

Minutes of UUSJ Board Annual Meeting – June 13, 2020

Participants: John Peterson and Ed Kringer (Accotink UU), Emily Koechlin and Serena Lowe (All Souls Unitarian), Larry Underwood (Bull Run UU), John Gubbings and Kay Scott (Cedar Lane UU), Eleanor Piez (part-time, Mt. Vernon UU), Pat Behenna (Paint Branch UU), Jack Lebowitz (River Road UU), David Shilton and Suzan Chastain (Arlington UU), Ken Mitchell (First Unitarian, Baltimore), Terry Grogan and Al Carlson (UU Church of Reston), Bob McCarthy (UU Cong of Fairfax), Gary Magnuson (UU Cong of Frederick), Sean McCarthy (UU Cong of Rockville), Peter Bishop (WES), Martha Ades, Bob Denniston, Lavona Grow, Charlotte Jones-Carroll and David Strauss (at-Large). Observers/ex-officio: Tanner Wray (future Cedar Lane UU), Pablo de Jesus, Executive Director and Paulette DeMeres, Administrative Assistant

ACTIONS:

- **Serena/ad hoc committee:** define details of transition plan within 30 days
- **Board:** monitor budget/income/expenses closely; provide feedback to ad hoc advocacy committee including on skills mapping; suggest candidates for treasurer and third member of finance committee.
- **Urge Congregations:** to respond to Kelsey Cowger's get-out-the-vote contacts.

The first 20 minutes of the gathering were spent sharing reflections about racism protests and UUSJ's role in seeking racial justice. Further actions will follow.

Chair Bob Denniston opened the meeting with chalice lighting and a reading from Bryan Stevenson (author of *Just Mercy*), emphasizing the importance of voting. He welcomed all, especially new member Ken Mitchell and member-to-be starting in July Tanner Wray.

1. Change to Agenda: The Chair noted that, in order for items of business and elements of our strategic planning to receive adequate attention respectively, those agenda items having to do with mission/vision and governance, along with strategic planning timeline would be tabled today and discussed at a future session (tentative dates, 6/30-7/1-7/2).
2. Quorum and approval of March 28 minutes. (Minutes circulated separately along with Executive Committee session minutes for April, May and June). Charlotte Jones-Carroll confirmed that we had 15 out of 20 attending so far which more than constituted a quorum (three more joined later). Martha Ades moved and Pat Behenna seconded approval of the minutes of the March 28 board meeting as presented. Board approved.
3. Treasurer's Report (circulated): John Gubbings reviewed salient points of his report, noting that UUSJ had \$94,052 cash on hand, of which \$25,000 represented the as-yet-undisbursed \$25,000 "angel" donation for mobilizing for 2020 elections. UUSJ had spent as of May almost \$30,000 less than it had budgeted, largely owing to unfilled positions (AA for half the year, advocacy assistant since November). Thus, we have decent reserves. We still expect \$4000 from UUA matching grant. The congregational fair share contributions including those received or expected in June were actually close

to those budgeted despite the pandemic's impact on church budgets. The Chair commended those congregations who made their donations in these difficult times.

4. Advocacy Program During the Pandemic: Lavona Grow indicated she was heartened by the engagement in both virtual meetings of the Advocacy Corps (AC) and brainstorming meetings of all partners about how to change delivery of our advocacy messages. A key message was not to lose momentum and regularity of the advocacy initiative. UUSJ plans to try Hill visits including some constituents via zoom or other virtual means. She will have held by end-June three issue briefings attended by WHWN partners (two on environment and one on funding the election and USPS). The results include two new Defending Our Democracy (DRD) task group members, five downloads of the WHWN toolkit and sign-ups for the July storytelling workshop. A second survey of AC members will take place to identify new needed talent for AC, which is likely to remain virtual through December, and to conduct "asset mapping" of AC members to identify their connections to states, congregations, policy makers, content expertise, etc. While physical letters to Congress have gone down since churches closed, messages have come through emails, snail mail and web uploads, which created increased workload. She was concerned about the incomplete transition plan as she moves away from her leadership of this signature program. Reasons to maintain UUSJ presence on the Hill include building relations with Congressional office and assuring continued engagement of partner congregations. This interim period can also be used to build capacity of the corps. Tanner Wray, convener of the AC training group, shared details of the initiative to assess needed skills, tools, materials and to inventory where those are in our volunteer or paid staff. Ultimately, this could help build a new model of advocacy. The plan for the remainder of this calendar year is to have letters July, September, October and December and to continue with Action Alerts where partners can take individual action. Lavona reminded the board of the webinar on election mobilizing, with new consultant Kelsey Cowger (UUSJ/Reeb Project voting specialist) on June 17, and July 11 storytelling workshop. UUSJ will be sharing a booth at virtual GA with UUs for Just Economic Community. While we did not get our requested grant, Lavona said, we got a \$1000 grant for technical assistance to develop a new grant on Storytelling as Advocacy, plus she expected to extend the expiration date of the current grant till end December, which would allow \$1500 for fundraising training expert, \$1500 for evaluation assistance and \$12,000 for the advocacy assistant (position vacant since 11/1/19). Lavona believes UUSJ should have 1.5 FTE person(s) to carry out this work at current levels. Discussion included clarification of how letters are being delivered (mailed April/May, scanned and emailed for June), agreement that including constituents was key (more possible from more distant congregations now that this is virtual) and doubts about any progress in Senate under its current leadership and about whether UUSJ is getting the zoom appointments that other lobbyists are getting (so far, UUSJ has only asked for one virtual meeting).
5. Ad Hoc Advocacy Oversight (report available): Serena Lowe, leader of this ad hoc initiative to re-think advocacy oversight and sustainability, reviewed the very active

discussion (7-8 meetings since March) and resulting proposals. After considering options to have (i) the whole board, (ii) the Executive Committee, (iii) a new group of board members, PARC, that would focus on oversight or (iv) an implementation group (AIM) that would carry out day to day work, the committee proposed a hybrid of (iii) and (iv). Both a PARC (board members for Policy and Advocacy Review) and an AIM (Advocacy Implementation and Management – mainly paid staff and volunteer staff) would be established, with a specific Exec Committee person to liaise with PARC. UUSJ would continue biennial surveys of membership to establish priority topics, and using those, an annual agenda would be defined. AIM would carry this out and report to PARC and the Board. PARC would seek funding needed to carry out the agenda, assure appropriate staffing, compliance and evaluation. A clear delineation would be made between review (board) and implementation (staff/volunteers). Discussion included many expressions of appreciation for the work of the ad hoc group and general endorsement of its proposals, with exception of one board member who felt that the EC was the appropriate oversight body. The Chair asked those working on governance how this proposal fit with likely governance proposals. Charlotte and Sean confirmed that the oversight group's recommendation was indeed consistent with the kind of separation of responsibilities envisioned. The board moved (Sean) and seconded (Larry) a motion to adopt the recommendation of the advocacy oversight group with details to be defined over the next 30 days. Board voted (15-1) in favor of the motion.

6. Medium Term Sustainability of Advocacy Program: Serena turned to the second part of the ad hoc committee's report – the different options for continuing in the immediate future without Lavona's extensive leadership input. The committee was not yet ready to make a recommendation on this, but it was looking at options such as (i) postponing all work for next seven months to concentrate on building capacity, (ii) attempting monthly actions but at less complex levels or (iii) carrying out an advocacy action every other month, with 60 days to engage partners and receive letters/messages. She noted that the level of effort of the recent past is more than the current staff capacity or financial resources would allow once Lavona steps back. Advocacy Corps training is already in motion, and Hill engagement is already suggested for July, September, October and December so this is close to (i) and (iii) above. An inventory of subject matter expertise within UUSJ, AC and partners is needed along with power mapping of Congress and a reconfiguration of the website's advocacy sections. The ad hoc committee will continue its work over the summer to hand over to PARC in the fall for 2021 planning. Feedback is welcome on these or other options.
7. FY20-21 budget (report and proposed budget circulated): Charlotte Jones-Carroll, Finance Committee member, explained the proposed budget. It incorporated not only the existing staffing, plus the first six months of an advocacy consultant (with grant funds left over from past) but also another six months of such a consultant (for which extraordinary fundraising efforts would be needed). Overall, the level of activity proposed for next FY would require dipping into reserves for around \$15,000, in addition to reasonably planned fundraising. Many uncertainties (strategic planning,

pandemic's effect on income, advocacy transition) make it especially hard this year to approve with confidence a budget, but it is a board duty. Best to consider approving this version and monitor it carefully for possible amendment next December. The discussion noted the aspirational nature of the level of funds to be raised, the lack of benefits for staff (sick and vacation leave to be clarified) and some hope about an upcoming fund appeal. A motion was made (David Strauss) and seconded (Bob McCarthy) to approve the budget with the condition that income and expenses be closely monitored was passed 16-1.

8. Nominations: Sean McCarthy indicated that the committee had been unable to identify a candidate for Treasurer and appealed for Board assistance in identifying someone. John Gubbings, outgoing interim treasurer, is willing to continue picking up checks, recording and depositing them. The Nominating Committee then proposed John Peterson for Vice-Chair and Serena Lowe for the At-Large position on the Executive Committee (presuming the Executive Committee agreed to name her at-large trustee, which it did). Sean moved and Martha Ades seconded approval of these two nominations, which were unanimously authorized (17-0). Sean then moved and Terry seconded the trustees to serve on Nominating Committee (Sean McCarthy, Larry Underwood, David Strauss), Finance Committee (Charlotte Jones-Carroll, Eleanor Piez – with one spot still vacant and the ex officio treasurer to be identified) and Development Committee (David Strauss, Gary Magnuson, Peter Bishop, Bob McCarthy, Eleanor Piez and Larry Underwood). The board also approved these nominations, 17-1.
9. Outgoing Board members recognition: Bob then identified John Gubbings, Lavona Grow, Carmelita Carter-Sykes and Al Carlson as having completed their permitted nine years on the board (three three-year terms). He commended their steadfast support, time and treasure. Pablo noted the many talents they had brought to the board.
10. Development Committee Report (circulated): David Strauss made a pitch for the coming year's virtual fundraiser. The needs would be extraordinary and the approaches more virtual than in the past, but other NGOs have demonstrated it is possible to raise funds and even provide speakers and entertainment in virtual mode. The key to future financial sustainability would likely be through greater individual contributions, he said.
11. Membership Committee Report (circulated): John Peterson indicated that, indeed, larger donations from individuals would be encouraged this year, with a suggested start level of \$60 (versus \$40 in the past) at the same time as we offered a "pay anything" option for membership to be sure we do not price anyone out of belonging. UUSJ had close to 100 new individuals added to the SALSA database who were outside the DMV area. In addition, we have had one-time donations from three non-DMV congregations. We have had individual membership totals ranging from 171 to 211 over the past three years. Since the Executive Committee had approved adoption of the Membership Committee's proposal for a fee structure for membership, the board ratified this decision 14-0 (Sean moved, D. Strauss seconded).

12. Executive Director's report on Mobilizing for 2020 Elections (circulated) and Poor People's Campaign (verbal): Pablo De Jesus updated the board on the voter mobilization initiative, to be funded with the angel donation, in partnership with All Souls Unitarian's Reeb Project. An experienced consultant, Kelsey Cowger, had been hired and would be supervised by Rev. Rob Keithan at All Souls. A Memorandum of Understanding is in final stages. All board members have been contacted to introduce Kelsey and encourage contacts from congregations working on getting out the vote to join her June 17 webinar. This joint project would focus on the Mid-Atlantic region (VA, PA, NC, GA) where any UU partner can seek Kelsey's help with their projects on GOTV. David Strauss encouraged reaching out to CASA as well (recognizing that they can be difficult to engage). Pablo went on to summarize our involvement with the Poor People's Campaign (PPC), especially the importance of participating in the June 20 virtual rally. This initiative substitutes for our past economic inequality task group which is no longer active. Pablo has been named UU representative on the PPC council. After June 20, PPC will pivot to voter mobilization. He emphasized that the PPC is led by poor people and people of color, which is in line with our strategic efforts to align with impacted people. Time did not permit Pablo to summarize or answer questions regarding his Executive Director's report. For highlights pertaining to UUSJ management, advocacy and operations, please review his report (circulated).

13. Closing steps: Bob will send out doodle polls for dates of strategic planning board meeting and a fall business meeting.

The meeting was adjourned.

Charlotte Jones-Carroll, Secretary