



Repairs Bring Renewal to Century-old House

Repairs and refurbishing are about to start on the historic William Penn House (WPH), acquired last year by the FCNL Education Fund. When it re-opens in fall 2020, the house will strengthen and expand Quaker presence on Capitol Hill.

As a Quaker learning and hospitality center on Capitol Hill, William Penn House advances peace, justice, and environmental stewardship.

“It provides yet another exciting way to invite new friends to Quaker advocacy and civic engagement,” said Diane Randall, general secretary of Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) and FCNL Education Fund.

FCNL has completed a business plan and architects have drawn up the sketches for repairs. The WPH board has authorized the funds for the repairs and is recruiting new staff. WPH is being rebranded while new marketing materials are being developed.

The building, constructed in 1917, was purchased in 1966 by Friends Meeting in Washington. Ed Snyder, then FCNL’s legislative director, and Bob and Sally Cory of the Quaker United Nations Office found the East Capitol Street property.

Since 1966, hundreds of Friends and other people of faith around the country have stayed at WPH while visiting Washington, D.C.

Starting in April, major repairs will be done, including a green roof, a new electrical system, and plumbing upgrades (including new bathrooms). Additional improvements such as painting, floor refinishing, new appliances, and furnishings will make the house more attractive and comfortable.

Improvements to the carriage house at the back will be done in the future.

When it re-opens in fall 2020, William Penn House will comfortably accommodate guests in four dormitory rooms (for up to 24 people) and in three private bedrooms. A modern conference room can accommodate 30 people and an informal meeting room can accommodate up to 20.

Prices for overnight accommodations and daytime rentals of the William Penn House conference rooms are being finalized. WPH will offer hospitality only to groups (not solo travelers) at reasonable prices.

Sergio Mata-Cisneros, currently an FCNL Young Fellow, is excited about the re-opening of William Penn House. “It will create new opportunities for young adults to receive advocacy training with access to Capitol Hill and members of Congress,” he said.



William Penn House will host more young adults and other groups when it re-opens in fall 2020.



Spiritual books line bookshelves. Photo by WorldMarch USA shared under a Creative Commons (BY) license.

Quaker advocacy programming will be FCNL's primary use of William Penn House. It will house young adults participating in Spring Lobby Weekend, the Washington Intensive for the Advocacy Corps, and participants to FCNL's Annual Meeting and Quaker Public Policy Institute.

It will be the base for a new FCNL program, the Quaker Advocacy Institute. The four-day/three-night training is intended to build a pipeline of progressive activists who learn Quaker advocacy and lobby on FCNL's legislative priorities. Advocacy training will be offered several times a year to various groups.

Each training will focus on a vital issue, such as climate change, election integrity, peacebuilding, immigration, or nuclear disarmament. Participants will exercise their new skills by visiting their members of Congress. FCNL will provide ongoing advocacy support when they return home.

William Penn House will be available for rental by groups seeking overnight hospitality on issues that align with FCNL's agenda. This includes college groups, youth trips, intergenerational trips for monthly or quarterly Quaker meetings or churches, and other faith communities or civic groups.

The house will be open to groups who come to Washington, D.C. to participate in national marches and protests. WPH is exploring the possibility of hosting a public meeting for worship, perhaps on Sunday evenings, under the care of a local Meeting.

The historic mission of WPH—to provide friendly hospitality and support for activism and education that builds peace, justice, and equality—aligns well with FCNL's mission: to live a prophetic Quaker vision for a peaceful, just, and healthy planet through education, lobbying, and grassroots advocacy.

"I am tremendously excited about FCNL reconnecting our historical relationship with William Penn House for the future. In the coming years, I envision thousands of people participating in FCNL's Quaker advocacy training at WPH, becoming lifelong advocates for peace and justice," said Randall.

William Penn House is conveniently located six blocks from the U.S. Congress and six blocks from FCNL. It is located between two Metro stops—Union Station and Capitol South.

For more information, email wph@fcnl.org.

Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), FCNL Education Fund, and William Penn House are national nonprofit, nonpartisan Quaker organizations working collectively to advance peace, justice, and environmental stewardship. ■■



Minds and hearts meet at the William Penn House. Flickr photo by WorldMarch USA shared under a Creative Commons (BY) license.

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