

BHBE General Board Meeting 4/27/23 @ 7:30 PM - In-Person at BHBE
Future of the Building

Meeting was called to order at 7:33 PM

Rabbi Crane gave his D'Var Torah.

Cynthia Lerner gave the introduction into the Future of the Building report. Community conversations were suggested. A drop in will be on Sunday, May 7th 9:30 AM to 10:30 AM. Feel free to ask questions.

Please see presentation and final report for more information.

Historically building was built for 1000 members. We now have fewer than 400 members.

Committee Members introduced themselves:

Harold Primack - Chair

Wayne Caplan

Arthur Braun

Greer Braun

Sheila Gideon

Adam Goldfarb

Michael Kahn

Jessica Littmann

Cynthia Lerner

Judy Levey

Bev Reinglass

Jim Stoller

Pathways were briefly discussed along with organization of the presentation.

Judy Levey - Congregation history

Bnai Emunah - 1953 over 1000 students - merged in 2004.

BHBE - 1958 - 360 current members - built for 1000 members.

Adam Goldfarb - Discussed the budget and projected financial issues.

Inflation is a major concern as well as the line of credit rate doubling as a result.

Revenues are decreasing. Costs are increasing.

Line of credit was pulled in December - earliest thus far.

Membership dues only cover half the budget. We need to be fair to members.

Sheila Gideon went over demographics.

Wilmette, Skokie, Glenview, Evanston, Chicago, Northbrook, Lincolnwood, Highland Park and Winnetka plus surrounding northern suburbs.

Bev Reinglass went over additional Jewish population demographics from “Jewish Chicago: Who We Are, A 2020 Population Study.” They’re generally decreasing in our area.

Harold Primack - gave overview of six options.

Michael Kahn went over Option 1 - Base Case - Retain existing building, continue to rent to BJE, only make necessary upgrades and modifications. 4 acres of land. 54,000 square feet.

Option 2 - Rent major portions of the building.

Harold Primack - Option 3: BHBE moves into the school wing of the building and sell the remainder of the building to a compatible institution that does not demolish it. Wall and parking would separate the buildings. Demolition price and upgrading the school wing will vary. Need to investigate feasibility and viability.

Jessica Littman - Option 4: Downsize and “mothball” the building. Still would need to heat and keep a roof maintained. Would not be worth it and not recommended.
Demolish part of the building. Would still need to remodel. Not recommended.

Wayne Kaplan - Option 5: Sell the building, lease or purchase a facility. Building is worth \$7.1 million from 2020 equals approximately \$130 a square foot.

A non-profit organization would pay the most. A residential developer would be the second option. Up to 23 single family homes could be built (or possibly townhomes to yield more profit). It would take a year to go through the Village of Wilmette’s processes.
It would be more expensive to move twice if we rented the entire facility or rented another one (rent would be high).
Zoning changes or variances must take place if we purchase a property.
A person or group of people could be equity partners.
Put together a Request for Proposal to qualified real estate firms (RFP)

Jessica Littman - Option 6: Tear down building and build a smaller facility that would be 12,000-15,000 square feet. Tear down would cost between \$300,000 or \$500,000.
Minimum \$3 million to \$5 million to construct a new facility.

Must read the final report over the next couple weeks.

Michael Kahn - Conclusion: Building is no longer financially viable.
Options 3 and 5 are the best options thus far.

Harold Primack - Recommendations:

Hold town hall meetings and discussion groups with congregants.

President to form a committee for options 3 and 5.

Consider every avenue that may contribute to long-term sustainability.

After input from congregants and professionals, put property on the market and look into options 3 and 5 depending on financial implications.

Discussion:

Gail Swerdlik - Undecided on what to do.

Robin Smulson - Concerned about Option 5 compared to Option 3. Should members stick around and those who go to the Academy? Will the community leave and go elsewhere? Option 3, the community will stick together.

Fran Diamond: Look towards the community, growth and opportunity/future. Not so much the building. There will still be challenges with changes. Lots of work to decide a path. It's very open-ended at this time. We need to bring everyone closer together.

Jay Goldstein: Referred to Page 5. Congregants are very well invested in this location. If we move, we might lose a significant number of people including more from the Academy. Area demographics matter. Very few new families in financial position yet to give large support. More established folks can keep it going longer as an established congregation. He'd like to see harder numbers to make an informed decision. Prices will keep going up. Must maintain membership base.

Fred Rosenwasser: 1964 Long-time congregant. Knows the neighborhood changed.

Gail Eisenberg: 1963 congregant. Grandmother a member since 1967. Need more historical photos from 1961 to 1971 of the original building.

Allison Kamen: Look at demographics. She does not want us to move away. Can we find something with less money and work? Academy improvements? Young families are moving in gradually from Chicago.

Jon Clemons: Joined in 2019. Oldest went to BJE and was invited to high holidays. Get more members from BJE.

Rochelle Leff: Member since 1968. Did we consider staying in the 1971 portion of the building instead and sell the Academy. Harold Primack said we'll study this option. Wayne Caplan stated demographics tell us we either need to be here or close by. A 3 mile radius was looked at from here. Option 3 - physical complication - requires us to hire a zoning attorney (pro bono?). Would the Village allow us. Need to hire architects and engineers.

Leah Buchbinder: Sits in office next to Chicago population folks. Data such as congregational demographics 50% are 70+. Joined us in 2017 after getting married. Chatter about selling the building and worries about the Kiddush spending/budget. We don't want to scare people away.

David Cohen: Real estate attorney and 2 year congregant. Works with community development and affordable housing. Grew up in Morton Grove at Northwest Suburban Jewish Congregation, which closed in 2007. It was painful to see it close. Ask the Jewish real estate developers if they can help us in an agreement.

Harold Primack thanked David Cohen for his ideas. Flexibility is key. We need professionals to take a closer look. Pursue options 3 and 5. Which option is better? Option 3 or Option 5 more attractive?

Larry Plawsky: There can be more opportunities such as merging, working together, etc.

Cynthia Lerner: Viable option within 2-3 years. Be mindful of what was discussed. Open to discuss options. Let people know about the report.

Susan Kaye: Member since 1995. Going forward, how are we going to put out something to the community/congregation? Cynthia: May 7th drop-in. Sign up for community conversations. Budget meeting on May 11th. Responsibility of the board is to make recommendations to the congregants. We represent the congregants and decide what's most viable.

Adam Goldfarb: We must be united to prevent fear.

Dan Meyer: Wants to digest report.

Harris Miller: Hopes the right decision is made. Our community is really important. Needs time to digest report.