

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, November 23, 2022
Time: 7 pm - 9 pm
Location: Zoom
Attending: Brent Nicolle, Phil Nagy, Mary Ella Keblusek, Amy Berube, Carl Sonnen, Caycee Price, David Chernushenko, Rev Eric Meter, Jen Brennan, Michelle Jackson
Regrets: Lisa Sharp

Attachments

1. Minister’s Report
2. Minutes for FirstU Board meeting – October 19th 2022 (to follow)

1. Call to Order
2. Consent Agenda 2.1 Motion to: - <i>Accept Agenda</i> - <i>Approve BOD Minutes for October 19th 2022</i> - <i>Acknowledge approved PPDDA request on Ontario Bill 23; Appendix C</i> Moved by: Brent Secended by: Carl, Carried
3. Report 3.1 Minister's Report [Rev. Eric] Appendix A 3.2 President’s Report [Brent] Brent discussed that the information for the FCM packet was assembled. He thanked the key players (Michelle, Phil, Jen, Amy, Mary Ella) who were also very involved in putting it together. 3.3 SJAN (Social Justice Action Network) Report [Lisa] Appendix B This report outlines the details from the November 2022 working meeting. The working group provided details of activities they will be involved in this year.
4. Old Business <i>Follow-ups from previous meetings, as applicable</i> 4.1 Membership Process Task Force Terms of Reference There are aspects of our membership definitions that are problematic, and don’t honour the fact that not all membership contributions can be financial. Terms of reference are being developed and the group will be meeting in early January. 4.2 Young Adults Games/Event Night We need to offer something social for Young Adults and Millennials. Caycee has offered to plan an event in early December, including board games and desserts. More information to follow.

4.3 Congregant Engagement “Tiger Team”

What would be the best way (or the best people) to try connecting people with opportunities (such as Arts Night Coordinator or Events Facilitation)? Larger implications of a volunteer database and job descriptions would be helpful in facilitating re-integration into social activities and helping to identify people to lead these activities.

5. New Business

5.1 Supporting young families in non-RE services

Amy gave a primer about the current condition of young children and how we can help families to feel welcome and empowered to travel in our UU circles. This is creating a greater discussion about board priorities and how to build a structure for all ages.

5.2 Supporting Amy as Secretary

Needs an administrative partner to do some of the organizing. Carl has very graciously agreed to help her along. Thanks!

5.3 Campus Development Response Team

A small group has been organized to help anticipate concerns of the members of the congregation regarding campus planning issues and prepare information to answer these questions.

5.4 Soliciting rough ideas for “Reorganizing” FirstU

This was a topic at our retreat, and it’s a big item. To start, when I say “FirstU’s organization is a problem”, what does that mean to you?

5. Closing

Appendix A

Minister's Report to the Board of Directors of the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa November 2022

Well, we've had a few full weeks, haven't we? First, the installation ceremony last month, and now the return of our Fall Fair.

As I said from the pulpit on Sunday, it was a joy to see so many folks working so well together to make sure folks enjoyed their time looking for a good deal at the Fair.

Kudos, again, to all those many souls who made the day such a success.

Looking back:

On Oct 27th I was part of a panel of UU clergy members currently serving Canadian congregations speaking to more than a dozen counterparts in the US who are thinking about migrating north. It was illuminating to see colleagues I've known for years as well as those I had not yet met asking questions about life and our congregations here. I came away realizing that while I have recently caught myself referring to the U.S. as back home, it is less so than it had been.

The Sunday before we held our installation ceremony. I'm still on a bit of a high from it, even now. I've said repeatedly, and only half-jokingly, that the stole you presented me deserves to be stored in a glass case. It really is museum quality. But more than that, the day sealed something that had been, even after more than a year, still a bit amorphous.

Now I'm not about to say that the bond between the congregation and I is now set in stone, never to wear away. That would be arrogant and foolhardy. Still, the connection does feel more solid to me. I hope that will continue, and deepen.

(Of course, officiating at memorial services, such as Margot Clarke's on November 6th, helps strengthen those bonds as well.)

I also want to let you know how impressed other clergy and speakers were with how well they were hosted, and with the quality of our choir.

On Sunday, Oct 30, I led a worship service devoted to those we've lost over the last year. One congregant wrote to me to say that they were surprised that I didn't mention the names of all members who died in that time frame. I had thought about this, and decided not to. I now wish I had made a different choice and will include those names in years to come.

Also, at Ria Heynen's request last Sunday afternoon I spoke at a rally against the pending deportation (for the second time) of Dr. Hassan Diab to France next Spring.

Looking Forward:

The search for an interim music director to fill in while Jenn Berntson is on maternity leave got off to a slower start than we had wished. That said, Anne Nagy and Bill Wylie are now on board. Job postings have been sent out in recent days. Additionally, Jenn let us learn last week that she's now hoping to return next August.

Following up on our conversation about staff returning to work in the office, Jen Brennan is now back full-time. I'm in the office Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays (and by appt). And Michelle is in on Wednesdays and as needed.

With the Fall Fair being wrapped up as I write this, many are hoping to take a bit of a breather. The next big things on the church calendar are two outside rental music events in December (11th and 19th) and the Christmas/New Year's holidays.

After discussions with Religious Exploration, our Worship Associates and others, our holiday plans are to have one service on Christmas Eve at 7pm, and not hold a worship service on Christmas morning. I will, however, lead worship on New Year's morning. I want to go on record for thanking Michelle Jackson for completing our FY23 budget while working sick from home. She's very proud of producing such a "beautiful" budget. While her aesthetic tastes may differ slightly from my own, it is certainly a piece of work worthy of our appreciation and gratitude.

Reflection:

Our installation ceremony last month was a tribute to shared ministry, the work we do together to fulfill the mission of the congregation. An incident last Sunday morning was an ideal case in point.

A man whom Terry Kimmel and I had met at the previous day's Fall Fair joined us for worship on Sunday. He was talkative and energetic, wanting to play piano before our worship began. While he was playing, I pulled Mike Lloyd and asked him to help keep an eye on the man. (While I am not a clinical diagnostician, I've been in the presence of more than a few people experiencing some sort of break with what many of us would call reality. Our guest was behaving in a similar fashion.) During the Board welcome and announcements, our guest wanted to respond to some of the things that were said. I went down to sit with him. We were still talking when I realized that I was due back up at the podium in just a minute. Right then Andrew Drake came up beside me and offered to sit with the man while I returned to the chancel.

At some point, our guest said to me that he didn't feel we were a good match for him and that he was going to leave. Actually, he had only left the worship hall. After the service I learned that Jodi McIntosh and Jane Lindsay had joined Mike in speaking with the man. In fact, Jodi and Jane had taken the lead in listening to him and trying to settle him down. During that time, our guest told us that he was living with a mental illness.

In short, members of our community came together to engage someone whose

behaviour may have become more disruptive than it was in ways that respected both our guest and everyone at church. I couldn't be more proud of us all.

In shared faith,
Rev. Eric

Appendix B

SJAN (Social Justice Action Network) Report, November 2022

SJAN had its Workplan and Budget Review meeting on November 16th. This is an overview of what to expect from SJAN groups this year. This is not an exhaustive list of all activities, but it's everything that has church allocated funds attached to it.

Environmental Action Group

- Earth Speaks
- guest speakers starting in December
- Creation of a vegetarian cookbook
- Review of Green Investments
- Deep Refit
- Energy Improvements in our building
- Social Media Boost
- Food Security - Ajashki (financial support to program)

Justice and Equality Action Group

- develop collaboration with Bethany Hope Centre (teen parents)
- advocacy with Interfaith Ontario Health Coalition (new group)
- develop food cupboard in partnership with Ajashki (targeting First U members and congregants who have financial difficulty)
- continue to collaborate with MHI, SWAG, Pathways to Education
- continue to sell Fair Trade products to raise money for SJAN

Mental Health and Support Action Group

- offer Mental Health First Aid (it didn't run in 2022)
- continue to collaborate with Ancoura

Refugees

- Getu (Ethiopia) - still waiting to hear back from application
- Almasaleh (Syrian family of 9) - has been processed, hope they will be in Canada during 2023; still raising money for them.

Truth and Reconciliation Action Group

- Education and Training - Water First
- Collaborate with IRSSS, Wanaki Centre,
- Workshop with Trent University
- Education events with MMIWG
- TR Day speaker
- Land Acknowledgement
- Indigenous People's Day speaker (in collaboration with JEAG)
- Ajashki - financial support to the program

Unitarian Go Gos

- (raising funds for Stephen Lewis Foundation in Africa)
- plant sale, theatre tickets, dinner at Biagios, bake sale

Appendix C

PPDDA Request from SJAN re Bill 23 “More Homes Built Faster Act”

The following PPDDA request came from SJAN on November 17th. As per our PPDDA policy, it was approved by Brent, Lisa and Rev Eric. Bill 23 is Ontario’s “More Homes Built Faster Act” (Ref <https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-43/session-1/bill-23>) which theoretically sounds favourable to affordable housing, but includes some measures that are unfriendly to the environment and to democracy in general. The limited window for public consultation (closing date was Nov 17th) was also a significant issue for our democracy.

Brent made the following online submission on behalf of the congregation largely using SJAN’s suggested text.

Paste submission

I am writing on behalf of the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa to voice our concerns with respect to Bill 23, the proposed ‘More Homes Built Faster Act’.

We readily acknowledge there is an affordable housing crisis in Ottawa and in Ontario. In reviewing this bill, we are not convinced it actually leads to more affordable housing and we think it may wreak environmental havoc. Furthermore, we are concerned by the diminishment of the consultative process that we know builds good democratic decisions. We are concerned with some undemocratic elements in this piece of legislation, and some unacceptable attacks on the environment, related biodiversity and food security.

These values are important to us. The Fifth Principle of Unitarian Universalism is “the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large”; our Seventh Principle concerns “the respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part”. The proposed legislation was presented during an election period with no opportunity for newly elected councils or the public to intercede. The Bill unilaterally overrides the right of municipalities to make local decisions on land use planning. This critically affects Ottawa’s High Performance Development Standard, our green building standard introduced earlier this year to help ensure we meet our climate change targets in terms of energy and carbon efficiency for new builds. This is short sighted and will ultimately cost homeowners and renters more. In addition, Ottawa is facing increasing heat and more intense storms. Buildings must be better designed to handle these crises to prevent escalating threats to human safety and ever rising insurance costs.

Bill 23 also raises a number of environmental concerns. The province’s proposed approach on Conservation Authorities deprives Ontario of its ecosystem and habitat protection, presaging risks of flooding, uncontained sprawl and lack of protection for habitats, ecosystems, and wetlands, along with urban parklands and other greenspaces.

The Bill also raises many social concerns, with significant impacts on housing for those most vulnerable. Regulations seeking to protect tenants from renovations will be cut; the requirement of new developments to set aside a certain proportion of affordable housing will be capped at 5%; and affordable housing will be able to return to the market after just 25 years. These changes will deepen our housing and homelessness crisis, not alleviate it.

Proposed exemptions from Development Charges levied by municipalities to pay for essential infrastructure, and from Parkland and Community Benefits Contributions, means fewer municipal

services, parks and community centres in newly developed areas. Such services will likely need to be funded by the taxpayer resulting in increased property taxes in a time of inflation. Densification of urban areas and an increase in housing are needed, and the allowance of three units per lot will help. But in realizing that goal it must be done in such a way as to prevent undue environmental, health, social and municipal fiscal damage.

We would ask for your support in adapting Bill 23 so it meets the criteria of democratic reform; and that the province use a climate lens on the housing crisis in Ontario so that development is aligned with the climate mitigation and adaptation that is required of us. We also ask that approval of this Bill be delayed so that there can be more fulsome review and consultation.

Sincerely

Brent Nicolle
President, Board of Directors
First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa