

UU Westport Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

Date: February 24, 2026

Time: 7:02 p.m. – 9:27 p.m.

Location: Zoom (weather-related)

Attendance

Board Members: Beth Cliff, Felicia Keeton, Rev. Carlton, Dayle Brownstein, Mark Corcoran, Julyen Norman, Sari Bodi, Jon Gage, Ravi Sankar (joined 7:05, left 9:20 p.m), Alexa Marshall (absent)

Observers: Alison Smith, Rob and Terri Laug

Opening

- Meeting called to order and observer rules shared by Beth Cliff at 7:02 p.m.
- Reflection and chalice lighting by Beth
- Welcome and check-in

Consent Agenda

- **Motion:** Approve minutes from 02/03/2026
- **Moved by:** Beth
- **Seconded by:** Julyen
- **Discussion:** To include the Treadwell gift motion
- **Outcome:** Passed unanimously

Minister's Report

Safety

- There have been four recent safety incidents reports.
- Discussion followed regarding financial constraints around repairing outdoor pathways and that clarification is needed on responsibility boundaries between Board and Senior Minister - especially with transition ministers who report to the Board not the congregation.

Staff Discussion

- The group reviewed Rev. Carlton's monthly report where he shared observations - in some cases concerns - about the staff and its workload, and how it and the congregation work together with respect and mutual understanding. There was

discussion on some of the root causes and possibly solutions - structural as well as cultural. Beth pointed out that staff hours aren't public so people don't know when they might be intruding on private time; job descriptions aren't made public, so people don't know when they are asking for things that are out of scope for the roles. She also added staff should be encouraged to pushback respectfully when there is overstepping by the congregation - otherwise no one can learn to do better. This may need some coaching - it's hard to do.

- Rev. Carlton mentioned that there needs to be some "right sizing" of the staff and congregation to make sure the jobs in place are appropriate for our size and financial resources. Beth noted that since she's been on the Board we've lost three paid staff - Associate Minister, Minister Intern and Social Justice/Membership staff role, but much of the work has remained.

All agreed that of equal concern is how we as a congregation talk with one another, and, especially as Rev. Carlton shared in his report, how we talk between staff and congregation. Beth suggested that the HR Committee might be able to help as it relates to job descriptions and boundaries, and that things like the Compassionate Conversations class that COM is offering can continue building our awareness and skills. She also suggested messaging from Rev. Carlton from the pulpit on good practices in this area could be a way to bring attention to this issue.

- There was agreement that we all need to continue conversations and increase awareness about staff -

Treasurer's Report

- Finances are positive relative to budget.
 - Pledge income exceeding expectations.
 - Originally budgeted deficit: **\$63k**, that includes the "normal" **\$30k** endowment draw. Reforecast shows a **small surplus**, not requiring any "extra" endowment support beyond the "normal" \$30K draw that has been customary in the past four or five years. We will need to keep our eye on this for the remainder of the year, but certainly this is very positive news: not only are we above budget for the first time in a while, but we are "in the black" as it were.

- Staff costs lower than budgeted due to Rev. Carlton's compensation structure as a single person without dependents.
- Felicia and Jon will meet to develop a financial dashboard for Stewardship communications.

Financial Management Handbook

- Recommendations to operationalize relevant Board policy limitations were reviewed (materials in Dropbox).
- Discussed need to clarify functions of Operations Council versus responsibilities currently held by the administrator. This might be deferred for a little while, as we continue to work out Operations Council role in the future. But the point is to make it so that either the administrator, or the Ops Council, has permission to take on some financial tasks. (Note that the administrator is on the Ops Council....)
- Also need to updated handbook references and replace named individuals with role-based designations.

Operations Council

Preschool Air Conditioning Proposal

The board discussed a recommendation to approve an air conditioning installation for the preschool.

- **Initial Motion:** Approve the Operations Council recommendation to allow the preschool to proceed with the project to install 3 heat pump condensers and 6 evaporators at their cost targeted to be used for Spring Break (April 13-16).
- **Moved by:** Beth
- **Seconded by:** Mark
- **Discussion:**
 - Electrical capacity concerns raised by Mark.
 - Beth noted feasibility study (steps A-F) includes electrical assessment with Gault.
 - Any cost overages requirements would be borne by the nursery school.
 - Additional considerations: Potential need for a separate electrical meter and possible insurance implications.
- **Amended motion:**

- Approve the Ops Council recommendation to pursue the Preschool installation AC as outlined in the Ops Council document dated Feb 18, 2026. The approval includes completing the next steps identified by the Ops Council, A-F, as the project requires.
- We agree that a stipulation should be included in the arrangement with the preschool that any additional financial outlays or liabilities from this installation and its usage would be at their expense.
- We thank the preschool for its investment in our building in this way.
- **Amended Motion Vote by Beth and seconded by Jon:** Passed **7-1** (dissent: Julyen). (Note: Julyen later shared that he was having ZOOM issues and couldn't share his thoughts, which were concerns re 1) possible noise implications, with staff directly above the compressors, and 2) aesthetics of the compressors. He later said he would have abstained vs dissented had he not had the tech issues, and had the opportunity to share.)

Memorial Garden Gift

- Beth spoke with David Thompson; he is going to revisit the structure of his gift so that it is clearly earmarked for Memorial Garden maintenance above and beyond normal budgeted service.
- For now, he will continue maintenance independently in consultation with staff and his caregiver assistance.
- Beth assured David everyone was extremely grateful for his generosity and appreciated and understood his desire to keep this important part of our campus looking its best for all who visit the garden, especially as they enter from the parking lot.
- The Board will stay in touch on this issue as appropriate.

Decision-Making Framework

- Recent session included participation from Dayle, Beth, Mark, Sari, Jon, and Julyen; roughly 40 attendees.
- Positive feedback received; all-in-all folks appreciated that a process was being worked out, and that there was a remedy to go to if the process for some reason broke down. (Bring to COM's attention, if need be.)
- A noted point of discussion was making clarifying the type of decision being made based on definition of impact: Minor, Moderate, Major. In some cases, the qualification is subjective and a "gray area." An example that was raised for learning and discussion purposes: the possibility of redoing our logo. Some folks thought it

was a moderate decision, handled by a committee with congregational input. Others, a major one handled by a vote. Beth shared that those are the conversations that need to continue, and the important thing is to have those open, transparent and collaborative. She also stressed two other points that will guide us: a) for faith communities like ours [as opposed to, for example, many corporations], the process is more important than the outcome ; and b) except for existential threats [e.g, the roof collapses!] decisions should not be rushed but taken the time they need - historically, many of our problems have come from feeling rushed to meet a deadline.

- Recommendation: designate a notetaker at future sessions.
- Beth will schedule follow-up Zoom sessions.

Governance Council

- Beth reviewed history of the Governance Committee and its intended role in addressing ministerial workload, as well as investigating how decision get made (see above for D-M).
- Current challenges include member availability (various personal or volunteer commitments) given Lyn Kobsa, the current chair moving out of state, and several of the committee members having been busy on the search team (Jamie Forbes, Tom Hearne).
- Jon expressed disappointment at lack of progress; Felicia suggested pausing and restarting at a time tbd.
- Decision deferred; board anticipates needing to refresh the committee.
- Carlton noted broader cultural challenge of “right-sizing” operations—the number of committees adds complexity.
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Final BOT Three-Month Preview

- Beth, Ravi, and Alexa will move off the board in June, meaning that all Board members next year will be on their first terms.
- Beth reviewed board activity schedule for the remaining 3 months, that includes Stewardship, Fine Awards, General Assembly, Budget approval and subsequent congregational review meetings, inviting new Board members to May meeting, and Annual Meeting prep and reporting.
- In addition, the backdrop will be a new settled minister announcement in April.
- Beth also mentioned the desire to have some organized celebration of Rev. Carlton's time with us: we need to raise this up next month.

General Assembly 2026

- UU Westport will serve as a satellite site.
- Ruth and Carlton coordinating a planning team.
- Board needs to oversee the identification and coordination of GA representatives, and how they conduct themselves - including voting - at the GA meeting, and afterwards with the congregation.

Other Topics

- Felicia will email regarding pledges and refreshments for our coffee hours
- Beth raised the issue of many volunteer organizations in the congregation working on internal matters: she counted 61 people focused on internal issues of how to keep us managed and together. (Board, COM, Endowment, Finance, Right Relations, Safer Congregations.) This seems inefficient, and it makes it difficult to staff some of the critical work. This is a project that some group needs to look into - in this term, or beyond. (Governance?) She would like to continue this conversation in the last three months of her term. This is the "right-sizing issue" Rev. Carlton raised as well.
- Upcoming interfaith luncheon: Carlton hosting next Tuesday.

Closing

- **Process read-out** by Jon
- **Action item review** (see below)
- **Closing reading** by Mark
- **Next meeting date** 3-24-26
- **Meeting adjourned** at 9:27 p.m.

ACTION ITEMS

- Beth: Draft and send first version of description/charter for Treadwell team process committee
- Jon and Mark: Research and recommend options for safe management of \$800,000 bequest, including possible Endowment Committee involvement
- Beth: Send follow-up communication to congregation about Treadwell team process, clarifying purpose and inviting additional candidates; Forward Treadwell team communication to previously interested candidates (blind copy) to confirm understanding of role.
- Beth: Put 3-month timeline document in Dropbox
- Finance Committee: Review and update financial handbook, particularly roles and responsibilities section

- Board: Identify and agree on Fine Award recipient by May
 - Felicia: Begin process for General Assembly candidates for June meeting
 - Board: Plan appropriate recognition for Reverend Carlton's service
 - Board: Consider future structure/size of board and committees (noted as future action)
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