

Master Plan Report for

CHURCH ON THE HILL
LENOX, MA



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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

This report is the third report prepared by Foresight Architects in the process of determining the best possible future use of Church on the Hill's current facilities. The first two documents, completed and submitted in October 2020, were Property Condition Assessments (PCAs) of the church's two buildings – the Meetinghouse and the Chapel – and the two different sites on which they are located. Those reports provided recommendations, preliminary cost estimates and priorities for remedying major deficiencies, updating aging major components, and undertaking further detailed investigations. Those reports are meant to guide the congregation in maintaining their facilities well into the future.

We also prepared a document outlining the worship needs of the congregation, which is included in the next section of this report. This document was the basis for the design efforts that resulted in the proposed Master Plan contained in this report.

Another important element of the Master Plan is the use of the church's facilities by members of the community. An earlier study by Partners for Sacred Places outlined many assets of these facilities that would be valuable to the community. An edited version of that Asset Mapping is contained in Appendix A.

During the months of November and December 2020, the Architect met with members of the 251st Year Committee to understand the code restrictions and explore design solutions to meet the needs of the congregation and the community. The preferred solution was subsequently presented to members of the congregation on December 30, 2020. The presentation seemed to be well received.

This report represents the culmination of all these efforts and is the formal documentation of the preferred solution to the identified programmatic and functional needs of Church on the Hill.

SECTION 2: WORSHIP NEEDS

The overall consensus about the current Meetinghouse worship space is that its beauty lies in its simplicity. These qualities give the space much of its feeling of sacredness and should be preserved in any modifications to the space. Many of the elements in the current space, including the pews, the chancel platform and the pulpit, were modifications made less than one hundred years ago. (Please see the excerpt from “The Church on the Hill” at the end of this section for further details of the transformation of the interior since the building was completed in 1806.)

The biggest drawback to the space is its lack of flexibility, which does not easily foster community, either within the congregation or the community. Some specific examples are:

- The fixed (uncomfortable) pews make alternate sociopetal seating arrangements – which would help to foster community – impossible.
- The lack of open space for gathering makes functions such as after-service coffee time difficult if not impossible.
- The baptismal font can be an obstacle, as it is very difficult to move.

Other site or building design-related issues reported by congregation members include:

- A handicapped ramp that is in a dangerous location and brings users in through a different entry than everyone else.
- The lack of accommodations for the disabled limits their opportunities to participate in community functions.
- The lack of prep space for bridal parties makes it less than ideal for weddings.
- The lack of on-site parking limits the number of attendees at functions.
- Entry doors that are difficult to operate.
- Poor sound system.
- No natural or mechanical ventilation.
- Lack of adequate electric light limits use of the building after dark.
- Landscaping on the east side of the building screens it from view from the street.

Many of these issues make the building feel less welcoming than the people are. Consequently, the building does not reflect the spirit of the congregation.

Other suggestions from members of the congregation included:

- Moving the organ down to the main floor so that it can be seen – especially when used for concerts.
- Make the gallery accessible and usable.
- Provide a labyrinth in floor of the worship space.

Consider the needs of families with young children.

Excerpt from "The Church on the Hill" by Rev. Harris B. Hinchcuff

On each side of the center aisle, or "alley" as it was called, were rows of seven box pews with numbers painted on the door according to their order of choice. Next to the outside walls, and separated from the main pews by two side aisles, were five long narrow pews. On each side of the pulpit were four pews extending into the body of the church, and beneath and in front of the pulpit was the Deacons' seat. The circular pulpit itself was not large, but it was high in order that the minister might see all his congregation seated either within their individual pews, or behind the high gallery front.*

Contrary to the current emphasis to retain or copy the "colonial style," the church of the past strived to be contemporary. Theologically, such efforts may be laudable, but for lovers of antiquity, modernization is anathema. However one feels, the meetinghouse has undergone several interior transformations.

In 1840, the first alterations in the floor plan were made. The box pews were changed to "slips," the center alley was abolished and replaced by larger side aisles, the pulpit and gallery front were lowered, and stoves were installed in the back of the room.

With the advent of a regular choir in 1850, the rear gallery was appropriated for its use and a musical instrument called a "Seraphim" was installed for the support of the singers. In 1868, the present Johnson tracker-action pipe organ was installed.

In 1866, the floor plan of the meetinghouse as it presently exists was set up, and in 1880 a society of young women of the church financed a projection of the front wall of the building and installed the present platform and pulpit.

Other histories of the church detail the many gifts received, such as the Eggleston Baptismal font, the Jessup Steeple Clock and the Robbins Fence surrounding the church lot

In the late 1940's and throughout the 1950's the meetinghouse received rather continuous efforts of modernisation. Electricity was finally brought in, oil heating was installed, so that for the first time in many years services might be conducted on The Hill throughout the winter, and the entire interior was scrubbed and painted white.

The following narrative description of the proposed design solution will demonstrate how the proposed design meets the identified functional needs.

SECTION 3: DESIGN NARRATIVE

See Appendices B & C for drawings of the existing facilities and the design solutions described in this report.

DESIGN PROCESS

To make sure that the design solutions that were presented to the Committee were as fiscally viable as possible, the design process started with a review of the potential limitations imposed by the Massachusetts Building Code. As long as the Meetinghouse continues to function as a place of worship, there are no retroactive code upgrade requirements. However, should the building be modified in a way that would constitute a Change in Occupancy, virtually all the provisions of the Building Code would apply as if one were to build a new building. The most significant requirement would be the addition of a sprinkler system throughout the building, including the attic and the steeple. While installing such a fire protection system might be a good idea in terms of protecting the structure, we did not want to propose a design solution that would require such a significant and costly upgrade. Therefore, we tried to work within the framework of maintaining the Meetinghouse's primary function as a place of worship.

MEETINGHOUSE RENOVATIONS

The proposed solution for renovation of the existing Meetinghouse springs from the original layout of the space when it was built. At that time, there were box pews all along the east, north and west walls. One of the stated needs for worship was a desire to have the ability to have alternate sociopetal seating arrangements that would help to foster community. Such arrangements typically involve people facing each other. Although the pews along the perimeter walls would really be too far from each other to create the sense of community the congregation is seeking, the new placement would help transform the overall feel of the space from one with a single focal point of the chancel to one where the focus is on what is happening in the entire space – not just the chancel. Another significant advantage of this placement is that by moving a good percentage of the seating to the perimeter, it eliminates the side aisles and creates the potential for a much larger open space in the middle of the building.

The pews in the Meetinghouse consist of two sections: approximately 9 feet and 10 feet long, with a wood panel joining them. For the proposed design solution, all of these pews would be carefully disassembled into the two sections. (The smaller pews that are built in along the north wall of the Meetinghouse would remain as is.) Eight of the 10-foot sections would be relocated along the east and west walls. The pew ends would be removed and they would be joined together using the same panels (or replicas) that are currently used to connect the pews, essentially forming a continuous bench along the east and west walls. These pews would be permanently affixed to the floor. The remainder of the 10-foot pews

would be removed and stored in the balcony, in compliance with the Preservation Restriction, which requires removed elements to be placed in storage.

Four of the 9-foot sections would be joined in a similar fashion into two 18' pews and would be fixed to the floor in the northeast and northwest corners of the space. The twenty remaining 9-foot pews would be fitted with the removed ends from the 10-foot pews and would be reinforced and modified as required to make them movable yet stable. It is this combination of fixed pews at the perimeter and twenty moveable pews that provides the space with all the flexibility needed to maximize the potential uses of the space. The drawings in Appendix C show just four of the many possible configurations of the space that would allow it to be used for everything from Sunday services to square dances.

Another element of the proposed renovations to the Meetinghouse is the relocation of the organ to the chancel area. Although this is not critical to the implementation or success of the renovations, it would make a nice focal point and would improve the use of the space for organ recitals. The chancel platform will most likely have to be lowered for the organ casework to fit below the circular window but the front paneling could be retained, if so desired.

As noted in the PCA for this building, the carpet throughout the building is in desperate need of replacement. Assuming that what is under the carpet is not a finished hardwood floor, we propose that the underlayment that is probably there be covered with electric radiant heating cables and that a new wood finish flooring be installed on top of that. Wood flooring will perform much better than carpet – especially when the space is used for functions other than Sunday worship. It is also better acoustically for music and would therefore create a better space for all sorts of music rehearsals and performances. As mentioned in the PCA, new lighting would be required if the space is to be used after dusk.

The advantage of using radiant heat in this space is that it is much more effective than the forced air system that is currently being used, where much of the warm air winds up at the ceiling. Radiant heat warms the people within 5 or 6 feet of it so those in the space would get the maximum benefit of the heating, and less heat would be required to create a comfortable environment. Combining this with improvements to the windows would make this a much more comfortable space in the winter. Adding air conditioning equipment to the existing forced air system will make the space much more comfortable in the summer. And as long as the telephone company continues to pay for the electricity used in this building, it will reduce the church's operating costs!

When the new wood floor is installed, the last ten feet or so nearest the Narthex would be gently pitched up to eliminate the 2" difference between the floor levels in the two spaces. As the slope will be very gentle, it will hardly be noticeable and will not require any railings, as a ramp would.

The final piece to making the assembly space truly flexible would be to make the existing baptismal font movable. Although the details of just how to do so would depend on the details of how the font is built and currently attached to the floor, other congregations have been successful in making fonts of a similar size and weight movable so this could certainly be done for Church on the Hill.

NARTHEX UPGRADES

It seems that the two biggest drawbacks to outside groups using the Meetinghouse are the lack of an accessible toilet room and the lack of a food preparation space. The proposed design addresses both those needs.

The current Narthex, with its nine door openings, is more of a circulation space than a useable space for gathering or other social activities. Therefore, it seemed that this was the best space into which any new spaces should be inserted. With so many door openings, it is almost impossible to create any new spaces within this space without blocking one or more door openings. Currently, the Meetinghouse has 4 separate exits. Only two are required for a building with an occupancy load of less than 500. The occupancy load for the Meetinghouse, after the renovation, will be 414. The minimum required exit width for a door is 32", which is provided by each leaf of the main entry door. Therefore, the two doors on the east and west sides of the Narthex are not required for egress and could theoretically be removed. That would open up the northeast and northwest corners of the Narthex for creating the required spaces.

The Master Plan proposes that new rooms be built in those two corners—one to serve as a new handicapped-accessible toilet room and the other to serve as a food prep room. In order to preserve the exterior appearance of the building and to make this renovation reversible, the existing exterior doors (including interior trim) will be left in place and simply covered over with new finishes inside the new rooms so that the Narthex could easily be restored back to its original appearance in the future, if so desired. The sides of these rooms facing the Narthex would receive new wainscoting to match the rest of the Narthex. The new rooms are spaced far enough apart that there is still a generous area to either side of the main entry door. (This door will need some work to make sure that it is fully functional, as it will become the primary entrance and exit.)

EXTERIOR UPGRADES

Since the center entry doors will become the main entrance to the Meetinghouse, the steps leading to these doors will have to be rebuilt to meet current codes for riser heights. This will most likely require one additional step and new railings.

The new handicapped-accessible toilet room, combined with the elimination of the step between the main assembly space and the Narthex will greatly improve the experience of mobility-impaired users of the Meetinghouse. To further improve the experience, we

recommend relocating the exterior access ramp to the north side of the building, where it will not be subject to dangerous snow and ice falling from the roof above. We also recommend providing a new accessible parking space near the ramp and striping as much of the paved area around the Meetinghouse as possible to maximize parking utilization.

CHAPEL RENOVATIONS

The work that has been done to the Chapel over the years has already positioned this building to be used by the community as well as by the congregation. On the upper level, rooms that could be used by the public include the chapel space (which is already being used for 12-step meetings) and the parlor. The lower level, with its own separate accessible entrance and second means of egress, is very well suited for use by outside groups, such as the Nursery School that has used it in the past. The kitchen, while not quite up to the standard of a commercial kitchen, is very well equipped and could be useful to many groups. The buildings adjacency to the park further enhances its use for the community, as it could be used for events that occur both indoors and outdoors at the same time. Once the issues discussed in the PCA have been addressed, this building will be well positioned as a community asset.

SECTION 4: MASTER PLAN COST ESTIMATE

To determine the total cost for a Master Plan, we combine the costs of any renovations with the recommended repairs from the PCA's. Appendix D contains a summary of the renovation costs for the Meetinghouse. The total Master Plan Costs are summarized below:

Building	Priority	Probable Cost
Meetinghouse	Immediate	\$5,000
Meetinghouse	Short-Term	\$90,000*
Meetinghouse	Unpredictable	\$40,000
Total for Meetinghouse:		\$135,000
Chapel	Immediate	\$3,000
Chapel	Short-Term	\$35,000
Chapel	Unpredictable	\$0
Total for Chapel:		\$38,000
GRAND TOTAL:		\$173,000

* Does not include new carpeting

We generally recommend that the immediate and short term needs be included in the first phase of the implementation of a Master Plan, if possible. In this case, we would recommend that the \$40,000 for new Meetinghouse lighting included under "Unpredictable" also be included in the first phase, as the uses of the renovated Meetinghouse will be quite limited without a new lighting system.

Taking the total figure of \$173,000 from above and adding it to the \$327,000 estimate for renovations to the Meetinghouse yields a total Master Plan Estimated Cost of \$500,000. This is an all-inclusive cost, which includes all repairs, construction, Owner-furnished items, professional fees and contingencies.

It is often the case that a congregation cannot afford to implement the entire Master Plan at once and needs to phase it in over time. There are a number of different ways in which this Master Plan could be phased. For example, you could start with the addition of the rooms to the Meetinghouse Narthex. Or you could focus on the improvements to the Chapel building that would improve its usability, such as dealing with the moisture issue in the basement. Our recommendation would be to bring the Master Plan report and drawings to potential community users and find out what elements of the Master Plan would be most beneficial to the community. This would then be compared to what elements would be most beneficial to the congregation to determine which elements to start with. The scope of the first phase of the Master Plan would be developed accordingly.

SECTION 5: SUMMARY

The Meetinghouse at Church on the Hill has provided a place of worship for its members for over two hundred years and has undoubtedly been the site of many important occasions in the life of its members. The Chapel, which was authorized by the Congregational Society in 1876, "in response to a felt need for a center for social activities", also holds a very important place in the hearts of the church members and the community. Members of the church would like to see these historic and beloved buildings become a "wellspring for renewed life", preserving the current assets (such as the sacredness of the Meetinghouse) while seeking ways to tap into their potential for community use as well.

The proposed Master Plan, along with the PCAs, tells us two very important things:

1. Both buildings have been extremely well maintained are cared for and continue to be architectural gems in the Village of Lenox.
2. Both buildings have tremendous potential to expand their use beyond the needs of the congregation.

This Master Plan demonstrates how much flexibility is possible – particularly with the Meetinghouse. Hopefully it will inspire both church members and the community-at-large to continue to invest in these facilities as they are renewed for a new life of service to the community.

APPENDIX A
ASSET MAPPING INFORMATION

ASSET MAPPING / DEFICIT MAPPING

Meetinghouse

- “Stage” area (referring to chancel) Small, limited use without wings
- Balcony Risers limit use; not accessible
- Natural light/light-filled Must be controlled for theatrical uses
- Large open gathering space Pews limit use
- Seats 200 (+ balcony) Eliminating pews will increase capacity
- View to the outside/beauty of natural setting Must be controlled for theatrical uses
- Attractive building
- Nice outdoor setting New parking must not detract from this
- Tracker organ Not flexible for concerts
- No neighbors (referring to noisy events)
- Open schedule
- Easy to find
- High ceilings
- Proximity to Kennedy Park entrance
- Walkable
- Well-maintained building
- Parking More parking is needed
- Peaceful/neutral interior
- Location near picturesque historic cemetery
- Flexible indoor space Only on first floor
- Handicap accessibility Limited; no accessible toilet room
- Potential re-use of space Will it be retained as a worship space?
- Central location in Berkshires
- History of civic use
- Piano
- Open 12 months/year Winter operational costs are high
- Good acoustics
- Simplicity
- Movable pulpit But only on the platform

- Newer electrical Check capacity for theater lighting
- Furniture (tables, chairs, etc.) No storage space
- Narthex
- Heated building
- Rose window Must be covered for theatrical use
- Comfortable size room (sanctuary)
- Electrical paid by AT&T

Chapel

- Wi-Fi Could also be at Meetinghouse
- Mid-sized meeting rooms
- Nice outdoor setting
- Location
- Commercial kitchen Stoves are not commercial; upgrades req'd
- Walkable
- Well-maintained building Moisture in basement **must** be addressed
- Parking On-street only
- Rentable Only lower level is stand-alone
- New sidewalk
- Flexible indoor/outdoor space
- Handicap accessibility Except between levels
- Classrooms All doors required maintenance
- Piano
- Open 12 months/year
- Updated insulation
- Furniture (tables, chairs, etc.)
- Proximity to Lilac Park

APPENDIX B
DRAWINGS OF EXISTING MEETINGHOUSE & CHAPEL

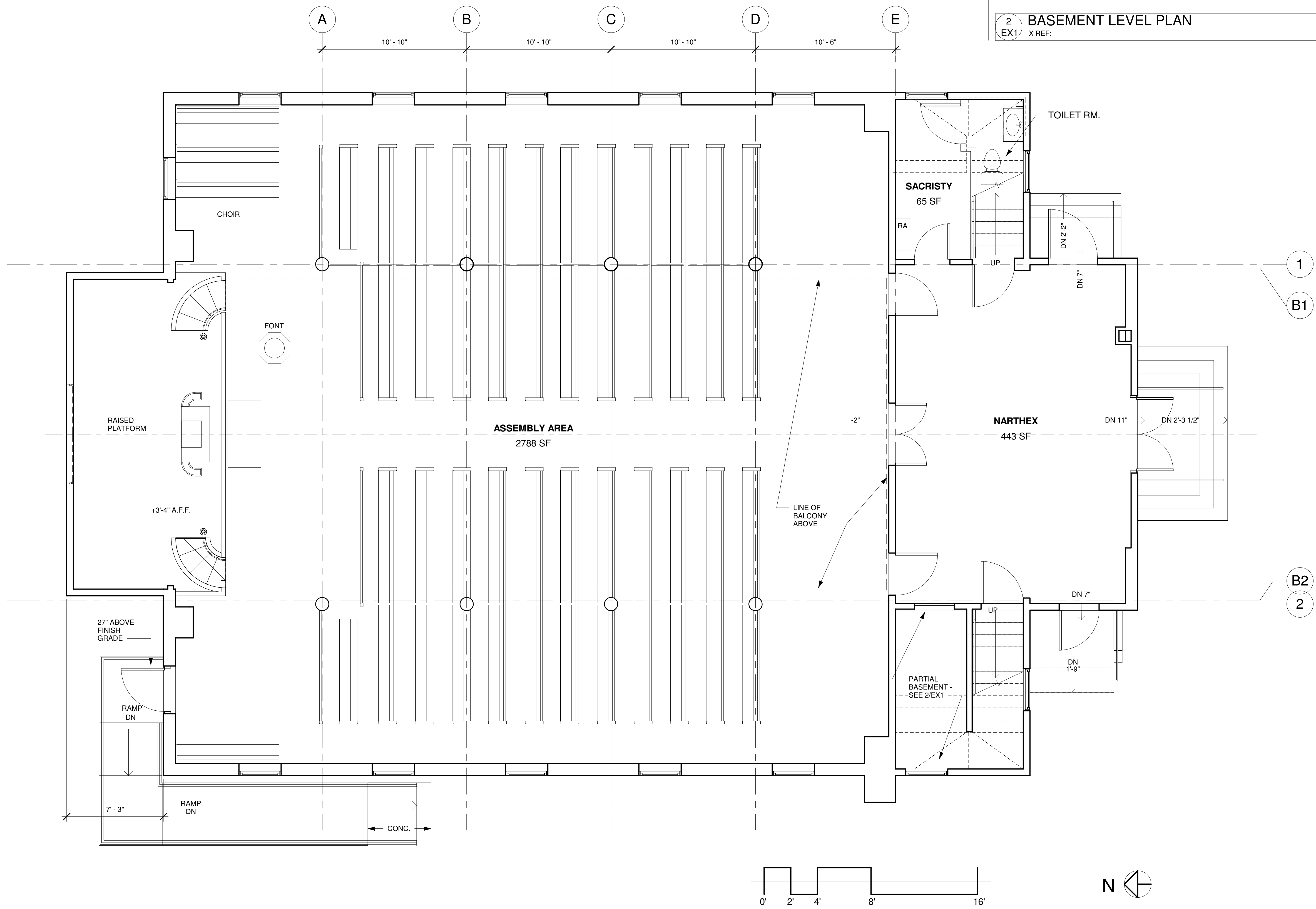
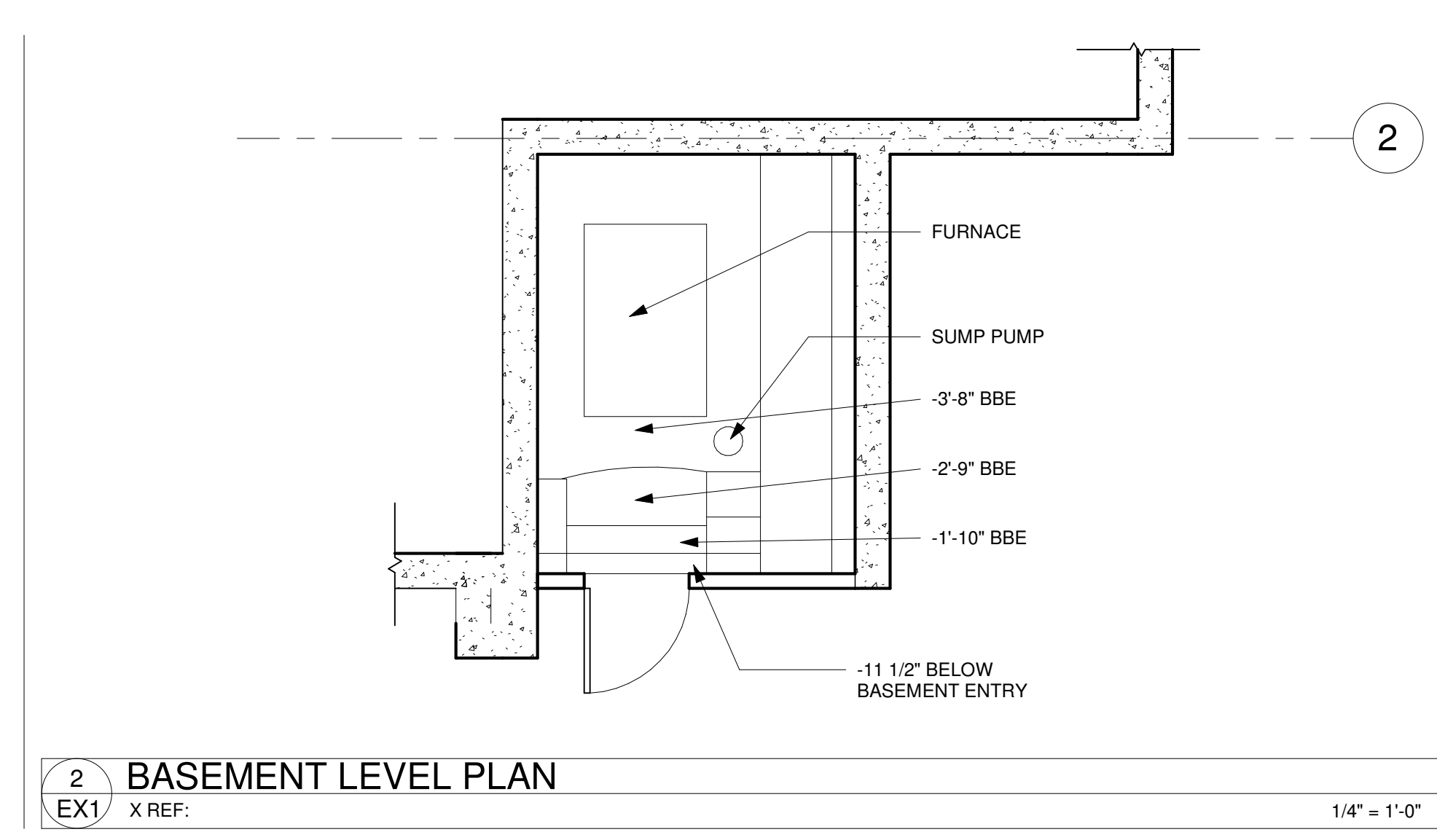
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EX1
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TITLE: MEETINGHOUSE - EXISTING MAIN LEVEL AND BASEMENT FLOOR PLANS

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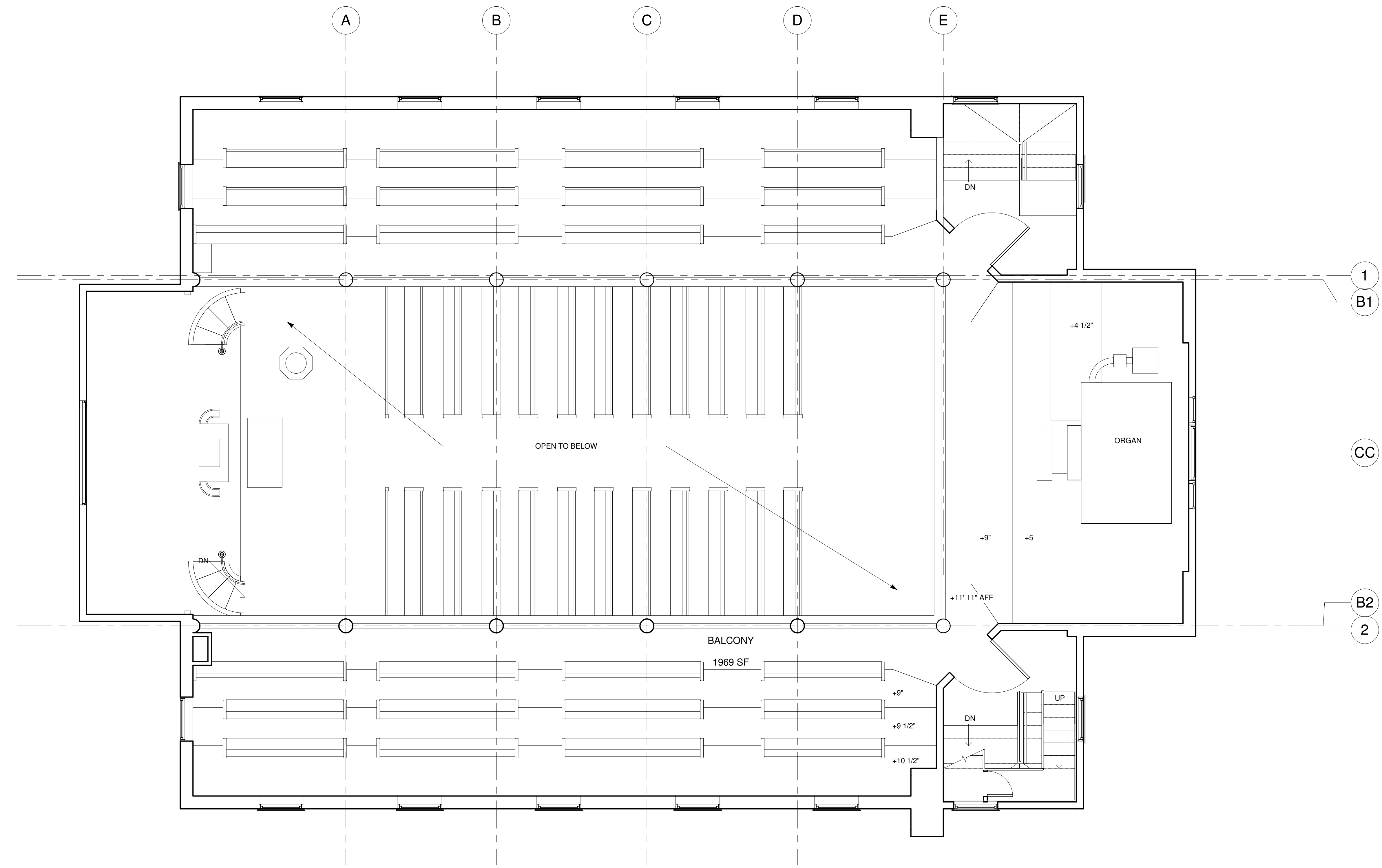
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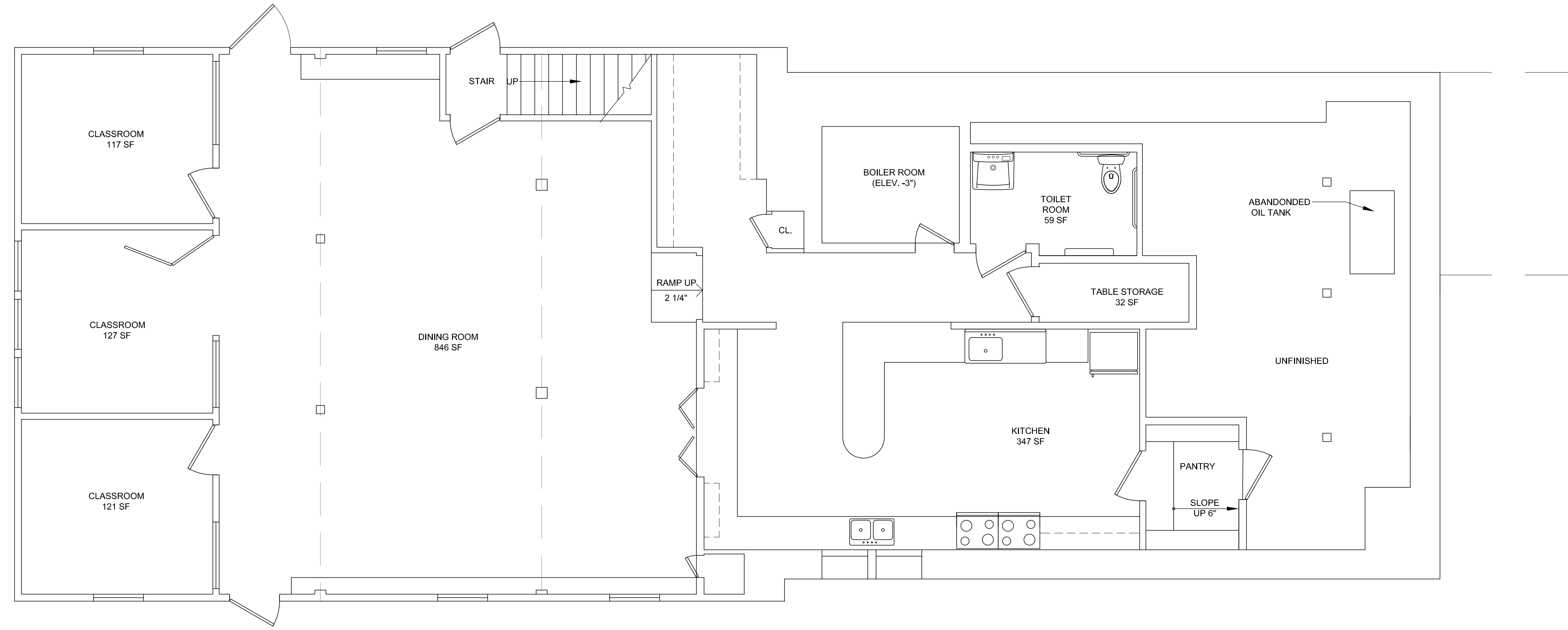
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TITLE: MEETING HOUSE - EXISTING BALCONY LEVEL

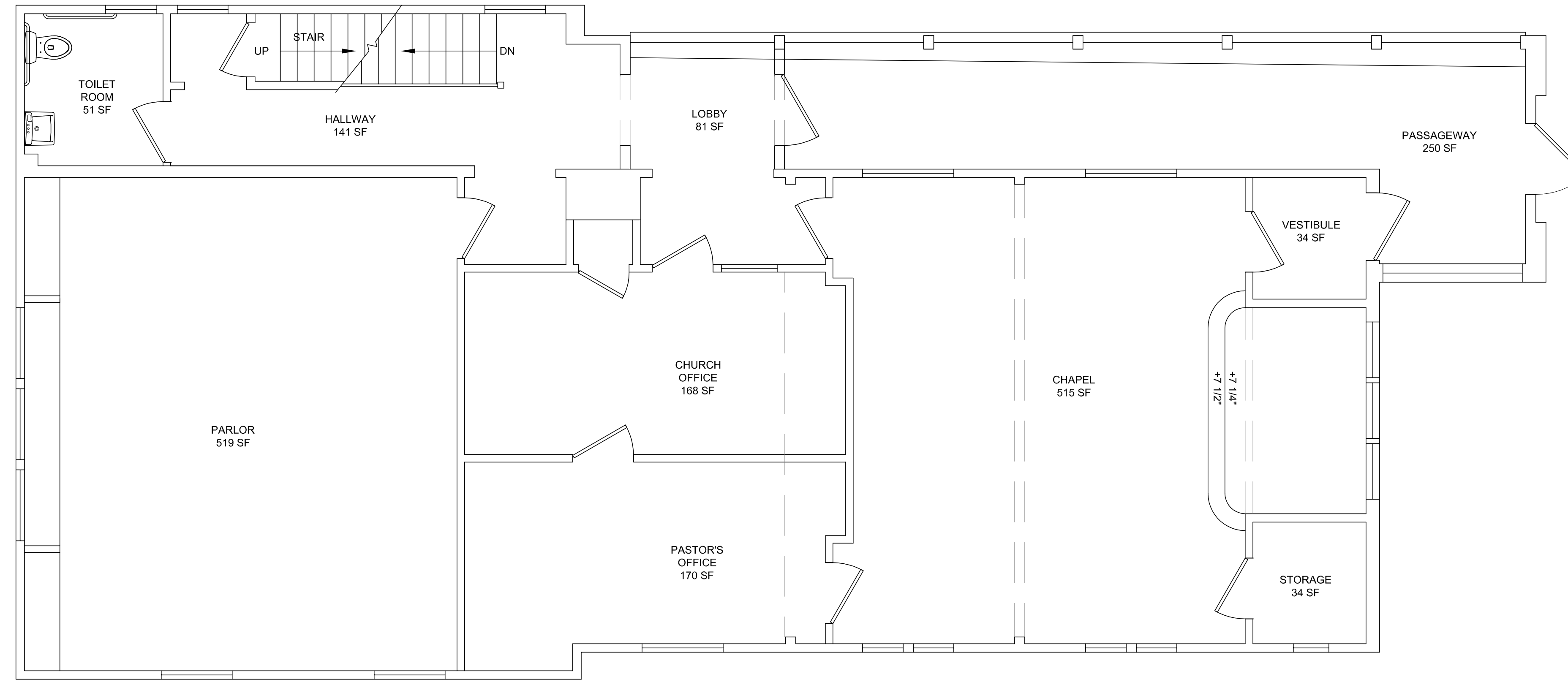
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EX2 X REF: REFERENCE

1/4" = 1'-0"



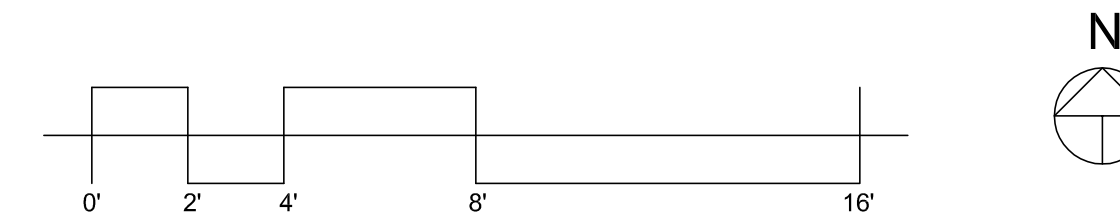
1 EXISTING BASEMENT PLAN

EX3 X REF:



2 EXISTING FIRST FLOOR PLAN

EX3 X REF:



TITLE: CHAPEL - EXISTING FIRST FLOOR AND BASEMENT PLANS

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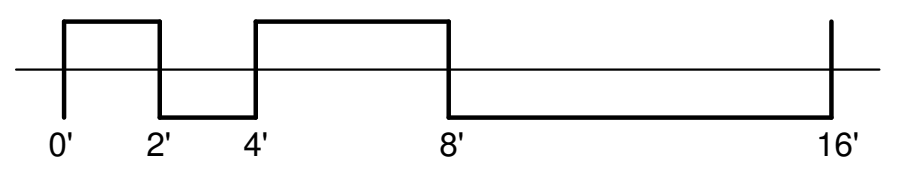
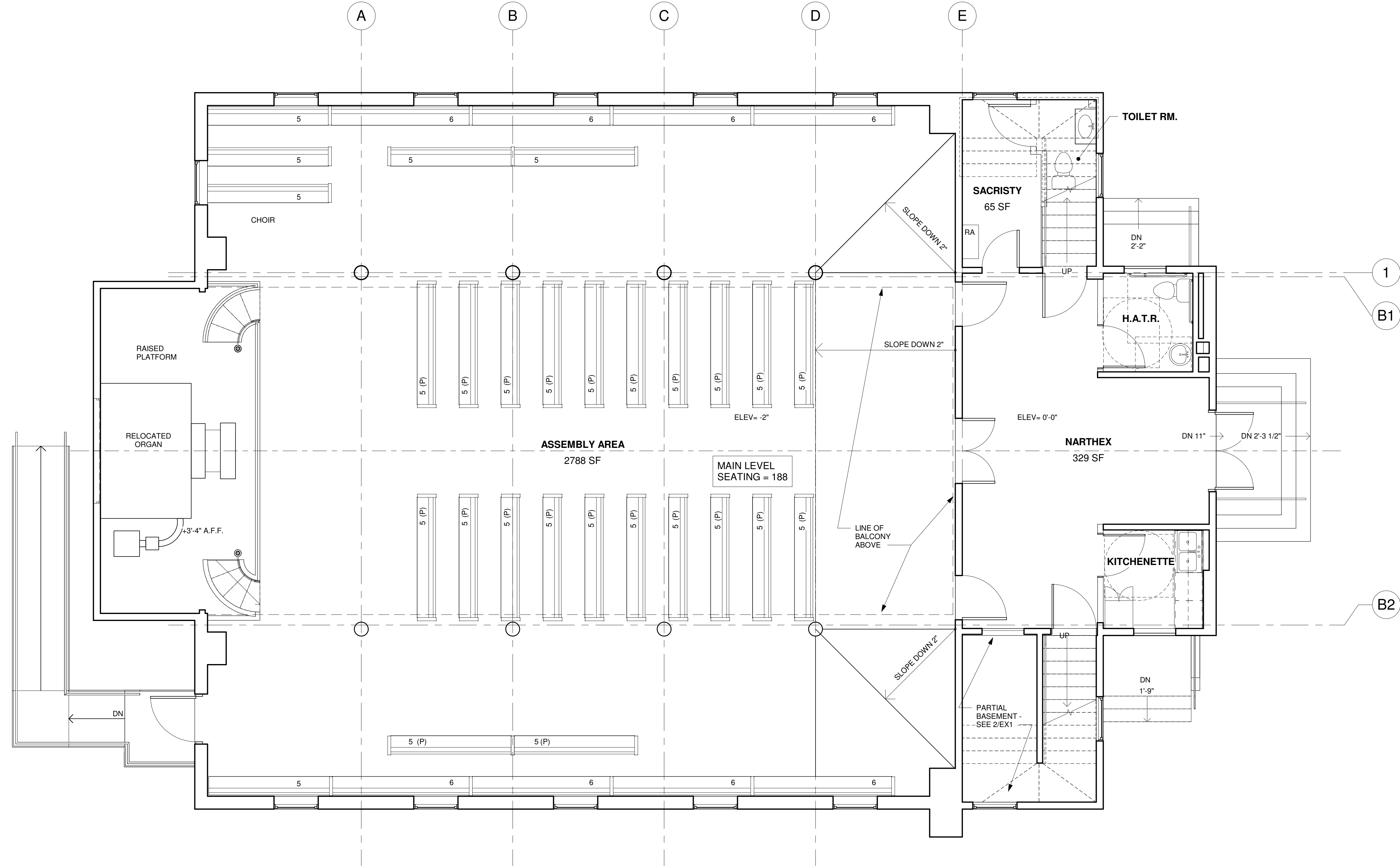
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APPENDIX C
DRAWINGS OF PROPOSED MASTER PLAN



TITLE: WEDDING LAYOUT

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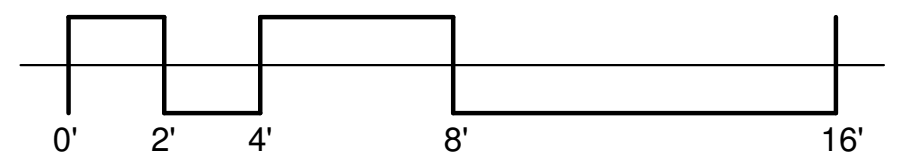
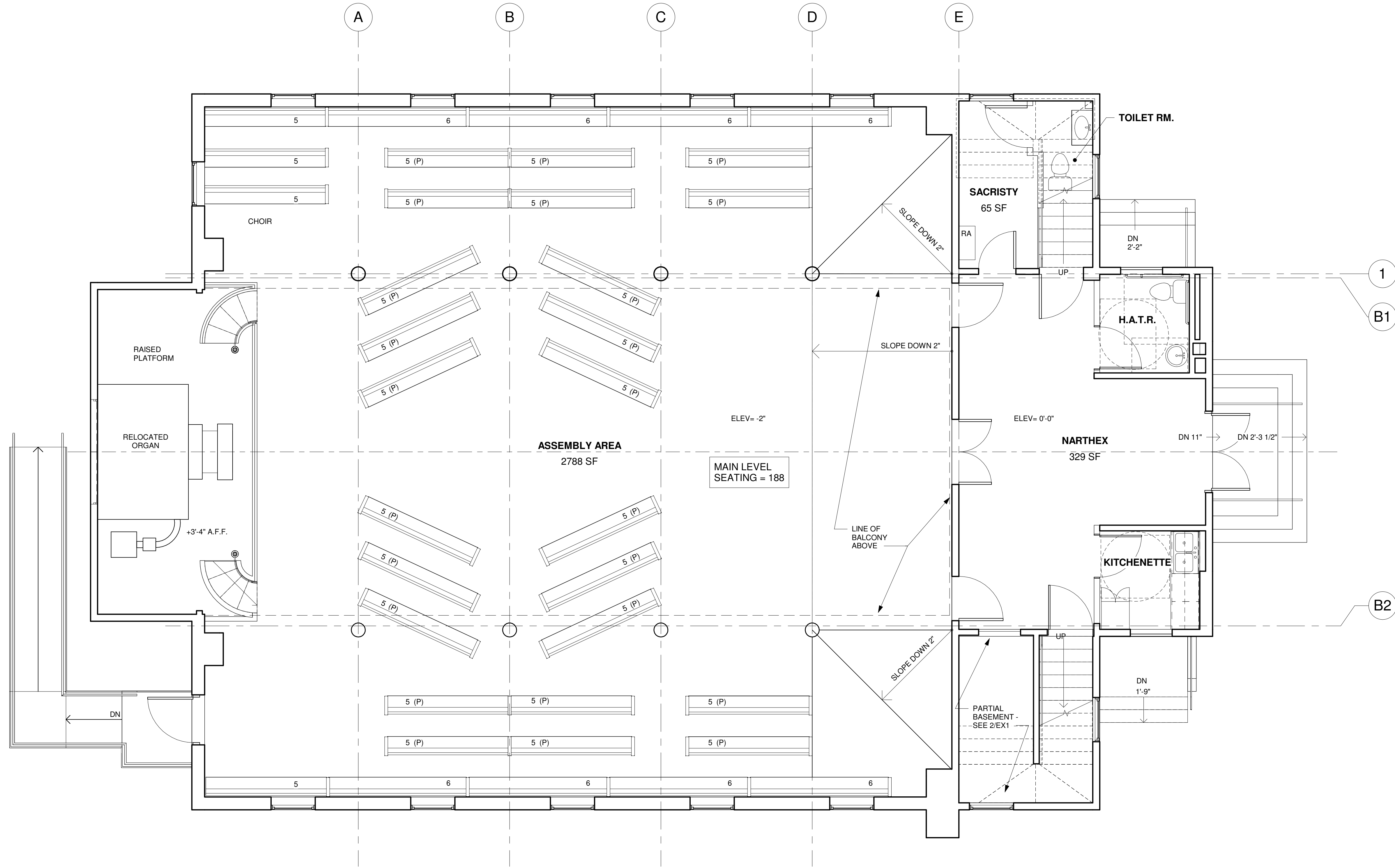
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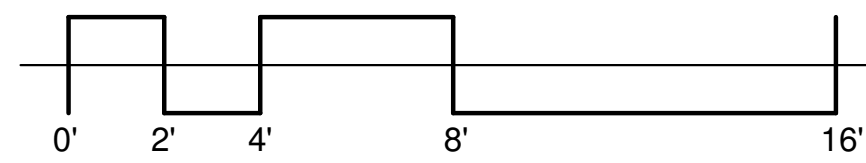
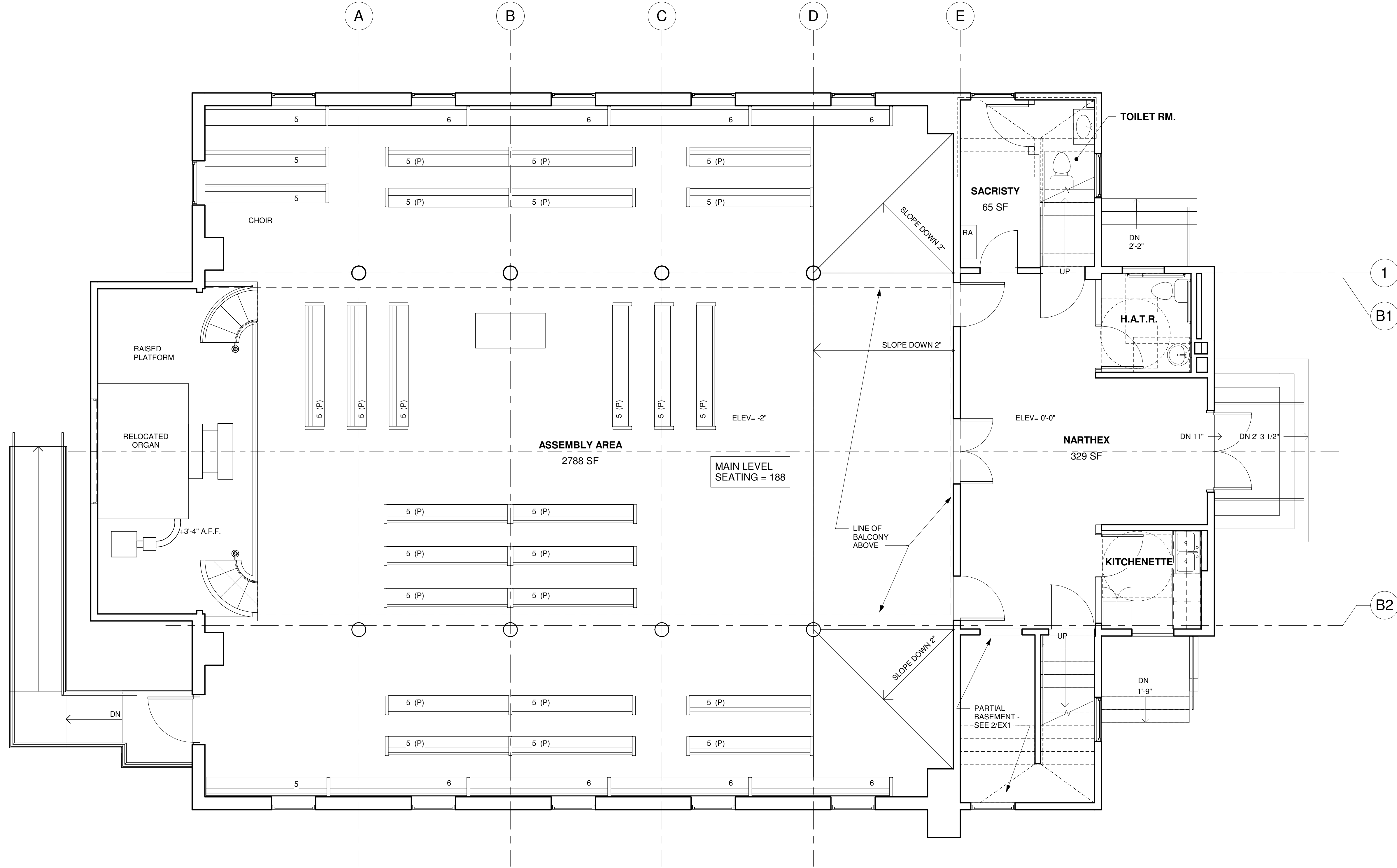
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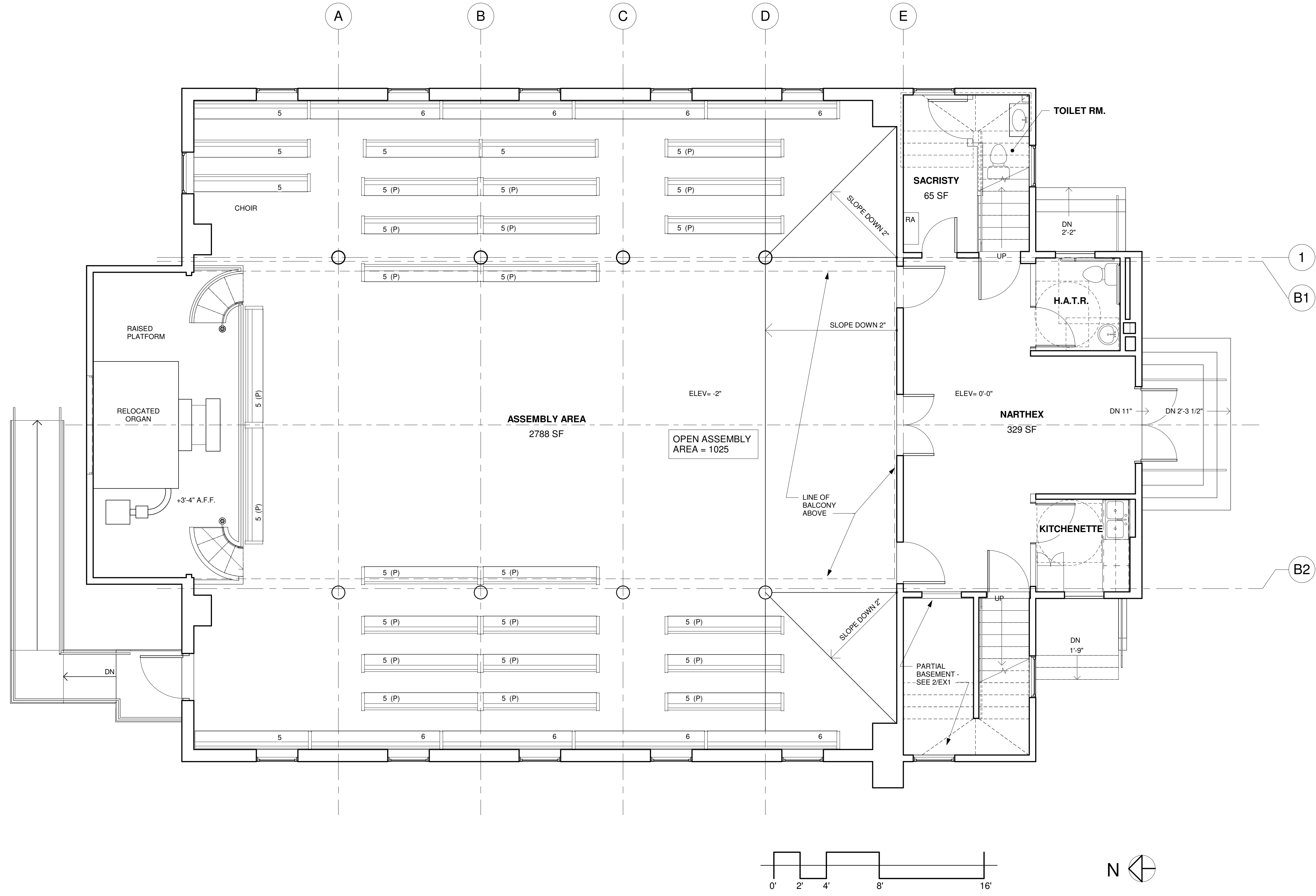
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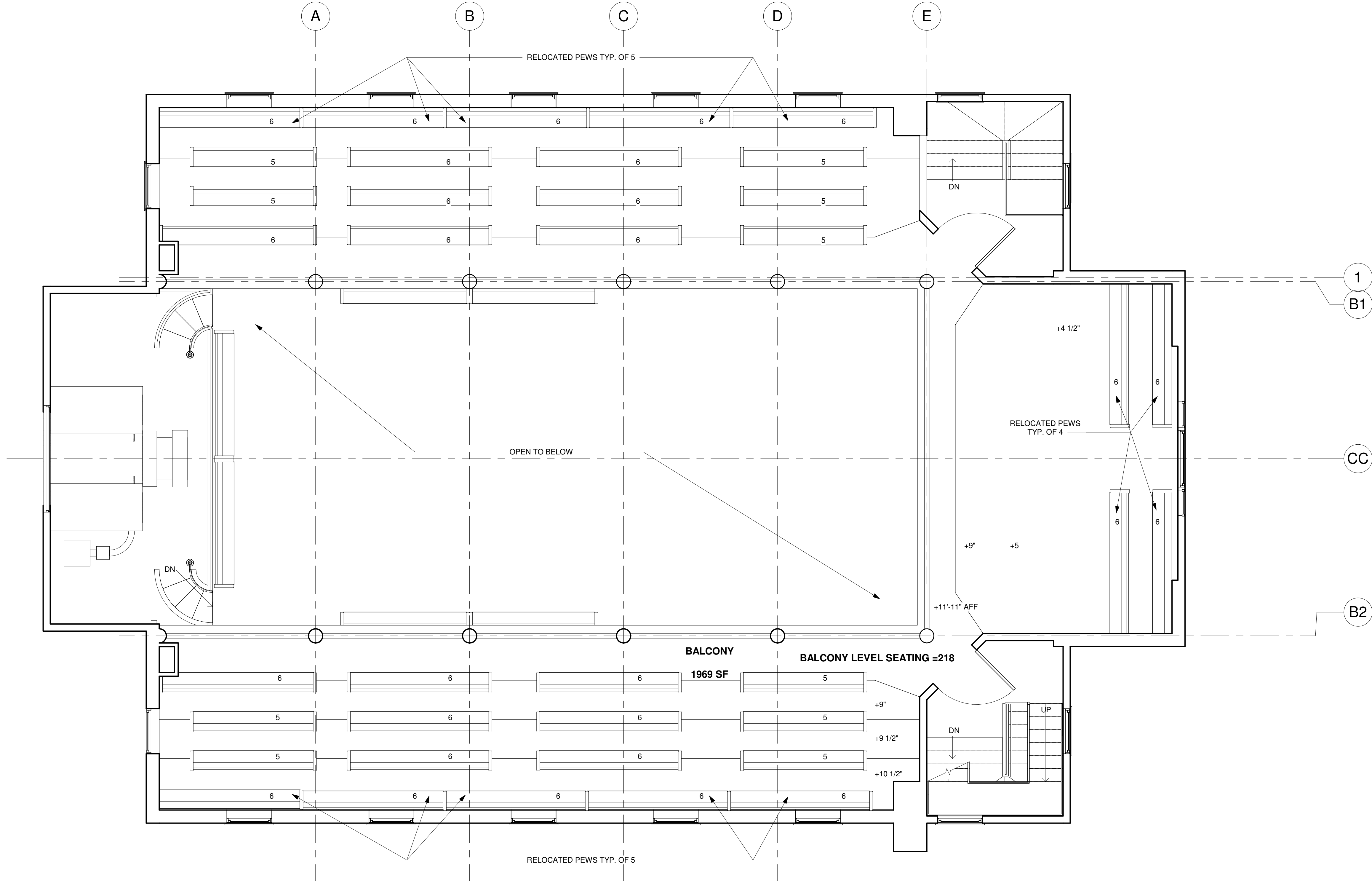
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TITLE: BALCONY LEVEL LAYOUT

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A5 OF

APPENDIX D

MEETINGHOUSE RENOVATION COST ESTIMATE

Meetinghouse Renovation Cost Estimate for Church on the Hill, Lenox, MA

CHURCH ON THE HILL
LENOX, MA
CONCEPT ESTIMATE

S U M M A R Y	TOTAL COST	COMMENTS
DIVISION 2 - DEMOLITION	\$10,000	Interior & exterior, as required for renovations
DIVISION 3 - CONCRETE	\$5,000	Foundations for steps and ramp
DIVISION 4 - MASONRY	\$12,000	Make marble entry steps code-compliant
DIVISION 5 - METALS	\$5,000	New railings for entry stair and ramp
DIVISION 6 - WOOD AND PLASTICS	\$28,000	Carpentry work, including pews
DIVISION 8 - OPENINGS	\$18,000	New interior & exterior doors
DIVISION 9 - FINISHES	\$36,000	Includes new hardwood flooring throughout
DIVISION 23 - PLUMBING & HVAC	\$32,000	New plumbing, radiant heat and A/C
DIVISION 26 - ELECTRICAL	<u>\$3,000</u>	As required for new construction
SUB-TOTAL	\$149,000	
GENERAL CONDITIONS	20% <u>\$30,000</u>	
SUB-TOTAL	\$179,000	
OVERHEAD AND PROFIT	20% <u>\$36,000</u>	
SUB-TOTAL	\$215,000	
DESIGN CONTINGENCY	20% <u>\$43,000</u>	
TOTAL CONSTRUCTION BUDGET	\$258,000	