

Unitarian Universalist Congregation
Board Meeting Minutes
October 4, 2018

Present: Pam Phillips, Steve Keighton, Sandy Power, Irene Peterson, Amy Bachi-Pruden, Ellen Plummer

Absent: Dan Kominsky

Chalice Lighting, Reading, Check In - The chalice was lit, Steve did the reading, and folks checked in.

Review and Accept Revised Agenda – The agenda was amended to discuss tree removal. The amended agenda was approved.

Member Forum - Rick Ashley and Bill Baker from the Environmental Justice Team addressed the committee's Solar Energy Proposal. Rick reviewed the proposal and answered questions the board had about the proposal.

Consent Agenda - Approved.

- Minister's Report - Pam reminded the group to refer to a link in her report regarding the new Welcoming Congregations Renewal Program called Five Pillars. All Board members are encouraged to sign up to attend one of these sessions. <https://www.uua.org/lgbtq/blog/five-pillars-welcome-renewal-october-weekly-orientations>
- Administrator's Report
- DLF's Report
- Previous meeting minutes

Treasurer's Report

Sandy Power gave a treasurer's report. Because the board meeting was held earlier than usual information from the bookkeeper was not yet available.

Old Business

- Document Management - The board will continue to use OneDrive for now.
- Board meeting date - November 20
- Minister Evaluation – Pam is pursuing ministerial fellowship with the UUA. This is a big deal and the UUC will be providing the UUA's Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC) with annual evaluations (due in November of each year). Previous members of the board provided comments for inclusion in the evaluation and Irene has compiled current and former board member comments into one document. The compiled comments will be sent by Irene to current board members for review. Comments regarding the evaluation are due to Irene by Friday October 12. Steve and Amy have agreed to meet with Pam to review the evaluation prior to its submission to the UUA/MFC on November 1.
- Review Board Goals – This was not able to be addressed at this meeting. It will be put on a future agenda.
- Solar Panels – Members discussed the proposal for solar panels and the valuable discussion with Rick and Bill from the Environmental Justice Committee (EJC). Ellen will craft a communication to the EJC acknowledging the board's support for exploring the possibilities of solar panels and desire to engage the full congregation in exploring this type of initiative as part of congregational long range planning.
- Board member at large nominees – Ellen will reach out to see if they want to serve.
- On-line automatic debit for pledges. Discussions continue regarding encouraging members to use the on-line automatic debit for pledges. This was unable to be addressed at this meeting. It will be put on a future agenda.
- Electronic backup system – The UUC uses Office 365 which has an automatic backup system. This issue has been resolved.

- Email addresses clarification - congregants may use addressstheboard@uucnrv.org which goes to the president. For e-mails to the board, minister, Lisa and Karen use board@uucnrv.org. For e-mails to only board members and not staff use boardonly@uucnr.org
- Newsletter submissions by board members. Article is due on the fourth Thursday of every month and is sent to Lisa. Ellen will write the article every other month and board members have agreed to write an article per set schedule:

Irene – November – article due to Lisa October 25
 Ellen – December – article due to Lisa November 22
 Steve – January – article due to Lisa December 27
 Ellen – February – article due to Lisa January 24
 Sandy – March. – article due to Lisa February 21
 Ellen – April. – article due to Lisa March 28
 Amy – May. – article due to Lisa April 25
 Ellen – June - – article due to Lisa May 23

- Board representative to New to UU - third Sunday of the month for the after-service gathering of New to UU. The following schedule has been set:
 - Ellen – October 21
 - Steve – November 18
 - Sandy – December 16
 - Amy – January 13
 - Irene – February 17
 - Dan – March 17
 - Irene – April 21
 - Ellen – May 19
 - Steve – June 16

New Business

- UUC Policy review - This was not able to be addressed at this meeting. It will be put on a future agenda.
- Date for Annual meeting - This was not able to be addressed at this meeting. It will be put on a future agenda.
- Endowment actions
 - The board approved extension of terms of the endowment committee:
 - Bill Baker—3 year term
 - Linda Powers—2 year term
 - Dennis Moody—1 year term
 - The board voted to waive the requirement outlined in the UUC endowment policy to use of a certified public accountant for the audit of the endowment fund. The endowment fund is small (but mighty) and has had little activity.
- Tree Removal – The grounds committee requested funds for the removal of a tree. The board approved an allocation of \$900 to the landscaping/grounds budget. This allocation will come from the UUC operating budget.

Select volunteer for opening words for next meeting – Irene

Next Meeting Nov 20.

Extinguish Chalice and Adjourn Meeting - Meeting was adjourned 9:10 PM

Respectfully submitted by Irene Peterson

**Unitarian Universalist Congregation
Board Meeting Agenda
October 4, 2018**

Present:

Absent:

**Chalice Lighting and Reading
Check in**

1. Review and Accept Revised Agenda

2. Member Forum

Environmental Justice Team member regarding the Solar Energy Proposal – Rich Ashley

3. Consent Agenda: Approve

Minister's Report
Administrator's Reports
DLFD's Reports
Previous meeting minutes

4. Treasurer's Report

Sandy Power

5. Old Business

Pam will set up Google Drive to replace OneDrive

November meeting date: November 20

Minister Evaluations – Ellen will ask some past board members to also complete the evaluation

Review Board Goals – next steps

Solar Panels – next steps

Nominees for board member at large – We are considering nominations for members at large.

Discussions are continuing regarding encouraging members to use the on-line automatic debit for pledges. Sandy will be asked to speak to finance about other ways congregants may be able to make ½ plate contributions electronically.

Follow-up to questions about our backup system . We use Office 365 which has an automatic backup system.

Clarify e-mail addresses – congregants use addressstheboard@uucnr.org which goes to the current president. For e-mails to the board, minister, Lisa and Karen use board@uucnr.org. For e-mails to only board members and not staff use boardonly@uucnr.org

Discussion about the assignment of newsletter article. Article is due on the fourth Thursday of every month and is sent to Lisa.

Discussion of assignment of Board representative to be present the third Sunday of the month for the after service gathering of New to UU.

6. New Business

UUC Policy review – next steps. Ellen and Steve will review and come back to the board for the next steps.

Date for Annual meeting – discuss date and time of annual meeting. Needs to be between March 22 and June 15

Endowment – Board needs to approve extension of terms of the endowment committee.

5 Pillars of Welcome Renewal orientation sessions - is anyone interested?

7. Select volunteer for opening words for next meeting

8. Extinguish Chalice and Adjourn Meeting

October 2018 Minister's Report to the Board
Submitted by Rev. Pam Philips

Leads Worship

In September, we explored what it means to be a people of Vision. This theme comes from *Soul Matters*, a network of UU churches who explore the same themes using input from member congregations to create packets. This year, we are also using the small group packets as we start up a new small group ministry. One of our services highlighted how small groups can help people explore their own beliefs, as well as build stronger connections. David Lally did a magnificent job with his reflection for that service. We also explored our congregational vision through a service that culminated in our "Ministries Convention"—opening the wall between the sanctuary and Elarth Hall to accommodate all the different committees, groups, and activities who work to fulfill our vision. Thanks to the Connections committee and especially Mark Benson for helping to set up this special service. We also explored mystical vision in anticipation of the Sufi mystic Rumi's birthday.

The worship team is undergoing transition, with some members stepping off (Tim Pickering, Jane Mahone, and soon Rhonda Johnson and Victoria Taylor) and others coming on. I'm pleased that Hayden Catlett, Stephen Henninger, and Kimberley Homer applied and were enthusiastically accepted onto the team as worship associates. Each of the new WA's will be participating in services in October. We'll also be scheduling a worship theory retreat for the WA team.

Officiates Rites of Passage

Karen Hager and Rachel Craine conducted a blessing of the backpacks during the service on the first day of Religious Education classes. The feedback from the worship team was positive and encouraged even more emphasis on the ritual next year.

Provides Pastoral Care and Presence

I continue to visit with congregants at the hospital, in my office, and at their homes. The Lay Pastoral Care Ministry is offering a new opportunity for people to receive pastoral care in what they are calling "Office Hours." Two LPCM associates will be staying after the Sunday service to meet with anyone who would like to share a joy or a sorrow one-on-one rather with the whole congregation. We have also posted "contact cards" on the LPCM bulletin board in Elarth so people can pick up one for themselves to or hand to someone else who is experiencing a time of loss or transition.

Encourages Spiritual Development

I'm gratified that so many people signed on to act as facilitators for the small group ministries program. We had 13 people attend training on September 22nd, with 3 others who I'll train separately. Marilyn DuPont has been staffing a table to sign up congregants after the service, as well as an on-line form, and so far 19 people have signed up to participate. The sign up deadline is October 7th, after which Marilyn and I will put together groups. I'm especially excited that it looks like we'll have a group in Radford so folks who live there will have UUC activity that doesn't require them to drive all the way to Blacksburg.

I led a spirited discussion of the Ware lecture among 16 participants in our first adult faith development program of the year and am looking forward to leading a six-session class on New (or not so New) to UU starting later this month.

Witnesses to Social Justice in the Public Square

An area of social justice on which we have not focused recently is LGBTQ rights. The UUA is rolling out a new Welcoming Congregations Renewal Program called Five Pillars in January. They are offering on-line orientations through the month of October, and I encourage all board members who can to [sign up to attend one of these sessions](#) so that we can discuss UUC's participating in the program. I have also emailed members of the original UUC Welcoming Congregation Task Force (whose names I got from the minutes of their first meeting in 2003!) to let them know about the new program. Several have responded that they are interested in helping again.

I continue to attend community meetings, including the NAACP, which hosted a candidate forum with one of the candidates for congress that I attended. I also met with members of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, along with Stephanie Gilmore and Molly McClintock, who is spearheading an effort to learn more about the needs of refugees and immigrants. We have a phone call set to talk with the intern at First UU in Richmond who has shepherded that congregation through the process of becoming a sanctuary church (good timing with our worship theme of sanctuary).

Leads Administration

The process to revise the DLFD contract has taken longer than anticipated, discussing with the personnel committee, the DLFD, and seeking outside counsel from UUA staff. We are nearing the end of that process.

With the current volunteer Facebook page administrator, Rhonda Johnson, preparing to move to Colorado, I am seeking new volunteers to take on the role she has played so well. We have purchased a Social Media Toolkit from Soul Matters, which includes all kinds of graphics and a training video to help volunteers transform the congregation's social media presence. We are also hoping to revive a UUC Facebook group in which members of our community can communicate with one another. This requires volunteer as well as staff monitoring, so I am actively seeking volunteers for this role, as well.

Pursues Personal Renewal and Professional Development

This has been a busy month, with the beginning of the church year and the preparation for a new small group ministry. Jamie and I enjoyed kayaking down the New River with John Imbur (auction purchase). We're looking forward to taking a brief, long-weekend vacation later this month.

It's been good to meet with clergy colleagues in the Blacksburg Ministerial Association. I also continue to take advantage of on-line opportunities to connect with colleagues, including my mentor, my peer discernment circle, and Soul Matters implementation calls.

Serves the Larger Unitarian Universalist Faith

It was good to meet with colleagues at our first VACUUM (Virginia Cluster of UU Ministers), and UUC will be hosting the Blue Ridge cluster of professionals in October.

The UU Legislative Ministry Virginia is going through a process of renewal and rejuvenation, and I'm currently seeking two members who will serve on UULMVA board (attending virtual meetings regularly and occasionally going to Richmond for training and advocacy).

Administrator's Report to the Board October 4, 2018

Endowment Webpage: I will be meeting shortly with Bill Baker to set up a new webpage under "Support" with info about our Endowment Fund. There will also be an article in the October newsletter.

Stewardship Committee: Thanks to the Ministries Conference, several people have joined or expressed an interest in serving on the committee. Each of the next few months, there will be a newsletter article discussing how donations/pledges have been used to help us fulfill our mission and vision.

Auction: Be sure to get your auction donations in by Oct. 14 and plan to attend! At this time, 77 items have been entered on the auction website with many more needed.

Seeking New Childcare Worker(s): We are losing one of our most reliable sitters this month, so I am searching for 1-2 new sitters. If you know of anyone, let me know.

Attendance/Members: See online Google Doc. Current membership at 215 as 2 inactive members returned after an absence. Another couple who were members many years ago have moved back to the area, but I am waiting for confirmation that they want to be added back to membership.

DLFD Report to the Board – October 2018

Submitted by Karen Hager, Director of Lifespan Faith Development

Registration

- CYRE: 112
- LFD Activity Slots: 131
- UUC Activity Slots: 146

Registration is up 5% over this time last year.

This Month

- Dumbledore's Army fights the Hunger Horcrux in October. This fight fits with our annual It's Scary To Be Hungry event on Sunday, October 21. DA will sort the food collected during the service that day to get it ready for donation to the Interfaith Food Pantry. Members will also help at Kroger and later stocking shelves at IFP.
- YRUU holds a book sale September 30-October 7. All donations will go towards the YRUU Trip Fund. All unsold books will be donated to the Montgomery-Floyd Little Library program.
- A representative from the Blacksburg Refugee Partnership will be visiting this month with YRUU to talk more about immigration justice.
- The Social Justice Film Series continues with "Straws", followed by a discussion facilitated by Carol Davis of Sustainable Blacksburg.
- A 2-part workshop will be held on the UUA Congregational Study/Action Issue (CSAI), The Corrupting of Our Democracy. This workshop will be facilitated by UUC member and Blacksburg's Mayor, Leslie Hager-Smith.
- Rev. Pam begins a class, New (Or Not So New) to UU.
- America Inside Out with Katie Couric continues; this month's episode is "The Muslim Next Door", exploring what it's like to be a Muslim in America today.
- Registration will be held this month for our annual Buddy Project, matching adults and children as buddies. The activity begins in November and culminates at the multi-generational holiday service in December.

Key Dates in October:

- Now through October 7: YRUU Book Sale
- October 5: Social Justice Film Series
- October 14-31: Buddy Project registration
- October 16 & 30: CSAI: The Corrupting of Our Democracy
- October 18: New (Or Not So New) to UU begins
- October 21: It's Scary To Be Hungry
- October 22: America Inside Out with Katie Couric
- October 25-28: MCPS Fall Break – no school
- October 23-29: I will be on vacation

October 4, 2018

Response to Board Queries Regarding The Proposed “Self-Funding UUC Solar Energy Project”

Prior to listing our responses to your queries, we would like to first raise up for your attention the idea – already to some extent embodied in the text of the August 27th proposal, immediately prior to (and including) footnote #4 – that we could easily combine the ‘marketing’ of the co-op “shares” proposed here with a ‘Capital Campaign’ soliciting outright lump-sum donations toward the purchase solar panels.

Such a campaign requires no legality investigations and (for sufficiently-large single-donor donations) would allow donating members a charitable-donation tax break for their donation, while still enabling each donator to make a contribution to UUC which is both socially responsible and which will provide the church with ongoing benefits (in the form of reduced electricity bills) for many years to come.

Bringing up this issue highlights both a strength and a weakness of the ‘self-funding’ proposal addressed here: On the one hand, we think that (if the ‘marketing’ campaign for them is adroitly done) the purchase of a “share” in the co-op ought not substitute for making a charitable donation to UUC in the minds and hearts of most congregants. We take this to be the case because these “shares” can reasonably be viewed as long-term moderately-attractive household financial investments, albeit ones which are very socially responsible. On the other hand, for some congregants this very advantage of such a “share” purchase in some sense ‘soils’ what they would prefer to frame as a purely charitable donation in the service of both the UUC and our global responsibilities. In some sense the concomitant ‘Capital Campaign’ alluded to above might allow us to attract/satisfy both sets of congregants.

Turning now to our responses to the questions you posed:

1. Has an engineering study been done to see if the roof can support solar panels without additional cost?

Not yet. The roof was last replaced 10 years ago, and Patrick Feucht (who has a great deal of roof-top expertise) is of the opinion that it is fine for another 10 years. The already-estimated cost of the project includes the cost of obtaining a building permit, which necessarily involves obtaining a structural evaluation of the roof. Prior to the installation we can also commission an independent engineering study if we wish, at a cost of perhaps \$800, and re-think the project if an issue arises thereby.

2. What kind of shape is the roof in now (when should it be replaced?)

See response above in #1.

3. Will trees need to be cut back in order to get the most from the panels?

No. Patrick reports, “There is plenty of room on the roof to avoid shade from the few trees close enough to cause shade.”

4. Why do dividends versus an outright donation of the solar panels?

The answer to this question is closely related to that presented below for #7 (“How will it affect our annual fund drive?”). We – which refers to both the renewable-energy subcommittee of the Environmental Justice Team (‘EJT’) and the EJT itself – fully understand the importance of minimizing the impact of the ‘marketing’ of these proposed solar panel “shares” on the charitable contributions which constitute our annual UUC fund drive.

In addition to suggesting that the solar panel “shares” be offered to the congregation at time period substantially apart from when the fund drive is conducted, this minimization also motivates our proposing a financing scheme that is designed to be clearly distinct from the solicitation of charitable donations to the church. In particular, we deem it both essential and fundamentally accurate to view the purchase of one of these proposed solar panel “shares” as a financial investment – one that provides a long-term stream of income (“dividends”) to the congregant purchaser and his/her family. Of course, anyone who wants to is free to donate their solar panel “share” to the church if they wish (and whenever they wish), but our intent is to avoid framing this project in those terms, for the very reason that we do not want the proposed program to ‘cannibalize’ annual fund pledges to the church.

On the other hand – as noted above, at the top of this document – the Board might well want to consider conducting a ‘Capital Campaign’ soliciting outright lump-sum donations toward the purchase of solar panels simultaneously with the effort to promote the take-up of the co-op “shares” proposed here, for the reasons set out above.

5. How is it proposed to pay for the extra bookkeeping that will be involved in making and keeping track of dividend payments?

We queried Lisa Evanylo early on in this process and she indicated that making the modest number (20-40 or so) of dividend payments would impose negligible costs on the church, because we already use a service for writing/ mailing payment checks and because this would be done only once a year.

The ‘smart’ metering which would be installed as part of the solar panel installation process would make it extremely simple to keep track of the amount of power which was fed back into the grid: the meter would simply need to be read once a year. This power amount would need to be multiplied by our average electricity rate per kilowatt-hour, which average would ordinarily (because our electricity rate changes infrequently) be simple to calculate. The total dollar savings from the solar panel array would then be divided by the number of “shares” and multiplied by 0.90 in order to obtain the dividend-per-share figure for that year. This process is sufficiently straightforward that a volunteer has already been obtained to perform this administrative task for the foreseeable future.

6. How long are dividend payments made?

The output from the current generation of solar panels decays at a rate of approximately 0.5 percent each year, so the array would be substantially productive for the 30-year period envisioned in the proposal; to put this into context, the panels come with a 25 year guarantee.

Thus, so long as AEP continues to reimburse its customers for power fed back into the grid, the “dividends” – calculated based on the annual value of this reimbursement – would continue for the full 30 years. Thus, each “share” is financially distinct from other investment opportunities available to our fellow congregants in that each one provides to the family (and its heirs) an exceedingly long stream of “dividends,” albeit one that is both taxable and variable.

Moreover, should electricity prices rise at a faster rate than prices in general in the coming decades – as one might expect – then this “dividend” stream would be more than indexed to overall inflation.

Why 30 years? Partly this is because the stream of electricity production from the solar panels is substantial over a period this long. Another reason that this period was chosen to be so lengthy is that – unlike a loan in the form of a typical bond – the re-payment of the initial \$1,000 purchase price (which mostly goes to financing one solar panel) is thus spread out over a lengthy period. Under a quite conservative estimate of only a 3% annual growth rate in our electricity rate, Table 1 indicates that the financial yield from a share purchase would be 2.7%. This yield is hardly spectacular – although it could be substantially larger if electricity prices increase at an annual rate faster than 3% – but it is not dismal. Moreover – as we should hardly need to note – each share in this program represents a financial investment that is very socially responsible.

7. How will it affect our annual fund drive?

Very little, insofar as we are adroit as to how and when these solar panel “share” investments are made available to the congregation. See our response to #4, above.

8. How can they convince the congregation that this should be done? (It is felt that congregational approval for this project would be a requirement.)

We think that it goes without saying that the congregation (as a group) would need to approve this project, but it clearly needs to be thoroughly investigated prior to that, as there are legal restrictions on what activities a non-profit can engage in.

Perhaps – although we doubt it – an independent examination of the roof would be warranted. More importantly however, as the final paragraph of the proposal notes:

“ ... this plan will need to be vetted by an attorney prior to implementation, as it is notably different from a simple member-loan. In particular, a formal share purchase agreement would clarify both the transferability of the “shares” and the contingency of the “dividend” payments on the continuation of AEP’s current policies with regard to crediting customers for power returned to the grid. We do not yet have access to an attorney willing to do this on a pro bono basis; it is for this reason that the terms “co-op,” “share,” and “dividend” have been repeatedly enclosed in quotation marks above.”

This legal ‘vetting’ might itself not be cost-free. We earnestly request help from the Board in identifying potential attorneys who might be willing to help the church out in this regard, either at reduced rates or on a *pro bono* basis, as our group is not able to do this part ourselves. Another possibility we would like to raise here is that – if and only if the Board is willing to endorse this proposal – we might be able to obtain help from the UUA in dealing with these legal issues and with the construction of a fully appropriate “share” agreement document. At that point we could perhaps cease putting the words “share” and “dividend” within quotation marks.

We also note that, in the worst-case scenario, implementation of the kind of co-op funding mechanism proposed here might require an amendment to the state laws governing non-profit entities. We understand that UUA is creating a ‘Legislative Action Committee’ which would likely be helpful in this regard; we would also be willing and able to bring this issue to the attention of our local State Delegate, Chris Hurst. While quite possibly successful – and of social value in and of itself – such an effort would clearly delay implementation of the project by at least a year or two.

The Board should be cognizant of this possibility when it compares this project proposal to an alternative of simply conducting a ‘Capital Campaign’ to collect donations to fund a solar panel array in the more-or-less immediate future. Should such a campaign be sufficiently successful as to fund a minimal installation (i.e., at least 20 panels, at ca. \$20,000), we could augment the array later on using the ‘self-funding’ mechanism proposed here, once the legalities for it were (perhaps several years later) in place. The Board might note, however, that announcing this possible future funding program might notably impact the effectiveness of such an immediate campaign, whereas failing to announce this possibility might later on negatively impact the feelings of the people who did donate to such a campaign.

9. Is this the right time to do this project in relation to the continued lower cost of panels?

We think that ‘right now’ is the right time to move this this project along . Here is Patrick’s response to your query:

“Installed cost and panel costs are at all time lows. They could certainly go lower, but they can also increase. In 2014 there was a sharp decline in panel cost, but it has been fairly stable since then. Rather than try to predict the future cost of equipment which I think will remain fairly stable, I recommend evaluating the proposition in front of us today, and if this meets the criteria for something we want to do now, then we do it and not worry about what might be had tomorrow.”

Beyond this, each year that we delay this project – in the hope that it will become cheaper – involves a responsibility on our part: for the additional greenhouse gases which a year of delay will cause our UUC electricity usage to induce AEP’s coal-fired power plants to emit into the atmosphere .

OVERALL:

What we would most like the Board to take away from the presentation of our proposal – and our responses to your questions – is that the Environmental Justice Team needs your help with this project proposal. In particular, we need two kinds of help:

(a) First, we need your encouragement – if we have in fact convinced you that this is an appropriate and valuable thing for our congregation to do.

and

(b) Second, we need your help in locating the kind of legal expertise that is necessary in order to take this proposal to the next stage. Because this proposal is perhaps (mixing metaphors a bit) a ‘new thing under the sun’ – the funding arrangement proposed here has not to our knowledge already been found to be legal by others for a non-profit to engage in. Consequently, its legality – and the precise formal format for the “share” agreements underlying it – need to be worked out with professional assistance. The help we need from you in locating this assistance might consist of leads to local attorneys who would be willing to work on this for us inexpensively or *pro bono*. Or it might consist of encouraging us to seek legal advice in this regard from the UUA, or to seek political help from our State Delegate. Each of these paths on our part would only be possible with your encouragement and imprimatur, so this point folds right back on item (a) immediately above.