

The Ethical Culture Society of Essex County

Minutes of Annual Meeting August 23, 2020

Present: Zia Durrani, Jeanine Rosh, William Stoeber, William Graves, Lorraine Graves, Jackie Herships, Lisa Novemsky, Peggy Toy, Elaine Durbach, Jill Farrer, Esther Barcun, Tom Cunningham, Evelyn Cunningham, Meredith Sue Willis, Andy Weinberger, Birgit Matzerath, Terry Suess, Barbara Lipton, Alice Robinson-Gilman, Martha Gallahue, Jim White

Meeting commenced at 12:00pm via Zoom, led by Meredith Sue Willis

A quorum was present.

Minutes from 2019 Annual Meeting held May 19, 2019 were presented and approved.

President Zia Durrani opened the meeting by thanking those who supported the organization through this time of the pandemic. She thanked Jeanine Rosh for her work as Treasurer and for ensuring our adherence to ECS bylaws. She also thanked Marshall Norstein for taking care of our ECS home.

President Durrani introduced two matters to be discussed as New Business items at the end of today's meeting.

- The first was related to a request from New Jersey Peace Action for an ECS contact person to communicate with them about our designation as the first Peace Site.
- The second was a request for a contact person to communicate with the AEU Leadership Team for a dialogue about the leadership situation in our society and our being a society without a leader at this time.

Financial Report

A detailed presentation of the report was shared on-screen by Jeanine Rosh. Jeanine explained that the budget estimates are provisional, based on a tentative building re-opening of 1/1/21 and resumption of rentals and programs at that time. Adjustments will be made if that date changes. The provisional proposed budget - Income for the fiscal year September 1, 2020 through August 31, 2021 is \$44, 825.

Jeanine reported that the AEU reduced two of the four quarterly dues payments this year, in May and August, by 40%, so we paid a total of \$1689 for AEU dues; however, the full amount is being proposed for next year since we don't know if the reduction will be given again. Committees had no expenditures; \$300 is projected. \$496 was spent on Bee Project with no expenses projected for the coming year. The projected total Expenses in the new budget are \$44,460.

Barbara Lipton made a suggestion for saving money by emailing newsletter instead of mailing. This matter was deferred to be taken up at a later time by the board.

The proposed tentative budget was unanimously approved.

Social Action Committee

SAC report was presented by Sue Willis. Activities and projects of SAC included:

- Pesticide Free Lawn/Bee initiative led by Jackie Herships and Martha Howlett. Signs, designed by Martha, are available for \$10. Jackie Herships said volunteers to be "Bee Ambassadors" can help support the project.
- Signing a letter to Acting Homeland Security Sec'y to expand Ebond program for immigrant detainees.
- Joining the AEU's Reclaim Our Vote project.
- Sending letter to NY and NJ govs expressing concern over immigrants being turned over to ICE, especially during the pandemic.
- Continuing work on gathering signatures for Immigration Letter.
- Collecting clothing for those in need.
- Choosing Nancy Zak as 6th Annual Local Hero for her environmental work in Newark.

Platforms

Elaine Durbach spoke about the valuable platforms around the principles of Ethical Culture presented by Alice Robinson-Gilman and Sue Willis during the past year. Elaine has scheduled Elisa Slattery, a human rights lawyer, to speak at our next meeting on September 13th; this will be an online presentation and will focus on civil rights around the world in the age of COVID. Elaine has proposed we have a speaker/Zoom meeting once a month while the building is closed and attendance at online meetings of other societies on the other weeks but will increase the frequency of our meetings if we have more speakers. Jill and others expressed a desire for more frequent meetings. Elaine suggested possibly holding colloquy meetings once a month.

A member request was made to keep the time of meetings at 2pm when we resume programs in September and to not return to our previous time of 11am for meetings. It was decided that this issue would be taken up as new business at the next board meeting.

Pledges

Jeanine reported that currently we have 44 members. We have no balance due on pledges but there are people that have not pledged/paid. Jeanine estimates we'll have \$800. She noted that one Friend of ECS who believes in the ethical movement gives \$75 every month to support the society.

Building

Elaine said repairs on a major plumbing leak in the house were underway. A plumber had been called and Marshall was repairing wall damage.

Membership

Jill reported that she has been in touch intermittently with 14 people. She will speak to them about the first kickoff speaker and will let them know about our Zoom meetings.

Ethical Education

Tom Cunningham reported that a group of 6-7 families had been meeting on a regular basis before COVID. He characterized the program as strong and slowly growing. After the pandemic started, some of the families continued to have Zoom meetings and then stopped during summer. A lot of families are dealing with concerns about school for their children in September, so no plans have been set at this time for meeting in the Fall. Martha Gallahue expressed interest in helping to get the Ethical Education program on the AEU website. She will find out who is in charge of publicity and communicate the information to Tom.

Hospitality

Terri Suess has been in touch with Rosalie and suggested we reach out to her by phone. Zia indicated that we are following up on that.

Elaine announced that Nancy Bohn has an apartment timeshare available in Manhattan. It is available in September for anyone interested.

Living Ethical Culture

Alice reported on the program she and Sue Willis gave. Leaders came to speak and colloquies were led by Alice and Sue. They plan to continue the program and will have other speakers. Bart Worden would like to do a workshop when the building reopens. Alice will be sending out a report.

Jim White said he would like to do another workshop and will reach out to schedule that for the Fall.

Esther suggested we do a program around the book *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson. Zia said there were a number of books that we can take into consideration for a program.

Election of board members

The nominating committee consisted of Bill Graves, Jeanine Rosh and Jackie Herships. Jeanine reported that we currently have a board of 10 people; three have to leave the board because members can only be on the board for 6 successive years. Jeanine, Zia and Bill Graves are leaving the board. Shannon Kirk will also be leaving the board.

Jeanine announced the following nominations to the board:

Tom Cunningham-President

Jackie Herships-Vice President

Terri Suess- Treasurer

Peggy Toy- Secretary

The other board members were nominated to remain on the board: Diane Beany, Bill Stoever, Jill Farrer, Lisa Novemsky

A discussion ensued around the bylaws and rules for electing a new president. Sue Willis questioned if the bylaws permitted election of a president (Tom Cunningham) who had not previously been on the board. The current bylaws (since 2007) state that the president should be on the board for at least a year prior to becoming president. The discussion focused on the distinction of the word “should” vs the word “must.” The bylaws state that the president “should” be on the board for at least a year prior to becoming president but does not say “must.” It was decided that legally the word “should” is a precatory not a mandatory term and therefore not a requirement.

To move the elections forward procedurally, Martha Gallahue suggested we open up to any other nominations on the floor and if there were none to then call for a vote by acclamation, providing a consensus vote.

Jeanine opened up nominations from the floor and nominated Elaine Durbach to the board, The nomination was seconded and Elaine accepted the nomination. The full slate of nominations was unanimously approved.

Some further discussion followed regarding some members' concerns about changing the bylaws frequently to fit circumstances and/or not adhering closely to them. Martha congratulated the board for their commitment to following the requirements of the bylaws as well as being resilient in these uncertain times. Members agreed that upon scrutiny of the language in the bylaws and after discussion there was a consensus of opinion that we were correctly following the intent of the bylaws as currently written and that we had only changed the bylaws infrequently and only when necessary to meet existing circumstances.

The following members were approved unanimously for the nominating committee-Jeanine Rosh, Bill Graves, and Jackie Herships.

The following areas were discussed during the New Business section of the meeting.

- Zia asked for a volunteer to take up the mantle of our Peace Site status and be the contact person for NJ Peace Action. Terri agreed to take on that role.
- Zia asked for someone to be the contact person for the Leadership Survey Team of the AEU to discuss the new leaders coming in and the leaders in training and if we need a leader for our society. Lisa Novemsky agreed to be the contact person. Tom offered to be a 2nd contact person.
- Zia will continue to attend monthly President's Council meetings and Tom will now be attending as president. Jeanine has been a third member attending. If she chooses to no longer attend, another member will be selected.
- Tom agreed to communicate a summary of the board's meeting with the Ethical Education program families.
- Members thanked Zia for her leadership especially during these difficult times.
- Esther asked members to do a program to acknowledge the contribution Marty and Barbara Cotler have made to the society over the years. Members agreed to do something in September.

- Tom spoke briefly to members, thanking them for their trust in him to elect him president and said he looks forward to working with members. He would like to expand the Ethical Education program and have a high school group.

Regulations and Guidelines for Reopening the Building

Jeanine is following regulations, requirements, re insurance, etc.

Other New Business

Birgit Matzerath has put all her concert series videos on YouTube. She is planning to do a complete run-through of the program on FB Live. She will play two preludes and two fugues with a talk about them every day, going through the whole book. Jeanine acknowledged the contribution Birgit has made and thanked her for her work.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:56pm.

Minutes submitted by Peggy Toy