

Unitarian Society of Hartford Board Meeting February 11, 2025

Location: USH and Zoom

Quorum NO___YES_X

Board Attendees	Guests	Regrets
Nancy Kemmerer Rick Tsukada Jon Covault Paul Cipriano Nina Elgo Judy Sullivan Laurie Kelliher Laura Cipriano Gloria F. Mengual Rev. Bob Janis Jim Venneman	David Newton Janice Newton Susan Hope	

Orders of Business

6:35 p.m. Nancy-called the meeting to order.

Approval of January 2025 Board Meeting Minutes –Gloria made motion to approve minutes. Nina seconded. Unanimous approval.

Endowment Recommendation to USH Board – David Newton

- Move to discuss policy on investments. No change; same as last year. Nina moved to approve; Judy seconded. Proposal: that Endowment committee annually adopt policy on investments (*see addendum below*). Vote: unanimous vote in favor.
- Second proposal needing review/approval. That Board endorse application for a max \$20,000 planning grant from National Fund for Sacred Places. Will hear back by September. Could be first step of \$500,000 potentially 5-year planning grant, which is part of a national competition. Motion to approve this planning grant: Nina; Judy seconded. Unanimous vote in favor. This is a matching grant- 50/50.

After grant is approved, matching efforts begin; it cannot be from endowment.

- Third proposal: use of endowment resources for support of Operating Budget. Recommendation: that Operating Fund support FY 25-26 at 4.5% of General UBS account #07854 - \$60,830 total. Total expected capital expense obligations: \$162,418.00, which would come out of the capital improvement bucket. Vote: unanimous approval by Board. *(see addendum below)*
- Sign maintenance project – unanimous Board approval.

Celebration Update: (Nancy)

- Judy has sent out more than 75 invitations. Sue Smolski is working on docent team for tours. Luncheon will happen as well. Congregation will not receive invitations.

Council Reports

- Rev Bob: CCIU – CT Council for Interfaith Understanding has approached 3 UU congregations about hosting discussions in their congregations in March, the earliest. This is in the works.
- **Social Justice – Judy Sullivan**
 - Group has been exploring immigration issues. Meeting planned with attorney working with immigrant groups. Sherry is working with these groups. We are also connecting with immigrant group Josh Polick is working with. Efforts to work with families and visiting families are taking place.
 - Joe Rubin is working with Center for Children’s Advocacy on immigration status work that included youth in correctional system and more.
 - GHIAA is working on multiple efforts – housing – evictions – expanding just cause protections for landlords that own larger properties. Fiscal guardrails – pushing spending on timely issues rather than focus solely on fiscal guardrails.
 - Rick – request for listing of all who received GNA funds from USH. Judy noted that these are listed in enews and will continue to be listed there.
- **Finance – Jim Venneman**
 - Stewardship has been pushed back one month.
- **Membership – Laurie**

- Attendance during past 6 weeks – over 90 in pews. Counting remote, over 100 during past 6 weeks
 - Carl's service – over 100 in attendance
 - Newcomers receive email. Under the stairs discussion had 6 people attend in February.
 - New member orientation will be this coming Sunday, followed by a weekday meeting. Seven people have signed up to attend.
 - Annual UUA certification for individual congregations – this year it is 144 count.
 - Nominations for Volunteer of the Year – please fill out and return to Laurie. Each year, we provide three volunteer recognitions.
- **Administration** – *Paul*
 - Cement planters to be delivered in April. Estimated cost: \$3,600, to be covered by grant. Need to plan installation, upkeep and maintenance.
 - **Spiritual Life**– *Rick*
 - Working on including audio-visual – creation of a budget to include more complex sound – adding equipment, given expected growth in this area.

GUEST COMMENTS

- None.

CLOSING WORDS/EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE

- Rev. Bob: On hands: reflections on words by Christine Robinson.

MOTION TO ADJOURN – Nancy made **motion** to adjourn at 7:35 p.m. Unanimous approval.

Addendums – January 2025 Reports

1. USH Ministerial Board Report ~ Rev. Bob Janis February 11th, 2025

"Nonviolent action, born of the awareness of suffering and nurtured by love, is the most effective way to confront adversity." – Thich Nhat Hanh

Sundays & Special Services

- We had extremely good feedback on the month of services – notable because, not only was it the month immediately following a tumultuous

election, for an unusual three Sundays in a row I wasn't in the pulpit (I watched two of the three live on Zoom). Kudos to the Worship Associates for getting such a strong roster of worship leaders – including musically, with Paul Bisaccia.

- February first Thursday Vespers was OK as far as the service went, but the driveway was dangerously icy. Thank you to Kevin for icing, but even so perhaps I should have cancelled that one; we were extremely lucky not to have congregants falling or crashing cars.

Programming and Social Justice

- Thank you all very much for your input on my suggestion for congregational action responding to the rapid changes in our nation and our world. I'll put off sending it around until Wednesday in case there is any more Board input on it – but it has been very helpful. I'm keen to preserve our sense of "sanctuary;" the right of individual conscience and freedom of thought; and the calling for engagement in a collective way. I believe we can do this well, though it will take intention every step of the way. Please keep letting me know if I make missteps or can improve.
- March 23rd is coming along, hope to have a more detailed order of service this week. Still awaiting RSVPs from many of our invited guests. Huge thank you to Judy Robbins who is doing an incredible amount of work on this.
- Wrapping up the "Bible Bonanza" this Thursday. It's been a really fun series and I'm grateful for the response from so many congregants. First time I've done a bible overview like that and I learned a lot.
- With the Bible out of the way (lol), will want to convene this group of people looking to start spiritual groups I mentioned last month.
- The "cancelled" Mids meeting had five attendees – and plans made for a hike in March. Also looking into starting an early-20s group here, with a couple of early 20s lay leaders and Shahan. I hope you agree; I've said USH would definitely support basic costs like hospitality for initial meetings – this is so important to us, and as you may remember, people in that age group tend to not have access to funds.
- CCIU (Connecticut Council For Understanding) has asked if we can be one of three sites – with Manchester and West Hartford UU – to be the host to an interfaith conversation featuring three major religions at each site (nine religions in all). Think this will be a great event, and very doable on our end.

Pastoral Care and Rites of Passage

- Possibly indirectly related to our national system, the number of people in financial crisis seems to only be increasing in 2025. MDF funds are very helpful, but realistically only for short-term, one-time needs. We're doing what we can.
- It was a great suggestion from Laurie Kelliher to offer to anyone who might have been affected by Carl's amazing reflection on grief that they can reach

out to me. I am getting regular requests for pastoral counselling but it's not overwhelming.

Foundations and Behind the Scenes

- Having 2025 goal-setting and planning meetings one-on-one with program staff. Thank you all! Take care of yourselves, really important as you care for others – and as the world is very much in flux. Grateful for every one of you

BOD Membership Report – Laurie Kelliher – February 2025

Attendance at Sunday services for the past 6 weeks has continued to be robust. Over 90 people have been in the pews and with the Zoom audience, attendance has been over 100 for 4 of those weeks. Total attendance peaked at 126 for Carl Sheilds' service.

Steve Gavron has suggested that with our current overhead camera a photo can be taken so that the ushers can count attendance via the photo rather than counting heads at the same time they are collecting the plate. This will be well received by the ushers.

Newcomers continue to arrive and the February First Connections was attended by 6 people. Newcomers receive an email of welcome in the week following their visit. Obtaining that email address is the limiting factor, but Karolina Wojtysko has developed a new plan where visitors can enter their information on a USH iPad.

Our most exciting news is the interest in our New Member Orientation to be held Sunday after service 2/16 and Thursday evening 2/20. The sessions will follow a similar format as last year. Thus far, 12 people have said that they will attend. Rev Bob will announce the meetings from the pulpit on Sunday which may entice those on the fence about considering membership.

The annual UUA Certification for individual congregations for 2024 was submitted to the UUA by Karolina Wojtysko. Jon Covault reviewed the membership list last used for a congregational vote, adjusted for deaths and new members since that vote. USH claims 144 members as of the close of 2024. Certification for the year 2023 tallied 132.

Nominations for the Volunteer of the Year will be gratefully received.

3. Building and Grounds – David Newton - February 2025

Members: (Present*) Co-Chairs, Paul Cipriano* & David Newton*; Laura Cipriano*, Toni Gold*, Bill Simmon*, Peter Meny, Ron Sexton, Jim Venneman, Fred Louis, Hugh Schweitzer, Lucille Giammatteo, Evan Williams*, Paula Bleck, Aaron Bleck, Steve Gavron

- **Friends of B&G:** Nancy Kemmerer Janice Newton, Frederique and Michael Shea, Susan Hope, anyone else who cares to attend.

Staff: Kevin Girouard* Rev. Bob Guests:

Co-Chair Newton This meeting was held on short notice because although the group had decided earlier in the week to omit the scheduled Sunday meeting for February, there arose on short notice information about a grant possibility with a deadline for March 3 application. Accordingly, a zoom meeting was convened at the above time on short notice to determine if USH should pursue the grant opportunity in the light of previous work leading to National Register Listing and a significant issue with the windows surrounding the sanctuary known as clerestory windows.

1. Meeting in Servetus and with zoom participants, an informed discussion of the grant possibilities and necessary procedures were discussed in detail. Paul and Laura discussed what they had learned from a webinar held on the subject. The group thereafter determined we ought to go forward with a grant application as there was no significant downside and inform the Board of the recommendation to do so with adequate background for board members' understanding.

The following Resolution conveys the basic facts. It was **approved** unanimously by those present.

Resolved, That the Building and Grounds Sub-Council recommends that the Board endorse application for a planning grant from the National Fund for Sacred Places. If granted said grant (about 20K) would permit professional evaluation of the Meeting House needs for preservation in keeping with our National Register Status and subsequently is necessary for an application for a substantial matching grant that could cover costs of repair/replacement of clerestory windows above the sanctuary among other items currently unknown.

David Newton will request the Resolution be included in the Board Agenda for next Tuesday. The meeting adjourned after about 1.5 hours of discussion.

4.– Endowment Committee Recommendation to USH Board – Approved Resolution - David Newton - February 2025 –

WHEREAS, The Endowment Committee has carefully considered endowment resources and prudent use of endowment funds to support the Operating Budget, Capital Budget and likely future expenses for maintenance of our Meeting House, now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, That the Board endorses the recommended expenditure for Operating Fund support during FY25-26 at 4.5% of the General UBS account # 07854 based on the most recent three calendar year average end of year balances. This is \$60,830 for FY 25-26.

Supporting Information

As in the past, In February it is desirable to advise the Board recommending a prudent amount that may be drawn from the Endowment for FY25-26. In the past we have considered the average amount at the close of the most recent three calendar years for the UBS General Account 07854.

Bylaw VII (e):

No later than 60 days before the end of the fiscal year and before the Finance Sub-council develops its budget recommendation for the coming fiscal year, the Endowment Committee shall submit a report to the Finance Sub-council and Board of Directors stating the amount of funds that can be prudently made available from the Endowment for the Operating and Capital Budgets for the subsequent fiscal year.

For the Operating Budget

Balances of UBS Account 07854 (General or unrestricted Account) which has and will fluctuate in growth from year to year using the average at the close of the most recent three calendar years.

December 31 2024	1,556,499
December 31 2023	1,334,527
December 31 2022	<u>1,164,329</u>
Total	4,055,355

Average **1,351,785** (Continued on next Page)

Recommended Draw from UBS Managed General Account 07854

4.5% \$60,830

Having considered the investment environment along with past expenditures, Operating Fund probable needs, and related factors, The Endowment Committee unanimously recommends \$60,830 be budgeted from the Endowment in support of the Operating Budget for FY25-26

The Board is asked to carefully consider this recommendation in the light of various capital expenses occurring in the next few months. Scheduling of these expenses is difficult as each has its characteristic difficulties in planning and execution. There are fixed numbers and estimates as appropriate listed below. The Board has not been asked to approve sign maintenance and paving of the upper north parking lot yet:

Maintenance of the Large River birch in the Memorial Garden	\$4,250
Chancel Lighting project now moving forward	65,105
Sign Maintenance Project	1,430
National Register Sign	1,233
Paving upper North Parking Lot	80,000
Piano Repair	10,400

Approximate Total Expected Obligations **\$162,418**

5.– Endowment Committee - Policy on Investments - David Newton - February 2025

Whereas, the Constitution requires a Policy on Investments from the Endowment Committee with various requirements, and

Whereas, the Policy is to be incorporated in the records of the Board of Directors, now therefore be it

Resolved, that the Policy on Investments appearing below is herewith accepted by the Board and shall be included in the Minutes as a matter of record.

Constitutional Relevant Information

The Endowment Committee shall annually adopt a policy on investments, which takes into consideration the current needs of the Society, preservation of the worth of permanent funds, the original restrictions on gifts and bequests, the economic climate, and the outlook for the future. Said policy shall be consistent with the funding ratios and reporting requirements set forth in Article XI and the Bylaws. This policy shall be incorporated in the records of the Board of Directors and included in the Annual Report.

Policy on Investments

The Endowment Committee will monitor the performance of UBS, our agent for management of Endowment funds that are not directly managed by the Endowment Committee. The management objective for the funds at UBS shall be to generate growth and income for Endowment funds to the benefit of USH through assessing investment risk for possible gains and losses associated with a reasonably aggressive deployment of resources among properly diversified cash instruments, stocks, and bonds. The original restrictions on gifts and bequests will be observed, the changing economic climate considered, and required funding ratios maintained. Required reports shall be timely prepared. Other matters as arise from time to time shall be considered.