

The First Parish in Malden, Universalist
Annual Congregational Meeting
May 4, 2025

Meeting Minutes

Call to Order: 12:15 PM by moderator Alex Pratt

39 members present online and in person (28 needed for quorum)

Moderator's Introduction (use of Menti for online voting)

First order of business: approval of minutes from 2024 annual meeting (available online)

Moved and seconded, adopted by online Menti ballot

Second order of business: Election of slate of officers

Motion to elect slate of officers made, seconded.

Slate of officers approved by online (Menti) vote

- Board member for 3 years: Ingrid Schneider (first term)
- Board member for 3 years: Dave Zerega (second term)
- Parish Treasurer for 1 year: Erik Fearing (sixth year)
- Parish Clerk for 1 year: Erin Murphy (second year)
- Parish Moderator for 1 year: Alex Pratt (sixth year)
- Nominating Committee for 2 years: Suad Mammadkhanli (first term)

Third Order of Business: Parish Budget

Summary from treasurer Erik Fearing

Largely the same, increase in some areas despite successful stewardship drive. Staff salary makes up significant portion of the budget:

- Minister- housing allowance and salary- 4.5% raise, cost of living and experience
- New line- ministerial intern for next 2 years, expense offset by grant from UUA next year, fewer guest ministers due to intern minister
- Salary increases for staff- music director based on experience and cost of living
- Administrator and custodian- raise to match living wage calculation
- Assistant director of religious ed- planning for events . Increase in pledge has mostly been spent here due to increase in kids
- Director of Religious Ed- 50 week work year, moving to 52, still taking all of July, essentially double duty for camp in August
- 10K increase in RE staff, more children than congregational size normally has – harder to get volunteers, supplement RE staff with part time professional staff
- Contract musicians- Soren on sabbatical next year- may not spend all of this due to guest minister, intern, and member participation for music

Discussion:

Sheila Holland: In favor in investing in religious education and the kids, church youth

Building expenses:

- Income 70K from rentals regular and individual private events, offsets
- Fuel costs pretty low, but went up quite a bit this year, big bump in insurance costs
- Added to cleaning budget – professional cleaning to treehouse more regularly
- Security budgeted 1K – door security alarm and fire alarm system

At a loss of 350K- this amount made up out of endowment, endowment balance 2 million (trump slump not great for us)

Should be spending down at this point, look to planned giving for lump sums, events like auctions.

Maintaining course with this budget is recommended by the board, proposed capital assessment to be discussed by Dave.

Discussion:

Therese Perkins: Appeal to congregation for stewardship team for ideas – fundraising, etc.

Aisha Cruise: add on to Therese's comment- any ideas about usages for church as rental space- up to and including using space as concert venue – sanctuary is most underutilized area for rental space

Carey MacDonald: talk about space for rental ideas- could board more explicit hold a session for space use ideas?

Alex Pratt: Question- how endowment has performed over last 5 years?

Answer- Erik Fearing: In general, have managed to get returns that have paid off drawdown, except for bad year in 2022 and expense of roof (350K that we did not recoup). 2.2/2.5 mil has been making 350k draw out needed. Roof and market drop means we'll be under even if we have good 15% return – drawing out a little more from endowment.

Motion to approve budget made and seconded. Budget is adopted unanimously by online vote

Fourth order of business: Building assessment authorization

Should we engage GLRA for a building capital needs study

Summary from Dave Zerega: At last year's meeting, authorized additional funds for building evaluation. Since then, house and grounds committee has sent out for quotes to assess building- 2 responses with quotes brought back to house and grounds.

One quote was lower but potential additional expenses made it sound like it would go beyond initial quote.

House and grounds recommended if we go forward that we use the higher of the two quotes (\$54,615) for this reason.

The assessment would tell us whether or not this building is a viable building to stay in as a church- give us a clear understanding for what costs are coming in certain areas.

Areas of concern to address in assessment:

- Mortar (starting to fail), structural elements, roof flashing, downspouts and drains, plumbing, structural support buttresses.

Board is not authorized to spend this amount of money without congregational authorization, exceeds previous amount authorization

Discussion:

Alexa Reed: Question – do we need to have another meeting to approve amount to assess whether or not we pay to fix building. Damage and how much it might cost to fix. When we get that info will we have to meet again to vote to approve company to repair or replace building

Dave Zerega: Answer- board is not authorized to spend beyond certain amount- any building repair would be above and beyond board authority – evaluation would require seeking other quotes. There would have to be a church meeting (before the next annual meeting) to approve costs to fix, if fixing issues is feasible.

Holly Wenninger: Conditions survey will prepare report- prioritize most urgent repairs to least urgent- will be flexibility to work around

Jim Tozza: Question- It will cost 54k to get evaluation. If the problems cost more to fix, money coming in may not be enough to do the work?

Dave Zerega: Answer- as of now, just the mortar alone is around \$300k, exceeding pledge drive amount

Jim Tozza: Question could we get a loan to get this fixed?

Erik Fearing: Answer- There would be additional drawdown on endowment, or seeking grants/financing if we want to do those repairs

Sheila Holland: We'd need evaluation before making decisions otherwise it's just speculation

Dave Zerega: One of the first steps in assessing building viability is to get this kind of assessment. If we want to keep this building, board believes this is necessary to see if viable. The building itself generates \$70k a year in income – our space use costs \$30K a year for this space use, lower than what renters pay

Matt Collins: Question- generally supports- what we authorized last year was lower estimate, what happened to cause increase?

Dave Zerega: Answer- Thought cost would be higher than board authorized to spend. We now have deeper set of knowledge about the situation

Aisha Cruise: When we made our first recommendation last year, had no idea what it would cost- estimated lower cost and everything has gotten more expensive- construction field in general has increased since pandemic, presidential election. Aisha suggested getting evaluation when we found out mortar was failing

Carey MacDonald: In favor of needs assessment, there are grants available for this kind of work- St Stephen's Episcopal church doing envelope study, got a grant from community preservation committee and Baird organization? Look up grants. Be strategic as possible about use of grant money- would rather vote to approve board to use money than to vote to approve specific company to do assessment. Ask the right questions, don't want to go back and ask later for more money. Money for energy needs assessments as a source of funds Question is- has board and building and grounds talked about sequence of conversations?

Dave Zerega: Have not discussed sequence, but point is authorize amount vs specific quote?

Carey MacDonald: Move to amend motion to authorize amount of money, not for specific company to do assessment.

Motion to authorize board and h/g committee to move forward with building capital needs study up to 60k, plus reimbursable expenses. Motion Seconded

Continue discussion on that motion:

Patrick Mayfield: Conflicted, conducting study as if this were a building we want to stay in long term, perhaps discussion about what other buildings we could be in/financial structure. Plus side of the study would be to know what runway is in this space before we have to move on – just a comment.

Alexa Reed: Strongly in favor of knocking down and starting over but due to political climate maybe wait 5 years

Jeremie Bateman: This is why we need assessment- information needed for robust conversation about pros and cons

Dave Zerega: Thoughts- seems like question is are we going to abandon building entirely or do a space needs to determine what is necessary for building. We are making money on rental, comparable space somewhere else would cost more. Space rental contact with largest renter does have time horizon on it- possibly in the middle of this contract?

Erik Fearing: Answer- current lease downstairs expires in Feb 2026 – coming up for renewal soon

Alex Pratt: When will results be available?

Dave Zerega: not sure if this is in quote – can ask for timeline

Alex Pratt: Question- will they honor quote?

Erik Fearing: Answer- we believe yes

Alex Pratt: whether assessment will help make decisions- as currently proposed, quote doesn't include redevelopment potential, or what building could be with redesign?

Dave Zerega: Only current structural components and mechanical components of building now will be in. Initial thoughts- brought up doing roof assessment

Aisha Cruise: Example- old building college in Vermont – 4th floor was condemned, 3rd floor was medium condemned? Friend who worked on housing went into basement said it was bad, foundation will fail in

15 years- college spent huge amount of money on new building. Do not want a surprise foundation failing- find out if that is happening so we can plan. How long can building in current state survive?

Marie McAllister: If we wanted to sell the building we'd need study anyways.

Motion to vote on amending motion to authorize 60K for use for capital needs study. Motion made and seconded.

Vote to authorize 60K amount not specifying who vendor is to do capital needs study

Online vote- 31 yes, 4 no. Motion adopted

Next order of business- new business

No new business

Motion to adjourn made, seconded approved.