

**JEWISH RECONSTRUCTIONIST CONGREGATION
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING
January 10, 2024**

Board Members Present: Luke Adams, David Block, Robin Byster, Edie Canter, Marie Davidson, Emily Harris, Nancy Katz, Rick Kulp, Gail Luxenberg, Irv Miller, Hanna Seltzer, Hannah Shearn, Chai Wolfman

Staff Present: Rabbi Rachel Weiss, Cantor Howard Friedland, Executive Director Micky Baer

- I. **Welcome, Agenda, and Call to Order – Hannah Shearn.** The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m.
- II. **Blessing/Covenant of Kavod Sicha – Board.**
- III. **D'Var Torah – Hannah**
- IV. **Minutes from November 1, 2023, and November 8, 2023 – Nancy Katz.** Motion to approve the 11/1/2023 and 11/8/2023 minutes. Motion made by Nancy, seconded by Marie. Vote on 11/1/2023 Minutes: 10 in favor, 0 opposed, 2 abstentions. **Motion passed.** Vote on 11/8/2023 Minutes: 12 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions. **Motion passed.**
- V. **Continued Security Hiring Motion – Hannah.** Hannah reported that the JRC Security Committee recommends that the Board approve funding to continue to hire Evanston Police Department personnel to provide security for Friday Shabbat services, Saturday Kehillah programming and services, and other additional services or programs based on expected turnout and public promotion that might fall outside of Shabbat. Micky and Rabbi Rachel reported that member response to the security has been generally positive, although some members have wondered why we use police and not private security in plain clothes. Rabbi Rachel has explained that we have confidence in the de-escalation training provided to the Evanston Police and that they have knowledge of our building. Many members also do not realize that the police presence outside JRC on Shabbat was something JRC paid for, and not part of general Evanston policing.

Reese reported on her inquires to outside security firms as a possible longer-term security option. She found that the JRC would not realize a savings because of the need for minimum booking hours and added fees for a security vehicle (which is included in the EPD cost) when using a private security firm.

The Board discussed the need to inform membership of the costs of the added security. There was agreement that we need to be transparent about our budget and to find

ways to educate our members as soon as possible about the increased costs of security. We discussed the possibility of a letter to the congregation and/or a blurb in the newsletter. The Board also discussed the possibility of an add-on membership fee for security that may be part of our FY25 budget plan.

A motion was made by Nancy and seconded by Luke to increase our FY24 budget by adding up to \$12,075 in expenses to cover hiring private security through June 2024, as needed. Vote: 12 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining. **Motion passed.**

- VI. By-Law Revisions – Emily, Nancy.** Emily gave the Board an update on the work of the Design Team 2.0. The design team was created to address two objectives in our strategic plan: 2.1, to create a robust system for connecting members to tasks, and 2.2, to recommend new structures for participation, leadership development, lay engagement, and bylaws changes. One subgroup of the Design Team is looking at how to motivate and encourage member engagement. The other subgroup is focusing on evaluating the Board’s pilot restructuring.

The goals of the pilot Board restructuring, which was instituted last fiscal year, were to fill gaps in programming and focus on sustainability and growth; to foster creativity, engagement, and collaboration through a team approach and with updated Board job descriptions; and to use Board meeting time efficiently. Certain Vice President positions were reconfigured, Board teams were created, and members at large were given specific tasks. The Design Team, in evaluating these changes and determining what infrastructure changes are needed, has surveyed immediate and past Board members, and has conducted interviews with Board members and other congregation leaders.

Based on their investigation, the Design Team workgroup is proposing bylaws changes. The guiding principles of the changes was to retain as much of the current bylaws as possible, as opposed to a complete rewrite, but to target changes that would increase the Board’s flexibility to respond to the changing needs of the congregation. Key areas of proposed changes include updating the congregation’s purpose statement, flexibility in size of the Board and in the Vice President roles and committee structure, and in the size and responsibilities of the governing team.

The next steps in this process will be to share the proposed changes with JRC’s past presidents and other interested members to obtain their feedback, and to bring the proposed amendments to the Board for discussion and a vote, which may take place either at the February or at the March Board Meeting.

- VII. Team Meetings – Board.** The Engagement and Programming Team and the Sustainability and Growth teams were directed to meet to address at least one of their major objectives, to determine realistic outcomes for 2024, and to think through the

steps necessary to obtain the outcomes. Based on these meetings, the Board Action Plan will be updated. At the next meeting, the Board will discuss adding an objective to the Action Plan to reaffirm JRC's commitment to dialogue on Israel/Palestine.

- VIII. Executive Director's Report – Micky Baer.** Micky reported that JRC has added a values section to the JRC website as part of the marketing plan. The budgeting process for FY25 is underway, and the Board has received updated budget projections for this fiscal year. Regarding membership, we are ahead of where we were last year at this time, with 10 additional memberships, and we have fewer resignations. We are also slightly ahead of last year in Kehillah enrollment. However, we budgeted optimistically for this fiscal year and may not hit our target for membership revenues.

The Board discussed membership dues. Micky reported that we have done better than we budgeted in the number of people paying more than the minimum in dues, but many new members have needed adjustments to dues and are paying less than the minimum membership amount. Rabbi Rachel and Micky remarked that membership dues and Kehillah costs are high for families with children, who may be struggling financially. New members are often shocked at the cost of joining a synagogue. We will take a closer look at the membership dues and adjustments as we budget for next year.

- IX. Consent Agenda – Rabbi, Cantor, and Board Members.**

Written reports were included in the Board's drop box for the meeting. Gail reported that Eli Shearn has agreed to be project manager for the Gala this coming year. Rick reported that Chai has been instrumental in preparing the marketing team report. Marie complemented Reese on the detail in her V.P of Administration report. Micky stated that our facilities manager will prepare a monthly report which she can share.

Rabbi Rachel presented her report orally. She has been spending a great deal of her time recently on Israel/Palestine issues, both at an administrative level and pastorally. She had 27 pastoral counseling sessions between November and January alone. She and Rabbi Andrea London have been advising Evanston school districts 65 and 202 on Israel/Palestine concerns, working with their teachers, school boards, and superintendents on how to manage the school climates and cultures. She also has been working actively with clergy from Evanston Interfaith Action to prepare education and programs on multi-cultural issues and Israel/Palestine issues. She finds that the rise in antisemitism has been destabilizing for many in the Jewish community. She is engaging with many individuals, including high school students, college students, and parents. She and Cantor Howard took 15 college students out to lunch over the winter break.

Rabbi Rachel reported that the new B'nai Mitzvah group has 26 adults, including 4 or 5 new member households, and she is working with 6 or 7 people converting to Judaism. She and Lauren Reeves are taking 9 JRC teens to Washington D.C. on a reform

movement project to learn about social justice issues through a Jewish lens, and to learn how to lobby members of Congress on social issues.

A motion was made by Irv to pass the Consent Agenda and seconded by Gail. Vote: 12 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions. **Motion passed.**

X. Upcoming Meetings and Tasks – Hannah.

Hannah reminded members to sign up for gift giving, D’var, snacks and Zoom gabbai slots for Board meetings. Rabbi Rachel reminded members that Rabbi Sandra Lawson will be visiting JRC during the first weekend in March. There will be Reconstructionist Shabbaton programming and a Board learning session on the Sunday of that weekend.

XI. Yasher Koach – Board. The following members were identified for recognition:

- Offered by Chai Wolfman: the website team who created the new Our Values section on the website: Debi Lewis, Sandy Spatz, Jerry Herst and Julie Dorfman, Sheri Young, Maria Tolpin, and Julia Tauber.

XII. Good and Welfare. Matters were discussed.

XIII. Executive Session. Micky and Rabbi Rachel were invited to meet with the Board. Matters were discussed.

XIV. Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nancy Katz
Board Secretary