

# Unitarian Society of Hartford Board Meeting

## March 12, 2024

Quorum NO \_\_\_ YES X

Location: Zoom

Board Attendees	Guests	Regrets
Dana Donovan Nancy Kemmerer Jon Covault Rick Tsukada Paul Cipriano Jim Venneman Judy Sullivan Tina Davies Laurie Kelliher Rev. Bob Janis	David Newton Janice Newton Beverly Spence Edith Savage	Gloria F. Mengual

## Orders of Business

6:30 p.m. Meeting was called to order by Dana Donavan. Welcome, check-in, reading, chalice lighting, opening words.

- 1. Approval of February 2024 Board Meeting Minutes** – Tina made Motion to approve. Jim seconded. Unanimous approval.
- 2. Building & Grounds/Endowment Committee Update** -David Newton (See complete report in addendum below)
  - \***Building & Grounds** - Building and Grounds Report: David Newton presented Building and Grounds report. See attachment.
  - \* David Newton explained that Joe Rubin is serving a one year term on the Endowment Committee. As chair of the committee he recommends appointing Joe to a new 3 year term to commence on July 1, 2024. Jim Venneman made the motion, Judy Sullivan seconded and it passed unanimously.
- 3. Treasurer's Report** (See Jon Covault's complete report in addendum below)

**4. Finance Chair Report** – *Jim Venneman* To date, 37% of the stewardship goal of \$308,000. has been pledged.

**5. Update on Search for RE Director** – *Rev. Bob & Rick Tsukada*  
Rev Bob and Rick led a discussion about the prospective Director of RE. That person should be concentrating on building a strong program for children first and may consider adult RE later. Employees need to work 15 hours per week to be eligible for benefits.

## **Council Chair Reports**\_\_\_\_\_

**1. MINISTER'S REPORT** - *Rev. Bob Janis* \*(See addendum below for complete report). Rev. Bob reported that 14 people showed up at Tisane for the initial 30s and 40s group and plans are underway for a second meeting. Other programs include Poetry Workshop, First Tuesdays, sermon writing session this month, Labyrinth Walk on March 19<sup>th</sup>, GHIAA House Meeting, First Thursday evening service in the chapel. In addition to this busy schedule, Rev. Bob has also been making several Pastoral Care visits.

**2. ADMINISTRATION**– *Paul Cipriano* – There is \$8K left in the first Security grant. That money will be spent on another keyless entry and cameras in the parking lot. A second grant (2025) will be applied for, to be used for lights in the parking lot and sidewalks.

**3. COMMUNITY WITHIN**– *Tina Davies*

\*Jim Landis and Fred Louis have started a USH Men's Group which will meet once a month.

\*Karolina and Tina have had difficulty getting into Constant Contact, the platform for USH E-news. Techs are working on the problem.

**4. FINANCE** – *Jim Venneman* - Our solar array is running a \$3000 credit from the utility company.

**5. MEMBERSHIP** – *Laurie Kelliher* \*(See addendum below for complete report) Attendance at Sunday service continues to grow, both in person and on-line. Our average attendance is between 80 and 100. Visitors are encouraged to use a blue mug at coffee hour so we may welcome them. A welcome table has been created in Fellowship Hall, in addition to the welcome table in the lobby. Laurie and Rev. Bob send letters to visitors each week. Also, invitations to the 30s-40s participants have been sent.

Signage near the monument along the street is being considered. There is a 4-page document on rules and regulations from the city of Hartford. David Newton will look into what we can do.

## **6. SOCIAL JUSTICE** – *Judy Sullivan* \*(See addendum below for complete report).

\*USH, Urban Hope, and New Antioch Baptist Church are co-hosting a GHIAA House Meeting March 20<sup>th</sup> at USH. These are 60-90-minute listening sessions that identify issues affecting our community.

\*The Sum of Us discussions center around podcasts by Heather McGee-stories of hope, collaboration and stronger communities. Gloria Mengual is the facilitator.

## **7. SPIRITUAL LIFE** - *Rick Tsukada* –

\*The music is better, playing different hymns. Chancel Art-Rick would like more candles. Worship Associates-doing great. OWL Program, combined with Fern Street, is progressing well. Annie is keeping families aware of programs we offer. There are new tables in Fellowship Hall thanks to David and Janice Newton.

Rowe Camp – Tina reports that since the Covid Pandemic, the Rowe Center is hurting financially. Rev. Bob suggested we think about a church wide retreat this summer.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

*Laura and Paul Cipriano* – Meeting House Presents is looking for:

1. Hosts for out-of-town performers.
2. People who would be willing to underwrite a performance
3. Advertising budget, street team to put out flyers
4. Incorporate a song into Sunday Worship Service to generate enthusiasm

By asking for a suggested donation, we avoid Christian copyright fees.

## **GUEST COMMENTS**

\***David Newton** – Word Press, editing, pasting links are difficult to do. Paula Pierce of Hosting CT can inexpensively adjust links and do updates every 4 months.

**Meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.**

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# Addendums – March 2024 Reports

## 1. USH Ministerial Board Report ~ Rev. Bob Janis

### **\*Foundations and Behind the Scenes**

The most important election of 2024 is behind us! Well, around here anyway... thank you so much for your vote of confidence. I am so honored to be in ministry with you. Here's to the next five years.

In conversations, working on vital staffing questions, from the RE search to making the most of our administrative position. Can discuss these at greater length during the meeting.

My thanks to Jim Venneman for getting this pledge season off and running with such aplomb, to Carolyn Carlson for passing on so much wisdom to us, and to the many people who pitched in to help – yayy! And most of all, thank you to everyone for pledging, and for all that time devoted here, too. We wouldn't seek, share or soar without you.

Nice to see October 6th historic status celebration coming along so nicely, thanks to Nancy and Judy – bravo!

Due to school holiday schedule, I have decided to alter my study leave from MAY 19 -MAY 26 (as reported in my December 2023 board report) to APRIL 12 – APRIL 19. Hope that's all right. Karolina goes on vacation the week before, so it's staggered. And I'll be working throughout May and June. I'll let you know on summer dates.

### **\*Programming and Social Justice**

As said in the e-news last week, there is a LOT of programming going on at the moment:

- 30s and 40s group had an impressive 14 people at first introductory session at Tisane;
- Poetry workshop continuing through March at least;
- "First Tuesdays" continuing through June (and may well keep it going next year)
- Sermon writing workshop this month;
- Labyrinth Walk on March 19<sup>th</sup>;
- A GHIAA House meeting being hosted here on March 20<sup>th</sup>
- Getting ready for second "First Thursday" evening service as I write this, featuring a guitarist;
- And so much more. (It's almost obligatory to close with that, right?)

I don't expect to always be starting/continuing this many programs at once, but it's good to experiment with different things and see what works, what continues, what evolves, and so on.

### **\*Sundays & Special Services**

Feel Sundays continue to be high quality including our guests. As spring involves more congregational activities and related announcements (this usually happens), it becomes more imperative to keep things a little tighter on the timing. I'm working on it...last Sunday was under 60 minutes with 3 speakers and a classical pianist!

### **\*Pastoral Care and Rites of Passage**

Plenty of visits and follow-up visits. Also a lot of hard news in the congregation – won't list it all here but lots of family of members to keep in our hearts this month, in challenging times.

## **2. Treasurer Report ~ Jon Covault**

**2023-2024 budget:** Pledge giving received as of January 31, 2024 totals \$236,084 or 84% of pledge total (\$279,135) with 33% of budget year remaining.

Expenses have generally been in line with the approved budget for most categories. Staff expenses are projected to be \$3-4,000 over budget and RE, music, worship and social justice expenses are projected to be under budget (in total \$10,000). The service contract for our elevator has increased by approximately \$1,200 per year. Health insurance premiums increased by 14% beginning January 1, 2024.

The current budget had one-time income items of \$41,100 from remaining PPP funds and \$22,000 from prior years' budget surplus. The net positive \$16,000 in revenue from year end stewardship appeal, \$8,000 collected from prior year pledges and projected \$6,000 under budget for expenses suggests we will not need to use reserve funds from prior years' surplus account nor the entire \$41,100 from PPP funds (\$8,000 projected remaining).

**UBS Endowment** – No USH withdrawals in January. **Schwab savings account** –

No USH withdrawals in February.

**Monthly GNO** giving for February:

Interreligious Eco-Justice Network: \$1,109 (\$729 USH)

**2024-2025 budget:** An initial draft budget based on current year expenses sent recently to Finance Committee chair with stewardship goal of \$308,000, a 10% increase in current FY pledges. The draft budget includes maintaining

our current UUA payment at \$14,00/yr (vs. the UUA suggested \$19,000 for FY24-25 and \$21,700 for FY23-24), increased salary/housing for our Minister as specified in the recent 5 yr contract. The augmented music and worship budgets from FY24 maintained to provide for guest musicians (10/yr), augmentation of choir monthly Sept-May, and 12 pulpit guests. The draft budget includes \$8,000 from projected remaining PPP and \$16,000 contribution from prior years' surplus to maintain current resource levels. Any increase in RE budget or office administrator hours would need to be funded by increased use of prior budget surplus rainy day fund (\$62,900 available).

Budget related requests include \$5,000 for expenses (external marketing and event costs) related to our October celebration of our historical designation, a modest increase of \$800 for staff appreciation/development (from \$200) and request by those involved in adult programs to rollover receipts from book sales, movie night, sing-a-long and yoga into a Schwab ledger for use to pay for expenses related to these or other community within programs (this would reduce these incomes to the general budget of approximately \$2,000) and to rollover unspent allocation for the caring network (\$100-350).

### **3. Membership Report ~ Laurie Kelliher**

**\*Newcomers Update** - USH continues to have 3-5 visitors/newcomers every Sunday. However, not everyone is being captured for information to make follow-up. The one Sunday that the welcome table was offered in Fellowship Hall after service did seem to be a good avenue for a more relaxed conversation with visitors, but it is not always possible to assign someone to be present there.

**\*Blue Mug Newcomer Welcome** -The blue coffee cups do act as an identifier but their placement in Fellowship Hall is a bit of a problem because the "urn" table has no more room. I will continue to work with the Worship Associates in the announcements regarding newcomers.

**\*New Member Ceremony** - Three people have been identified as interested in membership; the New Member ceremony will be in late May or early June. Further info on membership will be added to the weekly newsletter and hopefully, more newcomers will come forward.

**\*Notable Visitors** - We have had several notable guests in the past weeks...John Kerry, Derek Slapp and Christopher Murphy. Any thoughts on follow up?

**\*Front lawn signs** - During a previous meeting, there was conversation about use of signs on the front lawn to entice passersby to attend services. There are parameters for temporary signs in Hartford. Rules and regulations

for temporary signs have been printed for distribution to B&G. Sign suggestions from the Unitarian Hysterical Society to be sent to BOD members. Issues to be a discussion item for April BOD meeting.

#### **4. Social Justice Council ~ Judy Sullivan**

##### **\*Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA)**

USH is hosting a House Meeting on Wednesday, March 20 from 6 – 7:30 p.m. along with two GHIAA congregations, Urban Hope Refuge, led by Rev. AJ Johnson, and New Antioch Baptist, led by Pastor Jeff Powell.

House meetings are 60 – 90 minute listening sessions (similar to Connection Circles) with a small group of people, facilitated by trained leaders. Through House Meetings, we identify issues that are affecting our community. We hear direct impact stories and identify leaders motivated to create positive change. We build connections among leaders and strengthen our relational network. All are welcome and encouraged to attend. The March 24 Sunday service will be centered on the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA). Rev. Jocelyn Gardner Spencer, GHIAA Lead Organizer, will be the pulpit guest.

##### **\*Anti-Racism Programming: The Sum of Us Podcast Discussions**

The next session is scheduled for Thursday, March 21, and the discussion will be on the podcast titled: Lewiston, Maine: A New Crop – How immigrants strengthened one area's local farms and strengthen the overall economy nationwide. The full schedule of upcoming podcasts and discussion dates can be found on the USH Social Justice website.

##### **\*EqUUal Access and Disability Justice**

The team met on Sunday, March 10 with 9 members (4 board members) and Rev. Bob to review accessibility and safety issues of the chancel. The meeting took place in the sanctuary and chancel and was interactive regarding issues of the organ pit, railings for steps, choir area concerns and the electric lift. The discussion also included the need to promote equality and access to truly be a welcoming congregation. The work of EqUUal Justice is "to enable the full engagement of people with disabilities in Unitarian Universalist communities and the broader society".

#### **5. David Newton's Remarks ~ Remarks for the Board Meeting – 03/24**

##### **\*Good news.**

-Recent rains (3.3 inches in the last two; 5.5 in the last 30 days) have filled the berm and not exceeded the capacity of the west catch basin.

-No leaks have dumped water into the Sanctuary and specifically the Chancel. That formerly happened with every serious rain and was stopped by the last roof covering (May 2018), coupled with careful monitoring of

drain screens, drain heaters in the winter, and cable covers above the sanctuary roof.

**\*Bad news**, the continuing floods since the middle of last summer cause some leaking at the Fellowship Hall level. This has even included minor puddles in the Men's room not seen for the last three years or so, and slight incursions into the electrical room and kitchen.

**\*Our Aesthetic group** headed by Evan Williams has finished in Servetus. This included, among other things, refinishing of the conference table, treatment of various wood surfaces, painting, and repair of wall coverings. Meanwhile Kevin has figured out how to repair long dormant outdated light fixtures keeping the original valence covers and adding new LED lights. This, like many internal projects is saving a boatload of money otherwise necessary to accomplish such work. There are many such fixtures in the rooms around the Ambulatory. Current progress is in the meditation rooms.

**\*Alarm Systems** - Kevin, Karolina, and I spent the better part of a morning learning a good deal about fire alarm systems. We have updated one alarm pull outside the kitchen and have a grandfathered tested working system. There will be some cost associated with that work as we had it done by Lighthouse electricians. They also corrected one minor upward light in a Sanctuary fixture (no charge for that).

**\* Update on Meeting House inclusion on the National Registry of Historic Places** - Jenny Scofield has sent along the Microsoft Teams links for the meeting being held on March 22 for consideration of our application materials seeking Meeting House inclusion on the National Registry of Historic Places. It is generally believed, if our state body so recommends, the National Park service is highly likely to approve the recommendation. You will recall that Building Conservation Associates prepared the application funded by a grant we received for this important work.

**\*Blacktop Stripe Painting Update** - We are seeking another bid, we have one, for the necessary painting of stripes on our blacktop for traffic flow and accessible parking. This work is governed by various rules including making the north drive two way with yellow stripe down the middle, and making the south drive one way, in, only.

**\*Downfall of Trees** -We have some senescent cottonwood trees around our lower parking lot. One fell down some weeks ago and another came down in the last rain/wind. These need to be sawed up and the wood stacked for those who want to help themselves to it. Kevin has done the recent chain sawing of the trees.

**\*Solar Collectors** -Because of our solar collectors, we had no power bills through December 2023. And during the period received payments for ZRECs generated.



**\*Grant Reimbursement Updates** -We received grant funding for Security measures. A good deal of the work has been done and expenses against the grant are to be reimbursed. Reimbursements expected last November have not been received. We have a similar arrangement with the grant funds paid to Building Conservation Associates. At the close of that project, we will be seeking full reimbursement for the grant. We do not know how long that might take.

**\*Chancel Accessibility Issues** - Accessibility issues for the Chancel are under discussion within our congregation. We have a scheduled background meeting concerning the Chancel Lift.

**\*Summer/Fall Endowment Plans** - Unrelated but important, the Endowment Committee is busy planning an Endowment Campaign for next summer and fall. You have or will soon have an opportunity to appoint Joe Rubin to a full three-year Endowment Committee term beginning on July 1, 2024.