

Minutes for the Board Meeting of the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church, January 16, 2024 **APPROVED**

In attendance, virtually and in person (in alphabetical order):

Rob Bray, Chris Buice, Bill Cherry, Eddie Chin, AB Coleman, Denise Coleman, Miriam Davis, Steve Drevik, Lynn Hixson, Jack Hulse, Mebbie Jackson, Roy Kersey, Heather Kistner, Maddie Kulpa, Barbara Lamm, Catherine Farmer Loya, Maureen McBride, Devon Miller, Jeff Mellor, Mark Mohundro, Grier Novinger, Claudia Pressley, Mary Rogge, Ken Stephenson, Bella Thomas-Wilson

1. Opening Words - Mebbie Jackson

At Eddie's invitation, Mebbie opened the meeting with an appropriate reading from Kebir and the chalice was lighted. [01:21]

2. Announcements - Eddie

a) Minutes of the December 19 Board Meeting

After clarification of attendance at the December meeting, Bill moved, Ken seconded acceptance of the minutes as distributed and corrected. Unanimous [05:25]

b) Announcements [06:13]

- 1) Eddie announced the invitation of the High School Nights youth group to join with us for the game night at no cost to them.
- 2) He reviewed steps for the 75th Anniversary Celebration, including a Sign-up Genius method of coordinating participants and helpers in the various activities.
- 3) Mark suggested we make a point of inviting visitors to the Sunday service to come to the Chili/Game Night.
- 4) Claudia mentioned that she had some comments and suggestions from last year's attendees and asked who the point person was to whom they should be directed. Eddie asked, and Lynn agreed, to share this role. [09:06]

3. Ministers Report - Chris Buice

Chris previously emailed this report to the Board:

Minister's Report to the Board for January 2024

I will forgo my usual report to give Board members more time to read, review and reflect on the recommended bylaw changes. Here are some ministerial reflections to consider as we move forward,

- Focus on good process. In December during the coffee hour someone said to me in reference to the bylaws, "This is like the Republicans pushing through an agenda during the holidays when no one is paying attention." Partisan commentary and institutional cynicism aside, my response to that statement has been three newsletter columns focusing on the way congregational democracy works, urging members to read, review, reflect, ask questions, come to the meeting and vote. In a word, participate. One of our core principles is that

democracy is active co-creation not passive consumption. If people trust the process, they will trust the decision. So proceed in ways that build trust. Patience with questions and concerns will build trust.

- Reflect on the pace of change. 8 days is not a long time for the congregation to read, reflect and review proposed changes. Some of the changes will be easy. Youth board representatives for example. Some may be more challenging. Those that impact personnel and executive decision making come to mind. One way to proceed is to pass the easier changes in January, listen to feedback on other proposals with the goal of refining changes for May/June meeting.
- Take note that this meeting happens right before the pledge drive. If people leave the meeting with a sense of unity it will unquestionably boost your pledge drive especially if some time is used in the meeting to say something like, “Now that we have had this vote, we need your financial support to make this dream a reality. We encourage you to pledge early, pledge generously, pledge hopefully.” Use the big win to boost the overall mission of the church.
- Reflect on staff morale. Are we asking staff to “volunteer” for new responsibilities or are staff being “voluntold” they will be required to accept new responsibilities (with no additional pay.) Are we making decisions with staff or are we making decisions for staff. In the Unitarian Universalist church, we often say we want “power with” people rather than “power over” people. So that is a spiritual issue for us.
- Finally, these proposals do reflect my desire to move in the direction of becoming a Teaching Pastor focusing on preaching, teaching, pastoral care, community outreach/inreach aka recruiting new members and retaining old members. Is my idea a good one? I don’t know. In order for it to succeed the whole congregation will need to buy in. Also, without a clearer definition of the managerial team, roles and responsibilities I cannot tell if I will have more time for the above goal (preaching, teaching etc) or less time. The congregation I served in Oxford, Ohio, had a board that made decisions by consensus (also the Quaker school I attended for four years had committees governed by consensus.) My experience with consensus was that it took longer and resulted in fewer decisions. Thus, my Oxford congregation’s cheer, “Go, turtles, go!” So, a management team based on consensus may take more ministerial time not less. As John Buehrens loves to tell me, “I love Quaker theology and hate Quaker governance.” If the congregation as a whole-values slower processes then it definitely can work. If the congregation prefers to make speedier decisions, then consensus may prove challenging. As always, I serve at the pleasure of the congregation and will support congregational decisions.

Further discussion clarified that Chris is interested in expanding his pastoral role both within the congregation and in outreach to the larger community. This shift will necessitate shifting administrative tasks he has been fulfilling to the Management Team and he expressed the need to assure that proposed changes in the By-Laws actually enable him to devote his time to these pastoral commitments. [11:34]

4. Director of Finance & Operations (DFO) Report - Claudia Pressley

Claudia discussed this previously emailed report:

Director of Finance & Operations Board Report Jan. 16, 2024

Welcome Garden

Key facts: current to 01.16.24

Building and Grounds is the umbrella committee that this Task Force works under. For those who are unaware, at this current time, Building & Grounds is an Executive Team committee (not a Board or Program Council committee), that is advisory in nature and follows the directives of the Director of Finance and Operations. Because of that structure, the DFO will be the Chair of this Task Force.

Our directives are very clear and time sensitive.

Our goals are to develop a plan by Feb 28, 2024, using the key components of:

Safety (visibility for incoming/outgoing traffic, police patrolling our grounds as we deal with increasing homeless/transient populations, etc.)

Aesthetics (developing a wildflower area that also has a landscaped component. Adam & Oliver Dattillo will be our advisors in this area)

Maintenance (what is realistic to expect that volunteers will be able to maintain long term) **Finances** (what increased operating expenses will we need to build into our 2024/25 budget to allow us to maintain this area)

The Task Force is to:

Review the original plot map that Doris Grove presented to the Endowment Committee when this project was funded by the Endowment Committee and approved by that year's Board.

Using that information, we will identify the original plants and then determine which ones are still flourishing. Of the flourishing plants, we will determine if any need to be relocated to other areas of the church grounds because of their size or height and replaced with

smaller or shorter plants. All other plants that have sprung-up organically or have died will be marked and included in the plan to either relocate or remove them.

Looking at the original plants the Task Force will develop a diagram of the Welcome Garden area that will have defined borders so that our lawn care company can maintain our Front Lawn area including the area up to the Welcome Garden.

On or before Feb. 28, 2024, we will present our budget requests to the Finance Team to be included in the 2024/25 Operating Budget.

This group has completed step 1, 2 and 3.

They are on target to complete their goals by Feb 28 to present to the Finance Committee

Updates

January 7, 2024, the Usher Team began implementing a new attendance reporting structure. This will allow us a more accurate count of the number of people in our building on Sunday mornings.

18 new people have been entered into REALM in the last 30 days. There will be follow up with all.

The combined Stewardship/Worship Committee/Staff experiment of not "passing the offering update comparing Dec. 2023 with Dec. 2022

Our December Giving trends:

Week 1 (Dec. 1-2) \$5,062	2022 Week 1 (Dec. 1-3) \$4,142
Week 2 (Dec. 3-9) \$16,932	2022 Week 2 (Dec. 4-10) \$11,486
Week 3 (Dec. 10-16) \$13,849	2022 Week 3 (Dec. 11-17) \$14,978
Week 4 (Dec. 17-23) \$9,968	2022 Week 4 (Dec. 18-24) \$32,511
Week 5 (Dec. 24-30) \$11,756	2022 Week 5 (Dec. 25-31) \$12,228
Week 6 (Dec. 31) \$21,958	2022 Total \$75,345 Total \$79,525

This reflects all total contributions.

We have had 2 first-time givers in the last 7 days.
153 giving units have scheduled contributions (auto-drafts)

December Giving by Age

17 & under – 0
18-24- 1
15-39 – 8
40-59 –23
60-79 –46
80+ - 21

Constant Contact Email Facts

Newsletter - Jan. 10, 2024, sent to:
1,211 email addresses
538 opened it. A 48% open rate. 3 email addresses unsubscribed.

On-line Order of Service – Jan. 14, 2024, sent to: 1,186 email addresses
467 opened it. A 43% open rate. 0 unsubscribed

2024 Snow Policy – Jan. 15, 2024, sent to:
1,209 email addresses
545 opened it. A 49% open rate. 0 unsubscribed

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Further discussion touched on the effectiveness of not passing the collections plate during the service, but instead announcing that donations, not otherwise submitted, could be left in the plates situated on the choir rail. At least for December, this experiment has proven to yield substantially similar results. Since the Christmas holidays and services are included, where often more donations come in, the experience in the upcoming weeks will provide a clearer picture. Claudia called the Board's attention to the age structure of donors in this period, which reflects the importance of members providing their birthdate in REALM. With regard to the email opening rate in the report, Eddie asked if the 48% open rate provided by Constant Contact might signal problems in snow emergencies if non-readers of emails show up when we are closed. Claudia reported that the Constant Contact staff had stated that any open rate of greater than 30% signals *success*. In response to Jeff's question concerning the age structure of the donor population and whether this suggests a change or trend from earlier years, Claudia said she could provide an analysis of this sort if the Board desired. Ken mentioned his experience of counting up the collections after the service and asked if the data Claudia provided indicated any shift or trend in giving. Claudia noted that the majority of giving now comes in electronically. Ken opined that a closer look at the success of collections plates on the choir rail vs. collections plates passed around would be desirable and Claudia stated that could be done. [18:50]

Before proceeding, Heather announced that Eddie had lost internet service and that she would be assuming the chair in his absence. [19:03]

5. 75th Anniversary Issues - Barbara Lamm

Barbara reported that several graphic designs had been proposed for banners, announcements and other items for the event and she presented them to the Board for choosing the one to be adopted. The Board voted to accept this one (with minor editorial adjustments):



[31:04]

6. Treasurer's Report [31:19] - Bill Cherry

Bill discussed his previously emailed report to the Board.

We currently have an amount in excess of \$31,544, most of which can be attributed to a surge of contributions. This surge is likely the product of timing in the giving year, since some people prefer to have their contributions count in the 2023 Tax Year. He recommended a strong push to emphasize the Raise Right program, in preference to gift cards, to bolster the budget. He drew attention to the overage on Fundraising Events - a positive development - of \$2893. The auction had proved very successful and, because not all contributions to the auction had been sent it yet, was likely to be even better than current numbers show. He praised the Auction Committee for superb work. [35:41]

In light of uncertainty whether Bill had lost internet connection, the meeting proceeded with a promise to return if Bill did and had more to report. [37:28]

7. Endowment Committee - Maureen Dunn, Grier Novinger

Maureen and Grier discussed the report they had previously distributed to the Board:

By a unanimous vote at our regular January Endowment Fund (EF) Committee meeting, the Endowment Fund Committee recommends that the Board:

*Approve a distribution of \$24,620.00 which represents 4% of the average value of the General Fund computed over the last 12 quarters, 4% of the Religious Education Fund (similarly computed) and 4% of the Buildings and Grounds Fund (similarly computed). The Endowment Fund Committee requests Board approval of grants for the following projects:

1) Patio Chairs and Umbrellas — \$3,905

Project Coordinator: Barbara Lamm

Summary: Buy 16 Vineyard Garden Arm Chairs and 3 patio umbrellas. These are to replace patio chairs and umbrellas that have rotted

2) RE Furniture Upgrade —\$6,500

Project Coordinator: Catherine Farmer Loya,

Summary: Bookcase shelving for the Children’s Diversity & Justice Library; Tables for Rooms D, E, & F to replace odd shaped and difficult to move tables in rooms with limited space; Chairs for room C to replace the large, heavy chairs which cannot be stacked; Couches for Room C to replace couches that were salvaged from the rummage-sale.

3) TVUUC Music and Choir Modernization — \$3,759

Project Coordinator: A.B. Coleman

Summary: TVUUC’s Director of Music needs a portable electronic music system to replace and consolidate multiple paper copies and notebooks of music. TVUUC’s music program could be greatly enhanced by replacing the outdated Macintosh desktop system with a modern digital audio workstation (DAW) for music composition, production and playback.

4) Staff and Church Computer Updates — \$5,235

Project Coordinator: A.B. Coleman

Summary: Most of TVUUC’s computers will not support the current versions of their installed operating systems and will need to be updated to remain supported by Microsoft and Apple. Many features that can enhance staff and volunteer productivity and security are only available on the current versions of computer operating systems.

5). Gratitude Bench — \$4,175

Project Coordinator: David Massey

Summary: The EF Committee recognizes the donors of gifts that exceed \$50,000 with a bench and plaque. The bench is placed in an area that has been chosen and approved by the Building and Grounds Committee. This bench is in honor of Jamie Adcock.

Background

Under the Endowment Fund Charter, Article III, Section D (**Board Approval Thresholds**), “in response to an EFC recommendation, and having considered the duty-of-care factors listed above, the Board may approve, in any one year...a distribution no greater than four percent (4%) of the fair market value of a Sub-Fund by a vote of a majority of those Board members present at a Board meeting.”

The recommended distribution for 2024 is equal to or less than four percent of fair market value, a simple majority of Board members present at a meeting can approve these Endowment Fund Committee recommendations.

There were six (6) additional proposals that were not funded. There were not enough funds available to fund all proposed projects that were submitted. The ones that the committee selected were judged to be the most consistent with the mission and purpose of the Endowment Fund, and were the most well developed, supported, and coordinated in relation to the criteria for proposals.

All supported the important work of TVUUC.

For greater detailed project descriptions, see this folder of Google Drive:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1zjCg4_rgO3-U88iJcYjNfz7BWf5_zpSQ?usp=drive_link

Memorial Garden Distribution — \$1,332

The Memorial Garden Fund was initiated to provide enough income to support the maintenance of the Memorial Garden. For the years through 2021, the amount distributed was calculated in July of that year (the end of the church fiscal year) by taking the average value of the fund over the previous 13 quarters. It was given to TVUUC to add to their Restricted Memorial Garden Fund for maintenance.
With the changes in the EF charter, the EF should get a vote from the Board to make this distribution. And it seems prudent to calculate the amount for distribution in January to be consistent with the calculations of the other Funds.

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Jeff moved, Mary seconded acceptance of this report, expenditure of the items listed and associated expenditures as presented.

In discussion, the Endowment Committee was praised for their fine work. Committee Members noted that the number and quality of projects presented was very high causing some projects to be overlooked in this round that remain eligible for reconsideration next year.

Unanimous. [43:48]

7. Bylaw Review & Congregational Meeting Planning [45:16]

AB was called upon to review the history and reasons for this Bylaw review process, including input of the Management Team and Staff collected in the past week. {NB: It was reported that both Bill Cherry and Eddie were experiencing connectivity issues related to power outages in their neighborhoods. Discussion of By-laws was postponed.}

8. DRE Staff Report - Catherine Farmer Loya

At this point, the agenda was adjusted to consider Catherine’s DRE Staff Report she had previously submitted: [49:47]



HIGHLIGHTS:

TVUUC DRE Staff Report

January 2024



Catherine Farmer Loya

- ✦ **Playground Surface Upgrade:** We are delighted that the pea gravel removal and sod placement has now been completed in the play area behind the RE rooms. We will soon be moving the portable play structures that were stored on the patio during the project back into their places and getting them ready for use.
- ✦ **Our Whole Lives:** We are close to halfway through our 7th-9th grade OWL program, with nine participants and a fabulous team of five trained volunteer OWL facilitators: Devon Alley, Jon Coffee, Stephanie Kyriazis, Meris Porter and Kendra Straub. Three of these team members were among those trained at the OWL facilitator training we hosted, thanks to Endowment funding, earlier this fall.

✦ **Youth Programs:** This program year has seen a significant expansion of our programming for middle and high school youth. We now are offering our Sunday morning Crossing Paths world religions program, a monthly youth social outing, monthly High School Nights youth group gatherings at TVUUC, and also have an ongoing and expanding twice-monthly youth Dungeons & Dragons group. This breadth of programming is possible thanks to Assistant Director of Religious Education Miriam Davis, who has coordination of youth programs as part of her portfolio, as well as TVUUC volunteer Noël Arring, who is the lead facilitator for both the High School Nights and youth D&D programs (in addition to serving as an RE space lead on Sunday mornings and as a member of the RE Leadership Team). Three cheers for both of these fabulous folks!

✦ **RE Data:** We have 71 children and youth who are active in our programs so far this year. This number includes those who've officially registered, as well as those who have attended multiple times but haven't yet completed their registration paperwork. This does not include visitors who have attended fewer than three times; we have visiting families nearly every Sunday and have many new families who are joining our TVUUC community.

✦ **RE Volunteers:** There are roughly 40 members and friends of TVUUC who are volunteering in our programs as RE space leads, assistants, RE greeters, Hallway Helpers, youth event chaperones, storytime volunteers, weekday RE task helpers, RE Leadership Team members, and more. Our programming is possible thanks to the incredible amount of time and care offered by these volunteers and we are so grateful for their help!

LOOKING FORWARD:

✦ **Mid-year Sunday Morning RE Recruitment:** We are still in need of several additional volunteers to serve as lead and/or assistants in our Choose Your Own Adventure RE spaces, in order to reduce the frequency with which we need to call on our existing pool of folks, as well as prepare for the possibility of opening a third Choose Your Own Adventure program space each Sunday.

✦ **Adult RE Programming:** The Adult RE team is working on planning for the rest of the program year. After experimenting in the fall with offering multiple Adult RE programs on first Sundays following the Let's Connect lunches, we are now trying out spreading offerings more broadly throughout the month, making sure that there is one program offered each first Sunday, with more programs offered after the service on one or more additional Sundays (with food/snacks provided, which we have found greatly helps draw participation from folks who are already hungry for lunch by the time the service ends), as well as continuing to offer programming at a variety of non-Sunday times. Among the offerings that are on the horizon are the Wait a Minute! series, which will continue meeting with new sessions monthly, and I am also scheduling a series of four monthly sessions focused on UU History & Theology.

✦ **UU Values Focus in Choose Your Own Adventure RE:** We have concluded our fall 8th Principle focus in our CYOA RE spaces and are now launching our exploration of our core UU values in the second half of our program year. In a variety of experiential ways in our Story & Spirit, our Learning Lab, our Reflection Room, and our Helping Hands program spaces we'll be learning about and celebrating Love, Equity, Interdependence, Justice, Generosity, Pluralism and Transformation this winter and spring.

✦ **Elementary Con at The Mountain:** I am delighted to share that for the first time in many years, there will be a contingent of TVUUC elementary-schoolers attending the Elementary Con at The Mountain from March 8-10, at the same time as the TVUUC church retreat. The Con is open to current 3rd-5th graders, and we have two kids already committed. I will be attending as our adult advisor, and we can include up to two additional kids before needing to recruit an additional adult. We are also making plans to encourage participation the High School Con March 22-24.

✦ **TVUUC Summer Camp:** We are beginning our planning for our summer 2024 day camp week at TVUUC, which will take place during the week of Memorial Day, from Tues. May 28 – Fri. May 31. This year we will be offering Camp Critter! We'll be encountering, learning about, and taking part in projects to help support animals, as we explore our core UU values and put our hearts and hands to work to live them in community together.

Catherine repeated her call for all Board members to take part in the RE classes at least once a year and cited the mutual benefits for the RE program and the Board to be engaged and participate in learning experiences for both parties. The marked increase in the size of the RE program makes it especially desirable to have extra 'hands 'help as well. Concluding her remarks, she invited questions and inquiries now or later from participants. [52:34]

7. Resumption of item 7: Bylaw Review & Congregational Meeting Planning

Both Eddie and Bill reported continuing connectivity issues, but the discussion resumed under Heather's direction. AB resumed his background summary. [54:12] His preparation included conversations with several congregations throughout the southern region. [55:10] He emphasized that changing the *wording* of the by-laws is relatively easy. The long range and more difficult goal is changing the *behaviors* of all church members whose actions are to be governed by the by-laws. This will be a prolonged process as adjustments of habits are involved. [59:22] The current by-laws were derived from UUA recommendations and discussions in 2012. The proposed changes draw inspiration from current UUA recommendations for a church of our size. These changes stress the role of the Board in determining church policies which shape the culture and identity of the church mission. The Management Team will form the management policy. The Standing Team group will establish the standing team policy, and so on for the Program Council and other church entities. These various groups currently function under disparate names suggesting different processes and authorities that are in fact amenable to similar treatment and more uniform titles. [62:48] Consolidation of these efforts and integration of them into a REALM database is made far more difficult by the varying terms, titles, agendas, procedures, charters and names for these groups, their membership, leadership and participants. Solidification and standardization will increase the effectiveness and success of the wide range of initiatives in the church community. Scorecards or identifiable measures of accountability will both invigorate our actions and promote success. [64:45]

In further discussion, Ken expressed his concern that the By-laws refer to adherence to a policy that does not yet exist "a) Will follow meeting, decision, and evaluation guidelines as described in the Management Team Policy" [Art. V, Sec. 2, § c]. Chris reinforced this with his discomfort of abandoning a text with clear guidelines and defined roles and duties in favor of a text lacking any. He is familiar with, and has experience with, and is comfortable with consensus rule, but wonders if the congregation might be amenable to a process which is slower and less clearly laid out. To address these concerns, Jeff offered this wording:

" Will formulate the Management Team Charter to establish meeting, decision, and evaluation guidelines."

The sense of this change was to remove the uncertainty of referring to a non-existent policy and establish that the Team will be creating the policy by which they will function. [81:40]

[90:22] Ken then cautioned the Board that he, and he assumed, the rest of us may not be aware of possible reactions of the congregation at large on the scope and effects of the changes we are proposing. In addition, members of the congregation may have positive suggestions that we also haven't thought of. He raised the possibility of preparing a back-up/scaled down draft of By-Law amendments omitting items not yet fully formulated to move forward with non-controversial, widely agreed upon and needed items, thus avoiding problematic areas. [91:50] Chris voiced the concern that the staff already spends an hour and a half in a weekly meeting. The additional task of formulating a policy charter would necessarily add to the work load or time spent.

Ken moved, Maddie seconded acceptance of Jeff's suggestion revision of the draft By-laws. [108:41]

In discussion, Bill noted that By-laws are typically not tactical or transient documents, but provide a statement of where we are and what we need to do. [110:00] By-laws are not intended to be a project document. It was then suggested that this wording indeed captures the fact that we are in a transition and that subsequent clear policies will emerge consonant with the persons in these roles and the mission and spirit of the church. [113:25]

Heather stated her view that the appropriate people to formulate the policy in the proposed team of peers are the individuals charged with performing those tasks, rather than having them receive a policy from outside their group. [113:49] Eddie reported his experience in conferring with several other congregation presidents that what we are proposing resembles the process they use with success. [120:55] He added that he shared Roy's view that we should proceed with the text before us and not abandon the process, in view of the fact that the current structure has not been working well since before the pandemic. [126:25] Ken reminded the Board that he has a motion on the floor and believes we should proceed on it. He reiterated his concern that it would be prudent to have a backup/fallback plan with a set of widely agreed upon elements in this draft to present in case the draft is voted down. [127:13] Heather noted that we have sessions on several Sundays to address questions where members of the congregation can ask and discuss with Board members what we propose and why we are proposing these changes. [127:55] **Ken called the question.** [129:17]

Motion PASSED, with zero NO votes, and one ABSTENTION. [131:45]

Before proceeding to the vote on the DRAFT version to be presented to the congregation, the following points were made:

- a) Mary re-emphasized that our presentation of this draft to the congregation include a clear notice that we are presenting a transitional document and that we will be working out the details to form a FINAL document before the June Congregational Meeting. [134:10]
- b) Maddie asked if it would be possible to present the current draft to the congregation article by article (or some similar fashion) to be voted on individually. Subsequent discussion indicated that this would be difficult and ran counter to the developed understanding that the draft By-laws would be presented, and voted on, as a whole. [136:14]
- c) Bill asked if we can affirm the By-laws document with the friendly proviso that minor technical and editorial issues, none of which would affect the fundamental issues, could be included in the actual final document to be presented to the congregation. This was met with general agreement. [139:10]

9. Acceptance of the Draft By-laws for Presentation to the Congregation Roy moved, Maddie seconded presentation of the Draft By-Laws to the congregational for approval at the upcoming mid-year Congregational Meeting.

Yes 11, No 1, Abstain 1, Not Voting 1. Motion PASSES. [142:14]

10. Closing Words / Adjournment - Mebbie Jackson, Heather Kistner

Mebbie graced the conclusion of the meeting with an appropriate inspirational reading. [145:00] Heather thanked AB and Denise and all others involved for their valuable work in a trying process of transition in accordance with our principles of Unitarian-Universalism and mutual respect. [146:00]

**Respectfully submitted,
Jeff Mellor, Clerk-Secretary**