

36th Annual General Body Meeting of the New England Hindu Temple Inc.

Minutes of the meeting

36th Annual General Body meeting took place on April 26th, 2015 at the Sheraton Hotel, Framingham, MA.

Attendees: Chair Person Mrs. Ranjini Ramaswamy, President Mr. Chokku Manian, Secretary Mr. Manju Nathan and the members of the Board of Trustees of the New England Hindu Temple, General Body members of the New England Hindu Temple.

Prayer: Senior Priest Sri Krishna Bhattar delivered the prayer to begin the 36th AGM meeting.

Welcome Address:

Chairman Mrs. Ranjini Ramaswamy delivered the welcome address. Some of the highlights of Mrs. Ramaswamy's speech:

- Introduced two moderators Mr. Ganapathy and Mr. Harimurthy who will be helping in keeping the time and ensuring smooth proceedings of the meeting
 - Before Mrs. Ranjini Ramaswamy proceeded with Chairman's address, few of the members demanded to see the agenda at the start of the meeting and the Agenda was displayed on the screen

Chairman's address:

Mrs. Ranjini Ramaswamy delivered Chairman's report. Some of the highlights from Mrs. Ranjini's speech are:

- At the outset I wanted to thank my fellow trustees for their invaluable inputs and united effort in moving forward with the overdue projects. Thank you Trustees, thanks all of you
- All the temple services, pujas, festivals, cultural events have attracted large gatherings, and are well attended, these are regularly updated by the administration in our temple website
- The maintenance work and renovations have been regularly done at the temple and the temple properties
- Last year at the AGM, I committed we would complete three major projects. On behalf of my team, I'm proud to announce that we have completed two of those projects and third major one is in progress
 - The first one is sewer connection – the priest quarters and the temple property on 137 Waverly street are already connected to the Framingham town
 - The connection of Temple sewer system to the Framingham town is in progress. Now this goes on to the next project – the Temple construction for the expansion project

- The TCC has worked very diligently in getting the project off the ground; After getting the approval from the Ashland town for the expansion project, the annex construction finally began in January
- The Construction stopped because of the crippling winter, but now it has restarted again; the shell of the building should be completed in 6 to 7 months barring any unforeseen events. The committee chair will review the other important details in his report
- External audit for the 2013 has been completed and the audit for 2014 is in the works
- So, we delivered all the three that was promised
- Unfortunately this year, the temple was targeted by a frivolous law suit; this started in May 2014, soon after the last year's general body election, the board received a demand letter from 5 members who lost the election
- At that time, the temple was left with no option to defend the reputation of the temple. As responsible trustees, we handled the unwarranted distraction in a professional, appropriate and legal manner. Our main focus was to safeguard the interest of the temple
- This is not about the elections; temple is a place of divinity, offers solace and comfort to its faithful. The NEHTI was left with no option but to defend its long standing reputation built over 35 years
- At this time, the Chairman Mrs.Ranjini Ramaswamy gave the detailed over view / timeline of the lawsuit happened over the last 7 to 8 months
 - Initial hearing was on September 18, 2014; the Judge ordered us to go for a mediation
 - The mediation was on October 24th, it lasted over 4 and half hours. We were 4 officers, two trustees and a SC member were present at the mediation meeting; but the mediation failed
 - We went back to the court for a hearing and a dismissal of the case. The hearing lasted less than 20 minutes; the judge told us she will give the decision in two weeks after consultation
 - The case was dismissed after two weeks; it was a 9 page judgment
 - Finally it was a big burden off our shoulders; we were hoping the things would move smoothly
 - But the plaintiffs chose to appeal and we were still in litigation
- Committees chair will brief you on the happenings in their areas
- I wanted to share with you a personal note, this has something to do with the temple; in 1980, I had an opportunity to visit the Sankaracharya and have an audience with him.
 - I mentioned to him and said we have a plan to build a temple around Boston
 - He closed his eyes for a minute, opened and said this is a humongous task and asked to do this with utmost care asThe task will not stop with just building the temple, the real work is afterwards.
 - We need a lot of help in carrying forward, we need you, we need all of you in working together in serving the temple and the community
 - I wanted to thank the SC who always provided the bipartisan guidance

- I also thank the general body members and the devotees for their unconditional support and faith

Chairman invited the President Mr. Chokku Manian (CM) for giving the President's report

As President CM started speaking at the podium, a member Mr. Giri Barathan interjected and said, "We know there is going to be a Q&A session at the end. But we have been given lot of information by the Chairman; we can't hold our thoughts till the end." Mr. Harimurthy reminded the member that there is an agenda and it has to be followed. Member Giri replied saying the agenda was displayed, but not approved by the General Body members. Mr. Harimurthy told him that primary agenda of the AGM meeting is for all the officers to report the progress and activities happening to the General Body members and answer any questions, it cannot be short circuited; every question is important, please register all the questions you may have and it will be taken up during the Q&A session and answered one by one. 2-3 members also joined the conversation with Mr. Harimurthy and demanded that by Robert's rule the Agenda be put for vote and approved by simple majority.

The three or four members continued to disrupt the proceedings stating they don't agree with the agenda and the agenda is to be approved by the General body. Another member mentioned that she has attended so many years AGM meetings and has never seen the Agenda being put for approval by the General Body. There was a brief pandemonium with many of the members joining the cross-conversation. Mr. Harimurthy clarified and said, "The purpose of the AGM meeting is for the Officers to brief the general body members of the business and other happenings of the temple. By disrupting the proceedings and modifying the agenda is denying the other General Body members the opportunity to get to know these things. Q&A is important, we have set aside time for that in the end and I request the members to allow the proceedings to continue as per the agenda." After spending a few more minutes, the members agreed to go through the proceedings and keep the Q&A session later.

President's report:

President gave the list of accomplishments of the last year

- Thanked all the trustees, employees and volunteers
- Installed LED lights for power savings
- Got clearance from the town for the soil erosion, sewerage etc.
- Implemented online software for the priests scheduling
- Though we have employee handbook, it is badly needing update, we are working on updating the handbook, in a month or two it will be ready
- We had a bad winter, we did our best to keep the temple open as much as possible
 - At this time, there were few more interruptions by a few members saying keep the presentation shorter so that we have time for the Q&A

- Mr. Harimurthy again pointed out that if the number of interruptions are not there, we would always be able to complete the presentations and move on to the Q&A session
- A number of major festivals were conducted at the temple including the New Year day which had a record turn out
- Apart from that, there were many religious festivals / events numbering about 300 (showed a list of festivals and events)
- Operations at a glance; 4 Full time Priests, 1 manager, 1 religious cook, 3 part time staff, over 100 volunteers including the trustees
- Front desk collection is about \$1.2 million, operating expense is about \$ 1 million, which is somewhat high, but it included the expenses due to the construction and sewer projects
- 11,000 archanas performed, 1000 vahana pujas were performed
- Software updates improved the efficiency
- Cleanliness is improved, if you see any areas where we need improvement, please let us know and we will work on that
 - A member commented that the cleanliness of the temple has indeed improved and we are able to see the visible results
- Gave updates on parking, winter time snow plowing etc. We had to close the temple during the Winter Snow
- We took care of the roof cleaning during the heavy snow – as many of the roofs in the New England area were developing problems during the winter, we got people to clean the roof and we didn't face any problems
- Need for long term solution for the roof needs to be found
- Safety and installing of the cameras updates given
 - A member pointed out safety of the religious places is a concern in the USA and we need to take care of the safety of the temple
- There are many smaller temples in the greater Boston area, but still the Hindu community holds a special place for the Sri Lakshmi Temple.

President CM ended his speech by thanking everyone for the good work.

Treasurer's report delivered by Mr. Ranjit Singanayakam (RS)

Trustee RS delivered the Treasurer's report. Some of the highlights of Treasurer's report are:

- Details of annual income and expenses in 2014
- Details of bank accounts
- Details of investment accounts
- Details of top seven income categories for the Temple
- Details of top five expense categories for the Temple
- RS presented the Bank balance figure as of December 31st, 2014 and concluded Treasurer's report

Secretary's report delivered by Mr. Manju Nathan (MN)

Secretary MN gave the following updates:

- Life members of the Temple 374
- Annual members is 65
- Making a total members of 439
- New life members : 10
- New annual members are 12, with two applications pending
- This year we had a nominations committee headed by Mr. Harimurthy, which nominated the following five candidates:
 - Mrs. Ranjini Ramaswamy
 - Mr. Shanmugam Bhavanatham
 - Mr. Chokku Manian
 - Mrs. Jaishree Balaji
 - Mr. Jay Honavalli
- There were no external nominations received for the elections and therefore the members nominated by the nominations committee were declared elected unopposed
- BoT has decided to revise the fees for the membership, as below:
 - New Annual membership \$250
 - New Life Membership \$2000
 - Existing Annual members pay \$120 until they keep the membership in good standing and pay \$1000 to convert to life membership
 - Nomination fees for the election is increased to \$201 from the coming year

Secretary MN thanked everyone and ended his speech.

Some of the members now raised concerns, stated that few applications for new memberships have been rejected by the Secretary or the Board without clarifying the reasons for the rejections. Next few minutes were spent by the members and the officers discussing what the issues were. Mrs. Ammani Dasari and Mr. Giri Barathan stated that some of the applications they verified and signed were rejected by the board without assigning any proper reason. Mr. Harimurthy said this is a valid concern and has to be verified and addressed. Mr. Giri Barathan continued the discussion about the rejected applicants. Chairman Mrs. RR entered the conversation at this time and asked Mrs. Dasari on the details, when were the applications rejected. Mrs. Dasari replied it was in 2014. Mrs. Ranjini Ramaswamy pointed out to Mrs. Dasari that Mrs. Dasari was in the Board as a Trustee when all the membership applications were discussed in the Board meeting and minuted when rejections were done, but she did not point out about the completeness of the application. Member Vellaiyappan spoke about the need to encourage and increase the membership of the community especially among the youth.

Member Mr. Chandrakanth Panse wanted to register his protest for not adopting the Roberts Rule and putting the Agenda for approval by the general body members.

Member Mr. Giri Barathan now brought up the issue of four members who were removed from their primary membership. These removed members were the plaintiffs in the recent frivolous lawsuit against the temple. Mr. Giri Barathan claimed that he sent a proposal two weeks back to the Secretary by email asking the motion to be included in the agenda, the proposal signed by 20 members in good standing. At this time, member Mrs. Solai Annamalai pointed out in the past Mr. Jay Srinivasan was taken out from the primary membership of the temple, and there was no protests. When the Board has two thirds majority, it has the right to remove the members with a valid reason and nobody can question.

There was much of cross-talking and shouting from few members. Mr. Harimurthy tried to restore the order.

Life member and ex Trustee Mr. Tinniam Balasubramanian spoke at this time, highlighting the difficulties the administration had in the past in getting the memberships etc., requested the members to be calm and allow the proceedings to be completed without interruptions.

Secretary MN pointed out that the memberships were rejected only with some valid reasons and it will never happen without a valid reason. Mr. Harimurthy pointed out that the rejected applications have to be reviewed in a holistic manner and see how the process can be improved; I'm in support of increasing the membership etc. and let us do it in the coming year.

Mr. Giri Barathan again raised concerns about the expelled members, questioning if a due process was followed. At this time, Mr. Ram Nunna, a Stewardship Council member rose and spoke about his association with the temple in the past 35 years and now how the things have gotten better. Requested that the name of member ousted years before need not be brought up now for discussion.

Another Stewardship Council member Mr. Vembu Kannan rose and spoke about the right of the board to remove the members and in the past when it was done in the past no one went and fought with the board, we need to respect the rights of the board.

Moderator Mr. Harimurthy now announced a 15 minutes break.

Meeting continued after the break

Temple Construction Committee report presented by Mr. Jatinder Sharma

TCC report presented by Mr. Jatinder Sharma, introduced the other members of the committee, explained about the scope of the Committee etc. Thanked the BoT and other members of the committee.

- Gave the details of the processes involved and challenges faced in obtaining the license for the annex building
- Construction has already started

- Explained the floor plans of the new construction

Mr. Shanmugam, board member and member of the TCC took the podium, continued and gave further details about how the contractors were screened, the contracts were awarded and the vendor selection done etc. Mr. Shanmugam also explained the rationale of not continuing the work during the harsh winter – as the vendor also wanted about \$100,000 to work during the winter. It was decided to wait until the weather becomes better to continue the work.

Only one question was raised to the TCC:

Member Mr. Vasudevan: It will be preferable to have a place for conducting religious functions as the Basement area where the religious functions are currently held is not very convenient – even for washing the vessels, we need to take it to the wash basin etc. Are we planning to have convenient place for the religious functions in the new facility that is coming up?

TCC member Mr. Shanmugam welcomed the suggestion given by Mr. Vasudevan and responded with the plans etc.

Youth Cultural and Education Programs committee report presented by Mrs. Jaishree Balaji

Mrs. Jaishree Balaji started the report by introducing herself and other members of the YCEP, thanked the BoT and the members of the YCEP etc. Mrs. Balaji also gave the list of events conducted by the YCEP in the past year as follows:

- Aani thirumanjanam, Cultural events during Theppothsavam and Navarathri celebrations for 10 days, Nrithyanjali etc.
- We revived the Thyagaraja Aradhana which didn't happen in the last few years; this year the event was conducted, several music teachers and their students and music lovers in the New England area enthusiastically participated in the event
- We also conducted Tri-Murthy day and Radha kalyanam. There were three concerts conducted by us during Ganesh Chathurti, Diwali and the Rama Navami. All the events were well attended and were a huge success
- We have been planning more events to be conducted during this year
- Mrs. Balaji also gave details of the Bala Vidhya Mandhir and thanked the coordinators, parents and students who participate in the BVM
- Mrs. Balaji gave details of the scholarship given to the Ashland schools; also responded to a question on who decides on the scholarship given by the Temple. Mrs. Balaji replied that this is decided by the School.

There was another question on one of the scholarship stopped. Mr. Shanmugam, YCEP member responded and explained the reasons for stopping of that particular scholarship.

There was a comment & suggestion by another member on the importance of involving the next generation children in the Temple activities.

There were few more comments and concerns expressed by more members about involving the next generation children in the Temple activities and even using the Social Media etc.

Finance Committee report presented by Mr. Harimurthy

Mr. Harimurthy started the FinCom report, introducing the FinCom members and salient points of the Finances etc.

- We made some money, though we were conservative in our approach
- Gave details of rainy day fund, endowment fund and investments etc.
- Gave rationale for the conservative strategy followed by the FinCom, money made during the last year with the investments etc.

There were few concerns raised about the availability of the Hall for continuing the meeting etc. Temple manager, after speaking to the Hotel, confirmed the availability of the Hall for continuing the meeting.

Audit Committee report by Mr. Sethu Kumar

Mr. Sethu Kumar presented report on the Audit Committee, thanked the Board and continued the report. Mr. Sethu Kumar explained the charter of the internal audit and the external audit

- Explained the difficulties in getting a good auditor for conducting external audits as the auditor should be good for handling non-profit and religious institutions
- Assured for the next year the external audit will be complete and satisfactory
- During the internal audit, the IA committee found all the accounts and the records were clear etc.

There were comments and note of thanks by a couple of members for successfully completing the internal audit etc. There was a question if there was an IA committee and if there were non-Board members as part of the Committee. Mr. Sethu Kumar mentioned the names of the IA Committee members etc. and how the Internal Audit was done etc.

There were few concerns raised by members on the importance of having an external audit, how it would go a long way in reinforcing the trust of the non-profit organization etc.

Mr. Shanmugam's report on Safety and Security committee and other committees

Mr. Shanmugam gave a brief update on the steps taken by the Safety and Security committee – which included installing cameras and lights in the parking area etc. Also thanked the people involved in the other committees he was participating in, including the Construction committee for the cooperation and the work done.

Q & A session

At this time, there was a concern / comment raised by a life member with following points:

1. Keep the presentation brief, no need for every presenter to start with a thanks and end with thanks and spend time
2. Spend time only on necessary stuff in your presentation
3. If some of the presentation is not confidential, make it available to the members ahead of time, this would save a lot of time

Mr. Harimurthy responded to the question/comment and reiterated the importance of every committee doing their presentation and pointed out that the members are unique in many of the committees; however he appreciated and agreed with the member on the validity of the suggestion made by the member.

During the break, the members were given white paper to write their questions for which they were expecting an answer from the Board:

Life Member Mr. Giri Bharathan's question: Few days back we sent a resolution to the Board to revoke the removal of membership for four members who had filed case against the Temple. This proposal was sponsored by 20 members. This is as per the bylaws of the Temple. The resolution has to be put to vote at this general body meeting. If it is not put to vote by the general body, it will be a serious violation of the bylaws

Mr. Harimurthy was responding to the question while still in the process of collecting questions from other members; however there were repeated attempts by few members to raise the issue of removal of membership, they claimed to have brought the signatures of over 60 members (who were not present in the meeting) in support of the resolution.

The members who were raising the question of membership were not interested in letting other questions to be raised or answered until the membership removal issue was resolved.

Mr. Giri Barathan repeated his question again.

Chairman Mrs. Ramaswamy responded to the question and said this question when it came via email was already answered by the Secretary via email. As the lawsuit is still in the court, it cannot be discussed in detail in the public.

Mr. Giri Barathan explained what was there in the reply and why it was not satisfactory; stated that the Board must make it clear the circumstance of removing of the four member's membership, the nature of the lawsuit filed by them etc. has to be discussed in the meeting as this meeting is meeting of the General Body members and this is not a public meeting.

The discussion continued surrounding the membership question.

Life member Mr. Balaji Raghavan raised a concern at this time: We understand the lawsuit filed by the four members who are now removed from the membership was with regards to the result of the election. Every year there will be some winners and some losers; if those losing the election keep going to the court year after year, taking away the energy of the Board and wasting precious money of the

Temple, it is highly unfortunate and the Board or the other members should never support such behavior

Mr. Harimurthy said to Mr. Balaji that the point is well taken and let the discussion continue

Mr. Barathan continued the membership question discussion, pointed to the bylaws etc. With members such as Mrs. Dasari supported viewpoint of Mr. Barathan.

The Board members in the end reiterated the importance of working together in the interest of the Temple, need to preserve the resources of the temple and continue to serve the community.

As the meeting time had already over run the scheduled end time, the Board collected the rest of the questions that were not answered during the meeting and assured to take any action as needed.