

First Parish Cambridge Governing Board Minutes
October 17, 2023 at 7PM
(Virtual meeting via Zoom)

Present:

Cade Murray, Chair	Sylvia Wheeler, Past Board Chair
Tod Hibbard, Vice-Chair	Rev. Rob Hardies, Contract Minister 2022-23
Jane Stabile, Member at Large	Rich Lawson, Clerk
Nina Lytton, Member at Large	Grace Hall, Governance Advisory Committee
Lindsay Lucke, Treasurer	Carol Lewis, Director of Administration

Regrets: Patrick Sullivan

Agenda

The chalice lighting and check-in was led by Lindsay Lucke, who circulated the prompts in advance to provide more time for people to reflect on them:

- Is there an area in your life where you could be more tender with yourself?
- If not, is there a time that you can look back and see that you deserved more tenderness than you gave yourself?
- If neither, do you have plans for enjoying the fall foliage this year?

For the Consent Agenda, Cade Murray expressed appreciation to Carol Lewis for drawing attention to the need for a different approach to support hospitality after services. Tod Hibbard made a motion to accept the consent agenda, which was seconded by Lindsay. The motion was passed unanimously.

Board Priorities

Ministerial Transition

Tod Hibbard provided an update on the Ministerial Transition Team. Mara Vorhees has agreed to join the search committee. She has a child in RE and is very involved in the music program, so she is a valuable addition to the group in two ways.

The transition team sent another letter to the congregation to report back what has been heard in the congregational sessions to date. The third meeting will be Thursday night. This will be the first one that will be held by Zoom only, i.e., no in-person meeting.

The transition team has also begun convening focus groups. Rashid Shaikh is taking the lead with the People of Color Caucus. Tod Hibbard is convening recent board chairs. Mara Vorhees

will meet with the people in the music program. Carrie Fisher is taking the lead with a group of parents.

The committee will schedule a special board discussion of developmental goals, aiming for early November. The objective of this meeting will be to set the priorities for developmental goals from among all the input received from the congregation to that point.

This meeting needs to be held in early November so the committee can complete the congregational profile by the end of the month. That timing will enable the committee to post our information in the UUA system when that opens in Dec.

After our information is posted, the UUA will then provide us with comments. Our final material will be posted to ministers in search at the end of Jan, 2024. Applications will be due from them by March 4th. The month of March will then be focused on interviewing candidates. We will need to be able to make an offer by 1st of April. The highlights of the timing of this process will be shared with the congregations in an upcoming communication so that everyone is aware of the time constraints.

Cade Murray asked whether the committee was going to convene a focus group with people who usually attend services remotely. Rev. Rob suggested that someone from the committee could join the standard online conversation after service and have the discussion focused on the search process rather than on the service.

Membership Program

Rev. Rob provided an update on the successful newcomer meeting held last Sunday, with approximately 18 to 19 attendees. Even with the large number of people, the atmosphere was still intimate and engaging. The newcomers appear to be younger and more diverse than the current congregation. During Tuesday Meals, one of the newcomers was already involved in soup preparation. A newcomer welcome event is scheduled for mid-November.

Cade inquired about how people are discovering the church. Rev. Rob indicated that people often check the website and seem to know quite a bit about First Parish when they first come through the door. Nina Lytton noted the value of the short videos that Rev. Rob has recorded.

Rev. Rob also emphasized the significance of focusing on *why* individuals come in addition to how they find us. The board discussed the fact that many people are searching for community, hope, and meaning in their lives. If we can show that we can provide that, newcomers are likely to return.

Rebuilding Religious Education:

Rev. Rob invited Jennifer Goodman to the next board meeting so she can directly share all the exciting progress. Six weeks into the new program, the teacher team has been doing well, and

parents are positive about how thoughtful the program is. Caleigh's weekly "story for all ages" is also going very smoothly. New families are coming with children and checking us out once or twice. There have been about 18 kids in total over the last six weeks, with eight on a typical Sunday: two in the Nursery, and six in elementary education. There was a brief discussion about plans for a youth group in the spring. We do have a large enough cohort of late middle school and high school kids. We could consider OWL; visiting other congregations; a trip to Walden Pond; etc. The board agreed that this topic would be discussed further at the next meeting so Jennifer could comment.

The board discussed the possibility of exploring the childcare center at Harvard. Once the foundations are more solid, the RE team can begin to look into opportunities like those. It may be appropriate to begin to explore the options now so that we could have something in place in the new year. People are utilizing the childcare provided before services each Sunday, so this could be valuable to parents.

Overall, the board recognized the great progress in rebuilding the program from scratch.

Building Project and Other Improvements:

Sylvia Wheeler and Carol Lewis provided this update. We have all seen some of the scaffolding coming down revealing the beautiful work that has been completed so far. Work on South side of the meeting house has also started. The West side has some clapboards that are in rough shape and will need to be repaired or replaced. We have an opportunity to have a fresh coat of paint on the entire church, which will be the first time in about 20 years! The safety issues upstairs that were discussed previously are being addressed.

The main question is when to have the celebration for all these improvements. The board agreed that the 19th of Nov would be too soon for a number of reasons. The next possible date would be 10th of Dec.

For the "ribbon-cutting", we will coordinate with our neighbors in the community: Harvard Square Business Association, Y2Y, other Harvard Square churches, etc. Rev. Rob has a good sense of what he wants in the service for that Sunday. The 10th of Dec. would work for him.

The board also recognized the implications of the construction work in the financial reports. As expected, we will have used most of the reserves. Once this project is completed, we aren't going to be doing another really big project in the near future. Even some of the things that we hoped to do inside the building may not happen. We also recognized that the Cambridge Historical Commission may be willing to provide some additional funding.

Cambridge HEART Discussion:

Cade Murray provided an update on discussions concerning Cambridge HEART. The Leadership Team and the Governance Advisory Committee have recognized that there isn't currently a clear process for making endorsements. In the past, a Senior Minister would have taken the lead on something like this. Since we don't plan to have a called minister for the foreseeable future, the new suggestion is to have an established group, like the RET, do preparatory work and then bring a proposal to the board. The Governance Advisory Council has been asked to document a clear process.

For the HEART endorsement in particular, the RET has been asked to develop a proposal for the Board since RET has been in contact with HEART for nearly 2 years.

Discussion of November's Board Meeting:

The board discussed the objectives for the format of the November Board meeting. There was a consideration of an in-person board meeting after the service so that anyone with an interest could attend. After some discussion we recognized that there would probably not be much appeal for that type of meeting: non-board attendees would need to listen quietly to board discussions for the 2-hour meeting before being able to ask any questions or make any comments. The board members are all in favor of complete transparency in meetings, and anyone from the congregation is welcome to attend any meeting, but an open, in-person meeting did not seem to advance the cause of transparency.

The discussion concluded with agreement that the board will advertise the agenda for the November meeting in advance, and make it clear to the congregation that they are welcome to listen in. The meeting will be held on Sunday the 19th via Zoom to make it simpler for people to attend just the parts of the meeting that they are interested in. The timing for the November board meeting needs to be checked with Rev. Rob since he will attend a pot luck at 6pm. Board members will be notified when the time is set.

At 9:00 pm the meeting was adjourned

Respectfully submitted,

Rich Lawson, Clerk

Approved by the Board on 11 November 2023]

Note: Chalice lighting/check-in monthly rotation: November: Jane, December: Patrick, January: Tod, February: Rich, March: Lindsay, April: Nina, May: Jane, June: Patrick. (Sylvia is a substitute as needed)