

Board of Directors' Meeting

UNITARIAN SOCIETY OF HARTFORD

Tuesday, June 7, 2016

Members present: Virginia de Lima, Martha Bradley, Margaret Leicach, Rev. Cathy Rion Starr, John Clapp, Rev. Heather Rion Starr, Louise Schmoll, John Brancato

Members absent: Tina Davies, Gloria Francesca Mengual

Guests present: Phil Gardner, Incoming Treasurer 2016-17, Katharine Ann Buck Anderson, Incoming President-Elect 2016-17, Hank Murray, Incoming Chair of Council on Administration 2016-17, David Newton, Janice Newton

Call to Order: Virginia de Lima, President called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM

Chalice Lighting and Opening words

The chalice was lit and Rev. Heather Rion Starr offered opening words for reflection.

Board Covenant and Mission Statement

Members read the Board Covenant and USH Mission statement in silence and shared a moment of silent reflection.

Introductions

As there were three soon-to-be-new Board members and two guests present, those present introduced themselves.

Comments from guests

David Newton expressed the following concerns:

1. The Board needs to be paying closer attention to the Constitution and By-Laws and making sure that it is being followed in the Board's process. Specifically, the constitution calls for a Finance Committee of the Board, and during much of this year there has not been a functioning Finance Committee.
2. There needs to be more publicity to the congregation about Board meetings, the agenda, and upcoming topics so that members can attend if there are topics that they are concerned about.
3. Board minutes need to be posted on the website sooner and a brief summary put into the eNews as soon as possible after each meeting.
4. The Board needs to engage the congregation sooner and more often in dialogue about major decisions and actions. David cited the solar panel project as an example. While a laudable accomplishment, it happened without much engagement of the congregation prior to beginning the process.
5. There needs to be a process to circulate the major social justice proposals for the upcoming General Assembly to the congregation so that they can provide input for the USH delegates who will be voting on them.
6. In reference to several of the above, the monthly Board-Under-the-Stairs gatherings are only one way to get congregational input, but as the attendees are self-selected and few in number, their views should not be taken as reflective of the views of the congregation at large.

Responses:

1. Rev. Heather mentioned that Board has been aware of the need for a work group to study the constitution and by-laws and identify where we are falling short as well as where they need up-dating to reflect current realities, and that is on the agenda for the upcoming fiscal year.

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2. Virginia mentioned that an educational game to raise awareness of the constitution and by-laws was on the agenda for the Board retreat but got bumped because of time constraints.
3. Rev. Heather mentioned that she, Linda and Margaret are putting together a Board manual for the new Board to make it easier to reference the constitution, by-laws recent minutes and Council Reports, etc. during meetings.
4. Louise described less-than-successful efforts to find and have the Board appoint members for a Finance Committee, such that ultimately four people carried out that function, i.e. Phil Gardner, Rev. Cathy, Louise Schmoll and Business Manager Brian Mullen.

2016-2017 Budget

Discussion: The most recent draft of the budget, prepared by the four people listed above, was presented by Louise Schmoll, discussed and debated, with the understanding that a balanced budget had to be approved at this meeting. Members reviewed and discussed the up-dated budget projections for the up-coming fiscal year, based on this fiscal year's results through April and up-dated projections for the results of the current stewardship campaign. Highlights of the discussion included:

- John Clapp stressed the importance of always keeping in mind what revenue sources are 'permanent' and which are 'temporary', and making sure that we don't make permanent financial commitments using temporary money.
- We have been operating with a goal of keeping the draw on the endowment at 5% or less of the endowment. John Clapp suggested that a healthier target would be 3.5%.
- The target for income from rentals was kept the same as in the 2015-16 budget, even though we did not meet that target this year. It is our expectation that now that Rayla is handling and staffing rentals, we will meet or exceed that target this year.
- Projected income from Sunday collections was reduced to reflect current actuals. We reinstated the monthly Good Neighbour Offerings (GNOs) this year. Though data from congregations in general documents that GNOs *do not* cause an annual decrease in receipts from the collection for the general fund, we might want to consider doing a 50-50 split with our GNO offering plate donations, with half going to the designated cause for that week and half going to our general fund.
- Some line items have been or will be renamed and/or relocated within the budget for clarity without actually affecting the bottom line, e.g.
 - showing revenue from Friends of Music collections as income;
 - having a line item for archives expenses, instead of having it hidden within office supplies;
 - moving the GNO revenue and donations and other items that are essentially a pass-through, out of the main budget; and
 - moving expenses for summer musicians and choral scholars out of the worship and music budgets, respectively, and into personnel.
- Budget for pulpit guests at \$3,600 provides for 12 pulpit guests per year at \$300 each (\$250 + mileage).
- The childcare budget allows us to continue to have extended Sunday hours twice a month for meetings and post-service events, a practice we agreed to begin part way through the current fiscal year.
- The budget for piano tuning was increased to reflect the need to have 3 pianos tuned twice a year rather than only two. This adds the piano in the music room to the ones in the

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sanctuary and the chapel. The choir is now frequently practicing in the music room rather than in the sanctuary.

Decision: Martha moved and John Brancato seconded that we adopt the budget as presented with the following modifications, which collectively do not change the bottom line:

- Increase the expense budget for electricity by \$1,000 to a total of \$9,000.
- Add projected income from the Zero Emission Renewable Energy Credit of \$3,000.
- Reduce projected revenue from carryover from \$7,000 to \$5,000.

The budget was approved with one nay and one abstention.

Actions:

Louise and Hank will ensure that the budget is amended to reflect these decisions.

Revision made via email vote following the meeting:

Louise moved and Virginia seconded that the 2015-16 Board amend the budget to return to the membership amount to the original \$500, and adjust the use of prior year funds up by \$250 to cover this error. The motion carried with 7 ayes and 1 abstention.

Debrief 2016 Board Retreat

Discussion: Virginia asked for input on what aspects we want to remember to retain and what we might want to change for next year. Notes and materials from this year's retreat were distributed via email prior to the meeting. Suggestions/thoughts included:

- Ask the Nominating Committee to get the nominations to the Board sooner so we can notify incoming Board members about the retreat sooner.
- Schedule and publicize it sooner to increase the chances that more of the old and new Board members can attend.
- The small discussions with 3 or 4 people with an SGM-type format that we had at the 2015 retreat were missed this year, suggest adding those back in 2017.
- It was good that the ministers were able to participate more this year because we had an outside facilitator so they didn't have to fulfil that function.
- Jackie (the facilitator) sent an email asking for feedback; please complete that.
- Having that time to get to know one another outside of business meetings is important.
- The potlucks we had last summer in July and August before Board meetings were a mixed blessing. They gave us time to get to know one another but the transition from social to business, especially in someone's home, was tricky.

Decision: None needed

Actions: None needed

21st Century Sanctuary

Discussion: Virginia reported that the Task Force has been assembled to develop a detailed proposal and budget for this project and has had its first meeting. Building and Grounds, AIM, Worship Associates, Chancel Arts, Music, and Performing Arts are all represented. Membership includes Peter Meny, Bill LaPorte-Bryan, Chris Wilt, Laurie Kelliher, Debbie Gosselin, Denis Gallant, Aaron Bleck, Patrice Fitzgerald, Stu Spence and Rev. Cathy. Highlights of the discussion thus far include:

- *Lighting* – Make sure that what is designed meets the needs of both AIM and Performing Arts. These groups will collaborate rather than compete. Include the entryway into the lobby in the planning to enhance safety at the top of the stairs.

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- *Projection* – Consult with UUSE, which has this capability in their sanctuary.
- *Sound* – Various options will be investigated to enhance or replace our current system for both accessibility and performance.
- *AIM* – Planning a survey of the congregation in the fall, possibly around Ingathering Sunday. It was suggested that the survey include everyone, not only those with identified disabilities.
- *Financing* – A fund-raising campaign is planned for this project, probably in October or November. Louise cautioned that, based on past experience, we should expect to raise less than \$10,000 through such a campaign. Virginia noted that the fund-raising efforts for carpeting and pew cushions raised about \$4,200 and \$3,500 respectively. Martha noted that the improvement to our sanctuary might be expected, over time, to increase our rental income.

Decision: None - information only

Actions: None needed

Approve minutes of May meeting

Margaret apologized for being behind in getting the minutes out. The retreat and annual meeting with attendant preparation and documentation overwhelmed her time available for this important work and she committed to getting back on track as we go into the new fiscal year. Minutes will be distributed via email and members are asked to provide comments and corrections via email prior to the next meeting. Margaret has an email group for the Board that she will use so that members can use 'reply' rather than 'reply all' to avoid overloading everyone's inboxes.

Decision: None needed

Actions: Margaret will distribute draft minutes via email and members will provide additions and corrections using 'reply' only.

Input on minutes of annual meeting

Draft minutes of the annual meeting had been distributed via email and some feedback received. Margaret asked that anyone else who has feedback on the minutes get it to her via email within the next week or so, so that the minutes can be refined while the content of the meeting is still fresh in everyone's minds.

Decision: None needed at this time. Minutes of the annual meeting are approved at the following year's annual meeting.

Actions: Members will email Margaret with feedback.

Ministers' Report

Discussion: The ministers distributed a written report that addressed the following:

- The ministers will be at General Assembly, on vacation, and on annual study leave from June 20th through August 30th. They will be in CT from July 12th on and will be mostly off-email until August 30th. They can be reached by phone for member medical crises or other major congregational events.
- Summer services will be organized around the Six Sources with terrific guest and lay speakers, Pi-Hsun as our accompanist and the children exploring the sources through interactive play and in the garden.
- Rev. Heather and landscape architect Cynthia Dodd are heading a project to build a labyrinth in our Knox Garden plot.

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- The ministers thanked the HR SubCouncil for their participation in staff evaluations, which are nearly completed.
- The search for a permanent accompanist hasn't yet produced the right candidate and Rev. Cathy is putting together an interim plan for the fall while the search continues.
- The Sexually Safer Congregations Team gained a wealth of resources from its meeting with Kim Sweeney from the New England Region staff, including information about a new certification program. They completed a structured assessment of our congregation in regard to this important project and are ready to begin in the fall to draft improvements to our policies and practices to propose to the Board.

Decision: None needed

Actions: None needed

Scheduling 2016-17 Board meetings

Discussion: President-Elect, John Brancato indicated that Board meetings would continue to be on the 1st Tuesday of each month, with a few exceptions. Executive Committee meetings will be mid-afternoon on the 3rd Tuesday of the month, with a few exceptions. John will email the proposed meeting schedule for the full fiscal year this week and he asked Board members to reply by email to confirm their availability for those meetings.

Decision: None needed

Actions:

- John will send the full year's proposed schedule via email this week.
- 2016-17 Board members will respond individually to John as to their availability for the proposed meetings.

Council Report – Council on Administration

Discussion: John Clapp had distributed the report prior to the meeting via email. Members complimented John on its succinctness.

Decision: None needed

Actions: None needed

Comments from Board members, Other Items

- Louise Schmoll suggested that we hold a semi-annual congregational meeting again this year. The 4th Sunday in January was floated as a possible date and there was some brainstorming about possible formats and content.
- Virginia, Hank and possibly John Clapp agreed to be available for the Board Under the Stairs on June 26th.

Closing words

Rev. Cathy Rion Starr read a selection from Victoria Safford's *The Gates of Hope*.

Adjournment

President Virginia de Lima adjourned the meeting shortly after 9:00 PM.