



First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ is a few buildings away from the four corners of downtown Springfield. We have a high rise senior housing building across the street and the Black River running behind us. We have a green space on the east side of the building that is basically unchanged since the last fifty plus years. It is a raggedy place full of yews, hemlocks, a large maple that hides the entrance and grapevines and Japanese honeysuckle growing everywhere.

Our new mission statement, "We are a community in Christ, called to act with love toward our neighbors.", gave us a goal to make this green space a place open and inviting to all. We want to invite our neighbors to come and sit in a peaceful place, have conversations, eat lunch or just be in the moment in a busy town.

We talked among ourselves about what this area could look like, then we talked with a landscape architect who drew up plans based on our conversations. Now all we had to do was make it a reality. From the beginning concept, we knew our church could not afford to create this space. We are moving forward with an operating budget that is dependent on our Endowment and has been for many years. We have a full time pastor to guide us in the coming years discerning our path for our future. We travel together in faith that Christ has a plan for us.

The Hope Fund was the first place we choose to begin the process of writing grants for this green space project. The project will be spread out over three years. The first phase will be the removal of old bushes, a dying tree and limbing up the maple. We got bids and knew the cost for the first phase. The Hope Fund was just that, it gave us hope that we really will go forward towards our goal. Preparing the application for the Hope Fund was such a good beginning experience in asking for money to support the first phase of our project. We were asking friends who knew us and understood our dream. We are grateful to the Hope Fund for helping to make the first step possible.

Phase two and three will be creating a seating area accessible to all with pavers to allow rain to be absorbed and then adding native plants and shrubs.

