

Free Will Baptist Bible College President J. Matthew Pinson answers 20 frequently asked questions about the college's feasibility study that may result in relocating the Nashville campus.

1. FWBBC has served the denomination for 64 years at its current location in Nashville. Why relocate now?

It's ironic to me that what makes it *impossible* for us to remain here is the same thing that might make it *possible* for us to relocate: escalating neighborhood property values.

Over the years, the college expanded by buying residential property in the Richland-West End neighborhood and converting it to educational space—either by remodeling existing structures or demolishing them and building new ones. Since this area has undergone economic revitalization, that is no longer possible. Even if we did purchase more property in the neighborhood, we would have to apply for zoning variances to use it for education purposes. The likelihood of that happening with the community's current zoning-conservation overlay in place is very low.

For us to buy a half-acre of land with a large house on it and remodel the house would cost about twice what we would spend if we built on a new piece of property. So, if we want to expand as we grow, we must have more land and buildings.

We recently did a study of how much acreage colleges and universities typically need to operate. Most are more than 200 acres in size. Smaller campuses, like Tennessee Temple University's urban, 55-acre campus in Chattanooga, are still much larger than our current 9-acre campus.

2. Twenty-four years ago, FWBBC enrolled more than 600 students on the current campus. Why do 377 students now enrolled on the same campus need more space than 600 students did then?

That's right. The college at one time enrolled many more students than it currently does. Yet it was quite literally bursting at the seams with that many students. In our recently completed Strategic Plan, we are now projecting an enrollment that will meet and exceed that early-1980s enrollment. We will need more space to make it happen, of course.

Don't laugh, but right now the most pressing problem we face is parking. When I came here as a student in the 1980s, freshmen were not permitted to have cars on campus. Now our freshmen can, and, believe me, there's no turning the clock back on that one. Our students need their vehicles to get to their jobs. Plus, we must be competitive with other colleges that allow freshmen to have cars on campus. So we are in a parking crisis that is not going away.

Even before the current offer was made on our campus and we began this feasibility study, we were planning to contract with nearby churches to lease parking spaces and, if necessary, run shuttles from parking lots to the campus. We're simply running out of parking spaces. So, yes, we plan to continue growing and will outgrow this current campus. But right now we're just trying to find an extra parking spot for that eager freshman!

Another thing I might mention is that we now have intercollegiate athletic teams that we didn't have in the early 1980s. We would like to have on-campus sports fields where they can practice and play.

3. What's the worst thing that could happen if the college does not relocate?

The worst thing that could happen is that after we run out of parking and shuttling options for our commuter students, faculty, and staff, we would have to cap enrollment to have enough places for people to park. That means we would start turning away Free Will Baptist students. None of us wants that to happen.

4. If FWBBC relocates, will the new campus be technologically up-to-date?

At this preliminary stage, I can tell you that we have plans for a technologically cutting-edge campus—you know...wireless Internet across campus, educational technology in the classrooms, and more. That, of course, is one of the immediate benefits of building a new campus. A donor is more apt to fund a new, fully-wired media lab in a new room, in a new building, on a new campus, than to fund refurbishing an old one on our current campus.

5. Can the college afford to purchase land in Nashville to build a new campus?

Yes, we can afford land in the Nashville area, but it will have to be a smaller piece of land than we had anticipated earlier, maybe 30 or 40 acres. But that will seem huge compared to the nine acres we have now.

6. Since the 123-acre site we purchased in Joelton, Tennessee, a few years ago is paid for, why can't the college relocate there?

The main reason the Board of Trustees voted to sell the Joelton property and purchase a new site was the cost of site development which surged from an initial estimate of \$2 million to around \$9 million. Then, after severe curtailing of plans, they came down to just over \$5 million.

One factor driving site-development costs on the Joelton property was running a water and sewer line to the property that was sufficient for the campus needs as well as sufficient to meet fire-fighting requirements. College officials were originally told they could construct an onsite system, but later the county said "No" to those plans.

7. A Nashville newspaper reported that the college had an offer of about \$16 million for its West End campus. If the campus sells for that amount, how much more money must be raised to build a new campus?

We estimate that we will need around \$7 million more to build a new campus. If the current offer goes through and the feasibility study shows that such a move is feasible, then we will begin construction with funds from the sale of the current campus. As potential donors see buildings going up, they will catch the vision and become enthusiastic about what God is doing. This will help us raise the funds we need. Of course, the estimated \$7 million figure is for a debt-free project.

We are realistic, and we understand that almost no college or university undertakes a \$24-million construction project debt-free. We're prepared to acquire strategic debt if need be, which would be an excellent investment in what will be the most significant event yet in the college's life since its founding in 1942. But let me tell you, I would love to see our churches, alumni, and friends get on board with us, if the Lord leads in this direction, and make the new campus a debt-free project.

8. Where is FWBBC looking for land on which to relocate?

We're looking in the greater Nashville area. We'd like to purchase property in an area that's slated for growth and will be a secure, growing location even in the distant future. We aren't necessarily looking for land close to downtown Nashville, but we are looking for land near a major commercial center, a hospital, good schools, domestic and retail jobs for our students, major roads, and affordable housing for the college family. The proximity to downtown is not as important to us as the proximity to these other educational and economic resources.

9. If it looks like the decision will be to relocate the campus, why stay in Middle Tennessee? Why not relocate to, say, East Tennessee or Little Rock, Arkansas?

The college believes, like the original Board of Education of the National Association of Free Will Baptists believed in the early 1940s, that the Nashville area is an ideal location for our nationally owned and operated college. It's centrally located among the vast majority of the people and churches of the National Association. Greater Nashville is one of the most attractive areas to live and work. The Chamber of Commerce told us that Nashville ranks #1 in the United States for business expansion and relocation, according to *Expansion Management* magazine. That may explain why Nissan recently announced plans to relocate their \$70 million, 1,300-employee North American corporate headquarters to the Nashville area by 2008. That decision impacts all of Middle Tennessee.

10. When will the decision about relocation be made?

The Board of Trustees will meet at the end of June 2006 to hear the report of the Feasibility Study Committee, which consists of the FWBBC president (that's me), Colonel Mark Johnson (who leads the feasibility study), Tom Sass (treasurer), David Williford (director of advancement), Sandy Goodfellow (director of plant operations), Greg Kettelman (local member / Board of Trustees), and Bob Bass (local alumnus and trained engineer and builder). They will also hear from our architectural and fundraising firms, our banker, and other relevant groups that will comment on whether they think it is feasible to relocate the college.

The Feasibility Study Committee wants to answer four questions: (1) How much will it cost to relocate the campus? (2) How much money can we raise? (3) What are our primary prospects for land? (4) How much money are we in a position to borrow?

After hearing the committee's report, and after much deliberation and prayer, the Board of Trustees will make the final decision on whether or not to move forward. Of course, moving forward must wait until the real estate development group that made the offer on the current campus closes on the property.

If they exercise the option to withdraw their offer, we would immediately seek offers from others who have recently shown interest in the campus. Naturally, such a move would postpone the relocation process for another year or perhaps two. Yet the work we've done to this point—surveying the denominational constituency about interest levels in relocation, securing architectural and capital campaign firms, investigating potential campus sites, and more—would be immediately applicable to the project.

11. The relocation time-line seems tight. Is it realistic to think that we can locate property, build a new campus, and move in just over two years?

You're on target with that concern, because the time-line is tight. But it's the only way a unique process like this can work. By unique, I mean that very rarely does a real estate developer purchase a piece of property lock, stock, and barrel, and then let the previous owner stay on it until a new facility is constructed. That's the only way this sort of transaction can work for us. What makes it even more interesting is that we have to move when school is not in session, preferably during the summer. Thankfully, we have an architectural firm that specializes in "fast-tracking" construction processes similar to ours.

12. Who is this fast-tracking architectural firm, and what makes you think they can bring a complex project like this to completion in such a short time?

The firm is Hasting Associates, LLC, here in Nashville. They're a nationally-recognized, award-winning firm that has done large (but inexpensive) projects like schools and banks but also large, expensive projects like the interior of the new Schermerhorn Symphony Center in Nashville. We needed to know that we had a firm that was competent in design and master-planning (helping us plan the future of our campus for growth). But we also needed a firm that could keep costs low and had experience in fast-tracking. Hastings fit the bill perfectly.

They showed us their last five projects, all of which came in at or under budget and at or under projected time frame. What sold us on this firm was their most recent educational project, Ensworth High School, a private school in Nashville. There were only 24 months from the time they signed the contract to the ribbon-cutting ceremony. So they are very confident that they can do this project in the time we need it done. They have even said that "fast-tracking" can help us save money.

I might add that Colonel Mark Johnson has been in touch with Denver Baptist Theological Seminary which just relocated and built a new campus in Littleton, Colorado. They completed the entire process from voting to relocate to the ribbon-cutting ceremony on a new campus in 30 months—that's our relocation goal.

And that's why we chose Hastings Associates, LLC, as our architectural firm. We wanted a local firm that knew local conditions, local builders, and local governmental processes involved in approval of sites and design for specific uses. We also wanted a firm with experience in campus master-planning. We looked for firms with proven records of success within budget and time constraints. We began our search with 75 firms, narrowed the field to 25, and asked four outstanding firms to make presentations. Hastings brought a level of preparation and enthusiasm for this

project that clearly stood out. We have no doubts that Hastings is the right choice for the relocation project.

13. How much land is necessary in order to build the new campus?

Our architectural firm constructed a small scale model of all the buildings we would need in a new campus—athletic fields, parking lots, green space, and so forth—and placed them on a piece of graph paper divided into 30 and 38 acres. We could fit everything we currently need on 30 acres, but to allow future growth, we would probably require three-story buildings. However, when we looked at it in terms of 38 acres, we discovered there was ample space to have a campus that would meet long-term growth needs.

14. If FWBBC relocates, will we lose some faculty members who do not wish to drive longer distances?

I don't think so, since we're trying to find property that's no more than 25 miles from downtown Nashville. Our faculty and staff live in a wide geographic area in Middle Tennessee. No matter where we move, some will drive farther to work than they do now. On the other hand, some are already talking about moving after a new campus site is chosen. But we don't want a situation where this happens to the majority of our faculty and staff. As you can understand, we're very sensitive to this factor.

15. If the college relocates, will it retain historic building names such as Davidson Hall, Johnson Classroom Building, Goen Hall, and others?

We'll be discussing this more fully in the near future. I'm sure that some of the historic names will be moved to buildings on the new campus. We do, however, want the opportunity to name buildings on the new campus in honor of major donors.

This could be a wonderful way to leave a legacy for future generations. I hope that a number of Free Will Baptists who have the resources to do so will consider underwriting construction of a dormitory, an athletic field, or some other campus structure—and then naming that facility in memory of or in honor of a loved one.

16. Would relocating the campus weaken the Teacher Education program or the proposed Nursing program?

Relocating would help our Teacher Education program, because it has the potential to open up a new "market" of schools—a market where our graduates would be welcomed, and an educational community where we would have an opportunity to influence people with the quality of our student teachers and our academic professionalism. And, we would still be in close proximity to Davidson County and Belmont University, where our students in the (proposed) Nursing program would take most courses in their major.

17. Many Free Will Baptist students choose FWBBC because it's in a large metropolitan area. If the college relocates to a smaller town, won't that discourage students who are looking for more than a small-town experience?

Even if we relocate to another principality that does not have the name “Nashville,” it will still basically be a suburb of Nashville. We want to find a place where all the major amenities our students now enjoy will be in fairly close proximity.

18. If we proceed with campus relocation and the \$7 million capital campaign, what professional firm will provide guidance and materials for the project?

We chose Dickerson and Associates, a medium-sized fundraising firm out of Littleton, Colorado, to do the feasibility study for a possible capital campaign. They are a national firm with a strong reputation in serving evangelical Christian organizations. We were looking for a firm with special expertise in helping small Christian colleges that do most of their fundraising through local churches.

After looking at scores of firms and interviewing three, we settled on Dickerson and Associates. The firm’s CEO, Clark Dickerson, will be our lead consultant. He holds a doctorate in Higher Education Administration from Indiana University and has 25 years’ experience in fundraising for Christian higher education. We are very excited to have Dickerson and Associates on board.

19. Since another professional architectural firm prepared blueprints for a new campus in Joelton, why don’t we save some money and use those same plans to build wherever we relocate?

I asked myself that same question when we began the feasibility study. But the answer is “No,” we cannot use the earlier architectural drawings. Here’s why.

The plans, while well done, are six years old and designed to fit a different property. If we relocate, the local county and city where we go will have their own unique site development requirements and building codes for utilities, dormitories, parking, classroom buildings, athletic facilities, and more.

Revising plans that were prepared for another time and another place simply is not feasible. The Joelton plans were drawn for single-story buildings on 123 acres. But a new campus in the Nashville area would probably be in the 40-acre range, which means we will have to construct multi-storied buildings to get the square footage we need on a smaller property.

While it is possible that we may consider adapting a concept from the earlier design, we do not want to restrict our architectural firm, Hastings and Associates. They need the freedom to harness their creative staff and envision a new campus theme. They need the flexibility to pull all the design elements together from entry signage and landscaping to the number of structures needed and their placement on the property, to the kinds of materials which will be needed for construction.

20. What makes you think the current offer of about \$16 million for the West End campus is the best we could get?

We’ve received a number of offers in recent years for the campus property. The best one has been in the \$16-\$17 million range, and the market of interested parties confirms that this is a good price. Property value is tied to what can be built there, and this is an unknown since the neighborhood group is pro-active.

Estimating what our property might be worth to a buyer is more complex than we first thought. You see, our campus breaks into two sections: West End with more uses and higher value uses, and Richland which is under a zoning-conservation overlay and has less value per tract or square foot. What this means is that the best value is driven by what type development project can be approved for the nine-acre campus that includes a West End-Richland mixture of about 30 lots and 392,000 square feet.