

To: UUA Board of Trustees
From: GA Planning Committee
Date: November 16, 2015
RE: Request Approval of Recommended Site for General Assembly 2019

The General Assembly Planning Committee is recommending Spokane, Washington. Other cities considered were Long Beach, CA and Salt Lake City, UT. Site Selection Team was Jan Sneegas and Don Plante from GACS; Mary Alm from GAPC; Kathy Charles, UUA staff from Southern Region.

Spokane, WA – Recommended Site for GA 2019

The last time General Assembly was in Spokane was 1995. Since then, the Convention Center has gotten bigger and better, thanks to a recently completed \$55-million expansion. We will enjoy sufficient (but not excessive) meeting space in an attractive LEED certified facility directly connected to two of our conference hotels; the connected hotels provide additional meeting space for an accessible, comfortable GA campus. There is free (!) WiFi throughout (!) and wonderful natural light from floor-to-ceiling windows looking out on the Spokane River. The food preparation in the Convention Center is stellar and should please our people.

The hotels that aren't attached to the center are nearby, as are a wide variety of eating establishments. Lots of options for both vegans and vegetarians. A well-stocked natural food store is near the convention center and hotels; it offers take-out, as well. And the hotels are EXTREMELY reasonably priced, prices guaranteed for 2019. One is brand new (completed March 2015) and one is remodeling to appeal to millennials (there will be a climbing wall in the lobby). Everybody is offering free WiFi. Room rates range from \$119 to \$149.

All of this is located on the Spokane River, across from Riverfront Park, a 100-acre delight. Former site of the 1974 World's Fair, there are walking paths, a historic carousel, a gondola ride over Spokane Falls, and special events. The downtown area is full of old buildings repurposed for shopping and dining and living. The vibe is young. Lots of biking and hiking trails; the Centennial Trail is a 37-mile long paved, flat bike path that runs through Riverfront Park. Spokane's University District includes Gonzaga University, Washington State University Spokane (WSU Spokane), Eastern Washington University (EWU Spokane), and extensions of the medical and dental schools at the University of Washington. There are two community colleges with over 25,000 students, one of which partners with a Japanese Women's University with a campus in Spokane. Seems to be a small city with big ideas.

The demographics of Spokane's 209,000 citizens skew white; 5 % of the population is Hispanic/Latino. Asians account for 2.6 %, African-Americans 2.3%, Native Americans 2%, and there are 4.6 % mixed race (2010 census). The local congregation has over 400 members and would provide good local support. Rev. Dr. Todd Eklof, the minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane, is very supportive of General Assembly coming to Spokane. He indicated it would be good for the small communities of color to have GA there, as well as good for the congregation and the community at large. 3,000-4,000 Unitarian Universalists would be noticed, and our Witness would be a regional news event.

Why not the other cities?

We last held General Assembly in Long Beach in 2004. Now, our union partners UNITE HERE are attempting to organize Long Beach's major hotels, and they tell us that owner intransigence is likely to make their fight for fair wages and worker justice a long and ugly one. Without the largest hotels, the city is unable to meet our housing needs.

General Assembly was held in Salt Lake City in both 1999 and 2009. Although a new shopping mall has opened near the hotels and convention center, nothing much has changed to make the city an enticing venue for our people. Besides that, the hotels are comparatively expensive, ranging in cost from \$155 to \$185.

Why not an East Coast location?

The GACS office explored the possibility of holding GA 2019 in several East Coast cities in response to requests from the Joseph Priestly District. Baltimore did not have June dates. Philadelphia rates were over \$200 per room night as well as the city was in the midst of labor issues. Likewise, New York City and Washington, DC were too expensive. Don Plante did a site visit to Atlantic City in January 2015. Only one carrier flies into Atlantic City, so most attendees would have to fly to Philadelphia and obtain ground transportation for the 66 mile trip to Atlantic City. Nor are there enough non-casino hotel rooms close enough to the convention center; shuttles would have to be provided, and the Planning Committee decided after the 2008 GA in Fort Lauderdale that in addition to being very expensive, shuttling was not congruent with our sustainability initiative.

Please direct any questions to Jan Sneegas, jsneegas@uua.org, 617.948.4207.

Thank you for your consideration.