

## UU Westport Board Meeting Minutes

**Date:** September 30, 2025

**Time:** 7:01 p.m. – 9:25 p.m.

**Location:** Hybrid (in-person and remote)

### Attendees

#### Board & Minister:

Beth Cliff, Felicia Keeton, Mark Corcoran, Jon Gage, Dayle Brownstein, Julyen Norman, Sari Bodi, Alexa Marshall (remote), Rev. Carlton (joined at 7:19 p.m.), Ravi Sankar (joined at 8:16 p.m.)

#### Observers:

Allison Smith, Randy Burnham, Jim Cooper (joined at 7:42 p.m.), Ben (joined at 7:49 p.m.), Scott Seo (joined at 7:56 p.m.)

### Opening

- Meeting called to order by Beth Cliff at 7:01 p.m.
- Beth reminded attendees of observation protocols.
- Chalice lit.
- Reading shared by Mark.

### Consent Agenda

- **Motion:** Approve minutes from 6/17/25 (version 2).  
**Moved by:** Mark Corcoran  
**Seconded by:** Sari Bodi  
**Outcome:** Passed unanimously.

### Congregational Survey

- Alexa Marshall presented the survey results from our survey from last winter via a PowerPoint presentation. She noted there was a small sample size, and that this data comes from early in 2025.

She shared key findings:

1. Data identified a gap between favorability ("affinity") and importance of our minister and Sunday Services: there was a wide gap indicating some discontent/disconnect between the importance of these topics and how favorably they were currently valued. (high on importance and lower on affinity)

2. Music ministry (all inclusive) was the most favorable aspect of our congregation, followed by the building itself.
3. Faith Formation, Small Group Ministry and Connections show a relationship of higher affinity than importance, likely due to life stages of the congregants who filled out the survey
4. Financial stability is the largest concern amongst congregants
5. Sunday Services are the main anchor driving what makes our members feel most Unitarian Universalist, and what gives them the deepest sense of belonging
6. The sense of community, our people, the music and our commitment to social justice are key drivers of retention and why people stay with us.

The Board thanked Alexa for her work, and asked that she share this data with the minister search team, so they had it as they were working through their own analysis. And they encouraged her and the search team to figure out a way to get this data back out to the congregation since we had promised it to them.

### **Minister's Report – Rev. Carlton**

In his first report to the Board, Rev. Carlton reviewed thoughts on the first of our priority ends:

*1.1.1 Deepened spiritually in worship that guides them in individual and communal responses to the sacred; enriched through expanded religious understanding, and uplifted, sustained and transformed by living out UU principles.*

His report is on the website, and can be found [HERE](#). Rev. Carlton explained that with this first report, he had invited individual staff member's to share thoughts/report-outs. In the future he may embed their comments within his own report. Jon noted staff attended budget discussions due to concerns about potential changes to their positions. Beth emphasized that with these monthly reports, the Board was most interested in the way the work of the minister and staff were striving to meet the strategic ends for the year; they didn't need operational specifics so much as an overview demonstrating actions and plans taken against the ends. She commented, too, that regarding the 1.1.1 end, the Pastoral Care Associates played a strong role in deepening and supporting UU spirituality.

### **Treasurer's Report – Jon Gage**

Jon Gage shared financial documents, including his Treasurer's report and the monthly financials, including comparisons to budget, and to last year. In summary:

- Financials look strong for the first two months of the fiscal year.
- No current concerns.
- Endowment funds for construction do not require Board affirmation since they were already approved by the congregation
- Line of credit successfully renewed and secured
- Our required audit will begin in October.

**Operating Council Update:** Randy Burnham, Ben Chan, Jim Cooper, Scott Seo

The Operations Council, led by Ben Chan, shared their purpose and progress from having kicked off their work this summer. They reminded the Board that they were set up to free the minister and paid staff from having to do extensive operational work, allowing them to focus on ministerial and pastoral issues. (e.g., Worship, Social Justice, Spiritual Education, Outreach, Pastoral Care). The Ops Council will take on more work in the future, but for now, as part of Phase 1, they are tackling building and grounds issues, some of which need immediate attention since a building and grounds committee has not been around for a number of years. As time goes on they will pick up more workstreams and projects, as was originally envisioned.

The Board reviewed their plans and complemented and thanked the group for their volunteerism and efforts. They also raised the issue of how to handle things that were originally on the list of responsibilities that the Governance committee outlined, but that the current committee could not take on given their size and newness on the job. Who was going to spearhead those efforts, because that work still needed to get done? This would include work such as website rehaul, marketing, ongoing communication, and stewardship campaign and year 'round fundraising. In addition, there was discussion about how the Ops Council interfaced with paid staff - especially the Office Administrator, who reported to the minister but whose responsibilities including things that that the Ops Council was likely to oversee, especially, for example, in Buildings and Grounds.

The Board and Council agreed that more work needs to be done in this area, and they will work with Rev. Carlton and the Board to refine some of these issues further. Rev. Carlton emphasized need for clear communication and prioritization, and Beth stressed the urgency of finding volunteers for stewardship and fundraising before too much time went on.

The Ops Council shared their list of projects accomplished since they started, and they will continue to post identified projects to be taken on, and those that have been completed.

**Solar Power Discussion**

- Beth Cliff presented an overview of the solar situation: that we had applied for a grant with Eversource that could help our investment in solar; and that, as we had seen in the analysis over the summer, there was a modest payback; that the plan required an outlay of cash now that we would earn back later; and, the grant had not been approved yet. She added that construction must begin before Dec 31 to meet grant requirements, if we were to win it. Construction would be disruptive in the parking lot and physical plant for, likely, more than a year.
- There was discussion that pursuing this solar grant at this time would need congregational input and buy-in, and that we didn't have a lot of time to do that before Dec 31: we would have three months. The Board observed that trying to gain congregational approval through this fall, given all that is going on, including minister search cottage parties and meetings, and November and December holidays, might not be what we wanted to do right now.
- Rev. Carlton noted that we didn't have a list of major priorities in hand, and an understanding of where solar might fall on that list, given all that we want to do as a congregation this year. He also expressed concern about the potential visual impact of panels in the parking lot.
- Ravi Sankar suggested that in order to proceed, we would likely want to have 75% congregational support for an initiative of this size and timeframe: getting that in 3 months would be difficult.
- **Motion:** To table solar project until a later time.  
**Moved by:** Ravi Sankar  
**Seconded by:** Dayle Brownstein  
**Outcome:** Passed unanimously

### **Development Consultant – Brian Lasher**

- Consultant aims to revitalize philanthropic culture.
- Anticipated ROI: \$50K pledge increase and reactivation of legacy giving.
- Beth questioned whether this was going to be a consultant or "doer", since we've had varying degrees of success with consultants in the recent past. In the same vein, Sari asked about the success of a previous consultant: an issue was execution, and Brian indicated that this current hiring team was alerted to that pitfall and had learned from prior experience and wouldn't let it happen again. He maintained that the hiring team was very specific about the definition and requirements of the role, and is committed to making sure the consultant meets the specifications outlined.
- Rev. Carlton cautioned about staff capacity and the unintended consequences of adding new work onto their plates, with an additional hire generating work product.
- The Board thanked Brian for sharing the RFP with us, and gave its approval. As a final step, they asked that the hiring team determine to whom the consultant

would report to, given prior discussion about Ops Council and who's responsibility Stewardship ultimately landed: Ops Council, or Rev. Carlton?

## Linkage – Dayle

- Linkage Goal: To gain congregational engagement and feedback on our strategic ends, so that we can be planning and measuring our progress, and making tweaks and adjustments as needed
- Dayle presented a plan to engage the congregation after the October 19 service. The goal would be large and small group discussions anchored by prompting questions. Felicia raised the concern that there was a lot going on in the congregation at the moment. Others said that "we can't wait" - there never will be a good time; there is always going to be a lot going on.
- The Board agreed to proceed with the plan Dayle outlined, and Dayle will follow up with individual BOT members to take on specific tasks.
- *Update, 10/22/25: Upon seeing the request from the search team for cottage parties and the Nov 1 B4 meeting, subsequent to the Sept 30 Board meeting, the Board agreed via email vote to table this Linkage work until later in the year. Instead, it will invite individual feedback and glean insights as it participated in the search committee meetings and gatherings.*

## Priority Ends

- **Motion:** To prioritize three Ends for FY as discussed at our retreat in late August, and as found in the Policy Manual. These ends are:

*UU Westport is a place where our lives are:*

1.1.1 Deepened spiritually in worship that guides them in individual and communal responses to the sacred; enriched through expanded religious understanding, and uplifted, sustained and transformed by living out UU principles.

*We are a community of welcome and support, including:*

1.2.4 We become a financially sustainable, engaged, growing Congregation comprised of all generations.

*Beyond our walls, we:*

1.3.7 Empower us to amplify our positive impact of our UU principles on the world.

**Moved by:** Ravi Sankar

**Seconded by:** Jon Gage

**Outcome:** Passed unanimously.

## Assignments, Housekeeping and Process

- Beth to work with Felicia on Monitoring and Dayle on Linkage. Sari is supporting Felicia in secretarial work, and Mark supporting Jon in Financial matters. Julyen is supporting Beth in congregational communications. Additional support on different committees are most welcome.
- **Other work for the future:**
  - **The Decision-making framework** that was presented to the Board by the Governance Committee earlier in September needs to be discussed at our next meeting.
    - Rev. Carlton observed: Who decides if a decision is minor or major?
  - **Clarification of committee roles** and communicating with congregation on those roles will be important to do in the future: What does COM commit to do? Right Relations? Safer Congregations? How do they support each other? Are there overlaps?
  - **Mapping out a long-term Maintenance Plan.** Who should do it? What is the deliverable? By when?
- Process: Mark noted time management: overran most topics but ended only slightly late.

## Closing

- Reading by Ravi Sankar
- Next meeting 10/28. Felicia and Beth will be absent.
- Beth to email to reschedule November and December meeting dates.
- Meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.