

Minutes – November 17, 2010
Operations Council
First Unitarian Society in Newton

Members attending: Pat Rohan (Ch), Alan Cody, Laurel Farnsworth, Anne Hess-Mahan, and Kim Shanks. Jeannie Chaisson arrived during the Annual Budget Drive presentation. This was Anne Hess-Mahan's first meeting as a Member of the Council.

Also attending: Mr. Barb Greve. Jud Leonard and Holly Zeeb also attended portions of the meeting.

1. Opening Words: Alan shared a reading by T. Roosevelt about steadfast efforts towards a worthy cause. The group read its covenant aloud together.

2. Presentation: Annual Budget Drive: Jud Leonard, Chair of the Annual Budget Drive made a presentation and led a discussion regarding a) the volunteer functions and structure of the upcoming budget drive; and b) the goals and approach, as expressed in written materials. Jud also asked for the Council's comments and direction regarding a vision for next year, i.e. how will the funds be used? It was noted that efforts are underway to find a co-chair to serve with Jud.

Jud described a plan involving 15-20 captains, and 50-80 visiting stewards who will make approx. 300 stewardship visits. Receptions will be held for leadership and key donors. Jud sought Council Members' involvement as visiting stewards and captains. The drive will also use notices/inserts in the newsletter, order of service and email; and testimonials during Sunday services. The Fellowship Dinner will serve as the kickoff for this year's canvass.

With regard to expenses, there are no consultant costs this year. Expenditures will be made for printing & mailing, and cost of receptions.

Various draft written materials were discussed. With regard to an expense breakdown, several comments were offered. Jud noted that the Giving Guide is expected to be very similar to last year's version. Some discussion took place about providing "per household" costs, e.g. budget total = \$2,745 per household, and there was a sense that such information is useful to families.

The possibility of credit card pledge payments was briefly discussed. Pat recalled that such a system was in place many years ago, but the sponsoring company went out of business. It was noted that setting up such a system would cost not only the human effort to put it in place, but also a 3.5% – 4% service fee on every payment. There was a consensus that it's not a priority for this year. Anne asked about electronic payments; Jud replied that most local banks have systems that allow customers to order that checks be sent on a designated schedule. Alan commented that some pledging units in fact currently pay in that manner.

Members had an initial discussion regarding Jud's question about vision. The organ work was mentioned. Also mentioned was the gap to fill as a result of abolishing fees for religious education.

3. Welcome to Anne: Anne Hess-Mahan has been appointed by the Board of Trustees to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Carla Erb. Pat welcomed

Anne to the Operations Council, and described the role of the body, including a “who’s-who” description of committee liaison responsibilities of particular members.

4. Review Monthly Budget: Alan noted that the Finance Committee has reviewed expenditures and did not find any unusual items.

5. Committee Reports:

Finance Committee: Alan reported that the committee discussed the financial effect of eliminating RE fees, noting some concern about the first few years of transition. He also reported that the committee is working on a long-range forecast.

Religious Education: Kim stated that Adult R.E. is putting together a winter-spring catalog. In Coming of Age, teams of candidates are interviewing adults about their spirituality. Barb noted that the interviews will culminate with a talk-show format group discussion later this week. With regard to Children’s R.E., Barb noted that the committee is struggling to find its function; approx. ½ of the meetings have been cancelled so far this year. The Search Committee for DLRE (Director of Lifespan Religious Education) is meeting with a UUA rep. regarding the timeline. A public search is expected to open in September.

Memorials: Laurel noted that the memorial plaques have been installed in the sanctuary, although there has been some delay for one plaque.

Building/Grounds: Laurel spoke about repairs to roof, gutters, and chimney caps, funded from an existing budget line, which she hopes to complete before winter. On the matter of building insurance, she is still in correspondence with the insurance agent, waiting to hear whether the policy amount can be increased.

Green Sanctuary: The group is busily working to get everything done for the upcoming assessment.

Social Action Task Force: Jeannie reported that the recent congregational meetings were well-attended and useful.

Worship Committee: Jeannie stated that a recent brainstorming meeting was characterized by good energy.

Music Committee: Jeannie noted that the recent Music Sunday was successful. Laurel added that the organ consultant attended the service, and that he will be reviewing three proposals that have been received.

Membership/Personnel: Pat noted that seven applications for the Membership Coordinator part-time job were received by the 11/15 cut-off. The next step will be to review them and set up interviews.

6. Report on Trustees’ Meeting:

Investments: Alan reported on a recent discussion that points to an anticipated review of the draw policy for the endowment. Currently, the Society draws 5% on a rolling average basis, which Alan characterized as a pretty standard practice for charitable endowments. FUSN’s endowment was affected by the falling market a few years ago, although it subsequently stabilized. The discussion ahead might also consider the asset allocation, particularly whether to decrease the allocation to equities.

Community Minister Covenant: The Board has recently reviewed the arrangements, and Rev. Erin Splaine is going to take a greater role.

New District Program: The Board is undertaking a program provided by the Mass. Bay District in the context of ministerial start-up. Barb mentioned that although FUSN has not used it in the past, it is a decades-old program that involves discussion with recent leaders and certain committee chairs.

7. Thank You's: Pat sent a note to Wendy Schwartz for her work following-up with people who are behind with pledge payments. Barb suggested a Thank-You to the 6th grade class, which prepared brunch for the congregation last Sunday. Laurel suggested a note to Betsey Williams and Kate Mason for re-interring ashes in the Sanctuary memorial wall. Arrangements were agreed upon for expressing gratitude.

8. Small Group Ministry Program: Chair Holly Zeeb described the program, which now involves about 50 participants. The coordinators are currently collecting new topics, and they will be creating a new booklet for the groups. The program began in 2001 with 100 participants. The committee has recently met with Rev. Erin Splaine, who has agreed to provide increased ministerial involvement, in response to the committee's request.

Two new SMG groups are being established: a) one group that will, by covenant, have a one-year duration; and b) a 6-session group, as a trial.

Although the original design for SGM called for participants to change groups after the initial period, perhaps one year, that was not implemented because of preference expressed by many participants. Whether doing so now would be an improvement is a topic of continuing discussion. Interim Minister John Nichols suggested that "mixing it up" would improve the program. Members briefly discussed the pros and cons of participants staying together in SGM, including the relationship of SGM groups to support groups and Adult RE. Holly explained that one important difference from those other groups is found in the clear structure used in SGM, which eliminates cross-talk and requires lots of listening.

9. Electronic votes noted for the Record: Pat noted two votes that took place via email between the October and November meetings:

- ✓ Furnishings for Minister's office: Approval of expenditure of \$1,750.
- ✓ Minutes: Approval of Minutes for meeting of September 15, 2010.

10. Review: Priorities from Retreat/Coordination with Follow-up List: Pat led a discussion concerning the items on the two lists below.

OPERATIONS COUNCIL PRIORITIES FOR 2010-2011

- A. New meeting structure
 - Check-in on comm. activities plus presentation from "featured committee"
 - Action items
 - Collaborative agenda
- B. Communications
 - Share Operations Council success stories with the congregation
 - Share the news of the committees with the congregation
 - Make sure needed information gets communicated to staff

- C. Develop a global governance communication strategy (with a beginner in mind), collaborative effort with the Board of Trustees
- D. Expedite/streamline the budget process
- E. Evaluate the Operations Council structure and practices and make recommendations to the Board for the future
- F. Maintain/re-create communication between comm. chairs and Ops council
 - Evaluate the need to reinstitute larger meetings with committee chairs
 - Clarify the role of the Operations Council members and the committees
- G. Succession planning for the Operations Council and Committee Chairs

OTHER FOLLOW-UP ITEMS

- A. Create a Safe Congregation Policy – Nothing done, needs a committee
- B. Identify and Publish existing Board and Council Policies – Ongoing project
- C. Create a Guide for Committee Responsibilities Under the New Board Governance Policies
- D. Review and Update Staff Job Descriptions Where Necessary
- E. Review and Update Committee Charters Where Necessary
- F. Document Operations Council Procedures

Members briefly discussed each item of the two lists, noting the current status and work underway. The discussion included the following points:

- Laurel suggested a newsletter article about the budget process;
- The importance of promptly communicating to staff about new initiatives and policies that will involve staff work was noted;
- Pat intends to meet with Board Chair J. Lilienfeld regarding the communication strategy ("C" on Priority list);
- The timing of upcoming by-law amendments regarding governance was discussed; Pat expects it to be a year-long process next year;
- Regarding the budget process, Jeannie spoke strongly for joint meetings to avoid duplicative discussions and presentation. Laurel suggested asking a question at each major budget presentation, to the effect that if there was more or less funding, what would be the requesting party's priorities. She proposed that such an approach would allow the Ops Council to present both a recommendation, and tiers of cuts in rank order of funding.
- Regarding Committee Chair communications, Pat raised the possibility of quarterly meetings. Laurel suggested beginning with a January '11 meeting, and she spoke to the need for an agenda. Alan suggested it would be a good place to begin the discussion about governance by-law amendments. Barb suggested including the DLRE Search Committee, as that group seeks feedback. There was a consensus that a Saturday morning meeting would be a good approach, Pat agreed to schedule it and circulate a draft agenda.
- Safe Congregation policy: The existing R.E. policy was noted. Barb spoke to the need for a more comprehensive policy, noting 2 gaps: a) what do we do when

something [bad] happens; and b) what do we do if there is a sex offender among the congregation. Discussion ensued about carrying out policy creation in a structured manner, and Barb suggested a 5-year approach. At Alan's suggestion, Pat agreed to look to Rev. Erin Splaine's input to identifying the priorities for the policy.

- Carla Erb is continuing to help with publishing Board and Council's policies.
- Pat agreed to draft a Guide for Committee Responsibilities (item C, Follow-Up list).
- Pat mentioned that he has begun a document concerning Operations Council Procedures. Laurel and Alan noted that it will tie in to the by-law amendments.

11. New Item, Fundraiser: Laurel explained that she has almost completed renovations on the Perkins Street house that had belonged to long-time members, Bob and Ruth Daniels. She proposed offering house tours as a FUSN fundraiser. It was suggested that an event could be carried out as part of the upcoming Services Auction.

12. New Item, Budget line items & approved expenditures: Jeannie raised the possibility of creating new budget line items in connection with approval of expenditures. She pointed out that Fran Clancy needs to know the funding source in order to make payment, mentioning as an example funds that were approved for the Social Action Task Force. Alan and Laurel both replied that from a financial point of view, it is desirable to avoid creating line items, especially for one-time items. There was a consensus that going forward, whenever the Council approves an expenditure, the motion should identify the line item to be charged.

Respectfully submitted,

Gayle Smalley, Assistant Clerk