

Parish Committee Meeting Minutes

First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington

December 16, 2025 7 - 9 PM

Hybrid Meeting: In Person in the Parlor and on Zoom

Attendees: Marie Meteer (chair), Kate Tranquada (vice chair), Carolyn Hodges (treasurer), Joanna Pushee (clerk), John Anderson, Susan Moore, Amy Speare, and Al Tosti

Ministers: Rev. Dr. Jonipher Kwong, Rev. Erica Richmond, Rev. Stevie Carmody

Guests: Defending Democracy Working Group representatives: Joanne Pohl & Pam Linov
Finance Committee: Lissa McBurney

7:04 Call to Order (Marie)

7:05 Reading and Chalice Lighting (John, reading; Al, lighting)

7:08 Financial Review (Carolyn H.)

- The Harvest Moon Festival did well. The fundraising total exceeded the budgeted assumption.
- Pledges are showing slightly lower than expected; however, the time of year is consistent with previous years. The Assistant Treasurer send reminders in December.
- First Parish received a grant to hire part-time tech assistance; gratitude was expressed to the generous anonymous donor and the years of service of volunteers on the tech team.
- Expenses are running favorable.
 - One area to monitor is to reconfirm with the Property Committee on the status of the boiler and whether significant work is needed.

Reallocation of Transition Team (TT) budget expenses (Marie M.)

- The chair proposed reallocating funds so as to show clarity for how the Transition Team (TT) is utilizing their budget. First Parish approved \$6,000 in two pieces for that budget. A portion of that is for updating the First Parish website, with \$500 for everything else: The TT has been organizing gatherings such as the Listening Sessions, some with lunch or refreshments provided. To reallocate \$500 to the TT for a total of \$1,000 for the program year would allow them to continue in the spring with similar gatherings.
- At the Annual Meeting in May 2025, the Parish Committee disclosed the intended use of these funds.

7:21 PM **Vote 1: To reallocate Transition Team budget items**

MOTION 1: I move that we reallocate \$500 to the Transition Team budget expenses from other planned expenditures. (Carolyn) Seconded (John A) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

7:22 PM Financial Review, continued (Carolyn H.)

- Cleaning expenses & agreement with the tenant, Adventures in Montessori
 - First Parish's Office Manager is gathering job descriptions of what the cleaners do. It is proposed to at least keep the cleaning service through the end of December for now.
 - Parish Committee members discussed and asked questions about the temporary solution for cleaning.
 - The school needs cleaning each day.
 - More discussion will be revisited in January. There are upcoming changes that can be discussed well before March 31, 2026.

7:26 PM **Vote 2:** Consent agenda: Minutes, Financials, Ministers' reports

MOTION 2: I move that we adopt the consent agenda. (Al T) Seconded (Susan/Amy). 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

7:27 PM Short reports

- Two A/V Technicians have been hired by Rev. Jonipher.
 - There will be an announcement on Sunday 12/21 at the start of the service
 - The technicians will be starting in December, rather than in January and will be running the Zoom account for online worship.
- Rose of Recognition: the Tech Team is the nominee for January 2026
Nominations for upcoming Roses of Recognition are being added to the shared spreadsheet in the Google drive

7:31 PM **Defending Democracy Working Group** (Joanne Pohl, Pam Linov)

- The Defending Democracy Group gave updates since the previous presentation to the Parish Committee.
- The Defending Democracy Working Group hosted a workshop led by the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocates Coalition (MIRA Coalition) on Know Your Rights (KYR).
 - The MIRA Coalition's KYR workshop was held on Zoom and covered information on judicial warrants and timely explanations on public versus private spaces
 - The workshop was well-attended by the First Parish community, including ministers and lay leaders.
- Defending Democracy re-submitted a proposal to the Parish Committee for public versus private spaces at the meeting house and campus.
 - Signage rationale: to be a safe space

- Updated proposal shows fewer rooms and areas with signage as private: the parish minister's office, the minister of religious education's office, the green room, the Parlor, and the parking lot are included in the updated proposal

Questions and comments:

- Clarity on the report was requested per some differences
- Staff conversations and MIRA training attendance
- Is the sexton space private? It should be a private space, as well as the music space.
- Parking Lot area
 - Before the Parish Committee makes a determination, it would be good to have a conversation with Adventures in Montessori, which has access during school hours; they do not park adjacent to the office.
- The Parish Committee notes how much work went into the proposals, conversations, and Know Your Rights training. It has been a thoughtful process, and continues to be so, with staff and school AIM.
- The Parish Committee asked whether Defending Democracy could take on the collaboration with the First Parish staff conversations.
- There is also a question of whether there is any budget. Any signs in the parking area would be more costly.

7: 48 PM - **MOTION 3:** I vote to enable Defending Democracy to put up "private area" signs; the Parish Committee members are empowering Parish Committee Executive to approve the exact wording and budget of those signs. (Joanna/Marie) Seconded. (Susan) 7 in favor. 1 person opposed.

The opposition indicated a need for more information on the parking area.

7:49 PM **Budget Draft review** - Finance Committee - Lissa McBurney

- The Finance Committee has met with Parish Committee Executive twice.
- There are a number of changes such as personnel that either raise or lower costs. The personnel changes were planned changes.
- The cleaning budget has increased significantly.
- The Finance Committee is researching various line items from the past three years and is seeing if there are any items that First Parish may no longer need.
- Areas of note that show changes:
 - Bookkeeping costs
 - Cleaning services (being pulled out of personnel for clarity and to align with reality; opportunity to control the costs)
 - Electricity
 - Finance Committee is seeking guidance and help from the Parish Committee: very large cost and needs some further research

- Music
 - What would First Parish like for costs going forward?
- Reckoning & Repair - to be discussed (request of \$5,000 on wish list)
- With current numbers and requests for wish list items from committees, the budget would be \$78,000 below, pending some further research.
- Church size and Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) fees: Size C or Size D classification
 - If First Parish will be Size D in two years, the Parish Committee and Finance Committee need to dig into the calculations, especially as First Parish goes into search for a settled minister.
 - First Parish has been between 400 to 450 members for a while.

Break at 8:00 to 8:05 PM

8:05 PM Budget Draft review (continued)

- Sustainability is a theme that arises; Keep in mind an increase in healthcare premiums in 2026.
- First Parish is showing that 20% of the congregation did not pledge 2025-26.
- For the Stewardship campaign last program year, First Parish had 75% of the “stewardship list” who pledged; there was a big participation push.
- Discussion:
 - Reviewing the bylaws: currently there is an “expectation” for financial contributions
 - Rev. Jonipher and the Stewardship chair spoke in December: rather than one-on-one visiting stewards, there will be “Stewardship Ambassadors” to visit existing groups.
 - With the Transition Team, Rev. Jonipher is discussing how to approach the rest of the members who will not be meeting with Stewardship Ambassadors

Budget (30 minutes) - Lissa

- **Salaries to consider in the draft budget:**
 - Sexton (removed temporarily; replaced by cleaning service; about 2.9% COLA)
 - RE Minister upgrade (from Director midpoint to Executive II midpoint)
 - Six months of part-time tech staff (first 6 months coverage by the grant from an anonymous donor)
 - Salaries include only the current elections for health insurance FY 25-26

Comment:

Between January and May 2026, the Parish Committee will need to look at a multi-year scenario of a salary bump (based on possible congregation size); Set time aside for discussions and scenarios.

- With a three-minister model with sabbatical reserves, a total of \$63,000 above; only lead minister \$28,000 increase.

- The Parish Committee has been reviewing what our actual official membership size is and continues this process.
- For settled minister search, the draft budget shows the proposal of \$5,000 as a placeholder.
- The Transition Team is showing \$1,000.
- Book-keeping
 - The Finance Committee budgeted for \$4,000 per month. First Parish is currently paying \$2,100 and needs to increase this amount for the next program year. Note that credit card reconciliation and other activities needed to be done.
- **Cleaning**
 - Moved out of personnel to see clearly
 - Budgeted as \$5,000 per month as the expected new estimate (not scaled down for summer yet). Some of this expense will come from reimbursement from the school, Adventures in Montessori (AIM), but there is still a huge increase from last year.

Staffing task force (TBD)

The Finance Committee suggests a project of doing a Staffing Task Force and work with the Parish Committee chair, who works with the Office Manager, on some job descriptions. These job descriptions include what is being done by volunteers at a professional level.

Utilities, especially electricity

- Electricity is up \$10,000; this area of utilities needs some research.
- The Finance Committee will dig into the gas pricing and requests assistance on the maximum benefit out of the solar panels. First Parish rents half the solar panels and owns half.
- The budget does not include a new furnace. It would be expensive.

Music:

- The Parish Committee approved and recommended to the congregation a temporary line item for choral scholars for the budget last year. ParCom approved an accompanist for the children's choir. The plan was for 5 services a year for an organist. This has not played out as the actual experience.

Discussion/comments/questions:

- Discussing different schools of thought on how to approach Music Committee funding in terms of one bucket of funds or sub-categories of accountability with support from ParCom and/or the lead minister.
- The Parish Committee and/or the lead minister could request more details; looking to itemize in January and have a report.
- There may be a need for more training or clarity among volunteers.
- The budget has gone up 45% and have overspent by 15%.
- There is the possibility that Parish Committee would decide not to approve an overage.

Comments/Questions on Finance presentation overall:

- A Parish Committee member asked about inventory on software usage and if it is new software. Or are we paying for old software?
- Does First Parish have the capacity for a Spring Fundraiser? (like Taste of First Parish?)
- Comment regarding recent Reckoning & Repair fundraising with about \$26,000 generated in a 5-week campaign!

- Wish List summary:
 - Reckoning & Repair requests \$5,000 as institutional support
 - UU Mass Action (FP committed last year to make dues \$2500); Social Justice Committee (FP committee) requested increase: \$3,000.
 - Stewardship is seeking \$500 more.
 - Music is seeking \$500 more.

The Finance Committee requested some clarity from the Parish Committee about the Reckoning & Repair process.

- It is a longer conversation, but being asked for by the Racial Justice Committee umbrella. The category is outreach.
- If the committee is going up \$500, it does not add programming. It is outreach.

Rev. Erica noted our UU Mass Action partnership. First Parish receives a lot of programming, such as the de-escalation training in June, that was 'free' because of the partnership.

It was noted that the wish list items stay on the wish list until the Stewardship Committee knows what First Parish raised for pledges.

It was noted that the staff salaries are a much bigger increase than the wish list items combined. First Parish values our great staff.

Lissa left the meeting at 8:48 PM.

8:48 PM **Executive session**

MOTION 4: I move that we enter executive session and invite the ministers. (Susan Moore) Seconded (Carolyn) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

MOTION 5: I move that we leave executive session. (Joanna) Seconded (Susan) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

9:22 PM **Adjourn.** - **MOTION 6:** I move that we adjourn. (Joanna) Seconded (John A) 8 of 8 in favor. None Opposed.

MOTIONS:

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Minutes prepared by Joanna Pushee, clerk.