

New Castle Presbytery - Ad Hoc Hayloft Committee

Report of Mission Study and Recommendations to the Trustees on the Future of the Hayloft

As Adopted by Trustees – August 23, 2022

Consistent with the Ad Hoc Hayloft Committee's recommendations, NCP conducted a Mission Study on the Future of the Hayloft. The purpose of the Mission Study was to answer the question: How can continued use of this real property resource remain in line with NCP's mission and ministry. The Committee noted that decision-making regarding the Hayloft's future affords NCP a real-world, real-time opportunity to examine NCP's mission and ministry as a Matthew 25 presbytery in action.

Key Mission Study Elements included:

1. Education about the Hayloft's history
2. Small Group Discussion and Reporting
3. Review and publication of results of small group discussions.

The below describes our actions with respect to each of these three elements.

1. Education about the Hayloft's history

Because the Ad-Hoc Hayloft Committee was under the impression that many NCP constituents were not sufficiently aware of what the Hayloft is or how it could be utilized, time was set aside during the NCP's Beach Retreat Presbytery Meeting on March 5, 2022, to educate the Presbytery about the property's history and uses to date. Accordingly, the historical presentation included photos of the property and information about:

- The donor's purpose in giving the property to NCP as per her will.
- The absence of money to sustain those purposes and recognition of the age of the facility.
- The wonderful respite use of the property for ministers and their families and friends since the 1970s.
- The lack of ongoing volunteer maintenance.
- The Chancery Court's decision about future use of the property.
- The use of NCP staff and volunteer time to manage the property.

2. Small Group Discussion and Reporting

During the Presbytery meeting, we advertised three Zoom meeting dates (Wednesday, March 16; Tuesday, March 29; and Saturday, April 9, 2022) for those who wished to provide further input into decision-making and recommendations about the Hayloft's future, considering NCP's mission and ministry.

The 1-hour meetings were held as advertised, and notes were taken at each.

Discussion topics during those meetings included:

- Honoring the donor's intent
- Ensuring long-term property sustainability by having revenue from those using the property cover the cost of maintaining it.
- Determining whether local NCP members in Sussex County are aware of individuals (inside or outside NCP) who might be compensated (financially or with housing at the Hayloft off-season) to take a more active role in property maintenance.
- Opening use to more than seasonal 12 weeks in summer (and to whom the property could be marketed?).
- Recognizing that NCP staff/volunteer time will always be required to maintain the Hayloft.
- Molding ongoing utilization of the Hayloft to NCP's mission and ministry.

While the entire Presbytery was invited to the discussion of Hayloft's future, the small group participants (15, including those who participated by email) were almost exclusively limited to Hayloft users. Only one person who hadn't stayed at the Hayloft chose to participate in the mission study. Some of the participants had stayed at the home each year for decades.

Small Group Participants' comments are set forth anonymously in Appendix A to this report.

3. Review and publication of results of small group discussions

Small Group Participants' comments fell into several categories: History, Experiences/Expectations, and Recommendations.

Summary of Comments

- Those who participated were overwhelmingly supportive of continuing the ministry of sabbath and respite that the Hayloft affords to Teaching Elders and their families. Some Ruling Elders who have utilized the Hayloft in off-season weeks also spoke to the rest and relaxation they experienced at the Hayloft.
- Any changes to encourage and maintain financial sustainability (e.g., alternate and extra uses of the property to obtain additional income to sustain it) should be tried for a minimum of three years before any decision is made regarding changing the ministry of the Hayloft.
- Small group participants were uniformly supportive of extending the Hayloft rental season. Discussion about that extension was generally limited to its use by those within NCP.
- Almost all were in favor of increasing the rental fees – “paying a bit more” --, with a sliding scale for lower-paid pastors, to ensure future sustainability.
- In addition to extending the rental season, at least one participant wanted to use the Hayloft to prepare/train youth for mission trips, sort of a pre-mission trip preparation retreat/overnight.
- All were cognizant of the cost of the ministry, both in terms of maintenance costs and in terms of staff and volunteer time. Some suggested hiring a property manager. Others had specific

recommendations for greater “sweat equity” commitments for those who use the Hayloft, including spring and fall “cleanup” days and/or use of a particular individual(s) as a handyman.

- Other than maintenance and, if possible, increasing access for those with disabilities, none of the participants were particularly interested in “upgrades.” They expressed contentment with the Hayloft the way it was, while recognizing that the house is old and will need continued, expensive maintenance, as evidenced the past two years.
- With one exception, small group participants uniformly rejected the idea of selling the property or utilizing the property for short-term housing for families in need. Their reasons included the importance of the ministry to the family lives of NCP ministers, reliance on promises made by NCP leaders to pastors coming into NCP about the availability of the Hayloft for family retreat time, and concerns about the donor’s intent, maintaining a place for emergency pastoral housing, zoning issues, and costs of insurance and liability issues.
- When upgrades are needed, one participant suggested borrowing the funds and paying off the interest through increases in rent.

4. Recommendations to the Trustees re the Hayloft’s Future Approved By Trustees

- 1. The Ministry of Sabbath and respite of the Hayloft should be continued at this time, with a review in three years.**
- 2. NCP will extend the rental season and its availability, set an increase in rental fees to address additional expenses related to use of the property and to build a repair/maintenance fund.**
- 3. A local property manager (handyman) should be hired and covered by the rental fees.**

APPENDIX A

To Report of Mission Study and Recommendations to the Trustees on the Future of the Hayloft

HISTORY OF HAYLOFT USE

3/16

For many years, a Hayloft Committee took care of Hayloft maintenance.

NCP pays \$10/year for approximately 10 feet of space beyond the back door, because the property was built on the property line.

For a time, the Hayloft was used at Christmas and for 1-day retreats.

At least once in the 2010s, the Hayloft was used as emergency housing for a pastor and the pastor's family.

Winter use of the Hayloft was stopped after a user turned off the space heater and the pipes froze – this was after the house was winterized. The damage caused by the frozen pipes led to the then-active Hayloft Committee handing off responsibility for the Hayloft to the Trustees and the suggestion that the Trustees hire a manger for the property. Coldwell Banker is the current property manager, but they could be hired to do more.

Most of the participants had themselves been active in or responsible for prior rehabilitation projects at the Hayloft and/or were on or ran the Hayloft Committee for years, so they are very invested in the property.

3/29

The property was winterized in the late 1980s, at the same time the home was rewired and new wallboard was installed. In the early 1990s an administrative committee took over governance of the Hayloft.

Rents have been adjusted over the last 10 years, as the cost of a beach vacation and maintenance costs have increased.

HAYLOFT USERS' EXPERIENCES/EXPECTATIONS

3/16

The Hayloft "feels like a part of my compensation." The existence and availability of the Hayloft was highly touted by the then-Executive Presbyter as a reason for coming to NCP.

The Hayloft is a "major mental health facility for me and many others in the Presbytery."

3/29

Those who have used the property noted that it has "been a treasure" and they have beautiful family memories throughout their children/grandchildren's lives. One participant noted that there hadn't been a year in their grandchildren's lives when they hadn't stayed at the Hayloft and that, when younger,

grandchildren thought the Hayloft was “grandpa and nana’s house.” Another commented that the property has given NCP personnel respite and sabbath at times in ministry when it was “deeply necessary” and “very valuable.” Yet another indicated that it was a “tremendous” asset for NCP pastors and their families and therefore to NCP over the years.

4/9

Participant “really value[s] the ability to unplug and get away and experience sabbath.”

Two newer pastors were told about Hayloft when they came into NCP. It was promoted as a perk of accepting a call within NCP. They were told to take advantage of it. They have done so, either in reconnecting with family or hosting a reunion of seminary friends. As a result, it has functioned as a place of respite for those clergy (inside and outside the PC(USA) as well).

“Knowing that you have the opportunity to use it is an additive, even if you don’t/aren’t able to use it.”

“It is already in the headlines that pastors are leaving in droves. It speaks to NCP’s commitment to its pastors to honor and promote their taking sabbath and maintaining their health and the health of their families. Maintaining the Hayloft demonstrates NCP’s intention and care about what happens to the pastors within the presbytery.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

3/16

Extend the number of weeks that the Hayloft is available to rent to attempt to reach sustainability. Shouldn’t just “be sitting there.” Could easily use the house for 8-10 months of the year.

Increase the rent – with discounts for lower income pastors.

Hire a property manager

View the issue of support for retreats/sabbath for all pastors as separate from the existence of the Hayloft. The Hayloft is our asset – not everyone will like going to the beach. But we don’t have a mountain house – we have a beach house. Don’t assume that Eastern Shore or Sussex County folks don’t want to go to the beach. Some do. We should be using the gifts we have, which, for us, is the Hayloft.

Wide-spread concern that making it available to families in need of short-term housing would lead both to code issues (the property is in the middle of a residential block) and insurance liability. One of the participants was previously on a Family Promise board, and there was concern about neighbors blocking such use of the property as week as retaining availability of the Hayloft as emergency housing for pastors. While a rarely used option, it remains important to be able to house pastors in need.

3/29

All but one participant was strongly in favor of continued use of the property as a vacation/respite home for pastors – “keeping it as it is.” NCP should understand that this use should be the “guiding star” for

any future use discussions, as that is consistent with the donor's will. Once that is at the center, then we can discuss what other uses could be made of the property.

No one wanted it to be a drain on NCP finances, but almost all – or possibly all – were comfortable with NCP continuing to support this ministry. Some mentioned NCP's financial support of the Campus Ministry House as a comparative investment. Alternate and extra uses of the property to obtain additional income to sustain it should be tried for a minimum of three years before any other decision is made.

Keep costs down with "sweat equity" – holding Spring and Fall Clean Up days and putting skills within the community of renters to good use. Renters would be required to participate in one of the days.

Keep costs down with a local handyman. ***We may have an individual in the area who is willing to take on this task.**

Sliding scale for pastors, as some families could afford to pay more – but others (particularly younger pastors) could not afford to do so. Most were willing to pay a bit more.

Possibly renting the property at market rates to others (in NCP or not?) in the winter or in the shoulder seasons April and November, with the rents going towards capital improvements. Could easily say that we will rent the property until the end of December and then close it up for three months, during which capital improvements can be made.

Borrow the money to rehab the house and then add the principal and interest payment cost to the weekly rental rate for the house.

Rent the house for less than a week, particularly so that it could be used for retreats and sessions retreats/meetings – so we could take advantage of the home both for day use and for overnights during the remainder of the year and not just for large blocks of time.

Use of the house for transitional housing during the off-season. There was concern by the lawyer participant that we could and likely would run into all sorts of zoning and land use issues if we tried to use the home in this way (and that we might run into similar issues in using it as a retreat center).

One person advocated selling the property – recognizing that it is worth a large sum of money and there is little affordable housing in Sussex County. The biggest and most vocal opposition to this was the ministry Hayloft is offering now, consistent with the will granting the property to NCP indicating it was to be used as a vacation home for pastors. NCP's argument in favor of unrestricted use in front of the Chancery Court was in anticipation of possibly converting the building to conference center use. Had NCP said anything else, we would have to go back to the Chancery Court to get that approval, thus we were constrained to argue for unrestricted ownership.

Make the option to use the house more inclusive by rendering it more accessible for those with disabilities, as a transport chair cannot be used in the downstairs bathroom and the gravel is very difficult (if not impossible) to navigate with a wheelchair.

4/9

Could the Hayloft be used to prepare/train youth for mission trips, sort of a pre-mission trip retreat/overnight/weekend. (Note: This would have to be before the rental season.)

Switching up the reservation order? Possibly by starting with different portions of the alphabet each year to even up chances for access to prime summer weeks.

Willingness of several people to perform maintenance on the property