

Long-Term Planning – Interim Report – June 2017

The Board of Directors created an ad hoc working group to develop a long-term plan for our synagogue community. Following on the successful short-term planning efforts from two years that have resulted in important changes to our programs, the long-term planning working group has met with key committees and individuals in the synagogue to look further down the road – one and two decades and more – to consider what kind of community we want to be and what program and capital investments we need to make to achieve our hopes.

Mission, Vision, and Values

The CBI mission as stated below and amplified by a list of community values was modified and adopted after the first stages of a long range planning committee in 2014. It stands as an excellent statement of our values for a holistic, inclusive community that embraces Jewish values and study to engage as fully as possible with each other, with the larger community and with concern for the world which we inhabit. It has animated the work of the Long-Term Planning Committee.

The CBI Mission Statement:

“Over 100 years ago, a group of Jews who settled in Northampton founded Congregation B’nai Israel. Their stated purpose is still contained in our By-Laws:

The objectives of this Congregation shall be to maintain a synagogue, religious school, a cemetery, and such additional educational, religious, social, and recreational activities as will tend to strengthen Jewish life.

It is a simple, prosaic mission statement, with profound implications. Each generation following the founders has strived to strengthen Jewish life in Northampton while also recognizing that we live in and are affected by events and societal changes in the larger world. Maintaining our synagogue and our educational and social programs has meant continually adapting to the changing needs and desires of our congregation, while holding fast to the Jewish ideals and values that have sustained our people for thousands of years.

Our CBI Community Vision

Connection.

* Offering opportunities to engage together in many and varied opportunities to socialize, pray, and learn as part of a *kehila kedosha* (holy community).

* Conveying a feeling of homecoming and a sense of being held, surrounded, and supported during times of joy and times of sorrow.

* Welcoming all to experience lifecycle events and Jewish holidays as a community.

* Reaching out to our community, the State of Israel, and Jews around the world.

Tradition.

- * Encouraging joy for, and knowledge of, the riches of Jewish culture, prayer, learning, and Hebrew.
- * Fostering each Member's deep and rich experience of prayer and spirituality.

Inclusion.

- * Embracing all who are interested in creating a Jewish life for themselves and their families by fostering an atmosphere of joyful Jewish observance and culture.
- * Inviting diversity of practice, tradition, and spiritual path.

Education.

- * Supporting the development and implementation of curricula and learning models that spark or rekindle a lifelong passion for Jewish learning.
- * Integrating the Jewish learning experience with all other facets of this Vision.

Participation.

- * Encouraging and empowering Congregants to become involved in all aspects of synagogue life from participation in ritual, to volunteering, to leading.

Growth.

* We envision a common future as the heart of the Northampton Jewish Community, brimming with joyful spirituality and meaningful Jewish learning. We will continue to explore how best, as American Jews, to cherish the future of Israel and to create meaningful ways for our members to fulfill the responsibilities of *tikkun olam*.

Our CBI Community Values

Ours is a community that champions:

- * A common future rooted in Jewish education, culture, text, values, and history;
- * Diversity of practice, tradition, and spiritual path;
- * Reverence for Torah, for each other, for our community, for all people, and for our planet.

Our CBI Leadership Vision

Our synagogue leadership prioritizes:

- * efficient, mission-oriented leadership guided by love and deep respect for the institution and its individual congregants and employees;
- * financial security based on prudent stewardship of our resources and active fundraising;
- * enthusiastic and well-organized volunteerism;
- * unparalleled learning opportunities for children and adults; and
- * clear encouragement and communication of ways to support the synagogue through service or other forms of giving.

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

At the same time that we adopted this statement, the long-range planning committee engaged the entire community in a survey of its strengths and weaknesses. There was considerable consensus on a number of issues:

--CBI enjoys a strong sense of community, a prime location, an excellent rabbi, a warm and welcoming congregation, effective content and conduct of services.

--At the same time there was an undercurrent in responses from some congregants that they would like the place to be more welcoming, to feel a greater sense of excitement, to understand the vision of the leadership in a way they didn't currently feel that they did.

--The highest areas of satisfaction were: services, social action, sermons and staff. The areas with the highest rates of dissatisfaction were: leadership development, youth group activities and religious school. There was also expression of dissatisfaction with Israel programs, sermons, and adult education. While there was strong credit for the goals of diversity, not everyone felt included.

--We also recognized that a demographic analysis of our membership showed that a heavy preponderance of our members are over 60 and that we are weakest in recruiting young families. Our participation in Sulam, a national planning consortium revealed that this is a common problem shared by many Conservative synagogues across the country, where declining membership and participation has become a serious threat to the future of many congregations.

PHASE 2

There have been some significant changes since this survey was administered. We have been determined to build on the dynamism of our community. There has been growth and change in Alma (the Hebrew School), the expansion of Abundance Farm and its integration into the life of the community, Gan Keshet, and tikkun olam (social action) projects to name a few.

We have learned that these new initiatives have engaged our congregants and new constituencies. Enrollment in our schools has grown, participation in family and Abundance Farm programs has increased dramatically, and involvement in activities such as the legislative luncheon and events around social justice issues has increased substantially.

In the fall of 2016 we began the second phase of long range planning. This phase was meant to address needs of the physical facility and to project what the make-up of the Jewish community will be in the next several. We assessed the recent activities and met with various committees to understand their needs for space and support.

These preliminary conversations uncovered two directions for future planning. In the first, almost all constituencies recognized that the building is inadequate for the current level if

activity. Almost all the staff and congregants working in different areas of the program indicated that there was a need for upgrades to the social hall, the library (community meeting room), the classrooms, kitchen and bathrooms as well as storage space, office space, and a more welcoming entrance.

A second more ambitious agenda looked more critically at where we have been and where we are headed. While proud of the success of many of our programs, several members of the planning committee recognized that outreach to young families has just begun; that the traditional synagogue may not address the needs of the future. These people have raised the possibility of a campaign that is more ambitious as it seeks to put us in a strong place for the future.

After several preliminary meetings, members of the long-range planning committee spent two months interviewing representatives of key committees and constituencies in CBI. After reading all the reports that we have from Gan Keshet, Alma, the Farm, the Director, Kitchen Committee, Ritual Committee, we can summarize the results in the following ways.

I. Improvements to our existing Synagogue spaces

When asked what needs would help fulfill the mission of each of the groups under discussion, many replied with a set of requests for an updated and more flexible building that would enhance the current programs and allow them to evolve organically.

The most frequently mentioned needs in this category were the need for:

--A larger and more attractive social hall (that would enable us to rent the space for bar/bat mitzvah and wedding receptions and other private parties).

--An updated sanctuary with a variety of ideas about creating a useful and attractive prayer space.

--A useful divider between the sanctuary and the social hall

--A library/meeting/general purpose room that is attractive for multiple uses including alternative prayer space.

--Better bathrooms.

--An updated kitchen. CBI is hosting a growing number of functions with food, highlighting our aging kitchen's weaknesses.

--Storage. Almost everyone complained about the lack of storage which complicates the use of shared space.

Better lighting, sound system, and general aesthetic appeal.

Office space.

Some of the requests envisioned expanded use of the space. This was true about a new social hall (as mentioned above) with greater rental possibilities and also an expanded kitchen that could be adequate to rent to kosher caterers as a source of revenue.

II. New programs requiring new staff and space

On another level several of the educators envisioned new programs that would require both staff and space as we endeavor to meet current interests and demands.

Gan Keshet staff believe that there is demand for a new toddler program, which we currently do not offer. Many families with one toddler and one pre-school child look for an institution that can accommodate both ages. They feel they could run a quality toddler program in addition to the current preschool. Gan Keshet has remained a good program and financially viable but has not grown in any significant way. It will be important to discuss how important an expanded preschool is to the future of the synagogue.

Alma and Abundance Farm have both seen growth in the last four years and see great possibilities for further expansion. If properly resourced, Abundance Farm can become a kind of Jewish community center that will play a central role in the life of the Northampton Jewish community for generations, drawing out hundreds of unaffiliated and under-affiliated Jews, making CBI increasingly attractive and relevant to young families, while adding meaning to the Jewish lives of those already involved in Jewish communal life. In addition, Rabbi Jacob believes that Abundance Farm could be a national center for Jewish environmental stewardship education, training, and activism, drawing participants from across the country to take part in summer internships, gap-year programs and professional development. They are hoping to hire an outreach person who can develop a robust program for attracting new families. They envision someone who can harness the interest and energy of the many families that come for special events, but need targeted attention to become more fully involved in our larger community.

One widely discussed issue is offering a **wider range of adult education offerings**. The CBI Café has been a great success, as has been the series of Shabbat guest speakers and occasional scholars in residence. (There will be expanded offerings in the 2017-18 year). But over the course of our conversations with committee and individuals there was a widely heard call for a comprehensive adult program that is predictable and runs on a regular schedule. This too would require some staffing to develop and implement an ongoing curriculum.

III. Capital Needs

There are four options for dealing with our need to improve our existing facilities, as well as accommodate new programs.

1. Renovate our existing building within the same envelope. The building subcommittee of Alan Berkenwald and Joan Schafer developed a series of proposals for renovating and rearranging our building.
2. Renovate our existing building but add an addition to accommodate new space needs. It would be possible add a small addition to the back (toward LGA) of our current building.
3. Acquire the city's Water Building adjacent to Abundance Farm and renovate it. The City does intend to sell the building in the near future. Recently, a small group of us met with Mayor Narcewicz on May 17 to discuss the city's plans and to express our interest in examining the plans and the feasibility of reusing the building for any of our various needs.
4. Build a completely new CBI to accommodate our vision of the synagogue for the next half century.

Concluding Observations and Recommendations

CBI is in the rare position of being a synagogue that is growing, has a stable financial situation (including a carefully stewarded endowment), and an engaged membership and growing group of Jews who are participating in the synagogue's activities. While many synagogue community's are folding, or merging, or reeling from one financial crisis to the next, CBI is in the enviable position of considering who to grow and at the same deepen our spiritual, educational, and activist commitments.

Our recommendations come out of the conversations we have had, and the following observations:

--CBI must expand its range of spiritual opportunities to appeal to the wide range of backgrounds of our members.

--To grow, CBI must consider the way that younger families imagine being a part of a synagogue community. The overwhelming response to events such as the Hanukah party, the fall farm festival, and high holiday musical services for children and families suggest that there is great interest in what the synagogue community offers, but that prayer services are not the entry point.

--We must build a continuum of learning from the youngest children to the most senior of our members. There is a strong craving for adult education that we should honor.

--Finally, CBI members are remarkably engaged in a panoply of activities to improve the world. Increasingly, our members see a powerful tie between their Judaism and their

activism. Programs and capital plans should support the education, the organizing, the public meetings around important social justice issues that are a growing part of the life at CBI.

Next Steps

1. The Long-Term Planning working group believes that for the continued development of the synagogue, expansion of our most innovative projects, and for attracting new members over the long-term, we must engage in a major capital campaign for new spaces and new programs.
2. In the coming months (starting with Annual Meeting), we must hold meetings to share the findings of the long-term planning group and gather a consensus around a plan by the end of the summer or early fall.
3. At the same time, we need to raise sufficient funds (approximately \$40,000) to conduct a feasibility study for the use of the Water Building, as well as renovations or expansion of our existing synagogue building. While this is a not an insignificant expense, it is critical to do before launching a capital campaign.
4. We must develop a plan – perhaps a fundraising professional -- to determine both the capacity of the community to contribute to a capital program, as well as explore foundation sources to support our innovative programs such as Abundance Farm.

Sincerely,

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