

2024 Annual Meeting Q and A

Annual Meeting: June 23, 2024

Recording of Answers: July 11, 2024

Hello everyone, beautiful B'nai Havurah community. This is Dave Gordon, of course, your chair of our board of trustees, and I'm here to answer some questions. Thank you everyone who submitted questions at our annual meeting, and also thank you for trying out this new system of doing Q&A.

I know you're getting your answers a little bit after the meeting, but we felt it was important that the whole community had a chance to ask questions, not just those at the meeting. And additionally, we had tons to get through and share at the annual meeting, and we knew we wouldn't have time to get to everyone's questions and get out of the building in a reasonable time. So we wanted to ensure we answered everyone's questions.

So this is the route we're taking. I hope it works for everyone. Note that I'll also be transcribing this video, and we'll be posting that alongside, so everyone can have a chance to view it or read it, whatever works for you.

So let's get started. First set of questions, all are involving kind of the building project.

Question number one: how will we use the Ohio space during the remodel?

The short answer is we won't.

The Ohio Street site, B'nai East, will be for the most part unavailable for approximately two months during the construction. During that time, we'll be increasing our usage of Highlands Church, B'nai West for programming, and our staff will be doing a lot of working from home for day-to-day things when there's not programming or events going on.

Question number two, what is the total cost of the remodel?

We're still finalizing the contract and whatnot, but we're estimating somewhere between \$215,000, that might potentially get as high as \$250,000. We hope to have that finalized contract shortly and have a more exact figure. Of course, we are planning for contingencies, which commonly do arise during any building project.

Question number three, will the board share a copy of the new plan of the B'nai East renovation?

Again, we're waiting on the final contract to sign, which will have the exact scope of what's being planned, but the short answer is yes. We will put up a summary that includes highlights and an overview that includes the rough floor plan and the changes that are being made. We probably won't post the full contract and all the architectural drawings, but certainly a summary and an overview.

If there's additional questions, either members of the board or the building

committee will be certainly happy to get you more detail if there's things you want more information about.

Question number four, what is the meaning of right-angled ducts that will be installed in the sanctuary ceiling?

The right angles on the eight ducts, the venting, that will allow for a quieter return of air from our HVAC system into the sanctuary. This right-angled ducting was one of the primary recommendations from the acoustic study that we had done to improve the acoustics of the room.

Without knowing too much more detail, again, it's right angles on our HVAC ducting that's going to allow for quieter airflow and improved acoustics.

Question number five, what will the flooring in the sanctuary be?

The flooring will be laminated vinyl tile. We're going to be working with our contractor using his connections to find the highest quality at the best cost that works in our budget, and also making sure we're keeping an eye out to utilizing non-toxic substances.

The flooring will be the same throughout spaces where flooring is going, obviously except for the areas where there'll be a rug or carpeting.

Question number six, what are the details of the kitchen plans?

The exact specifications are being finalized by the architects who are doing up the drawings for the purpose of getting our permits, but essentially the plan is for the kitchen to be fairly similar to what it looks like currently. We will have two refrigerators, a sink, a dishwasher, microwave, ice machine, and ideally shooting for both a stove with a hood that can cook food on top as well.

We're finalizing and seeing if that fits in our budget and is allowed with permitting. We are going to be checking, or let me actually pause there, go on to the next question.

Question number seven, will the appliances be energy efficient?

The building committee's checking on that.

They've looked at appliances, believe they're energy efficient, but need to do a final confirmation, and we'll make that a priority. The appliances have not been purchased yet, so that's certainly something that they can prioritize.

Question number eight, when will the library books be removed for construction? Note the Saturday morning Tanakh class wants to make sure that books are available to them during the construction.

So the books will be packed up and moved certainly before the project begins. We actually have some volunteers already who are wanting to start working on that project, and that volunteer coordinator is going to assist the moving company. And so sometime in the next couple weeks, we're going to have either the volunteer or someone from the office reach out to folks in the Tanakh study group.

They will need pack up the books that they want to have available to them throughout the duration of the project, and they'll be able to hold on to those for the whole project. But the rest of the library will be packed up and relatively unaccessible during the time of the construction, and even leading up to it as we make preparations. But any books, either the Tanakh group or other groups need available, they should reach out to the office now and be connected with the coordinator who's helping with the library packing up.

Number nine, question number nine, will the building property improvement include exterior attention? The front entrance and parking lot question mark. It is very important as it will improve presentation and increase respect of the property and increase safety.

So I think that's a great point.

Myself, along with many others, agree that our exterior needs attention. The current building proposal, what the building committee is working on, and what we're working with the contractor to finalize a contract with and move forward is working on the interior only. That was prioritized initially.

However, as we've done budgeting and looking at finances from our building fund and previous building pledges to make this project happen, we've been doing our budgeting, so we have leftover monies in this building fund that can then be used for exterior improvements as well as potential improvements over at B'nai West. So the current plans do not include exterior improvements, but we've essentially been saving money to make exterior improvements part of this effort as well. Initially, we were trying and hoping we might be able to get the building project done before high holidays.

Obviously, that's not going to happen. Now that the project is going to happen a little later in the year, once we get our contract signed and have the budget and the project costs more clearly delineated, we might be able to start work on some assessment and decisions about the exterior. I'd just say if there are folks who want to do some work on that, have opinions, or want to help get estimates and take on a project such as that, please reach out to me or someone else from the board.

All right, question number 10, and these kind of lumped in kind of talking about the general community or membership.

So question number 10, is B'nai going to make an effort to facilitate new havurot or the expansion of existing havurot?

Yes, that's the answer, but I'll expand. We've actually been working on this some.

We had listening sessions in May and June with current members who are in havurot right now, and we're working on digesting what we've gleaned from these and highlighting things that we want to incorporate in our future plans. Next, we're going to be having a session in late August or early September, right after the rabbi returns from her vacation's / mini sabbatical. We're going to have listening sessions

at that time for folks who are not currently in havurot.

Whether you're a new member or a longstanding member, if you're not in havurot, those listening sessions are going to be so we can hear from you and understand your goals and priorities and things like that.

With all that being said and with the work that's already being done and the discussions we've had with many folks, this fall or certainly by the end of the year, we intend to be able to create, we think, one, two, or even potentially three new havurot, and also plan to roll out a clear process for how people can join an existing havurot. We're excited that this extra attention we hope will lead to some successful new havurot being created and strengthening of some of our current havurot.

Question number 11, if folks want to join a havurot, can there be a path for new members to meet and have the opportunity to discuss this option? In addition to this question, this person had a suggestion that we put together, like an interest fair or a job fair.

First, a lot of this addressed in the previous question for new members to meet and discuss the option to join a havurot. In a moment, I'll get to a couple questions about new members as well, so be able to expand on that.

The interest of some type of interest fair, job fair, I like, not just potentially for havurot, but it might be something where interest groups, committees, the board, havurot, you know, all be able to be available, so to speak, answer questions and see where people have interest. So, it's an interesting idea, something that we'll look into and see if that can be a reality.

Question number 12, are we planning orientation meetings for the new members?

Yes, yes we are.

These will be happening in the fall, and as we learn from these orientation meetings, which we really have not had in potentially years, we're going to learn from those and then certainly make it a priority to continue. I suspect these new sessions won't look exactly like they did decades ago. I don't think the plan is to have these sessions be mandatory, or they're not just going to kind of prioritize kind of what is reconstructionism in havurot.

We're going to kind of look at big picture and see really what the needs and education for new folks are, and obviously have a lot of ways for them to interact with each other. So, we don't know exactly what these orientation meetings are going to look like, but they will be starting back up in the fall, and like many things, if this is something you value and want to make valuable for our growing number of new members, please reach out to the office to participate, because we want them to not only meet each other, but to learn from folks who have already been in our community.

Question 13. How can we get new members to meet other new members? Lots of ways. There are lots of ways. So first, we are going to be having a new member Shabbat on September 7th, so keep that date in mind. I mentioned we're

already going to be having a new member orientation this fall, where new members will be able to connect with each other. So those are a couple specific areas where new members will be able to meet each other, but really the best way, in my opinion at least, for new members and members in general to meet each other is to come to stuff, come to Shabbat, come to other programming, and especially for long standing folks in the community, whether it's been two years, three years, five years, or 55 years, attend programming and introduce yourselves to people you haven't met. Existing members are really a crucial link to help connect new members.

The more people we all meet, we can connect people together. So really showing up for stuff and coming to services and programming for both new and prior long standing members is crucially important. We're also highlighting new members with short biographies in our communications and on the website.

So others, really anyone in the community, but especially other new members, they can kind of identify people that they have shared interest with and maybe reach out to them and whatnot. So those are just some of the ways, some specific programming that's new member focused happening this fall. But again, coming to stuff and connecting and introducing yourself and making connections with other new members is crucial.

Question 14, what desires for youth education and involvement have parents expressed? Are there any plans to start a school? And then there's just a note, it's very encouraging to learn of the enthusiasm and growth of the youth program.

I would agree. I'm so excited to see all the work that Hannah and many others have done, see the growth of youth and families with young children and young adults and whatnot.

But let me get to specifics to answer the question. So we have kind of a diverse range of asks from parents here at B'nai Havurah. Some of them wish there was a more critical mass of kids, the same age as their children. So it brings us to kind of a conundrum. Do we create the programming and hope kind of people will come and that critical mass will eventually happen? Or do we kind of find all the people first and then kind of create the programming based on the critical mass that we have? So it's a little bit of a balancing issue and because we can't just snap our fingers and have 12 fifth graders. So it's a little bit of a challenge.

Hannah's been up to that challenge and is doing great work. Right now, our largest concentration of children and families with children is in the youngest children. So most of our robust programming is really focused around Tot Shabbat and providing child care at our services and other programming.

So since that's where we've had the biggest growth of children, our programming has kind of prioritized that group right now. And also, as we hope, as that group grows, we can evolve to meet the needs based on what they're looking for as their children grow into more elementary years and whatnot. We also have a few teenagers and people under the age of 30 that have either been part of the community and completed their B'mitzvah's as well as folks joining the community in this young adult population. So we're focusing on creating more options for them

currently as well.

The Youth and Family Engagement Committee, which was formerly known as the Youth Education Committee, is made up of parents and their kids range from about a year and a half to age 16. And this group meets once a month and they work through kind of and discuss what the needs of the young people that we have in our community.

This committee also previously held a youth education summit where families with children came and discussed their needs. And it was determined based on that summit and other discussions that we've been having with families that a school right now is not in B'nais immediate future. There was not a desire from parents to have a traditional school and really instead wanted us to offer more hands-on family programming that engages young people in Judaism and kind of meets them where they're at.

So we're going to kind of continue to follow the guidance of those on the committee as well as those in our parent community to kind of guide the programs we create moving forward. So that's kind of the update there on our youth and family. I hope that answers your question.

Next category is, I guess, better described as staffing.

Question 15. Will there be someone hired to replace Debbie Goodman?

Well, first off, Debbie's irreplaceable.

But thankfully, we only need to replace her as an employee. We don't have to replace her as a congregant. We look forward to seeing her.

But what Debbie's done is remarkable and is amazing work. So much has changed in terms of our community's needs since Debbie was brought on. And so really, right now, we're just kind of in the assessment stage.

We are looking at our current needs, the funding sources that was supporting Debbie's salary, and kind of seeing how that fits and analyzing that before moving forward with a specific kind of replacement. I think from the work we've done so far, the discussions we've had, I think there's a strong likelihood that we do bring another person onto our staff. It's likely they will be part-time, but their role will probably be different than specifically just what Debbie was doing. There may be programming support. There may be communication support. There may be support helping with volunteer organization.

We're trying to, again, make sure we don't just kind of "hire a replacement", but look at really what our needs are right now and whether we have the funding to support those needs. So again, we think it's valuable to take a big picture kind of holistic approach based on our needs now. And we're going to be talking about this pretty intently among staff and at the board level really in the next days to weeks. Next category is finances.

Question 16. Have we considered going back to regular membership dues rather than the gifts of the heart?

So at this point, or I guess, yes, we've considered it. We're always considering all the options, but at this point, we think it's too soon to give up on this new strategy. First, when we researched the system and moved forward with this plan, we learned from other communities who had done similar things. They said it really took a few years to kind of work the way they envisioned it to work.

So I think we're still early in this process and we're certainly not giving up on this strategy. And at least personally, I think it remains a viable strategy, but we are still working to analyze the data that we're collecting to help us adapt and evolve this new dues process. Like any big change, we want to give it time before we can really know if it's meeting our financial goals.

We've done some work and some analysis and we've identified some themes, however, so I can make a few comments just about what we've noticed with our switch from traditional dues to annual gifts of the heart. First thing is that we've learned we really need to improve how we communicate our annual gifts of the heart policy. We find we're still explaining to members that gifts of the heart is this new evolution of what were once called dues and it's taking some time for people to get it.

We've really struggled to get everyone to promptly renew their annual gift of the heart each year. Just for an example, it is now mid-July as I record this and there are a substantial number of those in our community for whom we haven't yet received a 2024 annual gifts of the heart pledge. These are people who we strongly believe consider themselves active and part of this community.

Again, it's a communication process. We really are going to continue to try to improve how we message and help people understand the annual gifts of the heart model as a replacement for dues. Our goal in 2025 is to really work on this so we can try to have heard from everybody and have everybody who's continuing in our community make their pledge by April rather than spending a lot of legwork throughout the whole year kind of playing catch-up.

It's really important for everyone in the community to respond to renewal requests and also just remind those in your kind of B'nai micro-community to make it a priority. Our budgeting and sustainability depends on it. Kind of a long-winded answer but right now we feel that the gifts of the heart change is going to be successful but still needs some work especially on communication.

There's still a priority that we hope people in our community will give it one of the recommended levels in our materials but acknowledge that that's not feasible for everyone. We have robust programming and a lot that this community is bringing into the world and certainly annual gifts of the heart are the most important way that we financially support all that we're doing here at B'nai.

Question 17. Is the gifts of the heart donation tax deductible?

So first standard disclaimer, talk to your accountant, talk to your tax professional. I am an internal medicine physician so exact details on what's deductible is out of my scope but even out of the office's scope you always need to talk to your tax

professional.

That being said, yes. Presumably yes. We are a 501c3 charitable organization and to my understanding dues that you pay such as your annual gifts of the heart are considered tax deductible but once again I would confirm with your tax professional and not solely take my word for it.

Question 18. Oh, new category. This next category is kind of safety and security.

Question 18. In addition to the security guard we have hired since October 7th, what are we actually doing about security and safety?

So over the past year we've done several things to foster increased safety and security in the community. We certainly recognize there are many more items on our to-do list as we kind of optimize this and it's certainly a high priority. Just a quick snapshot of some of the things we've done in the past year.

We've created guides for emergency health situations that might arise. Thank you Ben Honigman for assisting with that. So these guides are available to staff and congregants as well if there's an emergency and they're very bullet points do this this and this for common health emergencies that could occur.

We had an on-site CPR and health emergency training for our staff. I think there was a small number of congregants there as well. We had a limit so it wasn't open to the entire community but they had on-site training for CPR and health emergencies.

We've had an automatic defibrillator installed on-site.

I personally participated in some education from Reconstructing Judaism regarding safety and security and have been part of discussions with other congregation leaders and leaders from Reconstructing Judaism to just understand what other communities are doing and what some of the best practices are. Many of us have been reviewing Reconstructing Judaism's guide to safety and security which gives essentially a blueprint not for what you have to do because every community is different but really a blueprint for things communities should be considering.

As alluded to in the question, we've hired an armed security guard for events that typically have more than about 25 people. That's still the case and we're continuing that. I will say there is some debate as to the actual safety value as well as the inclusiveness of having armed security and so that's a discussion we're continuing to have but right now that plan is in place and not planning on being changed at the moment.

Additionally, our staff alongside some volunteers and also security professionals from Jewish Colorado created a comprehensive list of a wide range of interior and exterior building security updates that we're attempting to get federal and or state funding to be able to implement.

Unfortunately, we did not receive funding for 2024. That being said, we're continuing to explore whether any outside funding for these improvements are an option in 2024. We certainly will reapply for this government funding next year. We're still looking to explore funding for the bulk or for the wide range of these

improvements this year. That being said, at the board level, we are now having discussions if and how we might be able to at least make some of these improvements with our current resources, financial resources. So I had asked Laura to connect with the staff, which she did and got feedback from staff about any safety concerns they had and what priorities in terms of improvements were most important to them.

So we're certainly taking that information into strong consideration. And again, we're gonna be looking really in the next couple of weeks as well as ongoing, but starting now to see what's realistic with our resources that we can implement as some of these improvements. We won't be able to do the full scope that we were hoping to do with government funding, but we're prioritizing and seeing whether some of those updates can be implemented in the very short term.

As far as safety and security, there's a few other things coming in the future, short term future.

We're gonna be having an event in the next couple months that is to hear and listen, but also discuss kind of what fears about safety people have in our community, as well as kind of the actions they feel are necessary to alleviate those fears. We've learned we have a very wide range of opinions, big shock. And so we really want to hear from people about what their concerns about safety and security are, what causes them to be fearful, and see where we can explore and find some shared goals and values and just help the board and kind of guide our decision-making as we move forward.

Also at that event, we hope people who are really interested and in kind of safety and security and wanna be more involved with these types of projects show up and let us know that they'd like to help moving forward. Again, we're gonna have a variety of ongoing safety and security measures and projects happening. And we'd love to have volunteers help implement those. It allows us to do it in a faster and more cost-effective way. So at that event, in addition to listening and discussing, we'll be able to collect names for folks who really wanna work on these safety and security measures moving forward.

We also plan to have some in-person safety training for congregants. It's possible we'll do that after Shabbat, even though it's Shabbat, it's when we have the largest kind of concentration of regular attendees there. And so it kind of makes sense when we do that. We're gonna be talking with our security consultants and set up some in-person onsite training, ideally both at B'nai East and B'nai West. Additionally, we hope to distribute some videos that cover some of that same information, but obviously not as potentially connecting as in-person training, but some videos that congregants can watch at home that cover a wide range of safety and security issues. So those are the things we've done and that we're expecting to do over the next several weeks and months.

I'll add one other thing right now that comes up in every kind of safety and security recommendations we get from professionals. One of the most important things we can do is say hello, get to know people, get to know anyone that doesn't look

familiar, say hello to anyone that doesn't look familiar. Most of the time, you're just gonna be meeting someone in your community that you don't know, and that's a huge priority. But safety starts with saying hello to people, and we can start that right now. And per, again, security professionals, that's one of the most valuable steps we can take.

Question 19, will we be doing some training for the community? And if so, when?

Just to reiterate, I mentioned this just in the last question, we hope to have in person training by the end of the summer or early into the fall, probably initially at B'nai East, and then hopefully shortly followed by an in-person training at B'nai West.

And again, I'll just add, if these are things you'd like to be involved with, please reach out now. I mentioned the event we'll be having, discussion and listening session coming up, but please reach out now. We obviously have active things we're paying attention to now, and certainly with high holidays coming up, we're gonna need a range of volunteers to help with kind of comfort of community members. So please reach out.

Next category, just kind of put into the general board question.

Question 20, why wasn't Ron Lepoff mentioned in the list of positions who were chairs of the board?

Specifically, because it was talking about positions in a row.

So Rabbi Katie was talking about chazakah, which is when something happens three times in a row. So, Ben as past chair, myself as current chair, and Alan Lazaroff as chair elect, make up three physicians in a row who were chairs of the board. So that's why Rabbi Katie mentioned those three in a row.

We've had other physicians including Ron as prior chairs, but again, Ron wasn't part of that three times in a row. He was close, but Ethan Waldman's term kind of interrupted what would have otherwise been a run of four straight chairs that were medical docs. But again, it was just Rabbi Katie when she mentioned that was talking about how many physicians in a row. And so that was Ben, myself and Alan.

Question 21, will the board be interested or willing to participate in a landscape day with the landscape group? This way, they would better understand what it means to have an entrance that is welcoming and an example of supporting Tikkun Olam and creating a sustainable local environment. Also to better understand what is needed to accomplish that process by committed volunteers and what is needed by contracting out.

The short answer is possibly. I guess I need to talk with them. I have it on my list to discuss at board meetings. I certainly myself am interested and willing and hope others are as well. And so I'll be discussing it with other board members and I'll be reaching out to some of the leaders of our landscape or sustainability interest group if we can make that a reality.

I think one thing I've heard and witnessed myself is just even with some necessary

updates to the building on the outside, the work that was done by the landscaping group is really quite phenomenal and really enhances the front of the building.

So lots of appreciation, certainly for me, other board members as well. And I really think the whole community appreciates that. But I will be connecting with the board to ask that question. I can't speak or guarantee for them, but I myself am happy to participate and hope we can get a group of board members and even other community members as well.

That is all the questions that we were given. So I hope that answers them for you.

Of course, if the answers were incomplete or you need more information, please send a note to the office and we can figure out a way to get further clarification. And I think we might even do this, at least a couple of times a year, not just at the annual meeting, just do an update where folks can send in questions over a couple of week period and get some information out. I like making sure what we're doing is transparent. And the more you guys know, the more you can participate and be involved. So have a wonderful day or evening or night whenever you are watching this. And I look forward to seeing everybody soon.