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FIRST PARISH CHURCH UNITED

What's happening here?

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The First Parish Church United launched a \$700,000 construction project this fall with the anticipation that the historic sanctuary will be connected to Fellowship Hall by the December holiday season.

"It's an aggressive schedule," said Jay Murray, president of Murray Brothers Construction in Leominster.

The Connector, as the addition is called by congregation members, will include an elevator that runs from the basement to the second floor and an archival storage room for the town's oldest records. Disabled visitors and worshippers will now be able to access the sanctuary without difficulty, Murray said.

The First Parish sanctuary is one of the oldest buildings in town, built in 1794, long before handicapped accessibility was a consideration. The church serves as a hub for local gatherings from the Westford Education Foundation's annual gala fundraiser to Eagle Scout ceremonies. But visitors who have difficulty walking or who are wheelchair-bound have struggled to climb the steep stairs that lead to the worship hall.

One disabled church member spoke publicly at Town Meeting in March about the challenges of going to weekly service. It requires someone to carry her up and down the stairs, the resident said.

Saying he's made no promises but has high hopes, Murray mapped out a potential timeline for the project.



A window in Fellowship Hall shows the distance between it and the Sanctuary. Building materials lie in wait on the ground below. STAFF PHOTOS BY JOYCE PELLINO CRANE

Timeline

- December The addition will open for services by Christmas Day
- January Interior finishes such as carpentry, trim, doors, and paint will be completed
- Spring Finishes to the exterior, such as landscaping and painting will be done

Funding aspects

Voters at the March Town Meeting approved \$354,000 in Community Preservation Funds to help fund the project.

"Most of the remainder was raised by the church through a capital campaign of its membership," said Tom Luminello, a member of the First Parish community and the project's clerk of the works.



An addition is being built between Fellowship Hall and the historic Sanctuary at the First Parish Church United. The project includes an elevator to make the older building on the right handicapped accessible.

Green aspects

The building's exterior walls are being built with structurally insulated panel systems. The rigid insulation is sandwiched between oriented (check) strand board, said Murray and will give the connector a higher level of heat insulation than is found in a typical residential home.