

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

Joint Councils

Saturday, May 10, 2025

9:00 AM - 12:27 PM EDT

In Attendance: Jean-Marie Prestwidge Barch (Clerk, Quaker Life Council), Meg Barney (Recording Clerk), Emily Blanck (Recording Clerk), Kate Bregman, Terry Christensen, Terry Cooke, Carleton Crispin, Chuck Devers, Sue Dietz, Christie Duncan-Tessmer (Staff, General Secretary), Jeanne Elberfeld (Clerk, Administrative Council), Susan Elliott (elder), Cecilia Filaurio (Staff, Executive Administrator) Kruskal Hewitt, John Marquette, Linell McCurry (Staff, CFO), Chris Mohr (Friends Center), Bethann Morgan, Nikki Mosgrove (Presiding Clerk), Cathleen Marion (elder), Michael Moulton, Debbie Murray-Sheppard, Carter Nash, F. Salvador Orellana (Staff, Deputy General Secretary), David Park (Staff, Senior Financial Officer), Nancy Robbins, George Schaefer (Clerk, Nominating Council), Selden Smith (Rising Clerk), Serita Spadoni, Roy Zatcoff (Governance Advisory Committee) and Tom Zemaitis (Treasurer)

Regrets: Andrew Anderson, Susan Claggett, Jessy Eaby, Robert Greene, Ron Inskeep, Neil Holzman, Kathryn Pettus, Chloe Rosenthal, Cathy Toner, and Deb Wood.

I. Worship & Welcome

Jeanne Elberfeld opened the meeting with worship at 9:00 am. She reminded us to sit in the web of light that we all share.

II. Friends Center Report

Chris Mohr, Executive Director of Friends Center, provided a report on Friends Center, a 501(c)(3) and the building that PYM owns together with AFSC and Central Philadelphia Friends Meeting. Friends Center is a non-profit with three PYM members on its board. It has a small staff. The campus includes the 1856 formerly-Hicksite Race Street Meetinghouse and the 1975 office building, which was renovated into a LEED Platinum green building in 2009. In 2021, they sold the 1520 Race Street building (not the ground beneath it) to Friends Select School, which renovated it as their STEAM building and to support enrollment expansion. The Child Care Center moved to the lower level of the office building, keeping the campus multigenerational. The building provides office space for a wide range of Quaker and non-Quaker non-profits that

advance shared values. There are several excellent meeting spaces, including ones equipped for hybrid meetings.

There is generally no fundraising so as not to compete with tenants. Expenses are covered through tenant and meeting space rentals; the partners contribute the rest. PYM supported the emergency preparedness certification of the building staff. The ministry of the Center is to hold space for the work to happen. They are working on a lease agreement to clarify how PYM and Friends Center work together. As the 50th anniversary of the office building approaches, they are seeking opportunities to promote Quakerism. They recently hosted an event for immigrant-serving organizations.. Looking ahead, they must lift up their presence to remain fully occupied—though they are currently well-occupied. They recommend following them on Instagram, Blue Sky, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Council members affirmed the vibrancy of the space and its recent updates.

III. **Meeting for Learning**

Tom Zematis led a Meeting for Learning on PYM’s investment history with the Reinvestment Fund. He shared the history of the Reinvestment Fund, which started locally 40 years ago to provide community redevelopment funding to underserved communities. We were equity investors in a bridge loan fund sponsored by the Reinvestment Fund in 2020. That fund has since wound down. Our investment—\$1,000,000—was returned to us, with a 6% annual return.

David Park shared a new program, the Developer Growth Fund, that is similar, offering capital funding -to diverse commercial real estate developers to preserve affordable housing. It is geared toward supporting Black and Hispanic developers in the Mid-Atlantic and Georgia markets whose business is affordable housing. The fund has a pipeline of developers who have been doing this work successfully. Changes in Washington have less impact on it because most government funding for affordable housing comes from local municipal and county sources. *The Councils approved \$1,000,000 in restricted funds be invested.*

IV. **Current Implementation Process of our Strategic Directions**

Christie Duncan-Tessmer led a discussion on the implementation process of our Strategic Directions through a focus on *Belonging* and its destinations. She reminded us that there will be a fun test in September.

Christie reminded us that *Belonging* emerged from two original strategic directions: **broaden engagement and deepen relationships, and ensure our communities are**

welcoming and safe for all people. From those directions, the Council identified two destinations.

The first is to increase conflict transformation capacity. We discussed ideas for how to reach this destination. Some included providing resources for Monthly Meetings; creating safe spaces that can handle conflict through faith; remembering that conflict is an opportunity to understand; sharing our “glasses” and making an effort to see through others’ “glasses”; being careful not to use silence as a weapon to stop conflict; and modeling this in relationship to our history—in contrast to the national narrative of history that will emerge in the coming years.

The second destination is to make meeting structures accessible. As Council members, it is essential to take this to heart: How do we set structures, big and small, so that all kinds of people can participate? We are doing this. For example, the calendar includes events focused on neurodivergent members, caregivers, recovery, and Gen X Friends—who ensure that newcomers belong from the beginning. Friends are encouraged not to use silence as a weapon, to look at issues through another person’s glasses, and to consider that one’s truth is not the only truth or the whole truth.

V. **General Secretary Report**

Christie Duncan-Tessmer lifted up that it is a joy to work with Chris Mohr at Friends Center. She reminded us about the timing of the transition from Linell McCurry as CFO to David Park, which will be completed by the end of May. Three times a year, there are leadership gatherings for Monthly Meeting and Quarter Meeting clerks, as well as committee clerks. Participants can recommend topics for small group discussions. There is a constant request to support small and struggling meetings, but an emerging call is also coming from the growth of newcomers.

The Salesforce database, which we have used to track people and their activities in PYM, is now beginning to integrate grantmaking tracking within its main programming.

The endeavor to plant 381 trees around the Yearly Meeting has been popular. However, in order for trees to count toward the goal, participants must share photos on PYM Connect.

VI. **New Business**

A. **Supporting Committees effectively**

George Schaefer led a discussion on how the Councils are supporting committees so they are inspired, their members are fed by the work, and the

committees are effective at carrying out their charges. Supporting Committees includes hearing reports. Last month, we decided that we needed new queries from the reports. The Councils are now considering how to receive more effective reports and recommend the following queries to guide their succinct reporting:

- a) Where is your committee finding joy in your work?
- b) Where is your committee finding challenges in your work?
- c) Through the lens of one of PYM's Strategic Directions, how is your work aligned with our strategic directions and destinations?

There is concern that these queries don't address accountability on their work that they're charged to do. Because there are two reports annually, this one is focused less on the traditional reporting, but the other report will reflect their work. *The Councils approve of these queries.*

VII. **Old Business**

A. **Lawsuit**

Jeanne Elberfeld offered a brief update of the Department of Homeland Security Lawsuit. She reminded us that every Thursday the newsletter will report on the lawsuit. The government has begun to push back. Fortunately, it's moving slowly, giving us time to build our safe spaces.

B. **Climate Benchmark Measuring**

Salvador Orellana and George Schaefer reported on the information that the Stone House Group is collecting from us to assess our climate footprint. Staff at Arch Street and Friends Center have begun to share data. PYM volunteers, including board members, will also be asked to provide relevant data as requested.

There is a challenge: the Stone House Group needs the data by the end of May in order to complete the report on time. This may be difficult, especially when relying on volunteers to gather and submit the information.

C. **Safe Spaces at Sessions**

Jean-Marie Barch discussed the two rapid Sprints that met last month to help us consider making plans for understanding what role safe spaces play at Sessions in light of the lawsuit and new unsafe factors. This group worked quickly and responsively to promote discussion and learning. They recommend holding a Zoom meeting in May to support learning, followed by a session during Annual Sessions to encourage us to take risks grounded in a shared desire to be safe. A follow-up meeting is proposed for after Sessions (in November), focused on

identifying next steps. This will be another opportunity to deepen our work on conflict resolution. It is also important to remember that one may feel hurt and still be safe..

D. Lobbying Guidance

E. Salvador Orellana reported on the progress on Lobbying Guidance. He reached out to collaboratives to beta test the lobbying guidance. He has heard from four collaboratives all reflecting on the beta test. Salvador sent an email to Collaboratives for their responses to the Lobbying Guidance. Four collaboratives responded.

VIII. Approve Minutes (15 min)

Emily Blanck read the minutes and they were approved.

Ongoing Business (55 min)

A. Committees: Governance Advisory Committee: Governance Handbook Revision

Roy Zatcoff shared that the revised Governance Handbook is ready for approval by the Councils. The Councils had requested a revision of the handbook, and staff spent significant time preparing it for the Governance Committee's review. Based on comments from last month, they made five key edits. First, they added a description of how to approach the responsibilities of Quaker Life Council and Administrative Councils. Second, they clarified two previously implied responsibilities of the Quaker Life Council. Third, they addressed a charge that the Nominating Council would help onboard new members—something it had not historically done—by reassigning that work and establishing a new, clear plan for onboarding members and clerks. Fourth, they tightened language in one section to be more direct and focused on relationship. Fifth, they clarified that the handbook was originally approved by the Implementation Committee in 2014 and the first Administrative Council. Council members asked that the handbook be carefully copyedited. There were also questions about how community groups such as sprints and collaboratives are addressed in the handbook and how their roles compare to committees in governance. *The revised handbook was approved.*

B. Nominating

George Schaefer reported on nominating efforts. At their last meeting, they have gotten close to having two new nominees for next month. There are only

six out of 13 Quarterly Meetings that provide representatives. There is a challenge in communicating this to Quarterly Meeting nominating committees that they are responsible for this work. Council members recommended ways to strengthen relationships between the Councils and Quarterly Meetings. In the future, the Councils will return to this topic for brainstorming.

C. Sessions

Jean-Marie Barch reported on Sessions planning. Spiritual Formation Collaborative will do a new kind of session for Annual Sessions, they will meet in the 3.5 hours before Sessions starts. The speakers are in place. There are two spots where Collaboratives and PYM Reps to Sister Organizations will speak prior to Sessions in late June. The committee is working with Cheney and Ending Gun Violence to safely share their exhibit.

D. Committees

1. Personnel Committee:

a) Policy Rescindment

A few years ago, PYM changed the policy so staff could work in more than one function. There were administrative and legal problems in doing this. *The Councils approve rescinding the previously established policy that allowed PYM staff members to hold multiple positions at once within the organization.*

b) Personnel Committee: Staff Handbook

Jean-Marie Barch and Tom Zematis shared that the Personnel Committee has updated the Staff Handbook and invites comments and questions. It will be regularly reviewed. There are no significant changes, but there are clarifications. They separated policies and procedures and did some other changes to clarify. No policies were changed in this review. The next step after the council's review will be to send it out for legal review.

2. Property Advisory Committee

Council revised the charge to the Property Committee to focus on its advisory role. Terry shared a report, noting that the six members had convened for their first meeting and reviewed the charge to gain a clear understanding of it. They delayed selecting a clerk. The group began to explore the balance between their role in supporting property management and a spiritually led understanding of property. They also

discussed helpful information-gathering procedures from their partners. Members reported a deep sense of joy, belonging, and connection at the meeting.

3. **Committee Appointment**

Jeanne Elberfeld and John Marquette presented Cori Rólon, of Lehigh Valley Monthly Meeting to join the Development Committee. *The Council approved Cori Rólon for the Development Committee.* Development Committee needs members. John Marquette lifted up Cori Rolon to be on the committee for a three year term ending in July 2028.

E. **Sprints**

1. **LGBTQIA+ minute**

Jean-Marie Barch and the convener shared a draft of minute that the LGBTQIA+ Community Sprint wrote in response to the PYM's request to write one. We discussed the action items on the minute and the accountability and authority to implement the action steps. The Council supports a minute that reflects our conviction, but some were not comfortable with the list of actions, as one sounds similar to lobbying. The Council returned the minute to the Sprint with gratitude and a request for few revisions.

2. **Council Member Terms** will be moved to the June meeting.

IX. **In Appreciation of Linell McCurry**

Tom Zematis shared comments of deepest appreciation of Linell McCurry. This is her last Council Meeting as CFO. *The Councils minute appreciation of Linell McCurry.*

X. **News from around the YM**

- A. George Rubin turned 100 this month.
- B. Providence Meeting received two awards. Providence Meeting won a local award, from Media Fellowship House: the 2025 Marie Whitaker Humanitarian Award. National Park Service recognizes places as a "Network to Freedom" and verified that Media was a site on the Underground Rail Road.
- C. YAF Potluck was last night and was a spiritually led event.
- D. Several members of Abington meeting went to see the Return of Benjamin Lay together.
- E. A 25 year old member, Jess Hobb-Pfeiffer, of the Germantown meeting, is a leader of the Quaker Walk from Brooklyn to Washington DC. Germantown

Meeting is hosting a variety of events for them. The walkers also had been to Trenton and engaged with members there.

- F. There was a recommendation to listen “Thee Quaker Podcast” where they interviewed Phil Gulley and asked Friends to share. .
- G. Sound for Council meeting was much approved.

XI. **Approve Minutes**

Emily Blanck read the minutes. *Friends approved.*

XII. **Public Communication**

For our public communication out of the meeting, the Councils will highlight the “Walk to Washington” Quaker walkers from Brooklyn, focusing on Germantown and Trenton.

Meeting for Business closed in worship at 12:27.