

St. George's Church Vestry Meeting Minutes

May 20, 2021

Present: Sean Albert, Jon Ewbank, Meg Hughes, Sandee Hughes, David Kennison, Debbie Lambeth, Lynn Paska, Paul Smigelski, Fr. Matt Stromberg, Rich Unger, Jeff Wengrovius

Absent: Carol Gage

Vestry convened via Zoom at 7:02 p.m., as Father opened the meeting with a prayer. Lynn Paska moved to accept the April minutes, and Debbie Lambeth seconded. All voted in favor.

Rector's Report

Father Matt reported that this Sunday, May 23 will mark the Day of Pentecost and the baptism of Piper Wisenburn. Light refreshments will be served outdoors after the Mass. The Diocese has circulated new guidelines and we are now able to have coffee hour. We can also take our masks off in our pews and can sing without masks if we are 12 feet from other churchgoers. Spoiler alert: The Pentecost service will include parishioners standing and reading aloud in foreign languages.

Sunday will also mark our final Celtic Mass at 6 p.m. St. Patrick will be the subject of the sermon.

Father is planning vacation time from June 14 through 21 and from July 8 through 16. He is seeking out a supply priest.

Senior Warden's Report

David Kennison initiated a discussion of potential pitfalls regarding George Soltysiak's current employment status at St. George's. George (and his helper Tommy) are hourly day laborers, not employees. They have no contract, benefits, or coverage by church insurance. They are not covered by NYS Workers Compensation Insurance. If one of them is injured on the job, we could have a problem.

We have treated them as independent contractors. Now that their earnings have exceeded \$600 in a year, we need to report that income via 1099-NEC. George is anxious about jeopardizing his Section 8 housing allowance, but according to Rich Unger, individuals on Section 8 are not prohibited from working and can earn a certain amount without losing an appreciable portion of their housing allowance. Failure to report income altogether, however, could result in the revocation of Section 8 benefits. St. George's could be in financial and/or legal jeopardy, as well.

Jon Ewbank, a professional tax preparer, advised that the church may issue a retroactive 1099-NEC for 2020.

Vestry discussed making George a regular employee. Father would like to bring him on as sexton. Consensus of the Vestry seemed to be that we should keep George as a contract employee for a limited interim time, during which we examine our options regarding contract labor versus employee status.

Meg Hughes commented that we may expect too much out of George and that he cannot possibly do everything in the job description in 15 hours a week. David raised the possibility of taking some church cleaning duties out of the job description and setting up an arrangement with a company to clean on a scheduled basis (example, once or twice a month). Then George could do maintenance-level cleaning in between. Jeff Wengrovius has identified a candidate for this work. He would like to take it offline and look into it further in consultation with others on Vestry.

Former Sextons

There is nothing new regarding the eviction of former sextons Sondra and Jeremy Kravetz. The next significant date in the process is June 30, the end of the 90-day waiting period. On April 19, David delivered a letter to Sondra and Jeremy detailing their termination, their violations of signed agreement, and their eviction. This was needed for our future court case.

The laundry door lock has been changed again. David had noted indications that the Kravetzes are taking the door off its hinges to do their laundry. David also remarked on their careless manner of leaving bagged garbage throughout the Great Hall. They also appear to have raided the supply closet and used hundreds of dollars' worth of disposable paper products. Another troublesome development is that Sondra has installed a bed and belongings in an upstairs room that is not part of their apartment. It is not unreasonable to assume that Sondra has attempted to distance herself from her son Jeremy, who is emotionally unstable. This volatility was a problem when we attempted to access the Great Hall roof via the apartment recently for a needed plumbing repair. They refused to open the door and when David started to cut the lock to gain entry, the Kravetzes called the police. The responding officers agreed that we have the right to enter the premises to perform needed maintenance, but a 24-hour notice is required for each entry. This wasn't possible for the job at hand, as the plumbers needed access over multiple days. Ultimately the church arranged for a scissor-lift to give the workers access to the roof, incurring an additional \$1,000 expense for the job. Repairs were completed on May 3. Jeff negotiated with the company to save us \$575, and the total cost was \$7,000.

Web Site

David was pleased to announce that Paul Smigelski has agreed to be an apprentice webmaster, working with Jon Pearson on our website.

Nursery

On April 18, Brian proposed upgrading our nursery due to an expanding baby census at St. George's. He feels that the current nursery is not easily accessible and needs modernization. Brian offered to commit \$500 towards upgrades. Vestry brainstormed regarding a better location for the nursery. The room in Cranmer Hall that was formerly the second-hand shop, and now site of AA meetings, would be better suited. It's nearer the church, has its own bathroom and kitchen adjacent, plenty of space, and window views to church. We could also put a video monitor in there so the adults could watch the service.

Do we want to pursue it? We would need to staff it. In the past (before Covid) this was handled by volunteers. There also something to be said for keeping the nursery and Sunday school in adjacent rooms as they are. At this time, relocation and refurbishment do not seem to be a priority.

Vestry Agenda

David proposed that a draft Vestry agenda be distributed a few days prior to the meeting. This will prompt people to comment and suggest new business and old business items as appropriate. Father committed to getting the agenda out earlier, perhaps toward the end of the week before Vestry meetings.

Junior Warden's Report

Jon Ewbank commented that, at the recommendation of the installer, we need to commence a regular routine of documented monthly and yearly preventative maintenance on all of our boilers. This requires monthly draining/refilling and annual descaling of all four boilers. In the past this was handled by the sexton but we may want to consider other options going forward. Vestry was advised that Indoor Weather Control is developing a boiler maintenance contract proposal.

Cranmer Hall – New railings will be installed in the coming week, as well as the wrought iron fence post in front of St. George's House. A leaking toilet in the AA meeting room has pointed up the fact that none of the plumbing fixtures in Cranmer House have individual shut-off valves. Chris Peters will fix the leaking toilet. He has also agreed to install shut-off valves on the toilet and the faucets in that bathroom, and the sink in the kitchen, not charging us for the additional labor, but just for the cost of materials. Chris will also reattach a broken gutter strap on the northeast corner of the church when he comes to complete roof repairs.

Great Hall hallway retiling – Project still on hold.

Removal of dead trees on Green Street and the subsequent rehabilitation of the sidewalks – As reported by Rich Unger, the City doesn't allow residents to do their own removal of trees in the amenity strip. Bob McCloskey has solicited an estimate for sidewalk replacement but Vestry is not currently in a position to consider the work.

Other – An estimate for the repainting of the sanctuary ceiling is being developed by Arthur (the same person who repaired and repainted the Cranmer House dormers). He will submit the estimate once he has determined the feasibility of a lift (or alternatively, the need for scaffolding).

Dr. Taylor has highlighted a problem with the framing of the window in the southwest corner of his living room in Cranmer House. The bottom of the frame has pulled loose from the exterior wall. It needs to be reattached and resealed. The iron railing on the steps to St. George's House is also rusting out and needs to be refurbished or replaced. We also need to replace the garage door opener for the Rectory.

Treasurer's Report

Jeff Wengrovius reported that our recent spate of unexpected building repairs has left us with only \$500 in our building repair budget for the rest of 2021. We have also drained all endowment interest available to us.

Jeff made a motion to take accumulated interest (about \$10,000) from the Whittingham Howe lecture series restricted fund for general church expenses. According to the rules governing the fund, Father Matt must recommend the expenditure and Vestry must approve by a majority of 75%. Father readily made the recommendation at the meeting that we take this money from the fund. Rich commented that he would have preferred to have a specific recommendation from Father in advance of the meeting (not just on the spot) so that we could consider it. Father and Jeff will prepare something for Vestry's review next month. The money is needed for payroll and other expenses, so a delay could mean dipping into endowment principal.

In a related motion, Jeff proposed that we take accumulated interest (about \$7,500) from the Education restricted fund. This fund was created with money leftover from the 250th campaign. Vestry is allowed to override the original intent of awarding the proceeds to deserving students. Jon Ewbank seconded the motion. Sean Albert had a concern similar to the comment Rich made on Jeff's previous motion, i.e., Vestry should be allowed adequate time to consider such a motion.

Both motions were withdrawn but will be considered for reintroduction next month. In the meantime, Jeff may be constrained to take money from principal to cover budget shortfalls.

Jeff noted that the dishwasher installation is expected to take place in July or August and will cost about \$2,000 because there are electrical upgrades needed in connection with the installation.

Community Liaison Report

Rich Unger supplied a detailed report of his interactions with City of Schenectady officials regarding a dead tree on Green Street. This was prompted by an offer from George Soltysiak to take down the tree. Rich learned that the City has no official process for allowing private citizens to remove trees in the City utility strip. He was told to have the tree added to a list of dead trees for consideration by the City. Rich concluded, and Vestry agreed, that it would be best to thank George for offering to take down the tree, and to let him know that we cannot handle it privately.

Postscript: Rich's inquiries have borne fruit. The tree was taken down by the City on Friday, May 21, the day after the meeting.

Fundraising Committee

N/A

Garden Ministry

A new euonymus border has been installed alongside Green Street. With weed season in full swing, Garden Ministry is going into maintenance mode. The goal is to have the grounds in top condition for the Stockade garden tour on August 7.

The exterior of the shed will soon be treated to a power wash and stain treatment courtesy of Bob McCloskey.

Hospitality Committee

Brian, Bob, and Father have made plans to have an outdoor coffee hour this summer. Brian has volunteered to do the setup. The current plan is for the Church to supply some light refreshments to get things started, giving Vestry time to plan for how we want to handle things in the fall.

Our paper product supply has been depleted (stolen) but we were moving towards using real cups and plates in any case. Brian is willing to wash up after

the summer coffee hours. Sandee noted that the china may need washing before use.

Sandee would like Vestry to consider whether we want to return to our usual every-Sunday coffee hours with parishioners supplying food, or should we change that up and introduce once-a-month or special occasion coffee hours with refreshments? The Diocese has issued new guidance stating that coffee hours may resume but that refreshments should be individually wrapped. We don't think that's necessary as the risk of Covid exposure from food, dishes, and surfaces is minimal. However, we should be mindful that some in our congregation probably have lingering concerns, so strict adherence to food safety protocols and social distancing will continue to be important.

Communications

Lynn Paska advises that pictures are up on the website for Little Red Wagon/SICM donations, Holy Week, and St. George's Day.

The deadline for the June *Georgian Report* is Friday, June 4. Contributors are urged to be timely with their articles as the Paskas are leaving for a Cape Cod vacation on the 24th and they want to have the June issue out prior to leaving.

Old Business

Tree removal, sidewalk remediation, and parking lot replacement—As previously stated, Bob has solicited estimates for these projects but we will let the City handle the trees, and currently lack the financial resources to pursue sidewalk or parking lot repairs.

Parking Situation—A neighbor using our parking lot moved a safety cone that was there to warn motorists regarding the eventual removal of the dead tree on Green Street. This individual reacted badly, including making threats of violence, when informed of our parking policies. He has been banned from parking at St. George's and his car will be towed should it appear on our lot.

Meeting adjournment

There being no objections, the meeting was adjourned at 9:05 p.m. The next regular Vestry meeting will be at 7 p.m. on June 10 (moved from June 17 to accommodate Father's vacation).

Meg Hughes, Vestry Clerk