

Meeting of the Board of directors of UREC for March 17, 2026

Attendance: Ron Gardner, Paul Stewart, Peter Gaback, Cecelia Tucker, Ren Lee, Leon Walker, Joan Rogers, Brenda Twiggs, Mary Liz Stewart, Celeste Knight, Jennifer Burns, Matt Kirk, Dave Hochfelder, Lizbeth Calendrino

The meeting was convened by Ron Gardner. The minutes of the previous meetings were presented, reviewed and approved. Paul moved for approval. Leon seconded. All Approved.

Ren raised an issue regarding the financial reports asking if they could be on the board log in page going back several months so Board members could examine them at their leisure. Maryliz agreed that this was workable and would be done.

Mary Liz gave the Executive Director's Report.

Lisbeth reported on the Theater Festival. She reported it was "fun", "stunning" and we could pack the house.

No committee reports were provided at this meeting to allow for more time for two key issues: 1) Providing a resolution to approve the opening of the second Fidelity account, and 2) Reviewing the issue of if it is appropriate to hire a subcontractor for services where the subcontractor is a relative (daughter) of the Executive Director. [Explanation follows]

A resolution was presented to approve the opening of a second Fidelity account with PKS Investments to hold funds that have been donated beyond the value of our initial account which was separated as it was being used as collateral for our loan with Pioneer Bank for Architectural Expenses. Matt made the motion. Dave seconded the motion. All approved.

Paul and Mary Liz left the meeting and the board went into Executive Session regarding the second issue. After discussion, Paul and Mary Liz were invited back to the meeting. Matt explained that the sense of the board was that a competitive process should be set up and interviews held to fill the position needed which Sarah was filling. If, within that process Sarah was the preferred candidate, that would be fine, but it must be a fair and competitive process. Mary Liz and Paul agreed to follow that process.

Paul provided an update on the Interpretive Center lawsuit – the suit has been worked out by a team of lawyers from Lawyers for Good Government. The materials have been prepared and are expected to be filed with the Court of the Northern District of New York.

Board Members were asked to complete and make available to have on file the conflict-of-interest forms.

Ren moved to adjourn. Dave seconded the motion. All Approved.

Minutes by Paul Stewart

Dear UREC Board Members,

3.19.26

Let me state up front that I recognize the value in determining steps in a process and doing one's best to adhere to that process. Processes are valuable in that they can contribute to streamlining, legitimizing, providing for the certainties of patterned behavior, ease of assessment. However, processes ought not be confining, or constraining, but rather strategies to effectively achieve objectives and goals. This means that I am not averse to the standard procedure of the hiring process. However, there is some backstory of which it seems worthwhile for you to be aware related to the contracted hiring of Sarah Stewart.

Both Paul and I maintain that UREC got burned across the two years that UREC employed a Youth, Family and Senior Program coordinator who was paid \$50,000 per year. While engaging in the standard competitive hiring process and making the best decision from among the candidates, the personnel choice resulted in a staff person who consistently failed to follow through on program ideas and plans. Frequent efforts at recommendations and encouragement and support to develop programs were unsuccessful. When it came time for staff evaluations at the end of 2025, this staff person chose to resign.

This vacancy created an immediate need – for a program developer. Not an educator, not a historian, not someone looking to make a fast buck, but a program developer who would attract people through a variety of mission-driven events to The Myers Residence with the goal of their becoming longstanding supporters. Needing someone to promptly fill this organizational staffing need of program development, proceeding through a standard hiring process could have meant as long as a six month, or more, time period across which no UREC programming would be implemented. The choice was to suspend programming for an extended period of time or find someone speedily with the requisite skill set and knowledge of and commitment to the organization to step into the vacancy as quickly as possible to re-ignite the programming process that was supposed to attract folks to The Myers Residence so as to introduce them to UREC and develop a relationship by which they would become longstanding supporters. Sarah Stewart was close at hand, knowledgeable about UREC, excited about the opportunity, committed to what it stands for, and ready with ideas to implement. This was not a fluff situation of her simply needing a job. I don't hire people because of who they are, I hire people who are believed to have the knowledge and skill set and commitment to UREC's mission to be able to achieve the goals set for that position that would, in turn, support, enhance and expand UREC's mission. She already had a job. What she did have was the needed skill set, commitment to the organization, knowledge and experience of the organization and organizing events that allowed her to step into this situation and run with it, which she has been doing.

As was mentioned at the end of the Board Meeting, the Executive Director is no longer able to shoulder the burden of program planning and implementation. UREC staff is already committed to courses of action that do not allow for them to pick up program planning and implementation. If UREC was to continue organizing its variety of community-facing programs, an additional person was required to fill this need. The variety and frequency of mission driven community facing programs has been a hallmark of UREC from the beginning.

This was not a mom-daughter thing. This was an Executive Director looking to hire a qualified person to carry the ball with program development. And it would be good to realize that the Executive Director (ED) has been very clear from the get-go that there is no favoritism or leniency shown to anyone who works for UREC, no matter the relationship. In the two-year time period that the previous Youth, Family and Senior Program Coordinator worked with UREC, the goal of the ED was to support that person in the staff role, recognizing that each of us learns, thinks and interacts differently and that there needs to be accommodation in the organization for these differences. The ED chose to offer support to the Coordinator with the hope that this person would be able to eventually disconnect from the support of the ED to manage the position without that support. Sadly, this was not the case. Had the staff person not resigned, termination was under consideration.

I trust that you can see from reading through these paragraphs that there was reason and purpose behind contracting with Sarah Stewart.

Rest assured, the Fundalopes contract will be ended, as directed by the UREC Board, but know that Sarah intends to continue to support UREC.

Your thoughts in response to this writing are welcome,

Mary Liz Stewart