

TUUCW
Board of Trustees Meeting Agenda
Wednesday, January 22, 2025

Present at the meeting:

Board & Minister: Beth Cliff, Felicia Keeton, Brian Lasher, Alexa Marshall, Ravi Sankar, Stapley Emberling, Anita Pfluger, Rev. Alan Taylor, Mark Corcoran (absent: Jon Gage)

Observers: Eileen Belmont, Chris Aquino, Chris Place

7:04 p.m. - Meeting was called to order by Beth Cliff

Anita Pfluger opening with a reflection. Folks checked in. None of the observers had specific issues to share.

Consent Agenda

- Minutes from 12/17/24 meeting – after Beth clarified an updated version is available in Dropbox that cleaned up formatting, the **motion passed unanimously**.
- Beth recognized the policy handbook update with the 2024-25 Ends.

Minister's Update and Discussion:

- Reverend Alan discussed the potential of using Realm and encouraged the Board to familiarize themselves with it. There was a discussion about the use of Realm, a robust platform for member data that many congregations use, and whether folks should opt-in or opt-out; it currently is a mix Felicia asked if the congregation had a confidentiality policy in force, and Beth agreed to find out. If there weren't one in place, Beth suggested that the staff might create one as they plan their REALM strategy.

Treasurer's Report and Discussion:

- Mark presented the Treasurer's report given Jon Gage's absence, stating that we are running ahead of budget, although acknowledging that the budget is variable month to month, especially during the first half of the church year. December is a good month for last minute pledge payments before the tax year ends, and this one was a good one. The holiday fundraiser exceeded its \$14,000 budgeted goal, although the announced goal was \$25k. Given that there was no fall fundraiser or money raised specifically for the minister's fund, we are a bit behind for the budgeted fundraisers through Dec 2024. The target for the annual pledge drive is still to be determined.
- Mark reported the loss of a contract for storing buses (\$9,000). This on top of the previously announced loss of \$11,000 from renting the Meeting House to the homeschooling program means a net loss of \$20K from these two revenue sources.
- There was discussion about the need for new revenue streams and strategies to address financial challenges. Solar panels could be one potential solution. Brian suggested chartering a committee to use solar panels as a test case for our governance process and decision making. While this is not a program for the Finance department per se, Steve Grathwohl, a prior Trustee and Treasurer, had told Beth he was interested in pursuing this idea should the Board be interested. Beth will follow up with him.

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- Mark updated the board on the issue of the remaining bus parking equipment and recommended Reverend Alan have the bus company remove it.

Active programs and workstreams:

In the event a written report or plan was submitted, the notes below reflect any discussion not captured in these documents which Board members reviewed prior to the meeting.

Linkage (Leads: Ravi and Anita)

- Reflections on the January 5th Bagels with the Board Article II meeting: The board discussed key takeaways from the session and reflected on the purpose and format of future Bagels with the Board meetings, with some advocating for open discussions without formally reporting back, while others felt a summary of the conversations should be shared with the congregation.

Who are we survey? A plan to understand why people engage with our congregation (Leads: Brian and Alexa)

- Alexa presented a plan to conduct a survey to gather data on the congregation's feelings about various aspects of the UU Westport congregation. The survey, which will be sent to the full congregation, will cover three key areas: how people feel about aspects of the congregation, how often they participate in them, and how important they are to them. The results will be used to guide focus areas and provide topics for deeper discussions in smaller groups. The survey is set to be launched shortly, with a two-to-three-week response period.

Forming a UU Operations Team

- Beth shared concerns about the workload of the minister, Alan, and proposed the formation of a "worker's brigade" of volunteers to help with various tasks. These tasks included painted lines on the parking lot, signage, website updates, and other discrete small projects. The idea was to alleviate some of the minister's responsibilities and allow him to focus on ministerial and pastoral responsibilities. The proposal is to pull a list of members together that Alan can call upon. This could be a fill in solution until the Governance committee work is complete. Beth proposed to wait until after the Feb 2 governance meeting, and then revisit the discussion in February, perhaps after talking with Ruth, Alan and other staff.

UU Website Refresh (Lead: Rev. Alan)

- The board discussed the need for a new website design to improve the congregation's online presence and attract new members. Alan is interviewing website designers with a budget of \$20,000 and landed on a preferred provider, EDUCO, whom he worked with at Unity Temple. He acknowledged that their ask was \$35K, and asked the Board to consider the extra spend.
- Brian made a motion to support EDUCO for a cost of \$35K, with the extra dollars coming from the Endowment Committee. The motion was seconded, but after discussion, tabled until more information could be gleaned about EDUCO and the possibilities of running much of the work

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inhouse, and of determining what kind of website (Cadillac, Chevy, Nova?) UU Westport needed. Brian agreed to follow up with Rev. Alan on understanding the EDUCO proposal better. Alan agreed to return in February with a more detailed proposal.

Minister search (Leads: Beth and Jon)

- Beth updated the board on our options for staffing a minister position following a discussion with Hilary Allen at the UUA. Key points:
 - The developmental minister program is likely not a good fit at this time. Alan confirmed this as well.
 - Supply and demand for ministers appears to have improved since two years ago. It should not be a disqualifying concern for us as we consider options.
 - We might want to consider creative options, like having Alan as our PT hybrid minister, combined with an on-site pastoral or operational staff member who sits in Westport
 - A contract minister in Westport with clearly defined responsibilities is also a possibility. There are ministers interested in short (1 or 2 year) interim assignments who could provide a steady presence in Westport New England can be a preferred location for many UU ministers given the proximity to Boston, and there are a number of UU ministers and churches in CT and the Metro-NYC area, which could bode well should that be an option to pursue.
- The board plans to continue congregational discussions, provide updated information, and gather feedback before deciding on how to proceed with staffing the minister role next year and beyond. It recognizes, however, that it needs to land on a decision at the latest, March 31, but preferably, before the end of February.
- **Motion** made by Beth to use time allocated for the February 2nd Bagels with the Board to collect member input on our minister search options. **The motion was passed unanimously.**
- It was also agreed, and Brian volunteered, to ask Right Relations (Linda) and COM (Monica) to help us with collecting input from the small groups (i.e., table conversations).

Large gift program wall plaques (Lead: Brian)

- Brian shared with the Board the history of the Large Gift program, and said it was ready to go “live.” The goal is to recognize significant donors to the congregation by placing a plaque with their names near a similar plaque that recognizes legacy donors.. There are initially eight individuals or families who have donated \$100,000 or more over the past decade. In addition, we’d like to recognize the original families who helped fund our building. The donor recognition program parameters were voted on in June 2023, so Brian was just reminding people. . He is taking steps to get permission to display the names in advance from the donors themselves. The Board agreed with these steps and encouraged Brian to proceed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION. The Board went into Executive Discussion to discuss some private personnel issues. This lasted 20 minutes.

New Business, Process Observer and Other Discussion

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- The board expressed their desire to have time to talk – someday, time permitting, - about events going on in Connecticut and with the Trump administration, and the role of UU Westport and how it should respond and be involved. The Board agreed that this is a topic of concern for us. Separately, it wanted to acknowledge the successful Share the Plate for Beardsley school – at over \$2K it is a sizeable gift of outreach support for one of our active social justice causes.
- As process observer, Brian observed that having papers prepared in advance with purpose, benefits, costs, and opinions written out made the discussions and decisions in the Board meetings themselves more focused and streamlined. The group agreed.

Check Out and Action Items

- February 1st Governance committee meeting
- Ravi and Anita to lead the February 2nd minister search session
- Alexa and Bria to launch the congregation survey. Alan will draft a cover letter.
- Brian to request support from Right Relations and COM on collecting member input on alternatives for the interim minister search.
- Brian to continue moving forward the donor recognition program. Alan will double check the records to find the families that contributed to our building.
- The board to continue discussions on using Realm, installing solar power panels and Article II.

Closing reflection by xxx

9:48 p.m. – Meeting adjourned