



The process to build a new church began back in 2010 with a capital campaign in 2013. However it seems like very little has happened. Why is this process so long and what has happened to date?

The process to build a new church or building, or the renovation and expansion of the parish property is a very extensive, detailed, and multi-faceted undertaking. There are many variables that impact the speed of bringing such a project from the initial idea of a new church to the actual completion and dedication. This essay will seek to provide a snapshot into this process.

There are several “stages” of the building process for a new church at St. Ambrose Parish:

Concept Design Stage:

This is the first stage in the process in which the parish determines the “basic needs” of the project (how many seats in the church, how many parking spots, basic design and layout of the new church, basement or no basement). This stage includes the zoning approval process of Fairfax County, which means checking to see if the parish is allowed to undertake the project based on current zoning parameters and/or if amendments to the current zoning parameters are needed. The parish will also develop a master plan so zoning issues for each phase of the master plan can be examined and approved at the same time.

Schematic Design Stage:

In this stage of the process the parish, working with the architect, seeks to develop a program, budget, and schedule for the project. The architect provides a preliminary design of the building with basic site plans and renderings. A professional estimator may be hired to provide a preliminary projection of the cost of the entire project. Various studies such as water management, traffic flow, geotechnical (soil quality), structural, environmental, etc. are undertaken at this time. A site plan is also developed and submitted, through a multi-review process, to the county for approval. This process alone could take close to a year. Finally the parish will seek “Request for Proposal” to multiple Construction companies in order to begin the interview process of hiring the Builder for the project.

Design Development Stage:

In this stage of the process the architect, working with the parish & diocese and the builder, will provide more detailed drawings incorporating such things as the structural, MEP (mechanical, electrical, and plumbing) systems, and interior and exterior finishes. During this process the budget and schedule of the project will continue to be refined.

Pre-Construction & Construction:

In these final stages of the process the builder, working with the parish & diocese and the architect, will hire and coordinate with subcontractors, secure construction materials, and develop a plan for establishing a construction site with as minimal disruptions to parish as school activities. The preconstruction and construction process is estimated to take 18-24 months.

The Site Plan:

The development and approval of the master plan by the County Board of Zoning Appeals is separate and distinct from the development and approval of the Site Plan. The Site Plan that is submitted to Fairfax County takes the master plan and adds specific engineering concepts to support the concepts promised in the zoning approval. The Site Plan is supported by various studies of traffic work, water management, geotechnical surveys, asbestos testing, etc.

The Studies:

As indicated above, various studies and evaluations are required prior the approval of the site plan by Fairfax County and acquiring of permits for demolition and construction. For example, the **geotechnical** survey determines if the current soil on the site of the future parking lot and the church is strong enough to support the parking lot or a church building of the projected size and weight of the one planned for St. Ambrose. This includes working with a civil engineer to determine how quickly retaining ponds on-site can absorb and drain water as part of the storm water design. Furthermore, an asbestos inspection is required for the demolition of the current rectory and the current church to determine if abatement will be required for the rectory and church prior to demolition.

Fundraising and financing:

Various factors will contribute to the overall cost of the entire project. As the parish moves forward in the various stages of design and development, multiple capital campaigns are necessary to provide the overall funding of the projects. Initial campaigns seek to raise seed money to retain the services of the architect and undertake the necessary studies. During the course of the process, the parish will secure a loan from the Arlington Diocese. The parish must be able to demonstrate the ability to pay back the loan while maintaining sufficient cash flow for regular parish expenses. Additional fundraising campaigns will seek to pay back the loan.