

FirstU Board Meeting Minutes

Our mission is to “Kindle the light within and inspire courage to nurture the web of life and to create a just and compassionate world.”

Date: Wednesday 2025/03/19

Time: 7pm-9pm

Attendees: Chuck Shields (President), Mary Ella Keblusek (Vice President) Phil Nagy (Treasurer), Carl Sonnen (Secretary), Rev. Eric Meter (Minister), Jen Brennan (Office Manager), Michelle Jackson (Finance Manager), Amy Berube, Brent Nicolle, Carmen Contreras, Guy Belleperche

Regrets: None

Main Goals: To discuss review status of the minister search and receive updates regarding campus-related topics.

Timekeeper: Brent

Process Monitor: Carmen

FirstU Board Covenant (summary)

- Be considerate towards one another
- Be open, honest and respectful
- Serve our role to the best of our ability
- Foster a spirit of patience and courage
- Speak with one voice
- Develop and promote genuine relationships
- Honour our faith

FirstU Strategic Plan (2022-26) Key Goals:

- An energized spirituality
- A renewed, growing and diverse congregation
- A firm commitment to social and climate justice
- A responsible, mission-oriented campus development
- Reliable structures and resources to support congregational priorities and growth

Minutes

Item
1. Call to Order ○ Check-in ○ Opening Reading []

○ Assignment of Timekeeper [Brent] and Process Monitor [Carmen]
2. Consent Agenda: ○ Approval of this Agenda ○ Approval of Board Minutes 2025/01/15 [Att. 1] ○ Approval of memberships of Mary Catherine Harpur and Stan Sears [Att. 2] ○ FP 3 [Att. 3] ○ Ajashki Report [Att. 4] ○ Confirmation of approval of the agreement with Dentech re Tiebacks, Crane and Parking ○ Confirmation of approval of the draft contract and compensation and benefit package for a new contract minister Moved by Carmen, Seconded by Guy to approve the consent agenda. Unanimous.
3. Discussion of items from Consent Agenda ○ Congratulations to new members
4. Minister's Report [Rev Eric] [Att. 5] ○ April 13th new member's ceremony ○ Ministerial transition. Eric had interviews last week and several colleagues have reached out to him regarding FirstU minister search. Mary Ella has their emails and vice versa
5. President's Report [Note 1] ○ No discussion
6. (<i>Goal: Reliable, Structures and Resources</i>) Financial ● Response from the investment manager re performance of FirstU investments [Att. 6] ○ Tied in some measure to our decision to divest from 'unethical' funds ○ Compared us to other groups without social protocols ▪ In 2023 we only performed about 0.3% worse ▪ In 2024 we performed 3% worse ● EAG AGM motion regarding bank we use [Att. 7] Be it resolved that: staff, with support by members of the congregation, be asked to investigate switching to a climate-friendly financial institution and report to the Board by the end of Q3, 2025. ○ Are there other environmental approaches that would be more effective than changing banks? Banking and investment boycotts regarding Banks and problem industries are having a sizeable impact (i.e. Tesla)
7. (<i>Goal: Reliable, Structures and Resources</i>) Minister search [Note 2] ● Update ○ Unbelievable that we've been able to come this far in a short time since learning of Rev Eric's departure. ○ March 5 – Posted Congregational Record

- March 8 – Received 2 applications
- Search team has already reviewed ministerial record and interviewed the 2 ministers
- Arranging for more interviews
- Have asked for References from the 2 already interviewed
- 2 more candidates have also applied recently
- Aiming for a March 31st decision
- Will need to decide whether to interview the 2 newest candidates
- Have both Canadians and Americans in the mix as well as both female and male candidates
- Ministerial search focus groups have provided great feedback from numerous congregants.
- No more capacity to review new minister candidate applications
- Ministers doing searches are looking early and often. A number of congregations are soliciting new ministers on a short timeframe like FirstU
- The ultimate decision and approval of who to hire, will be up to the Board. Will need a quick 24-hour turnaround. Search committee requires the trust and confidence of the Board. Need a unanimous vote of approval. Board decision will likely be a formality.
- Some suggested that the board have cvs and other summary details to help inform us and validate the search committee's choice
- Search committee should recommend only 1 candidate and not a ranked list. Board approval does not mean that the approved candidate will accept.
- It was agreed that the final search committee meeting would be on Sunday, March 30th from 6-8P, with Board availability 7-9PM, for final approval
- Identification of a contract negotiation group
 Motion: That Mary Ella Keblusek, Jane Lindsay, Phil Nagy and Chuck Shields serve as the group to negotiate a final draft contract with the proposed contract-to-call minister and to forward it to the board for approval.
 Moved: Guy. Seconded: Carl. Unanimous

8. *(Goal: A Responsible, Mission-Oriented Campus Development)*

Campus-related topics [Note 3]

- Update regarding the Odayanhaway Project
 - Held key meeting with OAHS and each organization's lawyers. Made modifications to land agreement 2 weeks ago, but still waiting for final update from OAHS.
 - Seems very close to becoming finalized
 - City deadlines have been communicated to OAHS. Our signed

- agreement is contingent on City of Ottawa final approval
 - Need our lawyer to follow-up with OAHS
 - Theia recognizes that OAHS land agreement is required for Theia development to move forward
- Community Bonds – a means to increase FirstU's equity share in the project [Att. 8]
 - Theia proposed this option to increase FirstU's share in the property. We could raise from \$1.5-\$3 million.
 - Once we've paid off the bonds and interest, we will accumulate an extra \$100,000+ a year
 - Other non-profits have gone this route. Tapestry capital, which is a non-profit, helps charities like ours to issue community bonds.
 - This will require a motion from the congregation to be approved. Required before at the upcoming AGM. Would need to implement quickly before construction begins in April 2026.
 - We wouldn't be able to pay this back with existing FirstU legacy funds—don't have enough. Who will invest, when interest payments won't begin until after rent/lease revenue is coming in?
 - We could cover the interest from the legacy initially, but the principal could not be paid back until rent/lease revenue is coming in
 - It might be hard to get mostly senior congregants to invest in these type of bonds, at such an advanced age
 - Will need to figure out the plan and approach and who to solicit, beyond our congregation and city.
 - Some congregants have experience with investing these types of community bonds. Perhaps they could be consulted
 - Need to send Finance committee some of these details asap so they can review before their next meeting.
- Discussion regarding 797 Richmond
 - Parking agreement was signed. Dentech, FirstU and UHouse are all agreed on costs regarding construction parking, tiebacks and other changes on our property to accommodate other Dentech construction requirements

9. *(Goal: A Responsible, Mission-Oriented Campus Development)*

Relations with Unitarian House [Note 4]

- Update regarding the Listening and Question and Answer sessions at UH held on Feb. 26
 - Was short and quite positive
 - UHouse is interested in being updated as things move forward that affect them.
- Discussions about parking
 - Chuck is preparing a plan with Bill and Brent regarding how parking will be allocated between FirstU and UHouse. 14 spaces on UHouse land are being sought to be available to FirstU. Some modification suggestions have essentially already been agreed to
 - Will need to move quickly

- Creation of a parkette on UHO leased land where Cleary ends
 - City's plan requires creating a 'park/green space' ~~on~~-existing in conjunction with construction projects and this is required for the Aspire building space.
 - The city's plan for the area around the FirstU campus indicated they want a parkette to be located along Cleary Ave., just opposite UHO.
 - The city has agreed that the parkette could meet the requirement of providing the required green space.
 - If the city didn't approve the parkette, Aspire would need to pay \$200,000 to the city in lieu of green space
 - If the city does agree that the parkette meets the green space requirement, then Aspire would pay \$100,000 each to UHO and FirstU because their land is being used.
 - Parkette location final decisions will need to be approved by the congregation

11. Closing

- Feedback from Process monitor: Meeting was very smoothly run and meeting finished on time
- Closing reading [Brent]
- Adjournment