

The North Universalist Chapel Society
Annual Meeting, January 28, 2024, Woodstock, VT

1. Moderator, Kevin Geiger, opened the meeting at 11:30. Kevin explained that for this meeting, seconding of motions is not required.
2. Welcome – For the Board of Trustees, Kathy Astemborski and Mary Blanton welcomed all to the Annual Meeting.
3. Election of 2024 Moderator – Nominating Committee nominated Kevin Geiger as moderator of the meeting. Sheri Belisle made the motion. Motion passed with unanimous approval.
4. Election of 2024 Clerk – Nominating Committee nominated Amy McElroy as clerk of the meeting. Sheri Belisle made the motion. Motion passed with unanimous approval.
5. Election of Treasurer – Nominating Committee nominated Ann Wynia as Treasurer. Sheri Belisle made the motion. Motion passed with unanimous approval.
6. Election of Board Members – Nominating Committee nominated Amy McElroy and Jo Reichle for a three-year term and Kate Johnson for a one-year term to the Board of Trustees. Sheri Belisle made the motion. Motion passed with unanimous approval. Thanks were expressed to both Richard Waddell and Richard Schramm for their years of service on the board. A thank you gift will be given to each of them.
7. Election of Finance Committee Nominees - The Board nominated Jo Reichle to the Finance Committee. Mary Blanton made the motion. Motion passed with unanimous approval.
8. Election of Nominating Committee Nominees – The Board nominated Joanne Boyle and Tambrey Vutech to the Nominating Committee. Mary made the motion. Motion passed with unanimous approval
9. Presentation of 2023 Annual Report – the 2023 Annual Report was made available to all on the Church website, and it was emailed to the church community by Joanne Boyle. It includes the agenda for today's meeting, Letter from the Board, Minutes from the 2023 Annual Meeting, Minister's Report, various committee reports, and 2023-2024 North Chapel Emergency Services.

Jenny Gelfan made a motion to accept the 2023 Annual Report. Neil Marinaro seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.
10. Presentation and Action on 2024 Budget
 - a. 2024 Stewardship Drive report - Mary Blanton reported. The goal for 2024 is \$120,000. As of printing the 2023 Financial Report, there are 68 pledges for \$116,000.
 - b. Discussion of North Chapel's Current and Future Finances: Opportunities and Challenges in our Changing Environment – Kathy Astemborski and Michael Zsoldos kicked off the discussion.

Kathy – The Board of Trustees has been in discussion on how to connect with the community and be transparent about financial information. We are currently in a deficit for 2024. Fundraising last year (led by about five people) allowed the church to overcome the 2023 proposed deficit.

Michael – Encouraged people to get involved in church projects, be a service coordinator, or take on any tasks that help North Chapel. Many hands make light work. We need more people to get involved in service to the church.

Frances Uptegrove said that Covenant Groups are a wonderful way to get to know people in a meaningful way.

Polly Forcier said that Amazing Grays is another good way to get to know others.

c. Finance and Trustees of Funds Committee Report – Laird Bradley, Committee Member

Laird reported that sustainability and resilience are the goals. The endowment is growing. It will allow a nest egg for surprise Expenses. The endowment as reported in the financial report is \$291,594. Laird report that as of today it is closer to \$300,000.

d. Discussion of the 2024 budget and vote to approve the 2024 budget.

Will Beirne-Freiman made a motion to accept the budget. Neil Marinello seconded.

Ann Wynia discussed the 2024 budget. The projected 2024 budget has a deficit of \$37,879. We can't expect the fundraisers to come to the rescue again. We don't have the budgeted \$120,000 of pledges yet, but Ann thinks we will get there. Ann asked whether we should pay all of the UUA suggested dues of \$12,750. In other years past, North Chapel has not paid all of the dues. In light of the projected 2024 deficit, Ann made a motion to reduce the UUA dues by \$6,000.

Laird Bradley – There is more interest in renting North Chapel for social events. Laird thinks we can raise more money in facility rentals.

Neil Marinello agrees with reducing the dues amount for the UUA.

Seeing no more discussion on the motion to adjust the UUA dues amount, Kevin redirected the meeting to respond to Ann Wynia's motion to reduce the UUA Line item by \$6000. This will make the UUA dues amount \$6,750. This will result in a \$6000 reduction of the total 2024 budgeted expenses from \$232,679 to \$226,679.

There was unanimous approval to reduce the UUA dues amount by \$6000.

There was a vote on Will's motion to accept the budget. There was unanimous approval to accept the 2024 budget as amended.

Diane Mellinger asked the moderator if she could present her thoughts on church finance issues. Kevin approved. Diane presented her thoughts, and then several others responded with their ideas.

Diane discussed concerns about the deficit budget. The number of pledging units is going down. North Chapel costs are going up. This is a trend that is expected to continue. The age of our congregation is going up. Aging members are dying. New members are pledging, but their pledges don't match those of members that have died. How will we deal with this long term? Suggested planning for at least six months in advance. What cuts do we need to make to have a balanced budget? Diane researched finances at four other UU churches in Vermont and found that they are facing deficit budgets as well. Fundraising has been fantastic, but we can't expect the few people that are leading the fundraising to continue those efforts. Diane suggested that we may need to cut staff costs. North Chapel has higher staff costs than other UU churches. Discussing the music director position (that is Diane's job), Diane suggested reducing her hours by 25%. She also suggested that cutting the minister hours may be needed. Diane emphasized that having a deficit budget is exhausting.

Kevin said that we cannot vote on Diane's suggestions, since this topic is not in the agenda. But we can make a resolution that documents the sense of the meeting.

The discussion below documents the sense of the meeting. Diane would like the board to make a plan for having a balanced budget.

Lyn Peterson - Discussed an approach that was taken in the past where the congregation was reached out to as individuals to get their input on various church issues.

Mary Blanton – In response to Lyn. This was done last year. 60 people engaged in small group meetings with board members, so that the board could get feedback on church community involvement and various issues that the church is facing.

Deb Rice – Suggested setting an action point. If we go into deficit by a specified amount, it would trigger an action.

Laird Bradley - Would like to see the church take into account various "what if" scenarios, and develop responses to such scenarios.

Diane Mellinger - Make it known that any staff cuts are not personal. The jobs at North Chapel are not ones that can expect raises every year. Also, do we want to publish names of those who have pledged and those who attended the annual meeting in the annual report? Some churches do that.

Jayne Hufferdine – Would like to charge the board with providing financial communication more frequently, maybe quarterly.

Neil Marinello – Stated that he supports the efforts that the board is making.

Polly Forcier – In past times of financial deficit, the church asked people to pledge more even if they have already pledged.

There was a vote on Diane's motion for the board to follow up on the sense of the meeting regarding her suggestions for a balanced budget and the ideas presented by meeting participants. There was unanimous approval.

11. Facilities for the Future Update - Tesla Powerwall and insulation for the sanctuary ceiling

Laird Bradley - Sustainability and resilience are the goals. North Chapel is getting 2 Tesla power walls, which will provide heat, water, and electricity on the lower level of the church if there is a loss of power. This can also supply refuge for the greater community if necessary. Power walls will be in the basement. There will be upgrades to the electrical panel to support the power walls.

Vinyl window inserts have been installed everywhere except the sanctuary. Inserts are going to be installed in the sanctuary. The inserts will reduce heating costs.

Insulation improvements in the attic are needed. This is a plan for the future.

Jenny Gelfan – Asked whether North Chapel has considered community solar? Laird said that the board has looked into this in the past and will keep this in mind if something becomes available.

Sue Reuble – Suggested asking people to donate for a particular item that the church needs.

Joanne Boyle – Supports increasing rentals for weddings and special events.

12. Unsung Hero – Presented by Mary Blanton on behalf of the Board of Trustees.

Mary passed around a basket with slips of paper stating little things that people do to help out at church. Individuals each read an item.

Mary asked us all to pat ourselves on the back. We are all the unsung heroes who have volunteered to complete these jobs that make North Chapel a better place.

13. New Business

Hope Yaeger – Thanked all for making coffee hour happen again. Coffee hour provides important social connections. In the past we have bought Costa Rican fair trade coffee from Change the World Kids (CTWK). During the pandemic the church started using a Keurig brewer, which uses plastic individual coffee pods. These pods end up in the landfill, which is not desirable. Hope proposed retiring the Keurig and reinstating buying coffee from CTWK or purchasing another environmentally sustainable / fair trade coffee. She proposed making the coffee in coffee urns. She volunteered to teach others how to make the coffee.

Sue Reuble volunteered to purchase a new coffee urn if it is necessary.

Laird volunteered to bring in some extra coffee equipment that he has.

Will Beirne-Freiman suggested teaching younger kids some computer tech skills.

Seth Webb – He hears the financial stress. Offered a message of hope and support. The church is important to his family and other young families. He is impressed with what the church does.

14. Closing - Kathy Astemborski thanked everybody for attending the meeting today.

Will Beirne-Freiman made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Unanimous approval. Meeting adjourned at 1:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy McElroy, Clerk of Annual Meeting