

Mini History - Acquiring our Land 4001 Ann Arbor-Saline Road



Presented February 15, 2015 by Barbara and Dave Hall

As many of you know, by 1988 our congregation had outgrown our previous church home at 1917 Washtenaw. We voted to search for land for a new church. Dave and I served with several others on the land acquisition committee. After much work evaluating sites, the committee presented the best option to the congregation, a 10-acre parcel on Huron Parkway. We voted to sign a sales agreement for \$650,000.

The next step was to satisfy the contingencies which included determining how the lot would be accessed with driveways. I was assigned the job of working with City engineers. On one visit to the engineering office I happened to see a map showing a plan to extend Clarke Road through the middle of this lot. The engineer suggested that we could have the church building on one side of the road and the parking lot on the other side. This prospect was, of course, ridiculous. With this sales agreement nullified, we were back to square one after 2 years of work.

We were discouraged. The thought of starting all over again was a terrible prospect. We asked a realtor for help. On April 30, 1990 at about 8:30 in the evening, I opened the seven property descriptions sent by the

realtor. Among them were several the committee had already considered and rejected. Then, I turned the page to a new one. There was a small site map, not more than a couple square inches and a description of an L-shaped property: "45.97 acres, Lodi Township, \$350,000". Immediately, I got out a map. Where is this place? It's huge, and so cheap! Dave said "for that price it must be a toxic waste dump!" We jumped in the car and headed for the site; it was about 9 PM, nearly dark. We walked around on the Ellsworth Road edge of the property and I started thinking and imagining. Immediately excited about this, I wondered if it was too big, or too far out in the country. We drove to downtown Ann Arbor: 4.2 miles! Not that far from the center of town!

When we got home, I was all churned up, and so excited that I called our minister, Ken Phifer. I thought it was around 10 PM, but Ken remembers says it was much later—closer to 11! I can't believe I called so late! I asked Ken if it was just too crazy to consider owning and caring for a 46-acre property. Should I forget about this or pursue it with the committee? Ken said he would think it over and get back to me the next day. He told us to go ahead—I think he was pretty excited about the idea, too. That day, Fran Lyman and I walked across the entire property, through thistles, mud, over wire fences all the way to the Travis Pointe property line. We were thrilled! Of course, there was so much more to be learned.

Soon, we figured out why the property was so cheap. There is no sewer system in Lodi Township. The county environmental office had a soils map that showed the site was 30 feet deep with blue clay, so a septic system would be a tough issue. Still, the congregation approved a sales agreement with a contingency that we determine an acceptable wastewater option. The negotiated price was \$300,000.

The committee got to work on the big questions, like Dave's first question: Was this a toxic waste dump? Fortunately, the environmental study had good news for us. Only 1 farm fuel tank to remove, otherwise, a clean site.

Next, a bigger question: How were we going to develop a septic system in 30 feet of blue clay? With a soils map showing no prospect of perking, Don MacMullen, a committee member, had a friend come to the site with a backhoe and they started digging holes. Eventually they found gravel under 10 feet of clay near the Travis Pointe property line. If we excavated an area 100ft x 100ft x 10ft deep, and filled in with gravel, we would have a drain field! The big hill outside the social hall is the result of that excavation for our drain field which is 1/3 of a mile from this building. With the discovery of gravel under clay, we were able to complete the purchase of this wonderful property in 1992.