

## **Kesher Israel Board Meeting Minutes – December 12, 2004**

Attendees: Gary Winters, Baruch Fellner, Elanit Rothschild, Jonathan Frenkel, Natasha Rosenstock, David Sloan, Roz Singer, Heather Zomer, David Barak, Leah Mendelsohn, Michael Gelfand, Evonne Marzouk, Jerome Chapman

### **1. Budget**

The budget is on track. At five months into the fiscal year, we are behind what we expected to spend this year.

It was noted that although our budget for Kol Nidre was \$65,000, it appears that pledges for the year were more than \$85,000. However, only \$47,000 has been collected so far. Gary clarified that these pledges were billed about three weeks before the date of the meeting, so intake since then was not reflected in this budget.

There is also a \$20,000 shortfall in dues budgeted for the year. Gary clarified that this money will come throughout the year. We will begin urging people in March.

### **2. Programs Update**

In terms of the winter fundraiser, we would like to honor the Maybergs for the contribution over the years. The Maybergs are considering the offer.

There will be an event on Sunday, February 13 on Religion in American Politics, featuring Leon Weiseltier and George Stephanopolous. Jesse Grauman is leading the organization of the event, with the help of Ellen Epstein. We would like to take the event and play it up with the press. Natasha Rosenstock said she could help with press promotion. We discussed the idea of having a pre-event patron reception, and also the idea of having a nominal fee for the event. The goal is to have an intellectually challenging program. We also discussed the idea of having Joseph Lieberman participate. These ideas will be discussed with Jesse.

There will be a free new member lunch on the Shabbat of December 18. Board members are welcome, but must reserve at the office. We previously agreed that board members would contribute a minimum of \$20 each to support the event.

Debbie Rogal is moving to Kemp Mill. She will continue her Adult Education role through the spring. Elanit Rothschild, among others, will work on the Adult Education Committee in the spring and continuing after Debbie leaves. We will develop a committee structure to manage adult education. We will have a brochure for Adult Education this spring, designed by Jane Field, as we did in the fall.

David Barak asked whether we could set our program schedule in advance for the year. Gary answered that we would do as much as we could, and should strive at least to set programs 4-5 months in advance.

### **3. Purchase of House**

The closing on the house (Bayit II) will be Wednesday, December 15. The property will be held by the trustees.

Michael Gelfand proposed a resolution that the board designate to the trustees the right to purchase 1310 28<sup>th</sup> St., and to have one trustee sign for this. The resolution passed with 11 in favor and 2 opposed.

Gary will send a letter to the bank indicating that this resolution was passed.

We have contracted with a broker to lease the space short term, for 6-18 months. The broker has recommended renting the house as a whole for \$4400 including the basement. This would cover the mortgage. Elanit said she would put this on the housing list. This is a slow time of year for the rental market; however, in January people from the new administration will be coming in, and with nothing available, this may be a good option for them.

We will purchase the house for a total of \$1.1 million, with about 50% coming from our own resources, and 50% borrowed from Virginia Commerce Bank. Our \$550,000 comes from a combination of trustees' funds, \$100,000 from the Bregstone bequest, and new donations made specifically for this purpose. The mortgage will be at 6%. Michael Gelfand is trying to get additional pledges by Wednesday to decrease the mortgage, but it will be approximately \$500,000 to \$550,000. Including insurance and taxes, the monthly payment will be approximately \$3500.

After the closing, the trustees must give a clear accounting of where the funding came from and how much was spent from this money for the house. The objective at this point is to pay all the money back to the trustees' funds and the Bregstone fund, and to pay off the mortgage, within 3-5 years. It is a 20-year mortgage, but we can pay it back early without penalty.

In terms of donors, we have 6-7 people to date, some anonymous. Virtually all who were asked have agreed to contribute generously. Two of the donors agreed to contribute on the condition that the house is used and not sold back. We now have commitments for \$300,000, and possibly more. We hope to raise about \$600,000 total from individuals.

Michael thinks there should be an assessment of members, if we keep the house. His recommendation would be \$300 per year for three years. This would raise approximately \$250,000. For the additional funds (\$250,000 plus, possibly, renovations to the house), Michael hopes to find one large donor for the naming of the building.

A concern was raised that renovations and construction were not included in the budget. Michael said that it would be easier to go to donors and grant organizations later for the details of the nursery school.

The question was raised: if the house is not used for a nursery school, what else can we use it for? There is the potential for anything. If we reach that point, Nir Buras (an

architect who is a member of the shul and is advising us) could have a design conversation with the board to discuss other possibilities.

#### **4. Nursery School Committee Report**

The Nursery School committee has put together a very thoughtful report detailing the considerations necessary to open a nursery school.

The budget predicts that we will need \$100,000 on hand for the first three years, so some fundraising will be needed each year for the school. The budget is based on a worst case scenario situation.

The intention is to start with one class, fill it up, and then begin a 2<sup>nd</sup> class. Daria Fane, attending on behalf of the committee, said that if we do not fill a class at the beginning of the year, we could do continuous intake, or perhaps do a reduced rate for the first year. The first class would have 10-12 students, with multiple ages. In order to get a full class for 2005, we would need to begin advertising now. If we announced the opening in the spring or summer, we could get students, but probably not a full class.

The question was raised about whether the space could be turned into something that feels like a school. Nir Buras answered that while there are stereotypes about what is “age appropriate” for children, it is not clear whether or not this is actually more comfortable for children – there is a view that a “traditional” environment may elevate children’s sensibilities. Baruch Fellner said that the only educator on the committee has dissented on report, and thinks that the location will have problems attracting children – among other concerns with the report. Jerome Chapman said that he knew of successful nursery schools in townhouses in Brooklyn and Passaic, where the children were very happy. David Barak said that this school would be fundamentally different from a “suburban” nursery school. It is clearly a downtown school, and we’d need to set up expectations for this.

David Sloan pointed out that we need a budget for year “0” to cover things like the salary for an executive director, and for advertising. The executive director should be hired as soon as possible.

Who would attend the school? We have a small natural base of parents who might want their children to be part of the first class, but much marketing would be needed to have full classes. Baruch pointed out that the survey indicated no need for a nursery school. Leah said that parents look for a reputation of the school, and no one wants to sacrifice their own child for a cause. There is a huge difference between a good school and a bad school. Adas Israel and the JCC have great reputations. She said that the first five years are most important for developing a good reputation – if we can develop a good reputation in those five years, students will come. We may be able to address the “no reputation” issue in the first few years by hiring a director with a good track record.

Baruch asked about zoning rights for us to have the school as part of the “customary use” of the synagogue. We need to be clear that we can get the zoning rights to do this, so that

we won't have problems with neighbors, etc. The answer to this will take many months to determine. We have been successful in the past with the Religious Affairs person in the DC government, who will send us to the right person in the zoning office. Daria has spoken to zoning officials and thinks we can try the customary use argument. We agree that the most important thing is to get started with the zoning request, but we need to have a plan for how to proceed in order to approach them. (To apply for the zoning rights, we need the details of how we plan to proceed.) We may already have a certificate of occupancy for the "Bayit 1" which indicates a school as a customary use. The committee will follow up on this. We need to get clear about the zoning answers before we begin any construction.

The sense of the board was that it would be appropriate to set fall 2006 as a tentative start date for the school. It was asked how long it would take to do renovations on the house. Nir answered that for carpet and paint renovations it would take about 6 months – for more extensive renovations, it could take a year.

In order to do this, we need to decide we want to do it and make a "full press" effort. We asked the committee to give us a timeline of things that need to be done, at the next meeting. We have resolved to try to rent the house immediately, with a goal of opening the school in fall 2006. The timeline should work backwards from fall 2006.

A concern was raised about whether non-parents will be excited enough about the school in order to pay the assessment. Roz Singer said that it was important to get community buy-in for the program, and to continue our focus on overall programming to make sure that people understand the expansion is not just for families.

We will schedule a meeting with the congregation in the middle of January. Evonne Marzouk suggested that we get parents engaged first, through a smaller meeting with them. Gary agreed with the importance to involve parents, through email and personal conversations, but didn't want to hold an additional meeting. He also said he would encourage the Rabbi to be vocal in his support for this initiative.

The meeting in January will be "about all the exciting things happening at Keshet Israel," including that we are moving forward on the plans for renovation of the shul upstairs. In terms of the Mikvah, we've gotten the critical pipes connected and can now start collecting water.

There is a DC Licensing Meeting related to nursery schools on January 19. People from the committee should attend, and others as well.

The Board of Jewish Education in DC would like to help us, and would be glad to make a presentation to the board or the congregation as a whole. The sense was that we should have a meeting with them with the board and committee first. The question was asked whether we should invite and publicize this meeting to the whole congregation; it was not clear what the answer was.

Several other groups may also be able to help, including:

- Torah U'Mesora, which gives grants, and
- Rabbi Brander at Yeshiva University, who is doing outreach there, including helping Modern Orthodox schools open in the U.S.

### **5. Other issues**

We approved the following new members:

David and Ariele Hain

Jared Brecher

Gabe Goldhirsh

Sarah Rubin

We decided to discuss other issues, including the question of OU membership, at our next meeting.