

## FRSUU Parish Board Minutes – February 18, 2026

**Present:** Bob Higgins, Tom Himmel, Jim Supple, Leslie Lawrence, Lori Clark, Andy Lobb, Liss Larsen, Julie Menin, Sarina Khan Reddy, Renee Wolf Foster, Rebekah Stafford, Kathy Desilets, Rev. Rebecca, members of Green Team (Bill Clary, Annie Madden). Absent: **Jeff Bard**.

**Call to Order:** Bob Higgins called the meeting to order at 6:05pm.

**Welcome:** Rev. Rebecca welcomed all to the meeting, reminding us that the world is in a dark time now. In contrast, Muslims are gathering to celebrate their spiritual values. As we struggle for peace and justice, we are reminded of the unity of all people.

### **Board Nominations:**

**Rebekah Stafford:** As chair of the governance committee, Leslie Lawrence introduced Rebekah, who is interested in joining the Board. Rebekah's bio was distributed prior to the meeting. She has been an active member of the Governance Committee and has worked with other Young Church parents.

**ACTION:** Approve Rebekah Stafford becoming a member of the Parish Board.

**Motion:** Leslie nominated Rebekah to join the Board for the remainder of the church year. Tom Himmel seconded and the motion carried without objection.

Rebekah joined the Board for the remainder of the meeting.

**Chris Fraser:** Andy Lobb, Finance Treasurer and member of the Grants Team, introduced Chris Fraser, who is interested in joining the Grants Team. His bio has been distributed. Chris's family has been connected to FRSUU for several generations. He has deep community connections and experience reviewing grant applications.

**ACTION:** Approve Chris Fraser to become a member of the Grants Team.

**Motion:** Jim Supple moved to accept Chris as a member of the Grants Team. Kathy Desilets seconded and the motion passed without objection.

**Action on Preliminary Budget:** Jim Supple and Bob Higgins reviewed the main issues on the proposed budget which was previously reviewed by the Board in two budget workshops. The proposed total to be raised through the 2026-2027 Annual Giving Campaign is \$660,000. To fully fund the proposed operating budget, it is possible that we will need to borrow \$50,000 from reserves. The budget increase from last year is due primarily due to:

- Loss of income from Dish.
- Ongoing costs for building maintenance and repair.

- Increased staff health insurance costs due to more staff joining our benefit plan and a large increase in the cost of health insurance.
- Costs related to change of minister.

**ACTION:** Approval of \$660,000 as the goal for the Annual Giving Campaign

**Motion:** Jim Supple moved that the Board reaffirm its decision to approve the goal for the Annual Campaign at \$660,000 based on the preliminary budget and discussion at two budget workshops. Renee Wolf Foster seconded and the motion passed without objection.

Rev. Rebecca left at this point in the meeting.

The Board continued discussion of the budget with a focus on generating income/reducing costs. Some ideas included:

- Sales and marketing of rental of church buildings or outside space. Our own programs would limit rental of the meetinghouse. Cynthia had started working on weddings when she was here. We would need a group to work on sales and logistics. Possible rental of outside space, e.g. during Yankee Homecoming.
- Sponsorships – the annual Candlelight services would be a good possibility.
- Sing Out events (as Nick Place has been doing) with fees.
- Using blue visitor cards to ask for sharing of skills.
- Exploring if it is possible to find a less expensive health care plan with equal benefits...possibly by partnering with others.

**Green Team Proposal on Solar Panels:** Bill Clary and Annie Madden

Presenters told the Board they are not asking for approval at this time, but that timing is important because we would need to act by July 2026 to take advantage of government rebates. The Team has examined FRSUU energy use since 2018 and has seen anticipated increases. Electricity is more expensive than natural gas and this cost could be reduced by the installation of solar panels on the southeast facing section of the Meetinghouse roof.

Having had preliminary discussions with the Newburyport Historical Commission, the Green Team is optimistic that installing the panels would be allowed. We could lease equipment and only pay capital costs for the project, which would include adding additional support to the roof. Once the panels were operational, we would purchase electricity from the panel owners at lower rate than we currently pay, allowing us to save approximately \$5,400 in electricity costs annually. The Team will share their slides with the Board to provide more detailed information.

After discussion, the board took the following action:

**ACTION:** Response to Green Team Proposal on Solar Panels

**Motion:** Jim Supple moved that the Board authorize the Green Team, in collaboration with the Facilities Team and the Grants Team, to move forward with exploration of the possibility of installing solar panels and to return to the March Board meeting with more specific information on grant sources, financial models, and the potential for energy generation. Sarina Khan Reddy seconded and the motion passed without objection.

**Annual Campaign:** Bob Higgins reporting

- Training of stewards is upcoming. A set of training slides will be sent to all stewards for reference.
- The campaign kickoff service will be on March 8, with the campaign continuing through March and likely into April.

**Finance:** Jim Supple reporting

- We are losing the surplus we had for the year due to unexpected expenses.
- We are looking at a \$26,000 expense to reconnect with our natural gas boiler. Looking at warranty (one year) on the new HVAC system which is not working to capacity.

**Consent Agenda:**

**ACTION:** Consideration of December 17 meeting.

**Motion:** Bob Higgins moved that the Board approve the December 17 meeting minutes. Julie Menin seconded and the motion passed without objection.

**January minutes will come to the Board for approval in March.**

The regular Board meeting adjourned at 7:50pm.

The Board then met in executive session regarding personnel matters.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kathy Desilets, Parish Clerk