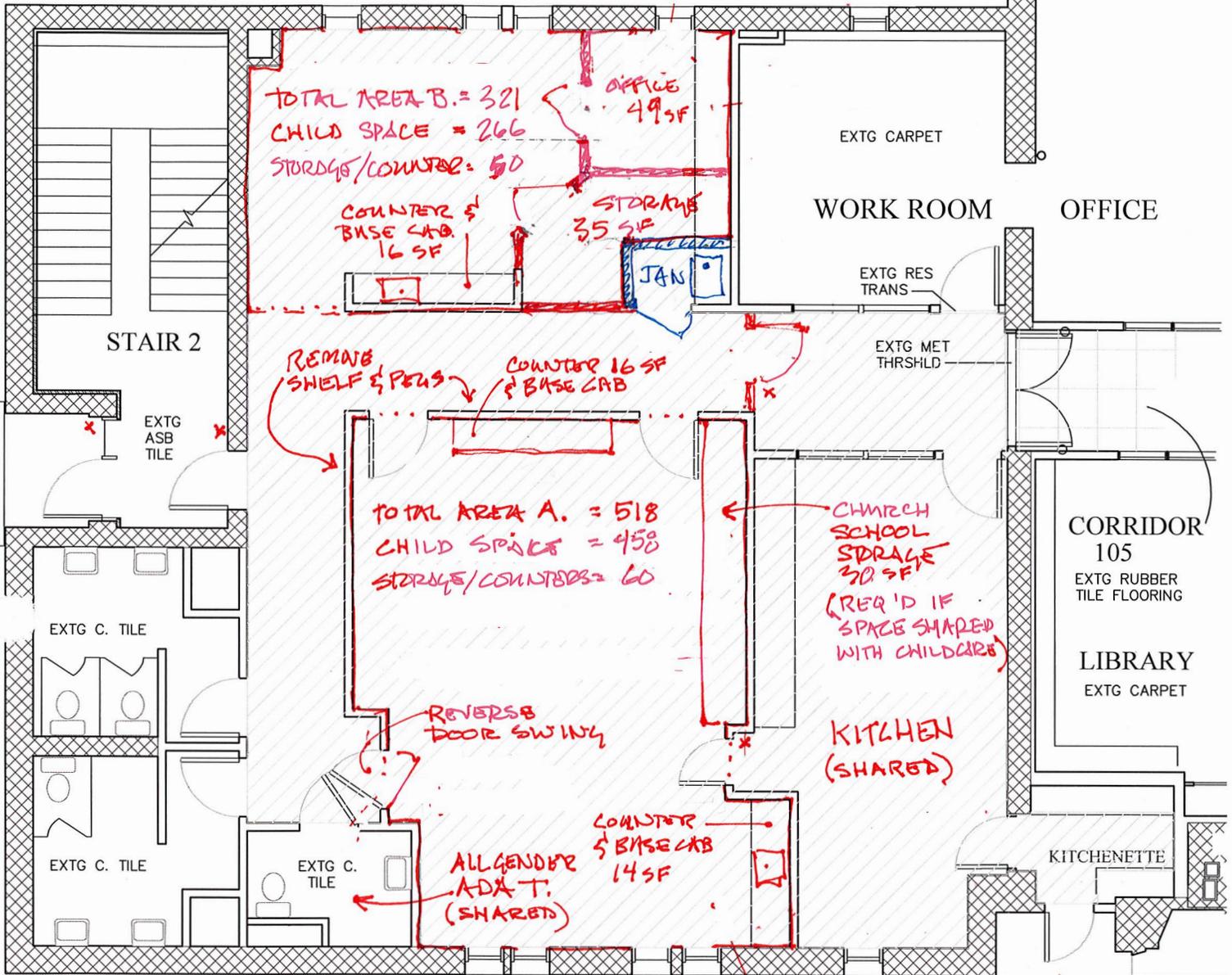
Bobbi Hozel _____

Steve Hyde _____

Bob Phillips _____

Al Weldon _____

X = KEY PAD ACCESS
 (NEED REQ'D AT 2ND FLR & BASEMENT DOORS FROM STAIR 2)



TOTALS:

CHILD CARE AREA 239 SF
 CHILD SPACE 724 SF
 CHILD CARE OFF. 49 SF

AREA OF NEW RUBBER TILE FLOORING & RES BASE.
 MATCH EXISTING FLOORING MATERIAL AT CORRIDOR 105, INSTALL IN 2 COLORS AS SELECTED & DIRECTED BY ARCHITECT.
 INSTALL OVER EXISTING SOLIDLY ADHERED ASBESTOS TILE.
 REMOVE CARPET AT KITCHEN TO EXPOSE EXISTING TILE BELOW.
 PROVIDE RESILIENT TRANSITION STRIPS TO DISSIMILAR MATERIALS.

NEGOTIATE KITCHEN USE 724/35 = 20 CHILDREN MAX.
 " " REST RM USE & ACCESS
 " " USE OF REST RMs BY PUBLIC DURING WEEK

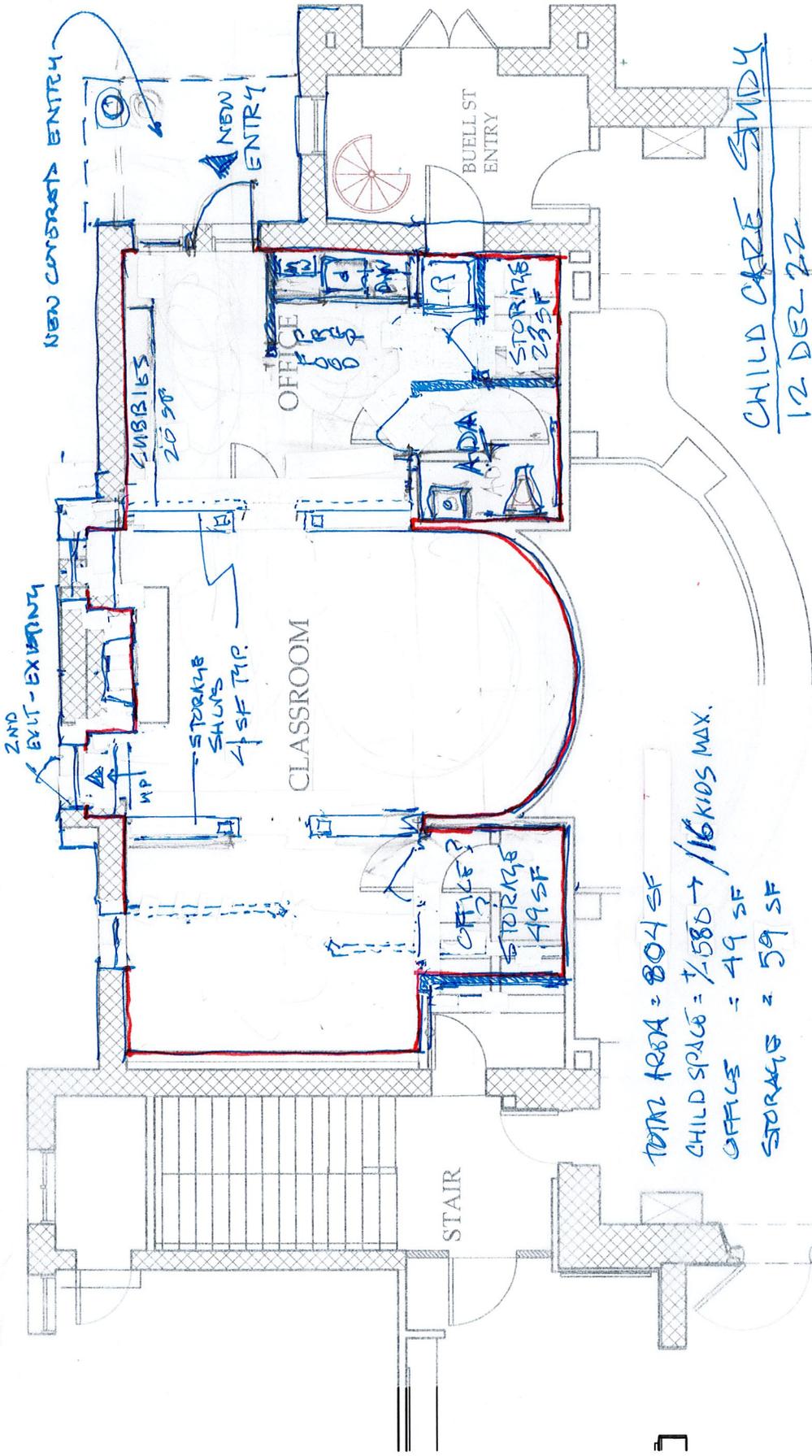
12 DEC 22
 CHILD CARE STUDY

First Congregational Church
 38 South Winooski Ave Burlington, VT

Guillot Vivian Viehmann
G V V
 ARCHITECTS
 Burlington, Vermont 05401
 (802) 862-9631

ED WING
 FLOORING
 1/8" = 1'-0"

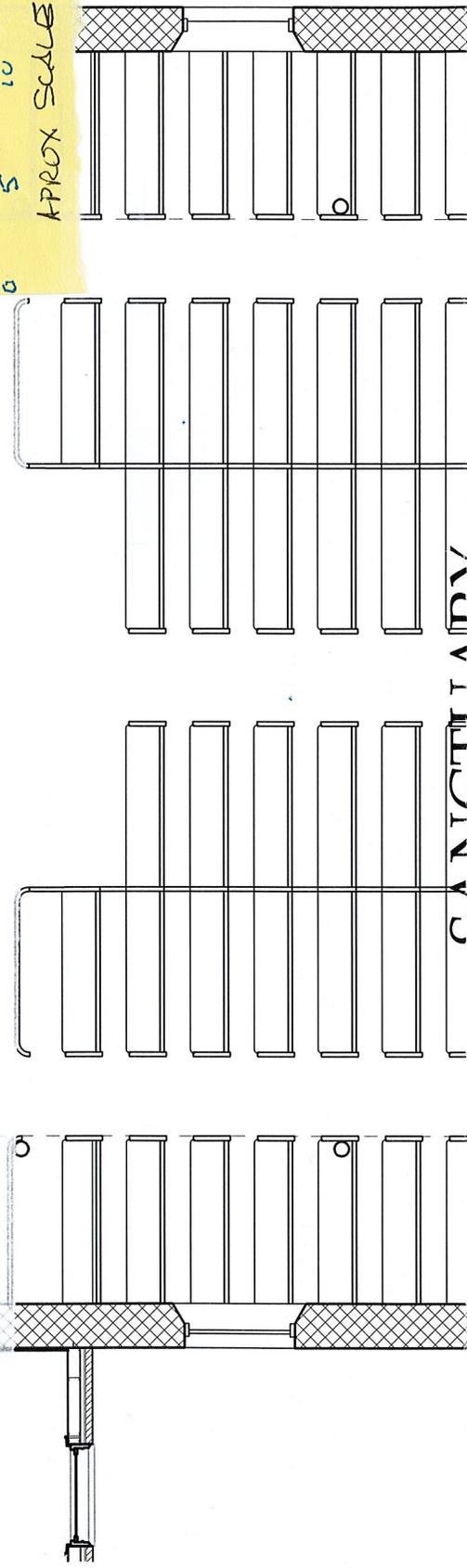
SK



TOTAL AREA = 804 SF
 CHILD SPACE = 7580 → 16 KIDS MAX.
 OFFICE = 49 SF
 STORAGE = 59 SF

CHILD CARE STUDY
 12 DEC 22

0 5 10 15
 APPROX SCALE



CANTONMENT ADV