

**JEWISH RECONSTRUCTIONIST CONGREGATION
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING
February 14, 2024**

Board Members Present: Luke Adams, David Block, Robin Byster, Edie Canter, Reese Gratch, Emily Harris, Nancy Katz, Rick Kulp, Gail Luxenberg, Irv Miller, Andrew Segall, Hanna Seltzer, Hannah Shearn, Anne Wildman, 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. Gail agreed to be timekeeper.
- II. **Blessing/Covenant of Kavod Sicha – Board.**
- III. **D’Var Torah – Hannah**
- IV. **Minutes from January 10, 2024 – Nancy Katz.** Motion to approve the January 10, 2024, minutes. Motion made by Nancy, seconded by Emily. Vote: 12 in favor, 0 opposed, 2 abstentions. **Motion passed.**
- V. **Tikkun Olam Tier 3 Request/ Policy on lobbying activity as a part of a JRC Activity. Hannah, Edie.**

Background: On January 31, 2024, Hannah sent an email to the Board regarding a Tier 2 Tikkun Olam request: In pertinent part, Hannah wrote:

“Tikkun Olam - Tier 2 Request - Learning and phone bank for Bring Chicago Home with JCUA

“Program proposal for JRC members interested in combating homelessness to learn about and make calls to 50th ward voters regarding JCUA’s campaign called Bring Chicago Home (a measure that - if passed - would increase the one-time real estate transfer tax on the buying of a property over a million dollars by less than 2% and the buying of a property over \$1,500,000 by less than 3%, creating a revenue stream of about \$160,000,000 per year to be used ONLY on housing and services for the homeless). JRC has been a synagogue partner with JCUA since 2017.... “

“This Learning and Phone-banking program would be hosted at JRC by Libby Moreno (JRC Teen) and Maria Tolpin (JRC's JCUA liaison) and the program would begin by allowing folks to grab snacks and chat before launching into a

welcome with an overview of the Bring Chicago Home ballot initiative. They will then receive instructions on how to properly use our phone banking system. Folks will separate and call voters for about 45 mins, we will have a break, then we will do another 45 mins of calls. Finally, we will reserve 30 minutes at the end for folks to debrief with each other on how the calls went and to discuss next steps. This program would need to be held prior to the Chicago election on March 19, 2024.”

“This program would fall within the tax guidelines of lobbying rules for non-profit organizations including houses of worship, even though support for ballot initiatives is considered lobbying. To stay within IRS guidelines, all lobbying for the year must be an insubstantial part of our overall activities, and most tax preparers agree this is around 3-5% threshold even though the IRS does not provide absolute guidance on what they see as insubstantial. At JRC we average 20 hours of programs/services each week, and therefore this 2.5-3-hour program would be an insubstantial part of our overall activities.”

The Tikkun Olam Leadership Team recommended approval of the request.

On February 2, 2024, Hannah reported that 8 members voted to postpone discussion until the next scheduled Board meeting on 2/14/24 for an in-person discussion, 2 members voted to approve, and 2 members voted to deny the request.

Board Discussion and Motion: Hannah asked Edie to report on her research on lobbying activities and not-for profits. Edie reviewed online materials and discussed the issue with lawyers generally familiar with IRS guidelines on lobbying by not-for-profits. Based on her conversations and research, not-for-profits may engage in lobbying without risking their not-for-profit status if the lobbying activities do not make up a “substantial portion” of the entity’s activities. Edie believes that JRC’s lobbying activities are nowhere near the threshold of a “substantial amount” of our activities. However, questions remain on what JRC should be counting towards the substantial activity standard, whether JRC should establish guidelines for its committees on lobbying activities, and whether we should develop a method of counting lobbying activities to ensure that we do not reach the “substantial portion” level. Both Edie and Luke reported that their contacts with JCUA did not shed light on these questions.

The Board discussed contacting the JCUA partner organizations and other congregations to see how they approached the question of tracking lobbying. Some members felt that tracking JRC lobbying was not worth the effort as we do not do a substantial amount and no one outside JRC is asking for this information.

Regarding the specific Tikkun Olam request, Rabbi Rachel explained that JCUA, of which JRC is a partner organization, sponsors a teen fellowship program where teens learn

about social justice issues and organizing. Two of our teens are involved and have become involved in the “Bring Chicago Home” campaign designed to reduce homelessness. Their activities are consistent with other JRC lobbying-type activities such as activities to reduce gun violence, and to encourage our government representatives to act on various initiatives. Rabbi Rachel did not think these activities are close to the threshold which would jeopardize our not-for-profit status. She thought it important that the Board is well versed in all the activities of the Congregation so that the Board can make thoughtful decisions consistent with our values.

The Board discussed the specifics of the request. Some members felt the program was consistent with what JRC has done in the past. One member felt that sponsoring the phone bank would tie JRC to a specific administration’s programs and the approach of the campaign could have unintended consequences of increasing rents. Other members felt more comfortable supporting the teens if the script they use for the phone bank was clear that this was a JCUA phone bank, and not a JRC phone bank. Motion: Approve the Tikkun Olam request, including the use of JRC facilities for the phone bank, so long as the script used by the callers identifies the callers as working on a JCUA project. The project may be advertised through JRC communications. Motion by Emily, seconded by Nancy. Vote: 14 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions. **Motion Passed.** **Additional action step:** Edie, with assistance from Anne, will continue to review the general issue of lobbying and make recommendations to the Board regarding whether we need guidelines for committees on lobbying activities, and whether we should develop a method of counting lobbying activities.

VI. By-Laws Revisions – Emily, Nancy. Nancy reported that she and Emily met with the past-presidents of JRC to solicit their feedback on the proposed By-Laws amendments. Based on their feedback, as well as feedback from the Board and other congregation leaders, the Design Team is no longer recommending that the Governance committee be authorized to act in exigent circumstances between Board meetings. The other changes to the current By-Laws proposal are grammatical and clarifying changes. Motion: The Board shall recommend the proposed By-Laws revisions to the JRC membership at the upcoming Annual Meeting on May 22. Motion by Emily, second by Reese. Vote: 14 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions. **Motion passed.**

VII. Executive Director Report - Micky. Micky reported that since Hannah’s letter soliciting contributions towards JRC outside security was sent to the congregation’s membership on 2/14/24, JRC has received over \$9,000. These funds are not included in the budget projection document she shared with the Board for tonight’s meeting. Micky is still projecting a deficit in this fiscal year. While this year’s deficit will be offset by our remaining PPP funds, we need to consider how to sustain our congregation financially. Staff departures this year will help reduce this year’s deficit, but this is not an ongoing expense reduction. At present, Micky projects an approximate \$57,000 deficit in this year’s budget.

Micky walked the Board through the variance from original budget projections and this year's revenues and expenses. It is possible that a preschool rental of our space could net approximately \$60,000 in the coming year, but we do not have any firm commitments at this time.

One of the challenges JRC faces is that JRC households, particularly new members, are requiring more downward adjustments in dues this year than last year. We have an income diverse congregation and the younger generations experience "sticker shock" when they realize the cost of synagogue dues and Kehillah tuition. Rabbi Rachel has used some of her discretionary funds to assist households with Kehillah costs. The Board discussed whether supporting families in financial need to belong to JRC could be part of a fundraising strategy. There was generally agreement that we need to educate our congregation about the financial needs of some of our congregation and the costs of sustaining JRC.

The Board discussed the status of hiring additional staff. Rabbi Rachel explained that the redesigned positions were the product of discussions between herself, Micky, and Lauren Reeves. They are looking to hire two staff members with higher level skills than entry-level staff, and all staff will share the basic administrative tasks that go along with their positions.

VIII. Consent Agenda – Rabbi, Cantor, and Board Members.

Rabbi Rachel presented her report orally to the Board. She reported in the absence of a clergy support staff person, she has been doing the administrative work supporting her clergy role. She and Micky have been working on programming support including Israel/Palestine programs and Dream and Plan support. While the traumatic response to the war in Israel/Palestine has abated somewhat, Rabbi Rachel continues to provide support to many individuals. The upcoming Shabbaton programs are exciting, and the event may provide an excellent marketing opportunity for JRC. She reminded members of the upcoming learning session with Rabbi Sandra Lawson.

Written Consent Agenda reports were included in the Board's drop box for the meeting. The Board discussed the motion to amend the policy on the Memorial Sculpture. The current policy, in pertinent part provides:

"II.B.5.a. To honor and memorialize individuals by inscribing their name on the Memorial Sculpture (granite sculpture located in the main hallway of the building), a donation of \$1000 is required."

The proposed new language adds the following: “The Rabbi and Board President jointly may decide to add names to memorialize JRC members and waive the fee on an occasional case-by-case basis.”

A motion was made by Robin to pass the Consent Agenda and seconded by Irv. Vote: 14 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions. **Motion passed.**

IX. Upcoming Meetings and Tasks – Hannah.

Hannah reminded members to sign up for gift giving, D’var, snacks and Zoom gabbai slots for Board meetings. The next Board meeting will be on March 13, 2024.

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

- Micky: Sara Polansky and Monica Lasky for organizing and cleaning the JRC kitchen.
- Reese: Micky, Rabbi Rachel, and Lauren for holding down the fort and keeping things moving while JRC is short staffed.
- Marie: Jerry Herst and Elliot Rossen for presenting at the Tu BiShvat Seder and re-energizing our JRC Green Team; Hannah Tauber-Weiss and Archer Stillwell For leading the children’s programming at the Tu Bishvat Seder.
- Emily and Nancy: Past presidents for commenting on/discussing the proposed By-laws revisions, namely Elliot Frolichstein-Appel, Josh Karsh, Reese Gratch, Sandy Spatz, Freddi Greenberg, Alan Saposnik, Alan Gratch, David Tabak, Robin Trilling; also, Linda Kaskel for commenting on/discussing the proposed By-laws revisions.
- Emily: Maria Tolpin, Frank Hill, Abby Harris-Ridker for organizing the JCUA training on Anti-Semitism and White Supremacy attended by almost 40 members; Hanna Tzucker-Seltzer, Marla Baker, Mark Zivin, Abby Harris-Ridker for organizing the Standing Together program and facilitated dialogue and other upcoming Israel-Palestine working group programs; Sandy Spatz and Sam Frolichstein-Appel for continuing to lead communications and supply I-P updates to the JRC newsletter and continuing to update the shared resource list; Marie Davidson, Luke Adams and Robin Byster for doing so much work to move programming forward on the Dream and Plan team;
- Luke: Libby Moreno, Alice Grossman and Maria Tolpin Co-sponsoring with JCUA (and sticking with it!) to make the Bring Chicago Home event happen, despite notable hurdles.
- Robin: Marcie Weiss for organizing the Shabbat door greeters and being there herself so many days; Rabbi Rachel and Lauren Reeves for taking our teens to DC and spending a whole weekend working with them on social justice.

XI. Executive Session. Matters were discussed.

XII. Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nancy Katz
Board Secretary