

Parish Committee Meeting Minutes
First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington
October 17, 2023
Online via Zoom: 7:02 pm to 9:05 pm

Attendees (Parish Committee members and Ministers): Anne Q., Joanna P., John A., John S., Jeff K., Al T., Carolyn H., Celia W., with Sara G. joining for the second half of the meeting at 8pm; with Rev. Marta, Rev. Erica, and Minister of Religious Education Rev. Stevie.

Guests from the First Parish Property Committee: John Galantowicz (chair), Greg Ruccio, Steve McMullin, and David Dreyfus.

Guests from the First Parish Emergent Issues Task Force - Alan Linov (Social Justice Committee chair) with Tish Miller and Adam McNeill (These guests arrived just before 8pm).

7:02 Call to Order (Anne Q., vice chair of the Parish Committee)

7:03 Reading and Chalice Lighting (John Anderson's poems and Rev Erica's prayer)

7:14 Parish Committee monthly gratitude (John A.)

The Parish Committee has started a public, monthly "rose of recognition" practice and is sending a note of appreciation to a person or group who is working hard to support the First Parish community.

October's recipient is the Religious Education committee.

The hope of the Parish Committee is to have the monthly meeting's host select a person or group to whom the Committee will express gratitude publicly, via the e-bulletin and the following edition of *The Spire*. The Parish Committee will coordinate with the Worship Associates.

The Parish Committee is resoundingly and unanimously in support of this new practice.

7:18 Review of Financial report & dashboard (Carolyn, 10 minutes) - September financials

- First Parish is running slightly ahead in the first quarter; revenue is greater than expenditures. Through September 30, First Parish net revenues are positive at \$8,000 year-to-date.
- Pledges and plate revenues are running lower than the "seasonalized" budget. The Treasurer pointed out that there is no need for concern given the 2022-2023 strong results.
- At the end of the calendar year, a reminder email from First Parish will be sent out to congregant pledgers to submit any lingering pledges in time before tax season and year-end.

- The Treasurer of FP acknowledges John G. and Greg R. of the Property Committee because a great deal of work has been done. Much gratitude was expressed by the Treasurer on behalf of the Parish Committee. Among the many projects that have been completed are the following: the spire has been repainted and re-lit, the leak in the Bailey room has been fixed, and the dishwasher has been fixed.
- (Votes 1 and 2, Discussion). Funding budget overages

The following budget overages were discussed:

- 1) The First Parish Music Committee had expressed the need for a gift to outgoing Music Director and that the Parish Committee vote to provide a \$1900 expenditure for that purpose.
- 2) The Religious Education reimbursement from a provider for the Youth Service Trip. The background is that the Provider reimbursed more funds than expected. A \$2,200 reimbursement was provided.
- 3) First Parish's IT needs, revisited: Sara Hidalgo, Office Manager, had provided a summary of IT needs including a one time cost and then recurring costs, to address the IT issues staff have been experiencing.

The Parish Committee agreed to empower parish Committee Exec to work with Sara H. to better understand the costs of the recommended steps and move forward.

Clarity was requested regarding generally how the overages are funded and the Parish Committee discussed the categories provided as well as the estimated remaining available Parish Committee funds. From the Parish Committee discretionary fund, after approval of overages, there would be about \$7,000 remaining in that discretionary fund.

Motion 1: We move to apply \$1,200 of the \$2,200 reimbursement to offset the Religious Education committee overage of 2022-2023, the amount will be reflected in prior year surplus. The remainder will be returned to the Youth Group fundraising account for future use. (Joanna). Seconded (Anne). 8 of 8 in favor.

MOTION 2: I move that the Parish Committee approve the added music expenditure of \$1,900. This amount represents a gift to the departing Music Director (\$1,500, and up to \$400 set aside for a fancy reception during coffee hour. (Carolyn.) Seconded (Celia) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

7:25 (Vote 3, Discussion). Consent agenda: Minutes, Financials, Ministers' Reports

The clerk, Joanna P., noted that September's minutes had been updated to re-include Al Tosti's name in the attendees list. **MOTION 3: I move that we adopt the consent agenda. (Celia) Seconded (Jeff). 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.**

Al Tosti voted in absentia, before he left the Parish Committee meeting temporarily.

[7:27 PM - The clerk notes that Al Tosti left the Parish Committee meeting in an exceptional situation to join in with the Town of Arlington and the discussion on Affordable Housing. Before leaving, Al requested that his vote for motions 1 and 2 be recorded in the affirmative. Al rejoined the Parish Committee meeting just before 8 PM.)

7:30 Update on Interim Music Staffing (Carolyn, 5 minutes)

- The Interim Music Staffing Committee has been working to find a candidate to join First Parish staff as Interim Music Director to complete the program year, from November 2023 to June 2024. The committee is proceeding with a potential candidate.
- There will be an audition rehearsal with the choir and this candidate. The Interim committee reports that things are proceeding as planned.
- First Parish will have a few weeks without a Music Director in late October and early November, as Jonathan Colby's last Sunday as Music Director is October 22.
- First Parish has musicians lined up for coverage, including the award-winning band Sol y Canto (Puerto Rican/Argentine singer and percussionist Rosi Amador and New Mexican guitarist/singer/composer Brian Amador) on October 29th, and then First Parish's own Molly Aronson-Breen on viola on November 12th.
- Gratitude was expressed to Alice P. for all of the work she has been putting into being chair of both the Music Committee and the Interim Music Staffing Committee.

7:35 Property Committee update (20 minutes)

- Background and overview of what Property Committee does (John Galantowicz, chair)
 - The Property Committee shared an extensive and thorough PowerPoint presentation with the Parish Committee. [Copies of the presentation can be provided by the Property Committee or the First Parish clerk.]
 - Highlights and important updates included such activities as:
 - Elimination of rodenticides and installation of traps (ongoing)
 - Remediation of asbestos (clerk's note: Remediation does not stop at removal; this action focuses on the source of the problem to correct it.)
 - Cleaning up trees on Massachusetts Avenue
 - Repairing the Parish House windows, a major item which David Dreyfus spearheaded.
 - New items and updates include:
 - Replacing fog windows in the sanctuary (\$42,000)
 - Motion detection in the annex has been fixed by Jamie Warter.
 - Switching to ADT alarm and fire safety from American Alarm [clerk's note: The clerk of the Parish Committee has signed the new contract with ADT as of October 25, 2023. Copies of the contract have been sent to the First Parish Office Manager and the Property Committee chair.]

- The change of vendor will save First Parish about \$4-6,000 per year (including regular contract cost and service calls)
 - Frustration with American Alarm and getting false alarms will be mitigated.
 - Acknowledging that Lori Kenshaft and Adrian Trilling have joined the Property Committee by appointment of the Parish Committee to work on energy and infrastructure.
 - Arranging for an off-site storage locker, especially for Harvest Moon Fair items; the hope is to do this for the fall 2023.
- Account balances for Property are healthy. The main line item is \$65,000 for the Property Committee Infrastructure fund, which has a total budget of \$150,000. For expenses, the current amount owed is \$21,000. There is a nice buffer for whatever else arises on the to do list.

Challenges that the Property Committee has faced include:

- Emergency calls such as the low temperature alarm for the boiler in February 2023 which necessitated that someone be on the First Parish property all day.
- False alarms (fire or burglary false alarms) - switching to an app that can be downloaded on a cell phone; scheduling available through new security supplier, ADT.
- Contractor management can be a burden (As all Property Committee members have full-time jobs). The HVAC contract was highlighted as a source of frustration.
- Scheduling around the Montessori Arlington Children's House hours can pose challenges since work often has to be outside of school hours.
- Knowledge preservation (John G. as chair has the history, but it is not on paper) and knowledge loss with people who have cycled off the committee can be tricky.
- First Parish has a large campus with the meeting house and grounds, from rust to leaks, projects are big and small.

Gratitude from Vice-chair of the Parish Committee, Anne Q., was expressed on the committee's behalf.

Discussion and questions followed including the following highlights:

- With the new ADT contract, are we changing out the physical systems in the church? Will new equipment be better?
 - At some point, yes. First Parish will pay about \$2,000 as an up front cost to change the equipment.
 - David Dreyfus added that the door/kitchen/piping for the alarm remains the same. All unchanged.
 - Previously with American Alarm, the alarms would go off and American Alarm would call in the middle of the night to say the system had reset. With ADT, there is an app and a schedule can be set for the time of day required.
 - The Office Manager would be allowed the same access through the app.

- It was mentioned that the Office Manager's contact information should be added to the contract with ADT. [Update: The clerk verified that this contact information had been added to the ADT contract before signing the contract and working with the Property Committee and Sales Representative Frederick Abraham at ADT, fabraham@adt.com, to do so.]
- The time commitment for the Property Committee is great. Is there a need for a professional property manager?
 - Property has not pursued that avenue.
 - In the 5-10 year visioning that the working group of the Parish Committee is doing, the members appreciate John G's thoughts on a professional manager.
- Appreciation was expressed for the aerial photos of the campus of First Parish. It was easier to see the size of the campus and square footage being dealt with regularly.
- A question about the maple tree was asked regarding cutting it back: Will there be a plan in place, as opposed to being surprised? A question for the Garden Committee and Property Committee to be determined.
- Celebration of the Property Committee as "phenomenal" by Lead Minister Marta Flanagan.
- Acknowledging that the work of the Property Committee could potentially take up enormous time from the governing board; much appreciation and thanks given.

At this point in the meeting, the Property Committee guests left and the Parish Committee members said farewell. The Parish Committee welcomed members of the Emergent Issues Task Force, under the Social Justice Coordinating Committee umbrella. Parish Committee chair Sara Galantowicz also joined the meeting (7:54 PM).

Tish Miller arrived at some point before 7:58pm, along with Alan Linov and Adam McNeil.

Rev. Marta celebrates that Parish Committee member Al Tosti had to make an exception and briefly leave the meeting in order to attend a Town of Arlington meeting on Affordable Housing.

8:03 **Break**

Sara G opened the second half of the meeting, taking over from vice-chair Anne Quaadgras who led the first half.

8:08 **Public Witness policy discussion (Alan Linov, 15 minutes)**

- Review of the existing Public Witness policy (Alan L.)
 - Web links were provided via email along with a one-page "Procedures for public witness banner composition and approval" which included the following text:

Public witness banners are a part of the congregation's social justice program. The Social Justice Committee (SJC) has delegated responsibility for managing public witness banners to the Emergent Issues Task Group (EITG), which was formed by SJC. The EITG can be reached at

EmergentIssues@firstparish.info. The authority to speak for the congregation to the outside community, such as with a banner, resides with the Parish Committee, according to the bylaws and the Public Witness Policy.

- In reviewing the Public Witness policy, it has been mentioned that there may be a need for a process for approving messages requested by organizations outside of First Parish
- Recently, an anti-gun violence banner was approved to be displayed on the First Parish lawn where a Wear Orange vigil also took place over the summer.
- Consideration of whether to revise the public witness policy with some ground rules or guidelines for external requests.
- Rev. Marta met with the Emergent Issues Working Group on 10/17. She said that the ministers support there being a banner that addresses the congregation's concerns about what is happening in Israel, Palestine, and Gaza.
- Rev. Erica made mention of detangling the issues of (1) the public witness banner and a process for approval, and (2) the process for approving a vigil. We at First Parish can hold multiple messages on the lawn at the same time.
- Alan Linov continued the discussion and proposed the wording for the banner to include "Justice and Peace" and Rev. Marta echoed this proposal with what Harvard is using in its language for justice and peace as "Just Peace"

Discussion and questions:

- While the Parish Committee reviews and discusses banners, vigils, and speakers, there is the question of who can represent the congregation. There was not anything specific in the Public Witness policy about vigils.
- It seems that there are two separate items from a policy perspective: banners and vigils.
- From the Emergent Task Force, Tish Miller mentioned trying to address vigils in the Rapid Response guidelines with best practices. First Parish participates in protests more frequently.
- A group can say that they want to have a vigil. They need to find a group within First Parish to sponsor them.
- A Parish Committee member highlighted the need to keep the wording on the banner short and to make sure that people driving by the lawn can read it.
- Another Parish Committee member suggested color is useful; it was learned from the Wear Orange anti-gun violence banner that the wording was much easier to read as white text on an orange background compared to black text on a white background.
- A Parish Committee member asked Marta to clarify taking a stand with a political message versus supporting a candidate or political party. First Parish can take a stand on an issue; that is within our purview. The parish cannot endorse a candidate or political party as a religious organization.

MOTION 4 - We support the Emergent Issues Working Group to wordsmith the banner for “peace with justice for everyone everywhere” to be available for this weekend 9/22.” (Anne Q) Seconded. (Carolyn H.) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

The Parish Committee expressed gratitude to Alan Linov, Tish Miller, and Adam McNeill for working on the public witness banner.

8:33 Parlor Accessibility (Sara, 5 minutes)

It was brought to the Parish Committee’s attention that the rug in the Parlor of the meeting house poses accessibility issues.

Because the rug is not fixed to the floor, it can catch in the wheels of walkers and wheelchairs and bunch up. It is a deep rug. It is acknowledged that the Parlor is used not only by First Parish congregants but also as an external space for renters and visitors.

As a short fix, the rug could be removed as the Parish and Property Committees commit to finding a solution.

In looking for a solution, there are three priorities: accessible, aesthetic, and acoustics.

Discussion followed including:

- highlights around clear messaging for the congregation to be aware of what happened to the Parlor rug. A physical sign can be placed along with a message in the e-bulletin.
- Acknowledgement of the ethical and emotional components of removing the rug: it was part of the Capital Campaign.
- Removal of the rug aligns with the important principle and value around accessibility

The Parish Committee chair commits to writing some language for signage.

Retreat workgroup report out (all, 15 minutes)

Volunteering (Jeff K. and Anne Q.)

The Parish Committee working group on Volunteerism and Engagement attended the Leadership Development Committee round-table on 9/22. Members in attendance included Celia W., Anne Q., Sara G., and Joanna P. with a total of about 15 participants most of whom were chairs of committees, including John A. The group talked about concerns in a changing world regarding volunteering. There was a good representation. Folks are thinking practically and spiritually.

The working group is developing a plan with LDC to get feedback from the congregation starting with conversations with chairs of committees. We on the Parish Committee want people’s input. We will talk

to current committee chairs about what is actually going on, discuss questions around recruitment to committees, and different pain points. Celia took excellent notes.

For our working group, the next step is to do individual conversations with various chairs. Kiki Giatis has volunteered to join our working group and attend the monthly meetings. She approached the group.

First Parish committees and chairs are already experimenting. People are really open to having this conversation around volunteerism.

Visioning (Sara G., Carolyn H., John A., with Marta)

The 5- to 10-year Visioning Working Group will work backwards from the annual meeting and do information gathering. The group will be in the data gathering and analysis phases first. Events can be leveraged (such as the financial summit on November 7th) where the visioning exercise conducted during the Parish Committee retreat will be done. John Anderson will facilitate again. There is also the all-congregation summit on December 3rd with a luncheon and presentation. Attendees will break out into smaller groups. This can be supplemented by intentional focus groups including former Parish Committee chairs.

What would people like to see in the next five to 10 years? What are all of the things that we would like First Parish to be?

For communications, we will need to have an article in the November edition of *The Spire*. With Jeff K.'s article in *The Spire*, Joanna's *ParSnips* blurb, and the December 3rd luncheon, we have many outlets for communication.

8:54 PM - State of Parish (Ministers)

- Things are going extraordinarily well. Attendance is up 10% on Sundays compared to last year. Anecdotally, it can be said that this increase is due to newcomers.
- Conversations with a Minister was extremely well attended with about 25 people!
 - Along with Rev. Marta facilitating, Amy Anderson and Maureen Dolan were in attendance as long-time members, two other people had been attending for about six months; the rest were even newer folks.
 - We have not had this experience for a while. We must be on our toes with how we are greeting new folks and being welcoming to all.

Marta shared two newcomers' stories as representative of what new people are seeking at First Parish: People rarely come to a religious community out of the blue. People come to First Parish often due to some kind of crisis, whether positive or negative. Baby. Divorce. Death. Some kind of shift going on in their lives. We at First Parish support each other in the changes in our lives: Active cancer, domestic violence, major world events to grapple with like what is happening in the Middle East right now. We tend not to notice these or elevate these stories in Parish Committee meetings.

-Significant staffing shifts. Our new Minister of Religious Education, Stevie, continues to be a wonderful addition to the staff. Our Music Director, Jonathan Colby, is leaving; staff are engaged in the search process. Staff is also engaged in a search for a new sexton since Jose F. left a few weeks ago. First Parish is employing a cleaning service in the meantime.

These staffing shifts are not unusual, looking at organizational systems. People are not leaving with hard feelings. The ministers are not concerned as these shifts are “in the water,” and there is often a flurry of activity.

The Parish Committee acknowledges the incredible job being done by all three of our ministers. Gratitude is expressed to Rev. Marta, Rev. Erica, and Rev. Stevie.

A Parish Committee member highlighted what Marta said about our problems being “golden” and how we have great people, great committees, and things are getting done. It is remarkable. First Parish is fortunate.

Various Parish Committee members expressed similar gratitude about having this community in our lives. We hold something so precious; it is easy to think that it is normal when it is astounding.

It was repeated that we are all ambassadors of First Parish and that even a brief hello / “I see you” is impactful. One of our many duties is as a welcoming committee. We sit with members. We reflect with members.

Calendar review and hosting (all)

9:05 Adjourn - The Parish Committee chair asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

(Motion) I move that we adjourn the meeting. (Celia) Seconded (Jeff) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

Attachments: Last month’s Minutes, Financial Documents, Ministers report

MOTIONS

(MOTION 1): We move to apply \$1,200 of the \$2,200 reimbursement to offset the Religious Education committee overage of 2022-2023, the amount will be reflected in prior year surplus. The remainder will be returned to the Youth Group fundraising account for future use. (Joanna). Seconded (Anne). 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

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(MOTION 3): I move that we adopt the consent agenda. (Celia). Seconded (Jeff). 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

(MOTION 4): - We support the Emergent Issues Working Group to wordsmith the banner for “peace with justice for everyone everywhere” to be available for this weekend 9/22.” (Anne Q) Seconded. (Carolyn H.) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

(MOTION 5): I move that we adjourn the meeting. (Celia.) Seconded (Jeff). 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.