

**First Unitarian Universalist Society in Newton
Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes**

Tuesday, February 28, 2023
Virtual Zoom, 7:00-9:00 P.M.

Staff

Parisa Parsa, Interim Minister
Devin Shmueli, DRE

Board Members

Stephanie Kendall
Hattie Kerwin Derrick
Joe Klinman (Youth)
Chris Krebs
RoseAnn Murray
Barbara Schmitt
Demie Stathoplos

Clerk: Wendy Schwartz

Visitor: Karen Bottar (Ops Council)

Welcoming, Chalice lighting & Covenant Stephanie

Check in

Those present were invited to share one, two or three words on how each person is doing & the meeting welcomed Wendy Schwartz as clerk for tonight. Barbara is working with Kit on completing the FUUSN tapestry with squares created during last year's fundraiser. It will be hung in the Parish Hall for coffee hour, Sunday, March 5th.

Procedural

- Vote to approve BOT meeting minutes for January 2023. Chris moved, Stephanie seconded. Approved.
- Vote to approve Julia Huston as GA rep for FUUSN: So far she's the only rep. Chris moved, Barbara seconded. Approved.
- Vote to approve a new member: Kristina Ashby. Demie moved, RoseAnn seconded. Approved.

Members of the congregation we want to recognize and thank were identified.

- Barbara suggested the breakfast crew, Chris Dame, et. al.
- Barbara also suggested Services Auction folks, including Pat Rohan, Christine Lookner, Karen Bottar, Bill Horne, Stephanie Kendall.
- Demie said Kieran Reynolds went up on the roof above the chapel to check on a leak and arranged to get it fixed.

Update on Staff and Congregational Activities

Review of current staff and congregational responses that are relevant for the Board's responsibilities and activities:

Parisa:

- Progress on the revised **website** continues: web page designs, populating the pages, files being set up and distributed to folks who are responsible for content. She has a proposal from an organization that can help maximize the use of Google Work Space. It can feature centralized storage and upkeep. She would like to have it completed during her tenure at FUUSN. It will enable tracking membership, RE, the stewardship drive, etc. It's a long-term project.
- The Personnel Policy Committee has been re-energized, thanks to Demie. It now includes John Atkins and Betty Lenex. Plus, Lila McCain will consult but not serve as a member of the committee.
- Work continues on figuring out next steps with FUUSN's history & storytelling project and what to do with the ministers' portraits that had been taken down. Roseanne, Hattie and Naomi Olsen have helped quite a bit with this.
- This Sunday (March 5th) will launch the stewardship drive. Barbara Niles, Kate Thibeault & Dan Stoll are this year's campaign leaders.
- FUUSN is also getting ready for Anne Watson Born's sabbatical. Music Sunday on March 26th is her final Sunday. She has April through June off.

Devin:

- February was a busy month in the religious exploration program. A focus was on the unhoused community. Representatives of that group came to RE. Gift bags were created and given to members of the community. Valentine's Day meals were put together on February 12th and served on the 15th, to 90 people. A trip was taken to visit a shelter. Thanks to RoseAnn for helping to make it happen, along with Barbara Niles, Meg Holland, Julia Wolfe and Melissa Kogut.
- Devin also met with the pledge drive people. There will be a 3-part series with RE's own pledge drive party on March 26th. The theme for March is Belonging. The focus will be on understanding that pledging time, talent and/or treasure is part of what it means to be a member. The pledge drive team will help with RE efforts.
- Devin has also been connecting with newcomers.
- This past Sunday, there were four baby & toddler kids. He hired a caregiver for that group.

Update on OPs Council Meeting: Chris Krebs

- Laurel Farnsworth presented the B&G budget request for the upcoming fiscal year. It was reviewed in detail.
- Bob Persons solicited a solar panel installation proposal for the FUUSN roof and presented the proposal to Ops. Discussion included cost, value and payback aspects. It was also asked if FUUSN could put a solar roof over the parking lot & what trade-offs might arise. Could FUUSN recoup the costs via lowering future energy expenses? Also Karen B. shared information about the construction project to add a lower-level entry to the building.

- Demie commented about solar panel options and that there's lots to consider. One place for the panels is the flat part on the rubber roof, now leaking. Puncturing it to put panels on is an issue.
- Demie mentioned that FUUSN has until 3/1 to advise Parisa Parsa that the Board will renew her contract. Barbara moved. Demie seconded. Approved renewal of Parisa Parsa's contract.
- Parisa asked if she will get an official follow-up. The Board vote makes it official. Barbara can provide a certificate if needed.

Strategic

Demie reported that next year's Pledge Drive team will be Michael Costello, John Dundon and Kit Ryan. She added that it has been suggested that maybe a 4th person should be added to the team. The current fundraising team is working very hard.

Strategic

Barbara: The construction project would create an exterior entry to the basement level. Such an entry would be necessary in order to rent that space. A bid for the work came in at \$475K+. Laurel met with a contractor. The contractor recommended getting someone to do a soil survey to determine what's needed for underlying support. The estimate for the study is around \$4K. Doing such a study could save up to \$100K, if it helps prevent over-engineering.

Barbara: FUUSN is not able to pay for the project out of existing funds (\$200K). Laurel thinks a rent stream on basement space could be around \$30-40K /year. If so, the payback period for a \$475K price tag would be 17 years. If the cost is \$300K, payback would be around 13.3 years. Preference would be for a 10-year payback, but such a project does add long-term value to building.

Demie: The above costs don't include bathrooms which would need to be put in, as well as finishing, so the payback would actually be longer. Laurel had hoped to get the external entrance done this summer to avoid re-digging in the future for the parking lot and there are fewer people in the building during summer.

Demie: Does it make sense to have the soil study done? This could impact a decision on whether to try to move forward, and it would provide useful information for the parking lot work. A study could reveal that less structural work may be needed for the entryway.

Stephanie: Will the parking lot work require the soil study be done anyway?

Barb: It's not clear a soil study would need to be done for the parking lot alone.

Demie: The project continues to be an element in the long-term survival of the congregation. The building is an important asset, and investment in it would be helpful for the long term.

RoseAnn: Can we bundle the 2 projects?

Barb: It's logical to bundle the financing, even if the work is done in phases. The foundation would need to be done first.

Demie: Inside construction could be done at a later date.

The Board agreed that it was prudent to move ahead with the soil study.

Next Steps on Values & History Project

- RoseAnn: We are trying to glean threads from the survey and will meet Thursday. Butcher block paper for comments was up but was taken down and is now in the membership office.
- Demie: At the steering committee meeting, it was proposed to have a small committee sort through the suggestions for what to do with the ministers' pictures. Laurel & Christine Lookner agreed. Maybe another person who is "invested" in the project should be included.
- Parisa: The work should start soon to honor RJM's purpose in taking down the portraits, as well as members' desire to honor ministers who have served FUUSN over the years. It is possible to come up with a proposal. More thinking is needed on how to communicate all that's happened since the portraits came down and how to regroup from that. It's a sequence of steps.
- RoseAnn: Some families felt they hadn't been included in the discussion despite efforts. We need to close the loop on that.
- Devin S. is willing to work with the subcommittee on it. Parisa will invite him to the Thursday meeting.
- Hattie: We need representation on the subcommittee to be open-minded and communicate carefully.

Next Steps on Settled Minister Search Committee Development

- Stephanie: Three information sessions have been scheduled and a notice has been distributed. A draft of a PowerPoint presentation is done. The 1st session is tomorrow evening, March 1st. A Google Form will go live tomorrow (3/1). We recommend people attend an info session before suggesting members to serve on the Search Committee. All sessions are before March 15, the deadline for proposing committee members. The deadline can be extended if they don't have enough recommendations. A list of questions has been generated for people interested in serving on the team.
- Chris: We will also send a mailing that Fran will help get out by the end of the week. This is an opportunity to contribute that doesn't involve a great deal of time but will have significant impact.
- Parisa will talk with Chris and Stephanie offline about some ideas.

Miscellaneous points:

- Demie talked with Tom Bean, who suggested that 1 person on the Search Committee go on the Board the first year of the new minister's term; another Search Committee member should go on the Board in the second year, so the minister has a Board member who was on the Search Committee in a leadership role as they establish themselves at FUUSN.
- Chris has a hesitation, that this may be asking for too much of a time commitment: i.e., being on the committee + being on the Board.
- Parisa suggests waiting to propose that until the Search Committee is well under way, vs. front-loading it to members of the Search Committee.
- RoseAnn: The time commitment seems unclear for being on the Search Committee.
- Stephanie: We can revise the wording so it's a total of 40 hours for the total committee vs. 40 hours for each person.

Update on Social Action Committee: Demie

Demie: Parisa and Demie met with Peter Smith & Judy Friedman, acting co-chairs. They talked about the history of the SAC and the effect of the pandemic on recent efforts and meetings. Individual groups continued their work, but whole committee meetings have not been happening during the pandemic, so there's less transparency on the allocation of social action funds. We will meet within the next couple of weeks with chairs of subgroups to discuss a more broadly inclusive process and clarify how to move forward and what issues to address. In particular, we want to engage with project leaders who've been active in the communities. This is part of an effort to re-envision the Social Action committee.

Update on Term Limits Conversation with congregation

By-law revisions under consideration for this year [FUUSN By-Laws notes 20221118.docx](#)

- Demie: The proposed by-laws revision to create term limits is part of an overall plan to develop a leadership pipeline and enhance sustainability and resilience. Some positions are hard to fill, e.g., treasurer and Laurel's leadership on B&G. The proposal asks us to explore the trade-off in term limits vs. continuity of experience. The goal is to develop a deep bench. It is hard to step into a role that someone else has filled for a long time. Limits will help people turn over vs. continuing because we can't find anyone to take on the role. There seems to be diverse opinions on the issue and how to create pipelines.
- Parisa: Sunday's meeting included a question about what problems are we trying to solve and do term limits solve the problems? It seemed the sense of the group was not necessarily to have hard and fast term limits. One long-term moderator felt that a certain number of years should be enough, and it's not beneficial to have a single person without alternative options.
- Hattie: We should have job descriptions. Clarify the end result but not necessarily require doing it the same way others have done it.
- Parisa: even with people who are ready to step out of their roles, if they've had them for a long time, they have sensitivities about how a new person might do things; their identity is wrapped up in those roles vs. what's good for FUUSN. We should honor and celebrate what they've done but also allow for new ways to do things. This would provide learning and growth as an organization, which is held back to some degree by not having new people. It may be easier for someone to let go of a role if they know in advance there's a time limit.
- Devin: People in long-term roles can feel that "this is how we've always done it" so it should continue that way. This can be a challenge.
- Demie: The budget drive team has been documenting their processes, so they can be clear to others. We need templates that others can use.

Discussion - Developing Overarching Structure for Communications

- Demie: Parisa raised questions about how FUUSN communication occurs, what's the infrastructure, etc.
- Parisa: How does FUUSN see its mission, and how do subsets view how their participation supports the mission? What's the purpose of each committee? This should be what drives process and outcomes. Are there functions or work that are not helping to fulfill the

mission? Are there legacies that may no longer be necessary. It's wonderful to have a permission-giving culture but do they support the mission?

- Demie: The question of mission clarity has been active for a while.
- Chris said, it's been a recurring theme since he's been on the Board. Clarify what the mission is and what is the vision for fulfilling the mission. Pressing and/or short-term issues have prevented reaching closure. Chris feels the purpose is vague: "encourage spiritual growth in ourselves and our children." The Board should instigate and steer the process.
- Parisa: What are the purposes of the different communications channels? Who's in charge of them? How are they effective in communicating and supporting the mission? The FUUSN list has a lot of noise. Listserv is an outdated form of communication. The Business List isn't monitored for intervention. Newcomers sign up for the Business List and may get some screed from someone. There needs to be some responsibility for what is posted.
- Demie: People have gotten off lists because they don't want to hear people ranting. It's a lack of respect for inherent worth & dignity in tone and content. Maybe the FUUSN list doesn't reflect the values we espouse.
- Stephanie agreed with comments so far. We can get mired in a discussion about mission. It is important to focus on communication, especially related to the new website. We need a place where official announcements are posted by the Board and the minister; not a place for discussion. It should be an official channel, where leadership pushes out what they want people to know, as well as a channel for committees. The website can push out notifications or let folks read on their own time.
- Parisa: It will be a culture change to move to a website more often for canonical information, a place to post accurate information about events, contacts. Activate Realm as an internal communication site. Heather [Beasley]'s survey of about a year ago showed that few members used the website for information; they find it cumbersome.
- Demie: The communications team is part of the Membership Committee.
- Parisa: The governance structure calls for a Membership Communications Committee that reports to membership rather than to Ops or the Board. A communications committee should report to the Board or Ops. Day to day management of communications should be done by staff. Create policies for staff to follow, such as who do you go to for crisis management? Specify who on staff handles aspects of communication, and the staffer gets their marching orders from the policies.
- Stephanie asked when we want to execute changes to the communications strategy? She's interested in participating after the Search Committee selection process is done, i.e. summer.
- Parisa proposed having a part time communications and technology staff member. She is gathering resources and will share with the Board at a future date.
- Demie: A member (Dede Vittori) forwarded the UUA idea of a larger community of communities.

- Hattie: other places of worship are also looking for part-time people to handle communications. Maybe they could join resources and share a qualified person.
- Parisa: Laurel also suggested she was looking forward to adding a part-time person.
- Barbara pointed out that the building is FUUSN's biggest asset and also its biggest liability. It's a money pit and you can't sell it. We need to focus on how to make building work, because we don't really have other options.

Next meeting: Tuesday March 28th, 7pm

Respectfully submitted,
Wendy Schwartz

Link to folder for Board Documents for FY2023:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1T33oIlNrebQci_OU0rFW9kLKIYOWuLby