

First Parish Cambridge Governing Board Minutes
December 19, 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
Patrick Sullivan, Member at Large	Jennifer Goodman, DRE

Agenda

Chalice Lighting & Check in

For the chalice lighting, Patrick Sullivan read from *The Peace Book* by Louise Diamond

His check-in question was: “How are you keeping your heart open, and what blocks you from doing that?”

Consent Agenda – Cade

Rich Lawson referred to an email from Grace Hall, who had pointed out that the names of new members are usually included in the minutes. Since those names were not presented at the previous meeting, they will be presented in this meeting so the names can be included in the minutes of this meeting.

Jane Stabile moved to approve the consent agenda. This was seconded by Tod Hibbard. The motion passed unanimously.

Confirmation of new members:

Patrick Sullivan then made a motion to approve the two new members: Justine Bowe and Wyatt Greene. Lindsay Lucke seconded the motion. It was approved unanimously.

Board Priorities

Membership Program/Team

In Rev. Rob’s report he mentioned a minor challenge for the membership committee. Newcomers are going to that newcomer’s table, but they stay at that table, which means that

there isn't room for the next wave of new members. The membership committee is exploring ways to help newcomers connect with other parishioners.

Sylvia Wheeler suggested this may indicate a broader role for the membership committee, i.e., actively helping people connect, track involvement over time, etc. It's not hard, but it does require focussed attention. Rev Rob replied that the membership committee is keeping track of whether visitors return. All parishioners should feel responsible for welcoming new members.

Jennifer Goodman then provided an update on rebuilding the RE Program. She has hired 3 teachers this year. There are three classrooms, including early morning care (9-10:15). In the new year there is a plan to add an additional class. Through the church year, the classes have gotten bigger and more steady; children coming back week after week. There are approximately 8-11 children each week in the elementary class, and 3-5 in nursery/kindergarten. Much of the groundwork has been established now, e.g., the routine of chalice lighting and singing are clear now.

The RE team has been working to engage parents. Jennifer spends a lot of time talking to them 1:1. There was recently a game night, and an invitation to caroling. Other adults are also being invited to volunteer in the classes. Volunteering can be a spiritual service. This also demonstrates that the congregation sees this as important. There may be an opportunity for volunteers to offer testimonials in a service in 2024. There are also plans to start an RE committee, ideally in January 2024. This can help coordinate volunteers and develop policies.

Jennifer noted a few challenges. First, the teachers are putting in significant prep time, which they are not reimbursed for. She would like to increase pay to teachers to reflect total time spent, including preparations. Another challenge is that Caleigh will be leaving after next semester. We knew from the beginning that this would be the timing because Caleigh is a student. Recruiting and training will take time. It would be ideal to have more continuity in the future. Finally, Jennifer indicated that she would appreciate help recruiting volunteers. She is grateful for the regular volunteers now, but needs more.

Rev Rob thanked Jen for her update, and also indicated how lucky we are to have her as our DRE. She has a passion for the spiritual development of children. She also appreciates the importance of intentionally welcoming parents. Since we are rebuilding, that outreach has been critical.

Jen expressed her appreciation for those comments, and noted that the program has been a process through the fall. She appreciates the patience from everyone as we do the shaping. She recognizes that there is still a lot of community building that needs to happen.

Building Project and other Improvements Update – Sylvia/Carol

A save the date message was sent out for the celebration that will be held on the 4th of Feb.

A lot of planning is still underway, as noted in Carol's report. We are where we were hoping to be, though, which is not always the case. The project turned out better than the building committee expected.

The celebration will be both for our congregation and for the broader Cambridge community, including the team that did the work. The event will outline what our building has meant to the Cambridge community and to our congregation over time. Rev. Rob has put a lot of thought into this. At the end we will acknowledge our partners who helped make this a success. This will include the Harvard Square business community (Denise Jillson), and Cambridge Historic Commission (Charlie Sullivan). Our architect will offer tours of project details, which should be very interesting. There will be a lunch and reception, too.

The building committee also recognizes a need for long-term planning, which will get started in January.

Cambridge HEART endorsement

Cade Murray briefly outlined the history of the request to endorse HEART, including the new process developed with the Governance Advisory Committee (GAC). Since the staff originally had some concerns about how this might impact our relationship with Cambridge Police, Carol Lewis provided an update on that topic. Since the last full board meeting, she spoke with Lt. Bonjourno of the Cambridge Police Department (CPD), with whom she has had a good relationship. He is aware of HEART. He had no reservation about First Parish endorsing this or any other group. This would have no impact on any service to the parish by CPD. He relayed the conversation to his superior officer, who also sent a message expressing support.

Grace Hall mentioned the new process for a church committee to propose a relationship with an external organization. Lois Markham completed the process on behalf of the Racial Equity Team, though the form that she completed had not been shared with the board.

Cade Murray suggested that since Lois had completed the process, it would not be appropriate for the board to vote.

Cade made a motion to endorse HEART. This was seconded by Jane Stabile

Nina Lytton indicated that she would abstain from the vote due to concerns about holding space for collaboration between police and HEART. Lindsay Lucke also indicated that she would abstain from the vote since the endorsement by itself would not constitute a partnership in any meaningful sense.

Patrick Sullivan suggested that the board move forward with endorsement, and follow-up as a board and congregation to make the relationship meaningful. He indicated his comfort with voting for the endorsement with the understanding that more will be happening

Sylvia Wheeler added that she still has some concerns about the relationship of HEART with the police. However, she also sees one role of First Parish as a mediating force to encourage collaboration and cooperation. As a church organization, we can demonstrate that we are committed to this approach. She added that she agrees that there is no point to just a paper endorsement.

Rich Lawson noted that Lois Markham, the liaison between HEART and the Racial Equity team, was not at the meeting to provide background to her proposal or to address questions from the

Board. He added that First Parish is already active with HEART in a number of ways, so this would not be just a paper endorsement. Lois participates in the regular coalition meetings, which are currently bi-weekly. Rich is the project manager for the HEART Research working group, which meets at least monthly. Rae Simpson and others had important roles in the early days of the Mental Health working group. Some of these points are addressed in the proposal that Lois completed as part of the new GAC process for requesting endorsements or formal partnerships. That form has a specific question about how a proposed endorsement would further the mission of First Parish. He suggested that we circulate this document to the Board members after this meeting.

At this point the vote was taken. There was unanimous approval, with no abstentions.

Updates to Board Policy Book

Tod Hibbard explained that the Governance Advisory Committee (Grace Hall, Tod Hibbard, Cade Murray, Sylvia Wheeler, and Maria Altamore) have been reviewing the policy board book to confirm that this reflects current practices. He plans to circulate the current version with board members who were not involved. The plan is to conclude by end January, 2024.

Grace Hall pointed out that the original book was written in 2017, before Rev. Adam even arrived. A lot has obviously changed since then.

Sylvia Wheeler acknowledged Grace's intensive work on this. It has not been an easy process.

Cade Murray indicated this agenda item was intended to raise awareness; there was no action or decision expected at this meeting.

Jan. 2024 board meeting – Cade

The board agreed that some meetings should be in person, recognizing that it is possible not everyone will be able to attend.

After some discussion about dates, it was agreed that the board would plan to meet in person on January 21st at 12:30.

Holiday Bonuses for Staff

Cade Murray introduced this agenda item. First Parish has not traditionally provided holiday bonuses to staff, but would like to do so now. Gift cards were already purchased. Cade was seeking volunteers to write holiday cards to accompany the sixteen gift cards.

Lindsay Lucke offered to help.

The meeting adjourned at 9pm.

Note: Chalice lighting/check-in monthly rotation – Proposed 2023-2024

*January: Tod, February: Rich, March: Lindsay, April: Nina, May: Jane, June: Patrick. July:
[replacement for Tod], August: Rich, September: Lindsay, October: Nina, November: Jane,
December: Patrick*

(Sylvia is a substitute as needed)