



Vol. 4 - December 19, 2025

Welcome to the First Parish in Bedford Capital Campaign Newsletter! This newsletter will keep the congregation informed about what the Capital Campaign Committee is doing and the current progress of the Campaign.

### **What is a Capital Campaign?**

As you may know, the budget of the church is based on various sources of income. These include fundraisers, income from the lease of cell tower space in the belfry, money from the church endowment, as well as collection from weekly services. The most important source of our budget comes from our annual pledge drive. All that money goes to paying salaries, heating the building, keeping the lights on, etc. However, that money does not cover the occasional “big ticket” item for the building and other physical improvements to our church.

### **Past campaigns**

In the past we have held capital campaigns including the Bility campaign that raised money to update the elevator and allow other accessibility improvements. We also added a new high efficient boiler and air conditioning to the sanctuary, as well as solar panels on the roof. These capital campaigns achieved our goals to make the church both greener and more welcoming.

### **Today: Potential Capital Campaign Projects 2026**

Currently we have a list of projects we hope to be able to complete with funds raised through a new Capital Campaign. These include (in no particular order):

1. HVAC in the Rear Addition (Common Room, kitchen & classrooms)
2. Organ maintenance
3. Fire suppression maintenance
4. Power backup
5. GreenerU Consultant
6. Kitchen cooktop replacement
7. Rear stairs and ramp
8. Soundproofing Maria's room

We will explain all these projects in more detail in future newsletters, including what the problem is, what we are looking to do, and why the project is needed.

## **What Can You Do?**

Come to the information sessions! Talk to others and learn what it's all about.

## **Next up:**

### **HVAC in the Rear Addition (Common Room, kitchen & classrooms)**

The biggest, most urgent and complicated item on the list is replacing the end-of-life heating and air conditioning units that serve the classrooms, Common Room, and the offices.

There are 4 roof top units (RTUs) on top of the Common Room. Last year one failed and had to be replaced on an emergency basis. The other 3 are old and need to be replaced –the sooner the better. Calling it complicated isn't accurate. They need to be replaced. End of story.

The reason it's complicated is because it's an opportunity to do something big. What to replace it with runs the gambit of options that are economical, greener, least disruptive, and all involve timing.

The least expensive thing to do would be to replace the 3 old RTUs in kind and be done with it.

On the other end of the financial spectrum is geothermal, which would be the greenest option but the most expensive by a significant amount. There are other options in between.

Making sense of the choices and being able to bring to the congregation realistic choices with real costs and timing associated with each is why we hired GreenerU. GreenerU is looking at what we have, what we might want to do, and how to present it to you.

## **History**

The history of what we have provides perspective on how we got to where we are.

The original meeting house was built in 1729. Needless to say, there was no central heating then. Also, going to church in the 18th century was an all day event, so keeping warm in the winter was an individual concern. When they built the current building in 1817, it had "box pews." Take a tour of the Old North Church in Boston and you'll learn that "box pews" were used as a way to keep warm in the winter. Crowding many people into a confined space shared body heat. Parishioners foot warmers that were boxes made of tin and wood that you would put coals in and take to church. The Job Lane

House has two. The Old North Church tour they mention church members would often bring their dogs or other animals into the box as a way of keeping warm.

The first mention of a furnace being put into the church dates to 1849. There had been discussion before that about adding a furnace, but in 1849 the church went through a renovation. They got rid of the box pews and, according to *The Annotated History of the Town of Bedford*, replaced it with “*a clumsy machine to furnish heat for the pulpit, so as to enable the minister to warm his fingers sufficiently to turn the leaves of his manuscript. The congregation retained their homemade mittens and shivered until a later date.*” Credit Sharon McDonald’s - A Meeting House & Its People.

Once the furnace was installed, First Parish in Bedford made other modifications to conserve the heat.

In 1884, the church went through another renovation with the help of a new congregant, William Baldwin, who donated to the cause. In what was akin to the State of the Congregation speech, he mentioned he was pleased with the renovations, specifically noting regarding the new furnace “*...[it] did work so forcefully that the windows were necessarily opened.*” Credit Sharon McDonald’s - A Meeting House & Its People.

In 1908 during the Church annual meeting, further updates were considered when a vote was taken to “*take no more than \$300 from the Niles and Gragg fund to electrify the meetinghouse.*” Credit Sharon McDonald’s - A Meeting House & Its People.

In 1970, the church had a very bad day. The furnace burned through its firebox, filling the church with smoke. The furnace not only had to be replaced, but the smoke caused widespread damage throughout the building.

### **Current Situation:**

Joel Parks from the Physical Plant Committee provided this recent history:

The meetinghouse has two main sections: an historic 1817 part and a modern 1999 addition. The Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems for these two sections of FPB are separate.

Until approximately 2016, the historic part of the church had a gas boiler that was described as a converted coal burner. (This description may be apocryphal. It may have been a converted oil burner. Or perhaps just a very old, inefficient and dangerous gas burner.) In 2016, FPB conducted a capital campaign which included replacing that burner with a modern, high-efficiency condensing

direct-vent boiler. New air handlers (heat exchangers) in the undercroft and outdoor heat pumps were introduced to add air conditioning to the heating capability in the sanctuary. Around 2016, mini-split HVAC units were installed in the Bacon, Blinn and Page rooms.

Those systems installed in the historic part of the church are functioning well and will not need replacing for many years.



FPB's 1999 rear addition has four HVAC zones, defined by the ductwork in the walls and ceilings. Each zone is heated or cooled by a Roof Top Unit (RTU) powered by electricity (AC) or a combination of natural gas and electricity (heat). Until late 2024, all four RTUs were original. But at the end of 2024, the RTU with the most load (i.e. hours) had a corrosion failure that could not be repaired cost-effectively.

So FPB replaced it with a similar unit but from a different manufacturer. That RTU services the zone for the parish office, ministers' offices, first floor restrooms and hallways. The new RTU does not handle the Common Room + kitchen which are on a separate zone.

The RTU servicing the 2nd floor zone is also at end-of-life. We may experience a failure this winter that results in the rear addition's 2nd floor being cold for several weeks or even months. Electric space heaters would then be required to continue operating that section of the church through this coming winter.

The RTUs for the lower-level and Common Room + kitchen zones are in slightly better shape. But they, too, are living on borrowed time. Also, economies of scale suggest FPB would save money in the long-term by replacing the three original RTUs at the same time.

Thanks to Joel we're now up to date on the history of the heating (and air conditioning and ventilation) of our beloved Meeting House.

## What's Next

We are working with GreenerU to come up with choices to present to the congregation. GreenerU is also preparing a survey to better understand what the congregation might want to do with the choices.