



Background: St. Vincent de Paul Baldwin Street Project (5/12/2022)

The core mission of the District Council of Madison – Society of St. Vincent de Paul is helping Dane County neighbors in need. A nonprofit 501(c)(3) charitable organization, the Society has been engaged in that mission in Madison since 1925 and has had a physical locus in the Williamson-Marquette neighborhood since 1941, when SVdP Madison opened a store on Baldwin Street. From that location, St. Vincent de Paul's retail and service complex grew organically around the Baldwin corner to Williamson Street to become into the Society's local flagship thrift store. The parcel at the corner of Williamson and Baldwin streets has since served as the Society's busy food pantry and then as the office location of the Seton House women's transitional housing program – as well the site of the adjoining Willy Street store's book room.

The Williamson-Baldwin corner property and original Baldwin Street portion of the thrift-store complex have clearly reached their end-of-life. SVdP Madison has been advised that the corner "Seton 2" building, an old balloon-frame structure, is not sound enough to salvage and remodel. Compromised wooden roof trusses of the Baldwin retail property have led the Society to empty that space and leave it unused for its usual purpose. The century-old concrete structure of the Baldwin store space is of unknown design capacity. After carefully considering options, St. Vincent de Paul is seeking to rebuild in the footprint of these two parcels. New construction designed to sensitively honor the look and feel of the local traditional shopping street and historic district will best serve the interest of safety, modern-code compliance, energy efficiency, sustainability and avoidance of unintended consequences. These are key objectives for the future of properties SVdP Madison intends to continue using for purposes toward which the site has long been put. Those purposes are supporting and meeting the Society's mission by selling and giving away donated goods and by offering other charitable services to local households in need. Through new, historically sensitive construction, SVdP Madison's plan is to devote almost all first-floor space to retail and – for the corner parcel -- create second-floor space focused on serving neighbors in need through SVdP Madison charitable programming.

Frequently Asked Questions (updated at <https://svdpmadison.org/baldwin-street-project/>):

1. What does St. Vincent de Paul want to do?

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul – Madison is looking to continue our commitment to the Marquette Neighborhood in which we first operated locally through a building of our own. For 50 years, it was only in this neighborhood that we owned property and operated a thrift store to help support our charitable work on behalf of people in need.

Our intent now is to demolish our two structurally comprised buildings along Baldwin Street – as well as our Williamson Street store's book room, which shares the lot with one of those buildings. We would excavate a basement space in the roughly 7,000 square-foot footprint of these structures to create a common foundation. We would then erect a two-story building at the Baldwin-Williamson corner and a single-story building where our Baldwin store building is now. Except for vestibule, elevator and stairwell space at the corner, our plan is to devote the new first-floor space to retail and the new corner building's second floor to our charitable programming. That programming would be primarily our Seton Program of assistance to custodial single-parents of minor children -- the non-residential successor to the Seton House Program with its current office in the corner structure being replaced.

2. Why was the Baldwin Street portion of your store closed?

In 2020 our maintenance team discovered above layers of ceiling that at least one of the century-old wooden trusses of our Baldwin Street retail building’s barrel-vault roof appeared to be seriously warped. We called in a structural engineer, who advised us to not use the Baldwin building for retail purposes and to construct a special support wall inside the space to support the most-seriously compromised of three trusses from below – to be able to withstand snow load while next steps were explored. We did close and empty our Baldwin building in August 2020 and that temporary support wall was built inside. We consider this structurally compromised building to be at the end of its useful life.

More background: The Baldwin Street portion of our retail space is the original St. Vincent de Paul Society retail property in Madison. Built in 1921, the building was acquired by St. Vincent de Paul in 1941. The main body of the Williamson Street portion of the store complex was acquired in 1954 and was connected to the adjoining Baldwin building.

3. What’s the problem with the building at the corner of Baldwin & Willy?

Because it is relatively unattractive, the two-story building St. Vincent de Paul owns at the Baldwin-Williamson corner has been considered to be a candidate at least for major façade improvement since 2017. Architect consultation and builder examination in the interim, however, made it evident that it would be infeasible to rehabilitate this structure. At the end of its useful life, this balloon-frame structure – actually a conjoined pair of buildings – is half seated on (and beyond) a rubble foundation and half on slab. It shares a single lot with a separate, more-modern, one-story masonry structure St. Vincent de Paul owns.

More background: The first floor of our corner building currently serves as the office and conference room for our Seton House Program. Between 1990 and 2005, these spaces had served as the site of Dane County’s busiest food pantry, operated by St. Vincent de Paul. Until June 2020, the building’s currently unoccupied second floor, had served as housing for up to three women at a time taking part in the Seton House Program. The one-story masonry structure on the same parcel is operated as the book room of the Williamson Street store.

4. When will work on the project begin?

Pending required approvals, we hope to begin demolition by late 2022 and begin construction by early 2023.

5. How long will it take for the project to be completed?

Construction projects always have a measure of uncertainty in their timetable, but our completion goal is for late 2023.

6. Will the Willy Street store stay open during construction?

Yes. Our plan is for the Williamson Street side of the store -- except for what is now its book room – to remain open during the construction project. Our plan is that the Baldwin Street section of the store will be demolished and reconstructed, and will then reopen as retail space when the project is complete.

7. What will happen with the book room?

Sharing the same parcel as the corner balloon-frame building, the more modern structure that now serves as our Williamson Street store's book room is planned for demolition and reconstruction, and would reopen as retail space when the project is complete. Our plan is that during construction, our Willy Street store space will be rearranged to devote some, but more limited, space to books and media. When construction is complete, our plan is to once again operate the Madison area's best thrift-store book section within our Willy Street store.

8. Will the project you intend to build look like it belongs in the neighborhood?

Our intent is that not only will what we'll build look much more attractive than what's there now, but our new construction will also be designed and built with an architectural approach and finishes that sensitively honor our property's Third Lake Ridge Historical District and Traditional Shopping Street settings.

9. Who's doing the work?

We have engaged the services of the design-build team of Dimension IV Architects of Madison and Advanced Building Corporation of McFarland.

10. Will construction affect my ability to get around the neighborhood?

No. Our builder intends to avoid impeding pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular travel.

11. Will the new building be environmentally friendly?

Yes. We intend for our new construction to be built with attention to energy-efficiency, sustainability and capacity to last for decades. We will give serious consideration to including roof-top solar in our plans. Likewise, our builder will seek to recycle as much of the material from the demolition process as we can.

12. Will you construct a drive-through goods-donation center?

No. We lack available space to do this in the footprint of our Williamson-Baldwin complex.

13. Do you plan to add parking spaces?

No. Because we're building within the current footprint of our complex, we intend to maintain the lot parking we currently have – 17 spaces immediately northeast of our Williamson Street store.

14. How will more information about the project be communicated?

As our plans solidify and move toward approval, we plan to create information displays to be posted within our Williamson Street store. Also, updates to this FAQ and to pertinent plan documents will be updated at <https://svdpmadison.org/baldwin-street-project/>.