



Friends Place  
on Capitol Hill  
Promoting Civic Engagement

Newsletter

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## New Programs Planned for Friends Place

Civic engagement programs for young adults and activist groups will be the focus when contractors finish repairs to the new Friends Place on Capitol Hill. The programs offered by the Quaker learning center and guesthouse will deal with building understanding and practice for creating a more just, peaceful, and equitable society.

“It is critical that Friends Place trains generations of students and activists to engage our government in support of the democracy we long for,” said FCNL General Secretary Diane Randall. “Our democracy can only live up to its potential if citizens are actively engaged in shaping policies and electing good leaders for our government.”

Friends Place will host the Quaker Advocacy Institute, workshops, and lectures. The programs will center on peoples movements and their role in addressing structural inequity and social injustice and in influencing government. The primary participants to these new programs will be middle school, high school, and college students.

As an affiliate of the FCNL Education Fund, Friends Place will also host participants to the annual Spring Lobby Weekend and Advocacy Corps organizers.

A new director of Friends Place, Sarah Johnson, was recently hired to work on the curricula for these programs and launch them. Depending on the Covid-19 pandemic and health regulations, the residential programs will start in early 2022.

A soft opening for Friends Place on Capitol Hill is tentatively planned in the fall when repairs are completed. When finished, donors and the FCNL Education Fund will have invested close to \$2

million dollars to refurbish the three-story, 104-year-old building in the country’s first historic district.

Wiring for electricity, building security, fire monitoring, and the Internet have been completed. Heating and cooling systems have been installed. A new sprinkler system, bathrooms, and new entry space, along with a green wall in the back of the building, offer security, comfort, and a welcoming space.

When completed, Friends Place can accommodate groups of up to 29 overnight guests. Four sleeping rooms are laid out with bunk beds and attached bathrooms. On the top floor are two private rooms with twin beds and a shared bathroom.



*The finial on the roof of Friends Place on Capitol Hill is in the foreground, with the Capitol and Washington Monument nearby.*



Repairs and upgrades continue inside. All photos by Eric Bond/FCNL.

The first floor of the building has been modified to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. This includes a wheelchair lift and an ADA-compliant private room and bath.

Friends Place has two multipurpose event spaces. The first-floor conference room can hold up to 30 people. The second floor space can hold up to 30 people. These will be available for daytime rentals.

“In repairing the building, our architects and contractors incorporated many of the green principles used in the Quaker Welcome Center and the FCNL building,” said Thomas Swindell, FCNL associate general secretary for finance and administration, who is managing the repairs. Friends Place uses new energy-efficient floor panels and appliances.

The new website, [www.friendsplacedc.org](http://www.friendsplacedc.org), is now operational. Group bookings, rental inquiries, and secure online donations can be made through the site. A publication, *Friends Place on Capitol Hill: Promoting Civic Engagement*, by Carl Abbott, will be available soon.

As Friends Place bears witness and promotes civic engagement, it also acknowledges the Nacotchtank tribe (or Anacostans) on whose ancestral land the Friends Place on Capitol Hill building stands. By the 1700s, the Nacotchtank tribe had merged with other tribes like the Pamunkey and the Piscataway, both of which still exist today. ■

## From William Penn House to Friends Place

When the William Penn House changed management in 2019, questions were raised as to continuing to use William Penn’s name on the building because Penn enslaved people. After careful discernment over a period of months, the board changed the name to Friends Place on Capitol Hill.

While the 17th-century Quaker promoted freedom of conscience in the state he established, Pennsylvania, William Penn also enslaved people. At his estate along the Delaware River, Penn controlled at least a dozen African-Americans whom he knew by slave names—Sam, Sue, Yaff, Jack, Parthenia, and others. He failed to follow through on his intention to free them after his death.

Since 1966, historians have come to understand that 17th century Quakers like William Penn did not always see a contradiction between freedom of conscience and individual unfreedom.

“Renaming the building is a way of reckoning with our country’s history, our Religious Society’s history, and our personal histories,” said FCNL General Secretary Diane Randall.

She added that by telling the story of this decision and the reasons for it, Friends Place on Capitol Hill becomes “a space where the complexity of our work for a better world can be fully explored—our failures, as well as our successes.” ■

For more information, email [info@friendsplacedc.org](mailto:info@friendsplacedc.org).

*The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), FCNL Education Fund, and Friends Place on Capitol Hill are national nonprofit, nonpartisan Quaker organizations working collectively to advance peace, justice, and environmental stewardship.*

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