

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Plattsburgh
Annual Congregational Meeting June 4, 2023

Chalice Lighting: Rev. Nicoline Guerrier

Co-Chair Annette Wells called the meeting to order. Annette thanked everyone for being here at the meeting.

Quorum: All voting members of the Fellowship indicated the same by raising their hand either in person in the sanctuary or online (zoom). There were 22 voting members in the sanctuary and 8 present online. The requirement of 24 voting members for a quorum was met.

Connie Shemo advised the Congregation the voting for the board members have been postponed until next week, June 11th. The by-laws state that we must slate the nominated candidates at the place of worship at least 7 days in advance prior to the election and this was not done.

Year in Review: Connie highlighted the following major events over the past year.

- Rev. Nicoline's Calling Celebration
- Reopened the sanctuary
- Restarted child care on Sunday mornings; this is a huge accomplishment! Thank you to Chris, Ursula and Kelly
- Building discussions

Voting on Bylaw Amendments:

Ursula reviewed amendment #1

Current V.1 The officers are the president, vice president, secretary and treasurer.

Recommended change: V.1 The officers are the president, vice president, secretary and treasurer. If mutually agreed upon, the president and vice president may function as co-chairs, dividing up the responsibilities of these two positions as they see fit.

A motion was made to accept the amendment to section V.1 1st by Ursula Jones and 2nd by Tom Morrissey and discussion/questions were requested from the floor.

There was a question of Do we elect a president and vice president and they agree to share duties or do we vote for co-chairs? Rev. Nicoline stated per New York State must have a president, vice president, treasurer and secretary so we need to keep those titles. Ursula stated we vote for president and vice president and they will agree to share duties.

With no further discussion a vote was taken and the amendment passed unanimously.

Ursula reviewed amendment #2

Current VII.6.C Each voting member will be entitled to one vote for each trustee and officer to be elected. Each voting member must vote in person.

Recommended change: VII6.C Each voting member will be entitled to one vote for each trustee and officer to be elected. Voting members may vote in person or while attending the meeting online.

A motion was made to accept the amendment to section V.II6.C 1st by Ursula Jones and 2nd by Hap Wheeler and discussion/questions were requested from the floor. No discussion and the amendment passed unanimously.

Presentation of Ad Hoc Committee

Connie stated we will now have a presentation from the Ad Hoc Committee that will show how we came to the decision to sell the Kansas Avenue property which will be our next vote.

Dorothy Latta went over the presentation

Slide 1: Ad-Hoc Building/Space Committee Established by the Board

Role of the Committee: Explore the widest possible array of options for building/Space to support the future path for the congregation.

Provide recommendations to the Board.
Decisions are **not made** by committee.

Members of Committee: Darlynn Bates, Jerry Bates, Rev. Nicoline Guerrier, Ursula Jones, Dorothy Latta, Nancy Lewin, JoEi Miano, Hap Wheeler

Slide 2: General Considerations of the Committee

Absolute necessity for UUFP to have a physical space; operating solely as a "virtual" congregation is not acceptable.

Financial considerations must be a primary factor in determining future building/space for UUFP; UUFP currently operating in deficit budget.

Physical space not necessary for all activities; Virtual participates (zoom) successfully used for meetings, small groups (Writer's Group, BLM, Faith Examined). Social justice work (UU the Vote).

No increase in membership over past years.

Slide 3: Looking at all Options

Stay at Palmer Street

Construction of New Building; Kansas Ave- owned by UUFP

Sharing Space; Faith community or other organization

Purchase existing building; Sole ownership or with partner

Renting/Leasing Space

Slide 4: Remain at Palmer Street

Least financial impact

Minimum required work to remain at Palmer Street with current capacity and offerings:

Paved driveway to accommodate accessibility for wheelchairs

Modification to existing ramp

Installation/modifications of current ventilation system

Additional modifications needed to optimize space:

Accessibility basement

Expand footprint of building (currently being evaluate)

Slide 5: Other Options also being evaluated

Share the Space: Finding partner, Coordination of schedules, allocation of dedicated space and signage for UUFP

Rent/Lease: Finding property that meet needs and constraints to modify space

Building For Sale: Available in market and Cost

Slide 6: Construction of New Building – Recommendation of Committee

UUFP currently does not have the manpower, financial or emotional resources to undertake a major building project.

Letter sent from Committee to the Board January 31st:

"This committee has concluded that the option of building on the Kansas Avenue property should be eliminated from further consideration. Instead, we consider this property to be an asset that could be utilized to support future alternative plans."

Slide 7: General comments about considerations for Building/Space

Absolute necessity for UUFP to have a physical space

Current needs: Membership: Demographics, membership and participation in most faith communities have shifted over the past several years and continue to change.

Physical Space not necessary for all activities (Zoom)

Financial considerations must be a primary factor in determining future building/space for UUFP.

Dorothy opened the floor for questions. One question was asked about fundraising and if it could help financially. Dorothy answered the question with a yes and this topic is being discussed later in the meeting.

Voting on Sale of the Kansas Ave Property

Ursula stated after the Board received the recommendation from the Ad Hoc Building Committee; the Board has decided to sell the Kansas Ave Property as it is not financially feasible to build on it. A motion was made 1st by Ursula Jones and 2nd by Kathy Sajor to approve the following motion:

The Board of the UUFJ is empowered to put up for sale the property owned by the UUFJ at Montana/Kansas Ave., Plattsburgh, NY at a future time for the greatest financial benefit to the congregation.

Discussion/questions were requested from the floor. Ursula stated the phrasing of this motion gives the Board maximum flexibility of when to put it on the market and the ability to get the best price with knowing we may have to settle for less. We purchased the property to build on it and if we are not going to do that we need to sell it.

Questions asked: Does the Fellowship own the property on Palmer Street? Ursula answered yes we do and the mortgage has been paid off for years. When we purchased the Kansas Avenue property, we paid cash for it.

Another question asked: Would we lose tax exemption status once the property is for sale? Jerry B. stated he has been in touch with the Town of Plattsburgh Assessor and as long as we own the property, we do not lose our tax exemption status.

One member has a concern about the last part of the motion that we want to sell it for the greatest financial benefit to the Congregation. The reason why is we purchased the property with the intent to build and received a tax exemption during that time. It's somewhat unethical that we hold onto the property so we can have the greatest financial benefit. Connie addressed the concern and stated we did not buy the property as investment property but in good faith to hopefully put a building there. Unfortunately, since the purchase, circumstances have changed, we could not have foreseen a pandemic, making our situation change. Jerry has been very honest with the Town of Plattsburgh. As a board we do feel we have an obligation to sell the property because of our financial situation and we cannot afford to build on it

Another question asked will the proceeds be earmarked towards capital improvement projects or go towards the operating budget? Ursula stated the proceeds have not been designated for any specific purpose. As mentioned earlier we are operating on a budget deficit of \$40,000 and eating away our savings

Connie stated to the congregation if anyone is uncomfortable voting for the sale, please feel free to vote against the sale. Please know the board feels this decision is most ethical and we have been very honest with the Town of Plattsburgh. As a board we are asking you to have confidence in our decisions.

With no further discussion a vote was taken for the sale of the property and giving the board discretion with the sale and the vote passed, 27 for and 2 against.

Presentation by the Board regarding the Bridge St. Property

Jerry described the Bridge Street property as everything we need, off street parking, handicap accessibility and lots of space. Once we examined how we would pay for this property it became very clear that no bank would give us a mortgage operating in a deficit. We knew then that this had to be off the table.

Ursula stated unless we address the budget deficit, we cannot afford a new building. Our main source of revenue is pledges, the current anticipated revenue for pledges is \$88,000 to eliminate the deficit everyone would have to increase their pledge by 50%.

Rev. Nicoline appreciates all the hard work everyone has done and continues to do. We need to be realistic and come up with other options to generate additional revenue besides pledge sources. Other congregations have a building that generates income.

A discussion took place regarding rentals and rental income. Jo El stated the Ad Hoc Committee is still working on other options.

Presentation about results of the UUA Survey of Congregations-Current Trends

Rev. Nicoline shared information from the results of the UUA Survey done In January 2023 which we completed.

Highlights:

In-person attendance declined by 25% from 2018 to 2023.

Online attendance increased from 7% to 93% from 2018 to 2023.

Ages of members: 51% - 65 years older and over
28% - 35-64 years old
7% - 18-34 years old

UU Participation by Race/Ethnicity – 83% - White
2.5% - Black
2.5% - Latino
2.5% - Multiracial

Financial Health 2018 vs. 2023

Significantly decrease in finance health reported as good in 2023 compared to 2018.

Disagreements or Conflicts during the Pandemic

13% - Reported no conflict
33.5% - Yes but not serious
9.34% - Yes and clergy leader left
27.0% - Yes and some people left

Words in a Cloud

Finances, Burnout, Aging, Resistance and Decline

Current Outlook on the Future

42% - Positive

37% - Very Positive

Closing Words by Rev. Nicoline

In the End it Won't Matter by John C. Morgan

In the end it won't matter how much we have,
but how generously we have given.

It won't matter how much we know,
but rather how well we live.

And it won't matter how much we believe,
But how deeply we love.

Meeting adjourned.