



## Temple Beth Abraham

25 Leroy Avenue  
Tarrytown, NY 10591  
Phone 914-631-1770  
Fax 914-631-7872

David K. Holtz, *Rabbi*  
Margot E.B. Goldberg, *Cantor*  
Stuart P. Skolnick, *Director of Temple Operations*  
Pamela J. Barkley, *Director of Education*  
Dr. Paul R. Siegel, *Rabbi Emeritus*

## TEMPLE BETH ABRAHAM BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

### Minutes

**Tuesday, July 1, 2014**

*(Reminder: Next Meeting – August 5, 2014 @ 7:30 PM)*

**Attendees:** Herb Baer, Alan Berkson, Neil Bruckner, Karen Filler, Cantor Margot Goldberg, Steven Gosset, Jennifer Greenspoon, , Liza Karsten, Jodie Lane, Glen Markowitz, Rick Misrok, Mark Polisar, Jen Povman, Loren Ratner, Mel Savitch, Michael Sonkin, Stuart Skolnick, Mark Stein, Risa Swersey, Jamie Wilson, Marla Peers

Meeting Commenced at 7:33PM.

We were reminded of our brand new tradition of giving tzedakeh to be used when we are asked to donate for a gift, etc.

*Invocation* - Cantor Margot: The Presbyterian church voted to divest. Protest next week planned at Macy's vs SodaStream. The Supreme Court voted this week -- what the future will hold remains to be seen. Yesterday, we prayed for the three boys who were abducted **Naftali Fraenkel**, **Gilad Sha'ar**, and **Eyal Yifrach**. Today we mourn their murders.

This was not the invocation that Margot would have liked to give at our first meeting of the year, but it was what was appropriate. The work we do here is also work we do in the world and it is sometimes difficult. Here we sit and we have work to do and new members to greet and people who have shifted positions and need guidance. Ken ya'he ratzon.

Introduction of members: We went around the room and introduced ourselves.

Approval of Minutes: Minutes were approved with corrections.

### **New Business**

#### *Proposed Roof Repair or Replacement of Roof over south portion of building*

There are two structures, side-by-side. Our building is the single structure and the roof that we are looking to work on is at the bottom of the building (it's the upper roof), encompassing from the doorway into the classrooms to the front of the building (Cantor and Rabbi's offices). They are putting together a proposal to redo this portion only and

they will come back with a proposal next month. The air conditioning is old and to redo the roofs would also require that the air conditioners be removed. The estimated cost including the air conditioners is about but under \$100,000. Currently, the building fund has about \$500,000, so we do have the funds to do it.

Mel asked if anyone has spoken with the temple renovations and it has nothing to do with the roof. That money will be left to redo the social hall.

Asked if we might consider changing the configuration of the roof to a pitched roof, Neil agreed that this is something he will look into. From a financial standpoint, we won't get any tax credit to install solar panels but there would be an energy savings. Rick said that perhaps we might consider finding out what that cost would be.

To reply to Glen's question, we need to replace approximately 20% of the roof and Glen noted that the cost was outrageous. Should we do more of the roof and Neil thought that we didn't need to do more of it.

Jen asked about the amount of money remaining in the building fund and Neil indicated that the building fund remains fairly high, drawing from new members. Loren asked if we have any big ticket items.

Herb noted that it is possible that we might want to do a complete renovation if we raise a huge amount of money with our capital campaign but we need to decide if we should bite the bullet and make the renovation in light of this possibility. Next month we will make that determination based on the information we have.

*Connected Congregation Report* – Alan: He explained that we are involved in a few different initiatives. We have applied for and received a grant from the UJA. We have a consultant we can work with who will help us learn how to do things better as an organization. We've also held parlor meetings and conducted a survey sponsored by UJA (Measuring Success), as well as moving forward with our fundraising initiative. When we started with the dues-to-donations, the task force thought we had a communications issue but now see that it's as much how we deliver services to our community. Anyone wishing to look at the survey results is welcomed to ask him. The survey and parlor meetings both have indicated that we have to look at what our vision is. We are clarifying how we need to move forward. We need to be less of a "lifecycle factory." This is typical throughout the US. If we want to get past that, what will be there to replace it; this is the essence of our struggle. We don't know how to connect with other adults in our community and that is what we must work on. A lot of groundwork has helped us understand what our congregation is thinking, what we like and don't like, and now have to move forward and find our vision. We need the support of our congregation, our leadership, and clergy. The Connected Congregations is now a two-year program and our team consists of six, with the intention of bringing in some others. Alan, Liza, Jen Povman, the Rabbi and Cantor, Melissa Baer (Stuart was last year,

but it was not the best use of his time; and Gayle Aaron was on it briefly). They will invite a few younger congregants as their voices also need to be heard and represented. No formal decisions have yet been made (Liza). This team will work with a business consultant from the grant. There has been a Synergy Report which was not specific to TBA or Westchester County, but rather a regional report about the state of affairs, following the Pew Survey, about levels of engagement. The grant opportunity came afterwards. Liza said that each of the six chosen congregations was assigned a coach and that is our next phase. They just met with her and their next conversation will focus on our visioning process. Their next meeting is July 15<sup>th</sup> and they hope to be able to tell us more at our next meeting. The Rabbi will be more involved in the process, bringing his own vision to the group.

*Executive Summary of Survey Results and Look Forward on 2014-2015 activity:* The results were not flattering. We were poorly rated on a variety of issues. We want to be rated as “love”; there was a great deal of “like,” and only a lot of “love” for the Cantor, but not for much else. Liza added that one of the major qualities that made the Cantor get high ratings was her warmth. We are not making our congregants feel warm and fuzzy, or connected (Liza) and if we cannot feel as if they matter and that their ideas and participation matter, we won’t be able to move to our dues-to-donations model, we won’t be able to have a successful campaign, etc.

Herb added that the best recruiters are people who really love what we are doing and spread that by word of mouth.

Liza said that one of the things they hope to do next month is to invite all of the board to jump into the process with them, allowing us to come out with a vision statement about who we are and who and what we strive to be.

The group decided that this was, in fact, worth the time and energy and were happy that the UJA agreed to add another year to the grant (this being the second).

One last thing that Alan added is that what people came looking for is not what they stayed for. Many came for connectedness and stayed for the services. Alan said that this provides us with a great opportunity. At the end of next year, that survey will be resubmitted to us and we hope that the results will be much better.

In response to a comment by Risa about our continual quest for positive change, Liza noted that this time, we have hard data which will make our work much more precise. This is our real opportunity to make significant changes to our congregation. Risa was just concerned that people might get left behind and that we should get to them so that they don’t leave.

*Annual Programming Theme –Jodie:* This came from her desire to reinitiate the meetings of the committee heads and to cross-plan our programming so that we aren’t

planning programs in a vacuum. This is easier to do if we have an organizing method that we are working around. What makes people “stick” at Temple? Jodie always thought it was the community and the people; this is certainly true, but in speaking with others, she sees at least one additional avenue, and that’s having their talents and abilities used and appreciated. That is something that we don’t always do. We don’t always make them feel great about being here. They need to feel valued and valuable. Jodie proposes that, when we start to plan our events, we reach out and then “validate.” Not all of us do that automatically. As we go into the committee chair meetings, we might keep in mind that we should reach out and validate. If we build this into our events, it will become more automatic.

Also, we might not have to have meetings every month, but we should get started. Perhaps our first one will be scheduled for a Sunday mid-morning. Jodie will also be available for us to come to her for advice.

*Renewal of standing committees – Herb:*

These are in the bylaws and Herb thought they should be in the minutes:

Renovations (Randy Carter)

Dues-to-Donations Task Force (Allison Fine)

Security (Bob Zinman)

Special Arrangements (Michael Karnes)

Legal (Howard Jacobowitz)

We are working to make volunteer coordination more organized (Sharon DeLevie); Melissa Baer is trying to do likewise for the Caring Committee

Israel Committee: is a standing committee, however it’s not in the bylaws so it’s not included. Chaired by Marla Peers

*Proposal for Discount for Auto-pay of Dues – Herb:* Herb received a proposal from a congregant on the dues-to-donations committee having to do with the budget that we just passed regarding credit card fees. That committee person believes that dues-to-donations transition, should it happen, would be more successful if we had more congregants pay by auto-pay, either by credit card or checking account EFT/ACH. Many businesses include this passive arrangement as part of their business plan. The incentive to offer people to change how they go about paying their current dues might be to waive that credit card fee or to give a discount to people using an automatic draft from their checking accounts. Bills will be sent out shortly and if we want to make a change, we need to act now. Last year, according to Mel, it cost us between \$7,000 and \$10,000 and the potential is there to cost us over \$20,000. Mel said that this should have come up at the congregational meeting and the person who made this suggestion should have made it then.

Risa added that this might be irrelevant should we go to a dues-to-donation platform.

Karen suggested, and Glen agreed, that we should actually encourage people to use automatic deductions from their checking accounts.

Glen suggested that we get some professional advice to determine if we will go with the fundraising campaign and dues-to-donation. He wonders if these will be compatible with each other, launching at the same time. Liza said that right now it's a little premature, especially given that we don't even know what kind of campaign we will even run. They may, as Liza suggested, be complementary, but Glen just wanted us to keep this in mind as a possibility. Discussion continued with varying opinions. This remains to be determined.

Herb ended discussion by saying that our conversation indicates that we are taking no action right now. He did add that many people really do like incentives.

Steve noted that he had a fundamental issue with the penalty and that if we wanted to incentivize people, we might offer something for those who do not pay by credit card. Again, conversation was very active. Jen Greenspoon did note that some people actually pay by credit card because they cannot afford to pay the entire amount and are paying interest on those payments, sometimes for many years; she added that an additional 3% charge will be further hurting those people.

No motion was made to vote on the proposal.

*Ritual Reminders* – Herb: Irene sent around a Sign-up Genius and Herb has a sheet that he is sending around for us to sign up to be at events. It is important for the TBA community to see us at events and services. At the oneg, we should make an effort to be a greeter to make people feel welcome. In the summer, when we don't have b'nei mitzvah, we don't have people to light candles and say Kiddush, so we've been invited to sign up for that, as well.

Liza added that when we get an automated sign-up, it doesn't even say Irene's name. She thought it should come from the Rabbi, inviting his board and congregants, and that this sets a very different tone. She is suggesting this to the Ritual committee to consider how we can send this message. Herb doesn't know the logistics, but we will see if we can make it work.

Herb also has Aliyah Nomination Forms for the High Holyday services. The deadline date should be ignored. No one knows the important people who should be honored as well as those of us in the room. Please consider nominating people.

*Preview of August Agenda item: What is the role of the Board?* This is one of the items Herb is considering we add to next month's agenda, but it will be tabled tonight. Are we the right number to be meeting; should we be meeting monthly? These are questions

to consider at a future meeting.

### **Old Business**

*Update on Sanctuary Ark Doors:* We have little information. All Herb knows is that the artist's mother or mother-in-law recently passed away and that this might impact when the doors will be complete or if they will be completed for the High Holydays.

**Financial Report** – Mel: At the annual meeting, Mel projected that we would not have a deficit. At this point, all of our deductions/expenses have come in and although the June numbers are not all in (our investment and dividend income; bank statement), it would seem that we have a \$10,000 surplus. In response to Margot's question, we paid \$15,000 this year to the URJ.

Mel found out that the \$500,000 donation was not even in our account and remained unreported in our financial statement. It was held temporarily in a separate account and now resides in its proper place.

### **Good and Welfare**

Announcements: Margot said that there were many simchas this year and that there will be others beginning in the fall. She conveys a thank you to Benjy Povman and his aunt; Leah Monack (including for leading tot Shabbat this Saturday); kol ha-kavod to Jodie, the Baers, and Jen Greenspoon for pulling it all together and to Pam for getting to the families)

Sharon Abner update: She has been our organist for 30 years; she suffered a stroke and ultimately moved, after being cleared medically, to a second rehab in Bethel, CT, closer to her community and support people. The stroke affected the left side of her body and she is making progress; she can now lift her left arm and independently move one of the fingers on her left hand. Her spirits are phenomenal and Margot is grateful to the community who has sent her cards. If we still want her address, please let Margot know. As well, there have been several different arms of the congregation who want to help raise money to help her as she is no longer able to earn a living. Margot is working on this.

Mark announced that today is Rabbi Allison's first day; he and Jen met with her today. Should we invite her to be at our meetings? The religious school director is the only member of senior staff who doesn't attend board meetings; do we want to invite her? There was agreement that we extend an invitation to Rabbi Allison. Mark Stein made a motion to invite Rabbi Allison and Liza seconded; all agreed.

Loren said that Member Services is looking for new members. If any of us is interested or knows of anyone who might be interested, please let her know. Mark said that the Board of Ed is also looking for new members, particularly families with younger children.

Jodie asked if we could have some sort of fair and it was noted that we have signups at opening day of religious school. We cannot make any determination here about how it might be handled on opening day this year; it's an issue for the Board of Ed. Loren noted that this should not be the only opportunity, as it reaches only a finite number of families.

Herb noted that people shy away from non-specific, open-ended commitments. He suggested that we actually figure out how best to market volunteer opportunities and reiterated that Sharon DeLevie is working on that.

Herb reminded the at-large trustees that each is expected to be on at least one committee.

Tikkun Olam is still looking for volunteers for the Midnight Run (contact is Jane Silverman).

The Spiritual Walk is on Sunday, July 13<sup>th</sup>.

Jodie's daughter, Leah, and Liza's daughter, Tess, were asked to participate in mechina at Kutz Camp.

Liza wanted to thank everyone for a meaningful moment at Installation and the beautiful gift from the board. She is grateful and very touched.

Stuart announced that for the first time in a long time, we will have a fully staffed operation. Toby Marrow, our former bookkeeper, is on board as our Administrative Assistant. She will be working 20 hours a week (flexible during the summer); during the fall, she will also be working on Sundays during school.

Stuart announced that his mother-in-law is celebrating her 94<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Benjy Povman is one of 150 students in the state to be admitted to the Skidmore NYS School of Orchestral Studies.

Rabbi has posted several things on Facebook about his trip with the Wisnik family in Poland. "Friend" Eva Wisnik for another view of the trip.

*Adjournment* Motion made by Steve to adjourn, seconded by Jen Greenspoon.  
Meeting adjourned at 9:46PM

Respectfully submitted,  
Marla Peers  
Recording Secretary