

Freestone Oversight Committee Report  
Congregational Meeting of February 23, 2025

Presented by Beth Pollard, co-chair, with Tom Tripp, of the Freestone Oversight Committee. Other committee members are Larry Nagel and Susan Lankford, as well as Freestone Committee members Dave Wemmer and Bob Moore.

The Freestone Oversight Committee was formed when the congregation in March 2023 approved a resolution governing the future of UUCB's Freestone retreat property in Sonoma County. The committee oversees implementation of the congregation's resolution. We make monthly reports to the Board of Trustees, and to the congregation via the Beacon newsletter, as well as reporting at our congregational meetings.

As you likely recall, the congregation's 2023 resolution called for funding to be raised for repairs and improvements to Freestone within specified timelines - called milestones. This fundraising and improvement work itself is being carried out by the Freestone Committee.

The first milestone was to raise \$250,000 by December 1, 2024. A first phase of repairs and improvements are to have County building permits by June 1 of this year, and be completed by June 1 of next year. A second phase of repairs and improvements are to be completed by June 1, 2027. Additionally, ongoing Freestone costs are not to exceed \$10,000 a year starting this July 1, unless otherwise authorized by the Board.

As we reported at the last congregational meeting, efforts to obtain funds through a conservation easement were unsuccessful. Attention then turned to selling the property's two undeveloped lots – known as Lots 1 and 2, for around \$300,000.

Although there was buyer interest, a sale became unfeasible without evidence of well water needed for a buyer to build on the lots.

The Freestone Committee then undertook surveying for potential water well sites on the lots, and drilling for water at promising locations. The first drilling was unsuccessful. A second and final drilling, which needs dry weather conditions and some prep work to access the site, was planned for late fall of 2024.

Meanwhile, the December 1, 2024 milestone to raise \$250,000 or else list the entire property for sale was looming.

The Freestone Oversight Committee, in preparing its recommendation for the Board's December meeting, considered the imminent drilling and the acknowledgment from the Freestone Committee members that this was its final drilling attempt. Additionally, we met with the Realtor for the sale of the lots. She expressed optimism about the lots selling for \$300,000 or more if there is sufficient water. She estimated that at least 60 days would be needed between re-activating the listing of the lots and close of escrow. She also advised that a listing of the entire Freestone property would be more favorable in the spring than in the winter.

Taking all that into account, the Freestone Oversight Committee recommended, and the Board on December 2 approved the action that:

1. The Board list the entire Freestone properties (Lots 1 and 2 and Dome Lot 4) for sale if the one pending well is unsuccessful, or on April 1, 2025, whichever comes first.
2. If water is found, and Lots 1 and 2 are sold & \$250,000 is raised by April 1, then the listing of the entire Freestone properties would not proceed on April 1<sup>st</sup>.

3. All the subsequent milestones in the resolution would remain as written and approved.

However due to weather and contractor scheduling challenges, the drilling of the second well is still pending and, in its words, being aggressively pursued by the Freestone Committee.

Yet, the prospects for the prospects for accomplishing a sale of the lots and raising \$250,000 by April 1 are quite slim.

The Freestone Oversight Committee will make the recommendation at the Board's March meeting that the April 1 deadline, and other deadlines, remain in place unless extended through approval of the congregation. Per the bylaws, such a congregational vote can occur either by call of the Board or by petition by 5% of church members -which means around a dozen or so members.

The costs to seek and drill for water first used the remainder of a \$12,500 loan from the church's General Fund, and then funds raised by the Freestone Committee. The remaining site prep and drilling costs are estimated at around \$30,000.

In summary, without raising \$250,000 by April 1 with a successful well drilling and lots sale, or without approval of one or more milestone extensions – which the Oversight Committee recommends can only be authorized by the congregation, the entire Freestone property will be listed for sale in April.

In closing, the Freestone Oversight Committee wishes to emphasize our respect for variety in perspectives about the Freestone property and respect for the investments of time, talent, and treasure made by the Freestone Committee and other church members into this retreat property. While we also strive to uphold the integrity of the congregation's direction in its March 2023 resolution that was crafted through a

year-long deliberative process. It is my personal hope that UUCB members continue to proceed in our Freestone deliberations under the principle that there is no “they”, there is only “us” in this church.

Please feel free to contact us at [FOC@uucb.org](mailto:FOC@uucb.org)