

First Unitarian Society in Newton
Annual Meeting - Minutes
June 8, 2014, 12:30, Parish Hall
Moderator – Bill Horne
Clerk for the Meeting – Wendy Schwartz

The meeting was called to order at 12:30 by Moderator Bill Horne, Esq.

Rev. Meghan Cefalu opened with the “Invocation for an Annual Meeting” by Heather Janules from the FUSN gray hymnal.

Approval of Minutes of 2013 Annual Meeting

Bill Horne asked if there were any corrections to last year’s Annual Meeting minutes. Several were provided.

On page 3, Eric should be Eric Olson.

On page 4, the first Eric should be Eric Riak. In the next paragraph, it should be Eric Olson.

The author of the opening reading last year was corrected to W. E. B DuBois.

Bev Droz moved that the 2013 minutes with changes be approved. Seconded. Passed.

Committee Reports

Jud Leonard provided copies of the full Ministerial Review Committee report. The executive summary was read aloud. The full report is also on the FUSN website.

The report includes three major sections:

1. Congregational input covered areas such as sermons; leadership /administrative /governance (pleased); pastoral care. There was consistent praise overall of the minister and also of how the congregation as a whole ministers to each other. There was not a lot of criticism.
2. Staff input indicated they felt they were working well together. They also felt that the leadership of FUSN was working well.
3. Erin’s self-assessment: One of her goals has been for congregational life to be better integrated; committees and groups seem to be like “silos,” and she would like them to communicate with each other more. Erin also acknowledged that the change from Small Group Ministries to Chalice Circles could have been handled better. Regarding staff, she mentioned that it takes time to insure all are working well together.

For the future, Erin feels the congregation needs to work together on how FUSN relates to and looks at the world.

Operations Council: Susan Bartlett

Susan thanked all members of the Ops Council, the ministers, committee chairs and members for their work over the past year.

She provided a special thank-you to Alan Cody as retiring treasurer. [Applause.]

Sue Skoler expressed appreciation to Susan Bartlett for sending out the proposed budget in advance.

Charlie Watts, outgoing Board Chair, thanked all members of this year's Board.

In a very rich and active year, he mentioned just a sample of Board projects:

A strategic planning session in the fall.

A joint session with the Ops Council in spring, which was a visioning session, included discussion of FUSN growth, inclusiveness and what that means, the life cycle of participation in FUSN, such as those who take part only while their children are in Religious Education, etc.

The Board also approved the charter for the Financial Oversight Committee, which is responsible for financial oversight.

Charlie also thanked Barbara Deck, Jonathan Lilienfeld and Sharon Sisskind for their leadership of this year's Annual Budget Drive. He said the "Thank UU" theme worked well. Although the drive didn't hit the exact targeted amount, there was a high level of participation. Charlie recognized the ABD trio with flowers and gifts.

On the table for next year is a review of how FUSN does fundraising.

He thanked Cathy Morocco & Ann Woodbury and other member of ministerial review committee, who collected and processed the data.

Charlie said the Board dealt well with staff changes. Rev. Meghan Cefalu was warmly welcomed as Assistant Minister in January. Near year's end, it was a challenge to work around the early departure for personal reasons of Religious Education Director, Perry Montrose.

Kim Shanks of the Religious Education Council talked about recent hires. Rowan Van Ness was hired as acting director of RE. She is a lifelong UU, ran a Coming of Age program at First Parish in Cambridge and has been a middle school teacher. She was at FUSN today.

Mandy Beal was hired as the new Youth Programs coordinator. She is studying to be a minister at Andover Theological Seminary in Newton.

Charlie presented flowers and gift to Kim Shanks in appreciation of her work on the RE Council.

Charlie said that, last year, a Disruptive Behavior Policy was approved. In addition, plans for increasing FUSN's skill in dealing with situations of conflict is a work in progress and will continue next year.

On another topic, Charlie said that a preliminary meeting had been held to discuss the concept of changing the name of the First Unitarian Society in Newton to add the other U - Universalist. This topic had been raised at the 2013 Annual Meeting by Allan Hartman, and a motion had been approved at that meeting to look into the possibility. There was no specific action taken, and follow up will continue next year.

Bill asked if any other committee wished to present its report live vs. the written report in the Annual Meeting booklet. No one came forward.

Nominations:

Shawn Konary presented the slate of candidates for 2014-2015. *[Ed: I will add the slate later!]*

Bill asked for additional nominations. None came from the floor. Nominations were closed. He requested a motion that would ask the clerk to cast a single vote for the full ballot. The motion was made, seconded and unanimously approved.

Bobbie Sproat, incoming Board Chair, thanked the three departing Board Members: Ann Woodbury, Strom Thacker and Charlie Watts. She also thanked Charlie, who is leaving after 2 years as a Board member, as he is moving away from Newton. She gave him flowers, a card and a gift certificate. [Applause.]

Brian Gill, co-chair of Finance Committee, presented the Budget for FY 2014-2015. He thanked everyone involved in putting it together. FUSN's annual budget is +/- \$800,000. Most of the expense is for staff and Buildings & Grounds. About 75% of revenue comes from the congregation and events. The rest comes from rent and the endowment. The latter is less than 10%. This is a typical ratio from year to year. FUSN ended FY14 with a surplus. He explained how a projected \$39k deficit for FY14 could become a \$12k surplus through lower-than-expected expenditures.

For FY15, the committee anticipates increases in both revenue and expenses. The budget includes a 3% increase in staff salaries. Also, FY15 will be the first full year of the Assistant Minister's costs. For FY14, costs were for a half year.

The committee recommends taking a slightly higher draw from the endowment for the coming year, an amount that is still less than the endowment earnings.

Currently, there is a projected budget deficit in FY15 of \$55K. This reflects the strategic plan that hiring the Assistant Minister will help to grow the congregation. New membership will bring in more funds. It will take time, however, to reap the benefit of growth, which a second minister should help achieve.

Currently, there is \$164k in the bank - \$152k accumulated over the years + 12k this year - so the budget will be okay, even if there is a deficit of \$55K. The general goal is to always have a full month of expenses in the bank. However, overall revenues need to increase.

Linda Morrison asked about renters at FUSN and having a balance of use by renters and for FUSNites. She would like to see a list of renters in the Annual Report. Brian pointed out that major tenants are listed in the budget, so are in the Annual Report.

Bill Horne said such a balance is an operations issue, so she could consult with the Operations Council on this valid issue.

Allan Hartman asked about the potential for a capital campaign: When will it be and how will it work? Charlie said that a concern is not to have it too soon. 2014-2015 will likely be a planning year. In 2015-2016, FUSN could do annual and capital campaigns as one combined effort.

Catherine Willinger expressed concern about potential for fire damage at FUSN and asked if a sprinkler system could be installed.

Laurel Farnsworth, Chair of Buildings and Grounds, said FUSN will never be able to do this out of the operating budget, because the cost would be around \$1 million. FUSN could do a section at a time. It could cost \$500k to do just the sanctuary, so we would have to do this in a capital campaign. She said other issues have been more pressing in the past capital campaigns, such as roof and other repairs, and we should talk about whether it should be in the next capital campaign.

FUSN does have a fire suppression system over the kitchen stove now. Plus the fully fire-alarmed building automatically calls the fire dept, and it is checked regularly.

Judy Zacek asked what ways there are to increase revenues. Brian said the answer is that the congregation needs to grow. Last year, the congregation had approved that strategy and increased staff size toward that goal.

Bill requested a motion to approve the budget. Jud Leonard moved; several seconds. Approved unanimously.

Laurel Farnsworth spoke about the status of the Green Sanctuary process. After years of preparation, FUSN is ready to apply for official UUA designation. A congregational vote is required to do so. Allan Hartman asked if, by approving this, FUSN is locked into any commitments it doesn't already have. Laurel said there are no required specific commitments. Each congregation takes its own steps to continue the path.

Eric Olson expressed appreciation for Carrie van der Laan's extensive work on the Green Sanctuary Committee. [Applause.]

FUSN has two certifications available: welcoming congregation & green sanctuary.

The process has pushed FUSN to be more engaged in environmental issues and review processes.

Barney Freiberg-Dale expressed pride and gratitude for all of the Green Sanctuary leadership.

[Applause.]

Laurel moved to approve FUSN's application as an official UUA Green Sanctuary. Seconded.

Unanimous approval.

Eric Olson credited others on the committee and those involved in FUSN finances Board of Investment for their help with the Divestment Study. This involved looking into whether FUSN's endowment invests in companies that are involved in fossil fuels and whether FUSN might divest from such investments.

Background: The UUA General Assembly held a vote in 2013 on an Action of Immediate Witness, requesting delegates to begin congregation-wide discussions on divestment from investments in fossil fuels. He said it is important to recognize that FUSN did so.

Conversations on the issue continue. Eric had sent a report about why they are not recommending to divest at this time but that we need to keep looking at the issue and reducing carbon emissions in other ways.

Eileen Kurkosky expressed disappointment at first that FUSN had decided not to divest. But then she did some research on her own and agrees that not divesting is the right decision for now, because many funds

that say they are “green” are involved somewhat in fossil fuels. She encourages each of us to take individual action toward being “green.”

Tim Wells said he is disappointed that FUSN will not take steps to divest. He is disappointed in the UUA and feels it should support initiatives. He asked what we can do to encourage the UUA to be more proactive in terms of policy and action.

Linda Morrison pointed out that the UUA has given up 25 Beacon Street and moved to a more fuel and energy efficient location.

Eric said the GS committee will continue to meet and promote a green economy. The discussion is not over. There’s a growing consensus in the investment community that there is benefit to creating diverse, safe, green investments.

The UUA is currently in discussion about divesting their pooled investments. He will send a video of a panel of 7-8 people discussing this to the FUSN general list.

Shawn Konary points out that we are all customers of industries that provide fossil fuel products, and personal use is a major factor. We are all feeding in to the fossil fuel industry every day. He says it is not bad to invest in products we use and that not investing deprives you of the benefit of the products you use.

Eric points out that many fossil fuel industries are now campaigning to minimize climate change.

Randy Block asked about stockholder influence of such companies. Eric says, if you own a certain number of stocks individually, you can participate in shareholder meetings. If you invest in a mutual fund, you cannot participate. He recommends supporting President Obama’s new campaign on coal.

Mindy Scharlin requested having another forum on this topic at a later date. She moved to adjourn. Seconded. Passed. The meeting adjourned at 1:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Wendy Schwartz, Assistant Clerk