



General Board Meeting - October 25, 2020

Present:

Barbara Abramson	Helaine Isaacs	Dana Molina (guest)
Alexandra Bar-Cohen	Bret Jacknow	Lauren Neufeld
Joel Berger	Heidi Joseph	Naomi Richman-Neumann
Rachelle Berkman	Edye Kamenir	Lynn Ross
Randy Brett	Judy Kutin	Adam Scheer
Gabrielle Cayton-Hodges	Nancy Lewis	Rabbi Elliott Schoenberg
Dane Dickler	Jenny Ludmer	Bob Schwartz
Martin Ettenberg	Moshe Margolin	Nicole Soffin
David Greenberg	Joshua McCoy	Polly Strauss
Samantha Hirschberg	Linda Meisel	Tom Will

Minutes:

1. The meeting was called to order at 5:05 PM and was held via video conference.
2. **D'var Torah** was delivered by David Greenberg, who spoke about Lekh Lekha, highlighting the covenant G-d made with Abraham, the significance of Sarah's name change, and the righteousness and faith exhibited by Abraham's trust in G-d. These themes spark thoughts about wrestling with faith and raise questions about ensuring how TJC's educational and religious opportunities can emphasize and elevate faith and spirituality in these times.
3. **Approval of Minutes**
 - The minutes of the September 17, 2020 Board meeting were approved unanimously in a motion made by Linda Meisel and seconded by Heidi Joseph, with one abstention.
 - The minutes of the September 30, 2020 Special Board meeting were approved unanimously in a motion made by Joshua McCoy and seconded by Heidi Joseph, with 4 abstentions.
 - See www.thejewishcenter.org/Resources/Board-Minutes.aspx.
4. **Finance Report - Dane Dickler**
 - 4.1 Financial Dashboard Review
 - We are past the High Holidays, so this is typically the time of year that reflects actual membership and Religious School enrollment numbers.
 - In terms of revenue, Dues are tracking at 79% versus budget. Capital Assessment is tracking at about 70% versus budget, which is coming in below the dues percentage, because capital assessment is weighted toward younger members. Education revenue is down significantly versus last year (47% versus same time last year), driven by the youngest students whose parents are hesitant to allow more screen time.

- In terms of expenses, Capital Expenditure and Security are lower than budget and lower relative to last year. Therefore, overall operational expenses are \$62K less than budget and \$82K less than last year. Education expenses are close to what was spent last year (87% of prior year) in spite of lower enrollment and, therefore, revenue. A large portion of Education expenses are related to salaries and building, so they are considered fixed and do not vary significantly with lower enrollment.
- With revenue down, it is imperative that a close watch be kept on expenses to compensate.
- Annual Fund is posting strong numbers this year versus same time last year. \$100K is budgeted, but it is a fairly aggressive target. Next month's dashboard will provide a better picture of how things are tracking.
- Total Revenue is about \$1.1M this year which is at budget versus \$1.3MM last year. In spite of decreased revenue, TJC is holding to budget because of ULeague payment and insurance proceeds, which, of course, are non-replicable events. In addition, the PPP loan has not yet been forgiven officially, so that will have a positive impact on revenue when that happens.

4.2 Membership Discussion in the Context of Financial Planning

- In terms of the Membership Units reflected by this budget, TJC currently has 486 FTE members, but the target is over 500. Family members are down by about 28 units. Senior memberships are up, some of whom aged into that category from other higher cost membership categories in the last year. However, there has been a 22 FTE net loss for full-paying membership units for the year.
- Randy Brett added that some people not reflected in the current numbers are people who have not yet replied to the membership packet or paid anything yet for this year. Randy reminded that Board members need to set an example on this front. There was a USCJ Presidents' Meeting today. Many synagogues are doing "okay" this year, but everyone is concerned about next year. The Board will need to think about that impending challenge and will discuss in future Board meetings.

4.3 Forecast Discussion

- The Finance Committee plans to put together a forecast for the remainder of the year for both revenue and expenses in order to plan accordingly. The aim to present at the next Board Meeting to give a sense of how we are doing for the rest of the year.
- Edye Kamenir asked if that forecast would be the new benchmark or if the current budget would remain the benchmark off of which actual are being assessed. Dane answered that the Committee will make that decision once the forecast is complete, but would aim to use the most updated information.

4.4 Billing Issues

- Randy mentioned that Board Members raised billing issues on Zoom chat. Joel Berger shared that we are currently finishing training on Shul Cloud. Randy believes that once the transition is made, there will be fewer issues with billing.

4.5 Annual Fund Update

- Joshua McCoy provided an update on the Annual Fund and will be reaching out to people over the coming weeks. Randy reminded the Board to set an example to the rest of the congregation by making a donation to the Annual Fund.

5. High Holiday Committee Resolution - Naomi Richman Neumann

- Naomi has provided a copy of a proposed resolution to formally acknowledge the contribution of Judy Fleitman, Cheryl Mintz and the 5781 High Holiday Committee for their incredible contributions of time and talent to make the first (and, hopefully, only!) virtual High Holiday observance a success. This resolution is appended to the minutes at the end.
- Naomi made the motion to accept the resolution as presented, which was seconded by Bob Schwartz. The resolution was approved unanimously.
- Randy Brett added that everyone pulled together fantastically to make the High Holidays such a success - the committees, clergy and staff. This collective effort showed TJC at its best. Randy does not believe that any other shul was able to put together a more comprehensive and meaningful High Holiday offering than TJC based on everything he has seen and heard from other synagogues and the Presidents Listserv.

6. Staff Appreciation - Polly Strauss

- Polly would like to take this opportunity to encourage everyone who interacts with the clergy and staff to express our appreciation. The Executive Committee will be making a donation in honor of the clergy and staff to thank them for their High Holiday efforts under these extraordinary circumstances.
- In addition, there are several other opportunities to express appreciation, including a Flash Mob of appreciation and a Zoom event honoring Mary Ann Yarin on her upcoming retirement. Details will follow, and all are encouraged to attend.

7. Working Group Update - Moshe Margolin

7.1 Background

- Moshe circulated a document to refresh everyone's memory on the recommendations of the working group previously presented to the Board. Moshe then provided a verbal re-cap.
- The reality is that the building will be closed for an extended period of time. Therefore, TJC is more dependent than on the use of technology for nearly all forms of congregant engagement and interaction.

7.2 Recommendation

- Moshe and the Committee urge the formation of a formal Technology group - above and beyond the original recommendation outlined in the report - who have expertise in this area and can help address technology needs and work to optimize the synagogue's offering in this area across various cohorts.
- Moshe noted that this Board has been exceptional in its thoughtfulness and the sheer amount of work and decisions it has had to confront in the last year. He believes the Board will also will need to figure out an organized way to take a pulse of the congregation to understand how people are receiving our offerings and how better to improve the offerings to better serve them.

- Moshe also noted that the staff and clergy are in transition again due to Mary Ann Yarin's retirement. He urges leadership to listen to the staff to understand the pressure they are under and their concerns.

7.3 Comments and Input from the Board

- Linda Meisel added in chat that she supports the technology committee idea.
- Polly Strauss added the same point for Religious Affairs Committee.
- Nicole Soffin raised the point that she has observed many Zoom B'nai Mitzvah celebrations, and many synagogues are hiring technology people to handle this aspect of the service, since there are so many opportunities for things to go wrong. It would serve us well to explore that option further either via a committee, as Moshe has proposed, or hiring that out to an outside group. She does not believe that the infrastructure currently in place is meeting the needs of the B'nai Mitzvah families. Randy Brett asked the House Committee to work with Joel Berger to explore that idea in greater depth.
- Helaine Isaacs added that for Programming, one silver lining is that elderly congregants and others who may have had barriers in the past to participation are able to attend events and programming now that they are held via Zoom. Therefore, TJC is able to engage people that previously were difficult to reach. Even when things go back to normal, she sees an opportunity for that engagement format to continue, particularly for programming and adult education.
- Other Board members voiced their support for the formation of a formal technology group via chat, including Bret Jacknow and Judy Kutin.

8. Membership Update - Naomi Richman Neumann

8.1 Status of Membership

- There were 486 FTE members on the Finance dashboard, but 14 units that have been on remissions in the past, but have not yet sent in their paperwork for that process, so the number should be closer to 500 once that process is complete.
- In addition, there has been a steady stream of inquiries about membership that is not High Holiday driven, since the holidays have passed. People are looking for a spiritual connection to Judaism, which is a positive sign.
- Ten member units have asked to put their membership on hold for the year, likely COVID related. There is presumably a high chance they will return after the crisis is over.
- Then there are a list of "questionable" members - of whose status we are unsure - and passive resignations.
- Another round of outreach calls to membership was done in August, which we hope to repeat around Thanksgiving.
- The congregation is aging, with each passing year pulling more and more people into the senior membership (i.e. lower cost) category.
- In addition, there are some unpaid membership bills, including Board members. There was no imperative to get High Holiday tickets, since the Zoom links were sent to everyone, but that hurt the exigency around getting the bill paid.

8.2 Going Forward

- Alexandra Bar-Cohen has been asked to look at the dues structure.
- Naomi requested that we let her and Bret Jacknow know of prospective new members or anyone who might be on the fence about leaving.
- She added that there is an opportunity to add another membership category like "friends" who would still receive the newsletter, etc., in order to keep connections and add a bit more revenue. Joshua McCoy recommended the addition of a "snowbird" membership category.

9. Alternate Financing Update - Alexandra Bar-Cohen

- Alexandra said a team met last Thursday to discuss the alternate dues model efforts that were tabled earlier this year due to the Rabbi's z"l passing and the pandemic.
- Serious barriers to membership are cost and lack of demonstrated value of belonging to TJC.
- The team is looking at synagogues comparable in size and other factors to TJC to consider other dues models and longer term viability to more voluntary dues options.
- Rachelle Berkman is working on modeling the impact of alternate models on the budget.
- The team will present recommendation at December Congregational meeting.

10. Discussion of Enforcement of Safety Protocols - Randy Brett

- The Board is in a leadership role and, therefore, is required to set an example for the congregation. All members without exception need to practice mask-wearing, social distancing, and all of the other rules and protocols established by the Safety Committee for on-premise gatherings. If the Board as leaders are not following protocols, it is difficult to expect others to do so. Our Safety protocols are constantly being updated to reflect the latest conditions relative to the pandemic. Even if individuals don't personally agree with those rules, the Board is still obligated to model such behavior for others.

11. Update on Permanent Rabbi Search - Polly Strauss and Dana Molina

11.1 Status to Date

- Polly reminded the Board that the congregational needs assessment survey has been fielded, and findings were consistent thematically with the key headlines from the focus groups held over the summer. The survey results will be shared in the November congregational newsletter in the spirit of full transparency.
- Both workstreams of congregational and multi-stakeholder feedback serve as the foundation for development of both the questionnaire and the job posting for the role. (The questionnaire is part of the overall posting and includes questions for potential candidates to answer as part of the screening process). The team's goal is to submit the questionnaire by the end of next week.
- Team members also attended a meeting with USCJ this week as part of the process.
- At the next Committee meeting, the team will try to reach consensus on the profile that will identify 3-4 'must-haves' in the next Rabbi. Areas of focus will include: 1) a

forward-thinking, innovative and creative person; 2) a community builder with proven skills and experience to bring the congregation together; 3) a good pastoral leader who prioritizes visiting the sick and infirm, comforting the bereaved, etc.; 4) one who wishes to enable more tikkun olam through TJC; 5) a person capable of delivering outstanding sermons providing relevance of Jewish teaching to contemporary life; 6) a real 'people person' who will make an effort to get to know each member and is energized by that prospect.

11.2 Timeline Going Forward

- Dana provided an update on the timeline. October is devoted to preparation of the questionnaire/posting, with the goal to post by November 1.
- Resumes will be collected from candidates from November through January. Several rounds of interviews will follow.
- February will be visits from finalists - either hybrid or all virtual depending on the status of the pandemic.
- The goal is that by the end of March, the Committee will make a candidate recommendation to the Board, and an offer would be extended to the new Rabbi by Pesach.
- The Committee is committed to offering a slate of multiple candidates for consideration.

11.3 Questions and Comments

- Lauren Neufeld asked a clarifying question around opportunities to meet the candidates. Randy Brett said that every effort will be made to have an in-person component to the candidate visits, but it will depend on the status of the virus. If in-person visits are not possible, there will be multiple virtual touchpoints for congregants.
- Helaine Isaacs asked if it would be okay to go visit a potential candidate's congregation (in person or virtually) to check them out. Randy asked Rabbi Schoenberg to comment. Rabbi Schoenberg said there will be new touchpoints created under the circumstances, and that it would be allowable with the permission of the candidate. Dana added that we'd like to have finalists teach an adult education class, as well. A comment was made that candidates can come and visit TJC, too, either in person or virtually, above and beyond the formal visiting weekend.
- Martin Ettenberg asked about the number of finalists the team is targeting. Polly responded that there will be 2-3 finalists, as it is very important for the congregation to have a choice. Joshua McCoy added that he appreciates that fact that everyone wants a say, but that we have "hired" a committee and have empowered them to make the choice. It can get chaotic if everyone gets involved and has a say. Polly clarified that 2-3 candidates will be presented to the congregation, the committee will take the feedback from the congregation and will make a decision to present one candidate to the Board.
- Rabbi Schoenberg added that many candidates' High Holiday sermons are archived on their congregations' websites to enable previews. If we are in total lockdown with no way to see candidates in person, Rabbi stated that he has already spoken to approximately 5 candidates who have asked about what it is really like at TJC. He suspects that the candidates in which we have the most interest will know him very well.
- Both Polly and Dana can be reached at RabbiSearch@TJC in any Board members have additional questions or comments.

12. Old Business

- There was no old business.

13. New Business

- There was no new business.

14. Good & Welfare

- Bob Schwartz is going to be a grandfather again
- Edye Kamenir asks for prayers, as she hasn't been running since she tore a ligament in her ankle two weeks ago. Prayers are requested for those around her who have to deal with her in her 'non-running' state.

15. Adjournment

15.1 The meeting went into Executive Session at 6:40PM.

15.2 The meeting was adjourned at 6:41 PM in a motion made by Moshe Margolin and Joshua McCoy.

15.3 The next meeting will be November 15, 2020.

Minutes recorded by Edye Kamenir

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS due to the COVID-19 pandemic the Governor of New Jersey issued executive orders requiring The Jewish Center to halt all in-person activities, including religious services, beginning in March 2020; and

WHEREAS although the executive orders were modified in July 2020 to permit limited gatherings inside The Jewish Center; and

WHEREAS on July 12, 2020 The Jewish Center Board of Directors decided to hold High Holiday 5781 services virtually as government mandates and our safety protocols limited the number of congregants that could attend in-person observances; and

WHEREAS the unique circumstances of the pandemic created an opportunity to re-imagine High Holiday services and create an extraordinary experience for our congregation; and

WHEREAS Judi Fleitman, working with Cheryl Mintz and the clergy took on the responsibility of forming and leading the 5781 High Holidays Committee to create virtual worship services for the congregation; and

WHEREAS the members of the Committee were Ra'anan Boustan, Phil Carchman, Bob Lebeau, Nancy Lewis, Linda Milstein and Polly Strauss (VP Religious Affairs); and
WHEREAS Judi and the Committee worked tirelessly under challenging conditions and a tight deadline, to create and present innovative and uplifting services for our congregation that included live and pre-recorded segments, musical elements, participation by many congregants and clergy members, moments of reflection and a tribute to our beloved Rabbi Adam Feldman z"l.

NOW THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Board of Directors of The Jewish Center takes official recognition of Judi Fleitman and the 5781 High Holidays Committee for their devoted service and extends to them this statement of gratitude for their extraordinary contributions to the spiritual life of the congregation,

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this statement of appreciation be appropriately inscribed and conveyed to Judi Fleitman and the other Committee members, with a copy to be included in the minutes of the October 25, 2020 meeting of the Board.

Voted and Passed by the Board of Directors on October 25, 2020.

Edyth J. Kamenir _____ Secretary