

**Draft Permanent Board Minutes
Framingham Friends Meeting
May 10, 2025**

25-19 Roll Call

Willa Taber (Fpond), Permanent Board Recording Clerk read the roll.

Permanent Board Members

In the room:

Susan Davies (PB Clerk), Willa Taber (PB Recording Clerk), Travis Belcher, Thomas Brenner, Allison Randall, Carole Rein, Martha Schwope, Newell Isbell Shinn, Liesa Stamm, Kathleen Wooten.

On Zoom:

Martin Forsythe, Elizabeth Hansen, Carolyne Lamar Jordan, Frances Lightsom, Edward Mair, Diane Weinholtz, Donn Weinholtz.

Ex-officio members

In the room

Marian Dalton (Treasurer), Sarah Gant (Clerk, Meeting Accompaniment Group), Rebecca Leuchak (Presiding Clerk), Jackie Stillwell (YM Secretary Supervisor, Clerk of Nominating Committee).

On Zoom

Scot Drysdale (Finance Clerk), Noah Merrill (YM Secretary), Carl Williams (Clerk of Ministry and Counsel).

Regrets/Absent

Kimberly Allen, Darcy Drayton, Meg Klepack, Bob O'Connor, Anna Radochia, Morgan Wilson, Mary Zwirner.

Visitors

In the room

Anna Hopkins Buller (Wellesley, Friends Camp Director), Betsy Cazden (Providence), Beth Collea (Dover), Jerimiah Dickenson (Dover), Richard Lindo (Framingham), Martha Manglesdorf (New Bedford), Fredrick Martin (Beacon Hill), Lou Anne McDonald (Hartford), Sara Smith (Concord), Rob Spivey, (Brunswick), Nia Thomas (Northampton), Phil Veatch, (Fresh Pond),

Zoom

Elizabeth Hacala (Events Coordinator), Mary Hopkins (Fpond), Kristina Keefe-Perry (Fresh Pond/3 Rivers), Kara Price (Storrs), Michael Wajda (Bennington), Maille Wooten (Lawrence).

25-20 Minutes from previous meetings

The clerk expressed her thanks to Kathleen Wooten (Lawrence) for taking minutes at our March meeting in the absence of our recording clerk. The document containing the minutes from March was lost soon after the meeting and it has taken a while to reconstruct it. People have reviewed this document and there are enough changes to it that we will be holding over approval of minutes to our next meeting which will probably be a called meeting this summer.

25-21 Permanent Board Clerks comments

Susan Davies (Vassalboro), Permanent Board clerk, expressed our thanks to Framingham Meeting for hosting us even as they have been providing hospitality for several other Yearly Meeting activities. Noah Merrill (Putney) is joining us from Zoom because he is with his father after his father's emergency heart surgery. She also called our attention to the report from Connecticut Valley QM that Litchfield Hills Meeting has been laid down, attached. Also attached is the letter from the Clerk of Permanent Board to Quarterly Meeting Leaders.

Recently, a reconstituted planning group from within the Salem Quarter has taken the initiative to call together the Friends in the quarter interested either in restarting the quarter or envisioning how Friends are called in the quarter. That is something that we very much welcome. In the meantime, the Permanent Board continues to carry the responsibility and the charge to ensure that the quarter is functioning structurally and functioning in terms of relationships. We will continue to be involved in that. Susan would certainly welcome hearing from any Permanent Board members who would like to participate in these efforts. Susan called our attention to a notice in the advance documents, attached, announcing that she has appointed a working group consisting of Mary Link, clerk of the Legacy Gift Committee; Morgan Wilson, past clerk of the Salem Quarter Funds Committee; and John Robinson, treasurer of Salem Quarter to serve on a working group to develop a new Memorandum of Understanding to resume availability and disbursement of funds from the Salem Quarter Fund

Susan Davies also called Friends attention to the report from Mary Zwirner and Gordon Bugbee concerning their travels among Native American people in Oklahoma, attached. She also asked Richard Lindo (Framingham) to report on his recent travel to Cuba. The Puente des Amigos delegation consisted of himself, Carolyn Stone (Wellesley), Erik Philbrook (Wellesley), and David Barabas (Wellesley). They just returned last week. They spent most of their time in Puerto Padre and Delicias but also visited Holguin and Valasco.

Also in Advance Documents are minutes of recording of gifts in ministry going back quite a ways. If Friends know of corrections, additions or other minutes of recording, please forward them to Susan.

25-22 Friends Camp endowment update

Anna Hopkins, the director of Friends Camp, reported on the Camp. In a month staff will be on site and in 6 weeks, campers will be arriving. There are 7 international staff members who they are hoping will be able to obtain their visas and join us this summer. There is concern that some of them will not receive their visa. The camp will be offering over \$150,000 worth of camperships this year.

She presented the proposal for creating an endowment fund for camperships here attached. This is a 30-year term-limited endowment, after which time it will become a board-designated fund. This is done to allow flexibility because no one knows what things will look like in 30 years, while allowing donors to know that the funds will continue to grow and may outlast

them. Any capital campaign to fund this endowment would be carried on in coordination with the Yearly Meeting. The Friends Camp Finance Committee will have oversight of the fund.

Friends suggested that the document not list specific testimonies but instead reference NEYM Faith and Practice for this information, or describe included testimonies as only some of Friends testimonies.

Friends **approved** the policies outlined for the 30-year limited endowment fund for Friends Camp camperships.

25-23 Archives Committee revised Memorandum of Understanding

In 2017 the NEYM archives were moved from the Rhode Island Historical Society to the University of Massachusetts Special Collections and University Archives (SCUA). They are presenting revisions for the Memorandum of Understanding here attached. These changes include updates to the policies on privacy and on digitization. These are areas which have changed significantly in the time since the original version was first agreed to.

Friends **approved** the updated Memorandum of Understanding.

25-24 Treasurer's Report

Marian Dalton, NEYM Treasurer, presented the Treasurer's report here attached. At the end of FY 2024 we had operating reserves of about 3%. Since then we have received about \$56,000 in Employee Retention Tax Credit funds and about \$3,000 from the laying down of Litchfield Hills Meeting. This has increased our reserves somewhat. On the other hand, the first quarter of 2025 was a bad time for our investments. Our net income for the first half of the fiscal year is still negative but that is part of our normal cash flow. Our net income will improve once we start getting income coming in from Sessions.

25-25 Finance Committee Report

Scot Drysdale (Hanover) presented the Fiscal Year 2026 budget and his commentary on the budget, both of which are attached. The Finance Committee is not presenting a budget for us to approve to send to Sessions because there is a great deal of uncertainty about what Sessions will look like in 2026. They had hoped that the Sessions Visioning process would have resulted in some concrete proposals, but it did not. We do not know what Sessions will look like in 2026, but the Finance Committee is assuming that Sessions, in whatever form, will return \$30,500 to the general budget.

If we run about a \$60,000 deficit as we have in the past several years, we will exhaust all of our reserves and the COVID relief money. About 78% of the non-Sessions budget goes to pay staff. About one third of staff time is spent on preparing for Sessions. The priorities established by the Permanent Board are to support staff and support monthly meetings. Does the Permanent Board have guidance to the Finance Committee on where we might make further cuts?

This is not a contingency budget meaning that we are not planning to distribute any possible surplus to other Friends organizations.

Friends raised a number of concerns about the budget: One Friend spoke of her long involvement with AFSC and the important work that it has been doing, including work in Palestine and Gaza, and would hope that NEYM could provide some support for AFSC even while we are not supporting other organizations. Another suggested a hiring freeze. Friends expressed the need to balance the budget, under the concern that the economy is getting worse. The NEYM deficit budgets of the last several years are not sustainable.

Scot Drysdale and Noah Merrill explained that the increase in staff costs has been due to some cost-of-living increases and increases in health-care costs. In some recent years individual giving has gone down and staff expenses have gone up. This problem is not limited to NEYM but has been seen in other non-profits. Nationally, attendance at large conferences and gatherings are down 30% overall, and this has been true for us. Contributions have not increased to what they were before the pandemic, while the cost of living has gone up. Half of our deficit in 2023 and 2024 was due to reduced attendance at Sessions.

The big questions about the budget cannot be answered by the Finance Committee. The Permanent Board needs to engage more in the larger questions so that the Finance Committee can provide PB with actionable information. Do we need to rethink our process in light of the structural problems that we are encountering? These are large questions that cannot be resolved in a single PB meeting. How can we change our actions to deal with the structural problems we are facing? Do we need to make a 5-year plan so that we are not making these decisions on a year to year basis?

Friends also expressed excitement about the programs and work that NEYM is doing. Our alternatives are to cut what we do or to effectively invite new people to join us. We were running surpluses before the pandemic. We are not on a long descent into disaster but what we need to do is to adapt to changing conditions. It is faith that supports us. What we're called to do in the world is important. A time of constriction is the time to think of creative new solutions that will transform the constriction into something else with God's help.

25-26 NEYM Secretary's Report

Noah Merrill thanked Friends for their prayers and support as he sits with his father, who has had a serious heart attack this past week.

He started his report with two quotes:

Ring the bells that still can ring
forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's where the light gets in.
Leonard Cohen

Let us walk together the journey that God has prepared for us.
Pope Leo XIV

Noah said, "I always consider our life together as Friends in our meetings and in our relationships as a journey. A journey in which we're accompanied by the Spirit and one another and a journey that leads in whatever sense we can imagine to home. And I've always been grateful as a Friend to be part of a tradition that recognizes that even in the moment where we remember that invitation, even in the moment where we turn our attention and our hearts again to that journey together, we are already in some sense arriving. I just want to invite us into that in the midst of all of the turmoil and the anxiety and the intensity around us. This has been an anchor and a gift to me in these recent days and months and years. I hope it might be for some of us as well."

He recently rejoined the executive committee of the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) Section of the Americas. At the section meeting in Arizona it became clear that there were problems among the six yearly meetings in Bolivia. He was invited to travel to Bolivia to accompany Evan Welken, the new FWCC clerk, who had never been to Bolivia before. The primary visit was to Central YM in Bolivia on the occasion of its 50th anniversary. There are over 50,000 Quakers in Bolivia. Bolivia is the poorest country in South America. People are waiting in lines up to 8 blocks long to get gasoline. In that context, hundreds of people traveled for up to a day to arrive at the small town in the Altiplano to celebrate the life in their yearly meeting. He found that being in the midst of this growing and dynamic yearly meeting gave him perspective on our problems. Many Friends in Bolivia were moved by NEYM's lawsuit to challenge ICE interference in our meetings.

25-27 Development Report

Noah Merrill and Michael Wajda (Bennington) presented a plan for a development initiative for the Yearly Meeting. What has emerged in a lot of prayerful conversation is to focus our fundraising efforts with understanding that the yearly meeting is not a traditional nonprofit but that we are really a set of local communities of transformative practice bound together in a covenant relationship with one another and with God. And that framing our approach to development that way has seemed more and more important.

Noah presented a series of slides here attached. **[Note to Sara Hubner. I do not believe that these slides were in the advance documents. I can send them to you or you can get them from Noah]**

The goals of the development project are:

- To deepen relationships among Friends in this time of scattering and division.
- To nurture a shared understanding of the vision and ministries which God calls us to as a yearly meeting.
- To nourish local meetings and Friends through inviting broader participation in, and support of these ministries.
- Increase giving to the annual fund about 5% per year to increase resilience and to keep pace with rising costs and disruptions.

This will be done by continuing and strengthening our current annual fundraising efforts, gathering and training a group of people to visit meetings and invite conversations, and continuing to season ideas for other fundraising efforts.

The expected cost of this project is:

- Expanding Events Coordinator position to full time, \$140,000 over 3 years
- Continuing relationship with the Development Consultant, \$50,000 over 3 years
- Administrative expenses, \$25,000 over three years.

For a total of \$215,000 over 3 years.

The three-year period for this is because that is the shortest time in which it is likely to start to see results from this work. There are significant up-front costs for training and planning that will be incurred before we begin to see the desired increases in giving.

Michael Wajda spoke of the six strengths that he sees in New England Yearly Meeting.

1. We name ourselves as a spiritual movement and see ourselves as being grounded in the living stream.
2. We are working towards sustainability as a long-term goal. We are not building something new, we are continuing something that has been going for 365 years.
3. We recognize that it is all about the relationship. We need to visit and affirm relationships.
4. NEYM is showing leadership, accountability and responsibility: Leadership because the visioning process for Sessions involves everyone; responsibility because the need for change is real. We showed leadership in stepping up for the lawsuit against ICE. People see that as strength.
5. The world is noticing Quakers in this fraught time. We represent a nonviolent approach to conflict resolution.
6. New England Yearly Meeting is us. We are family. The story we are telling is a story of us.

Fundraising is work. It takes time, care, vulnerability, listening, and faith. When we do it with faith it is a gift.

Friends approved designating \$215,000 of the Future Uses Fund to be spent over three years to implement the fundraising program outlined here.

25-28 Personnel Policy

Sara Hubner (Gonic), NEYM Office Manager, has been working with the YM Secretary, the PB clerk, the Nominating Committee clerk, and other experienced NEYM Friends on revising the Personnel Policy Manual. They hope to bring it to the September Permanent Board Meeting for approval.

25-29 Addressing racism in the Yearly Meeting

PB previously approved, in concept, bringing in Collabarinth as a consultant to meet with people to focus on staff and volunteer leaders to address issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity. Noah has issued a retainer of \$10,000 to hire Melvin Bray to consult on these issues

from the contractual services budget line, but he would like to take these funds from the Future Uses Fund.

Friends approved paying consulting fees up to \$10,000 to Melvin Bray, to be taken from the Future Uses Fund.

25-30 Ministry and Counsel Clerk's report

Carl Williams, clerk of Ministry and Counsel, reported that the third Meeting for Listening will be held at Hartford on June 21. In some ways this is a rebirth of the traditional Friends annual meeting for ministers and elders, who gathered before Sessions every year to consider the state of the Yearly Meeting. He hopes that some members of Permanent Board will be able to attend. We look forward to the establishment of a "Thriving Ministers and Elders" group to continue reimagining and nurturing the work and functions of Ministry and Counsel.

25-31 Meeting Accompaniment Group report

Sarah Gant (Beacon Hill), clerk of the Meeting Accompaniment Group, reported that the group held a retreat to review their Purposes, Procedures and Composition document. The members of the group feel that this work is very personal, tender, and intimate and is very rewarding. The Accompaniment Group will be the presenters at the monthly meeting leaders call on May 13. One of the benefits of having been named by Sessions is the consistency of meeting and their communications with the meetings they are working with. Their largest work is to listen and to raise up the existing capacity of the meeting. It is to support the monthly meetings in their own discernment about their own issues in their meeting.

25-32 Presiding Clerks and C&A report

Rebecca Leuchek, Presiding Clerk, presented her written report and the report of the Coordinating and Advisory committee, both here attached. We have all been grieving and when we come together we can comfort each other. She hopes that at Sessions we can have an opportunity to mourn and grieve together but also move forward together. Can we feel Spirit at Sessions at every moment and not just during worship?

25-33 Nominating Committee Clerk Nomination

Rebecca Leuchek and Susan Davies presented a report on their recommendation for the clerk of Nominating Committee, here attached.

Friends **approved** the nomination of Sadie Forsythe to serve as clerk of the Nominating Committee.

25-34 Nominating Committee report

Jackie Stillwell (Monadnock) presented the report of the Nominating Committee here attached.

Friends **affirmed** sending the name of Bill Monroe to the Moses Brown School Nominating Committee to be nominated to the Moses Brown Board of Trustees.

She brought the first reading of the name Janet Hough of Cobscook to be clerk of Ministry and Counsel.

25-35 Sessions Visioning Report and next steps

The report from the Sessions Visioning Process is here attached. Nia Thomas (Northampton), NEYM Program Director, reported on the outcomes of that process and the next steps in the process. The slides that she used in her presentation are attached. She reminded us of the purpose of Sessions as described in the Purpose, Procedures and Composition document for the Sessions Planning Committee approved at Sessions in 2022:

Friends gather at Annual Sessions to encourage the ministry and spiritual life of the Religious Society of Friends in New England. We seek to gather in ways that are intergenerational, welcoming, and inclusive. We seek to share our experience of how the Spirit is moving, and the ways it is impeded, to learn from each other, to discern how God is leading us as a People, and to experience Divine Love as it appears in our midst and is revealed in our relationships. (NEYM 2022 Minute Book, p 28.)

This is still true today.

In this process we have learned that many Friends across our Yearly Meeting feel a deep call to meaningful relationships with Friends across the region and that we understand ourselves as a people of God undertaking a shared journey of faith. Many people who have attended Sessions often have cherished memories of Sessions. There is a widespread desire to increase attendance at Sessions as a way to deepen our community and to improve the financial health of the Yearly Meeting. Many friends are also aware that there are many barriers to attending Sessions, including cost, travel time, and work schedules. There is also a widely held desire to change our approach to corporate discernment so that we can have more spacious discernment on fewer items.

The visioning process did not lead to a single vision of how to proceed. We will need to approach modifications of Sessions as experiments that we learn from, and adapt, based on our experience.

The next steps in the process will be:

- We will carry forward what was learned in the visioning process into our planning for Sessions in coming years.
- The Permanent Board clerk will continue to consult with Quarterly Meeting clerks.
- A presentation of the planning process will be made at Sessions 2025.
- As planning continues through the fall of 2025 there will be regular updates on the process. Friends will be encouraged to give concrete and specific feedback on the plans.
- In late winter, Sessions planners will conduct extensive outreach to share the plans for Sessions 2026.

25-36 Approval of Memorial Minutes

Friends received memorial minutes for Donna McDaniel, Karen Cadbury, Andrea Cousins, Sarah Spencer, and Elizabeth Kincaid-Ehlers, here attached. The Permanent Board **approved** the memorial minute for Donna McDaniel on behalf of Salem Quarter. It then **approved** forwarding all five of these memorial minutes to Sessions.

