



Parish Board
Meeting Minutes
December 8, 2019

Present: Gene Thompson-Grove (chair), Karla Baehr (clerk), Ellen Blaney, Micaela Coady, Dave Demerjian, Steve Pratt-Otto, Charles Sandmel (treasurer), Bob Williamson

Absent: Janet Britcher (vice chair)

Staff Present: Rev Lisa Perry-Wood

Visitors: Sara Warren at 2:00 for presentation and discussion on the Brookline Schools Staff Children's Center (BSSCC) space renovation and rental proposal

Chair Gene Thompson-Grove called the meeting to order at 12:50pm.

We lit the chalice, listened to a reading shared by Rev Lisa, read our covenant and Ways of Being and danced together as this meeting's opportunity to "do something fun together".

Welcoming Visitors

In advance of this meeting, the Board had adopted via email and by consensus at the level of 4 ground rules to pilot at open Parish Board meetings:

1. Meetings of the First Parish Board are open to all those in the congregation who wish to attend.
2. We will open our proceedings with introductions of everyone in the room.
3. The main business of the meeting is the agenda set by the board.
4. At the end of each agenda topic or each hour, as decided by the board chair or facilitating board member, guests will have the opportunity to comment and ask questions.
5. The board chair or facilitating board member will decide if guest comments and questions can be addressed in the meeting time, or if they constitute "new business" to be taken up at another designated time.

There were no visitors at the start of the meeting. Sara Warren arrived at 2:00 as a presenter on the BSSCC preschool space renovation and longterm rental proposal from the Space Use Task Force, which she chairs.

Congregational Finances

- **Operating Budget**

- Church Year (CY) 2018-2019 (July 2018 thru June 2019) Highlights
 - We fell short of the Canvass Goal of \$440,000 by \$53,790.
 - We offset that loss by
 - Exceeding estimated rental income budget of \$26,000 by \$18,413
 - Underspending expenses by \$26,043 primarily from not filling the custodial position for part of the year with Bob Williamson filling in)

- We wound up drawing less from our endowment than anticipated because of fortuitous timing of receipt of some income
- Church Year (CY) 2019-2020 (July 1, 2019 thru October 31, 2019)
 - We built the Church Year (CY) 2019-20 budget assuming pledge income equal to the actual amount pledged as of Annual Meeting in May 2019 which was \$386,000
 - Based on income and spending for the first four months into this church year, the Finance Committee sees no cause for concern, e.g., general repair costs have been higher than budgeted, but spending on custodial service has been lower than budgeted
 - **Next Steps:** Charles will make these refinements in format/information:
 - Add a column on left for full-year budget
 - Separate out Sunday income and spending for social action special collections
 - Break out Social Action/IJC/RJAC budgets from other committee budgets
- **Canvass (Annual Pledging Campaign)**
 - For Church Year 2019-20, 123 pledge units pledged, on average \$3,080; a canvass total of \$385,000 represents 62% of our total budget
 - FPB annual spending of \$625,000 represents \$5,000 in spending per pledging unit
 - Changes in pledges between CY 18-19 and 19-20:
 - Pledge units dropped by 22 from 145 to 123 (-18%)
 - Pledge totals dropped by \$49,000 from \$428,000 to \$379,000 (-13%)
 - Average pledge rose by \$130 to \$3,081
 - Median pledge dropped by \$100 to \$1,500
 - High pledge rose by \$4,000 to \$30,000
 - 2019-20 Canvass
 - Steve Pratt-Otto has recruited Whit Larrabee to co-chair the 2019-20 Canvass
 - Karla Baehr and Steve Pratt-Otto will join the Canvass team
 - **Next Step:** Micaela Coady will attempt to recruit someone from RE or consider joining the Canvass team herself
 - All other members of the Board agreed to be canvassers
- **Endowment**
 - The current value of our endowment is \$ 2,383,000
 - Why we invest through the UU Common Endowment Fund: Steve Pratt-Otto reviewed the rationale for the congregation's 2014 decision to switch its endowment to the UUA Common Endowment Fund: 1) access to the oversight of the UUA's Investment Committee and staff, 2) more sophisticated investment strategies than our endowment size would typically allow, 3) lower than typical costs of investment, 4) anyone can look at the website and see every security that the fund is invested in and all of their shareholder resolutions, and 5) UU CEF does all the screening. In addition, shareholder activism is an added benefit, e.g., the UU Common Fund proposed and followed through on the demand that McDonald's abandon use of Styrofoam
 - Fees charged by UUA Common Endowment Fund have been less than 1%
 - transparency. anyone can look at the website and see every security that the fund is invested in and all of their shareholder resolutions

- Withdrawals:
 - Because of withdrawals from our endowment beyond only its annual income, our endowment's value, corrected for inflation, has decreased by an estimated 23% since 2014 from what it would have been had we only drawn income.
 - For CY 2019-20, 26% of our operating budget, or \$162,000, is expected to be paid by withdrawals from the endowment
 - \$69,000 (11%) will come from the endowment's income
 - \$93,000 (15%) will come from the endowment's principal
 - Our bylaws require that withdrawals from principal require a 2/3 vote at a congregational meeting
 - The total estimated endowment withdrawal for CY 2019-20 is 7% of the current value of the endowment
 - The Finance Committee has been exploring the possibility of investing all or part of our endowment in the Roxbury-based Ujima Fund or another social justice/equity focused fund.
 - **Next Steps:** The Finance Committee was asked to:
 - Anticipate questions from the congregation during budget discussions about how endowment funds are allocated.
 - Help the congregation learn how the endowment came to be

Proposal for Renovation and Rental to BSSCC

- The Space Use Task Force (Sara Williams, Karla Baehr, Bob Williamson) presented its proposal, following through on the Parish Board's initial authorization in 2017 for it to pursue plans for cost-sharing RE space renovation and recruiting a preschool program to share the renovated space.
- Task Force members explained that information will be learned about the scope and cost of renovations that may lead it to return to the Board with additional requests.
- After discussion, the Board authorized the Space Use Task Force to negotiate an agreement on its behalf with the Brookline Schools Staff Children's Center (BSSCC) to renovate the first floor at its own expense, using a design approved by FPB, and use that space for its school-year toddler and childcare program, Monday – Friday from 7:30am to 4:30pm, commencing on or after August 2020; and to use Pierce Hall, if necessary, during all or part of the 2020-21 church year if the first floor space renovation is not complete.
- The Board achieved strong consensus to authorize negotiations (seven 5's and one 4)

Transfer of archives to Harvard

- The Board discussed whether to accept the recommendation of the Deacons and senior minister to transfer FPB archives to Harvard Divinity School Library; discussion focused on the response from HDSL to questions about privacy and access that Board members had raised in the Board's first discussion of this matter earlier in the fall.

- The Board concluded that the following restrictions should be stipulated: employment records will be sealed for 50 years from date of creation, and financial records will be sealed for 30 years from date of creation.
- The Board achieved strong consensus in approving the transfer (5 4's and 3 5's)
- **Next Steps:** On behalf of the Board, Clerk Karla Baehr will send a letter to Elizabeth Cousins thanking her for the archive preparation work she did over several years that made it possible for First Parish to approach Harvard and for Harvard to accept.

Debrief October 8th Shared Leadership and November 17th Congregational Meeting

- Members present for one or both meetings shared their perceptions:
 - The October 8th experience of structured conversations about organ restoration and driveway renovation supported people to challenge their own and others' assumptions in constructive ways; it helped lay the foundation for using the consensus decision-making process on November 17th.
 - Both meetings enabled participants to engage in more meaningful conversations than typical and to make decisions in ways that built community rather than weakening it.
- **Next Step:** Karla and Rev Lisa will recruit two or more members of the congregation (based on their engagement at the sessions, possibly Alfred Brownell, Elena Garofoli, Ann Gilmore, Megan Hansen, Jody Leader, and/or Margaret Williams) to join them in thinking through how a "congregational engagement committee" might plan a series of highly engaging sessions for the congregation to explore more deeply questions about the place of "money" in congregational life and values.

Minister's Report (attached)

Rev Lisa shared her Minister's Report and responded to questions; discussion focused on:

- Ways to address the unsustainable pressure being placed on our parish administrator by rental management.
- Endorsement of IJC's plan to secure volunteers to host and support housing in a private homes/apartment for an immigrant awaiting asylum.
- Plans to pilot an on-line auction as a fundraiser in the new year.

Approval of November Minutes

- Minutes for the Board meeting of November 5th were approved via email vote prior to this meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Karla Baehr, Clerk