

## **Kesher Israel Board Meeting Minutes – June 19, 2005**

Attendees: Roz Singer, Gary Winters, David Barak, Evonne Marzouk, Baruch Fellner, David Epstein, Jonathan Pincus, and Barry Shochet

**A quorum for the board is 9 members, and we only had 8. Thus, this board meeting was only for discussion but not for voting.**

### **1. Discussion of Refurbishment**

Gary announced that he had received a letter from the Gottesman family committing \$475,000 to the refurbishment project. (There had been a previous donation of \$25,000.) The conceptual plans and the estimate based on the original scope of work have been circulated to all Board members. The Gottesman donation is intended to cover “beautification” in the upstairs sanctuary, but not any modifications to the coat closet, the bathrooms, or the kitchen. We have received conceptual drawings for the kitchen and bathrooms from Shalom Baranes, but the work has not yet been priced. Our current estimate for work is \$417,000, plus architects’ and consultants’ fees of about \$55,000.

David Epstein explained that in order to meet all the desires on a previously-circulated “wish list,” we would need to raise approximately an additional \$200,000. He said that it makes sense to do the full project while the contractors are here.

David Barak expressed his concern about the windows. Milton Gottesman’s desire was to replace the windows in the upstairs sanctuary. David said that the original windows are made of marble rather than glass, and thus effectively keep heat and light out of the sanctuary. He said that the Rabbi has expressed the view that as a matter of halacha, if the windows change, they would need to be replaced with clear glass so that the sky can be seen. He is concerned that clear glass will create glare and too much heat. He also said that the marble is unique and beautiful, and worth keeping.

David Epstein agreed with the practical issues of the windows and said that we need to pursue discussions with the Rabbi and contractors to see if a good option can be found which will not cause too much extra heat and light in the sanctuary.

Roz Singer thanked David Epstein for the history of this project, and asked whether it would be possible to have colored/translucent glass for the windows. David Barak and David Epstein said that they understood from the Rabbi that “clear” is “clear” and that colored glass would be forbidden. Roz asked whether it would be possible to replace one panel in the center of the windows, and David Epstein said no. Apparently the Rabbi can live with it as it is, if not changed. Roz also clarified that this will only be done to the upstairs windows. Changing the windows in the social hall might be a security issue.

Gary said that there are lots of small details that need to be decided by the aesthetics committee, not the board. Barry Shochet said that we should address the windows issue

first with the architects, so that it can be resolved quickly. Gary said he would like to discuss the issue more with the Rabbi and investigate the windows issue with architects, but we need to accept the Gottesman money to proceed with the investigation.

We would need to agree at least to look for a window solution in order to accept the Gottesman money in good faith. The windows are high on the list of the Gottesman family's intentions for their donated money. The windows themselves are budgeted at approximately \$70,000 to replace. Gary said that if we reach an impasse on alternatives regarding the windows, we'll go back to the Gottesman family to discuss other options. He also said that every architect that has looked at the sanctuary has said that changing the windows will open the space of the sanctuary and improve the feel of the room.

Baruch Fellner said that he has been involved with issues about improving the building for 13 years, and his focus has been on meeting unmet needs. He did not believe that this work meets those needs. He said much of the "beautification work" intended by the money we were receiving, with the exception of addressing the threadbare quality of the shul, is "putting lipstick on a pig," and he thinks spending \$750,000 or even \$1 million (with cost overruns) is not appropriate for beautification. He said that if we were looking at a self-contained gift, we should take it and do the best we can, but he thought we should not raise additional funds to do this work.

Gary said that we can't meet unmet needs in our current space. However, he hears constantly about the state of the upstairs, and he believes a good architect can improve the look of the sanctuary.

Jonathan Pincus asked whether we could just do what the Gottesmans want and not raise any additional money? He said his concern was that additional space may become available at any moment, and we need the money for that purpose. Gary said that there are some additional things that we ought to do if we are doing a major renovation, such as improving the kitchen. It will cost a little more, but he thinks it can be raised through the donor base of people who would be willing to contribute \$3-5,000. He didn't think that this extra money would get in the way of funds for possible additional space. He said that he didn't think it was "putting lipstick on a pig," but that it would really improve the space.

David Epstein asked that Baruch not use the phrase because it is not appropriate. Most of the work is directed to addressing the threadbare quality of the shul – rugs, lighting, flooring. He said that there is the possibility of a substantial contribution to cover these costs, perhaps from the anonymous donor.

Baruch said he had no ability to judge because he had not seen the sketches. He said the descriptions sound more aesthetic than practical. He agrees that we need to address the threadbare issues – the bima, the carpeting. He raised a process issue about providing detailed drawings of plans.

Gary said that he had presented drawings and photographs at a previous board meeting, but that they are not blueprints, because we are not building anything new.

Baruch asked what work would be done to the electrical fixtures. Gary said that we would only leave the 3 chandelier fixtures – the ceiling lights and grid pattern lights on the ceilings would be removed.

Jonathan Pincus asked if we could consider amplification that is halachic, not electric. He said it was available and this should be discussed.

Baruch asked what the architect fees are for. Gary answered that they are for selection of materials, carpeting, paint, designing for AC and lighting, addressing the electrical issues in the coat room.

David Barak said that “glazing” (the window work) is the highest line-item on the budget. Electrical is the third largest. Gary noted that these costs do not include an electrical engineer who will need to check the status of the wiring in the building. He said that we might be able to avoid the costs of “masonry” – part of the original Gottesman plan, but that the family might be okay with removing this item.

Gary said that replacing the roof needs to be done now, and it is unclear whether this is part of the Gottesman money. He said they want a separate account. They are looking at this as an aesthetic project.

There is at least one other substantial commitment in the shul to funding this work, but it is unclear how much would be available. This person is supportive of “getting it all done at one time.”

David Epstein said the building committee understands the issues related to funding and the window challenges. David Barak said he could accept sending the work to the committee, as long as the scope is understood.

Baruch said he was in favor of spending the Gottesman funds, and he would entrust it to the good judgment of David Epstein and the aesthetics committee. Gary asked why he would object to a modest fundraising goal to address other issues? He said that windows would be on the top of the aesthetics committee agenda.

## **2. Raising Dues**

There is a proposal to increase the dues by a small amount and to remove the additional security assessment (simply to include it in the dues themselves). Baruch asked why we don't raise the dues more to address our fundraising goals. Gary said that given the cost of housing, he did not want to additionally burden the congregation, but rather to have steady, small increases of the dues. He said that there is an opportunity for those with additional funds to donate at fundraisers throughout the year. This year we are having a small fundraiser on June 28<sup>th</sup>, but we can have a bigger event in the winter.

### **3. Additional issues**

Gary announced that the Mikvah has passed its electrical, fire, plumbing, and mechanical inspections. All that is left is a building inspection, to get the Certificate of Occupancy.

Gary referred the board to the report of Jerome Chapman in a memo sent to the board, in regard to the shul property that we will try to sell to the H Street Development Corporation.

Roz asked whether it would be possible to hold a fire drill this summer on Shabbat. Gary agreed with this idea, and said that we should do it on a week when DC Minyan doesn't meet, so the shul will be crowded.

Evonne Marzouk announced that a letter will be coming to the congregation requesting donations to the Green Group-JNF project to raise funds for the Alexander Stream in Israel. The synagogue raised \$2500 at the Yom Hatzma'ut Concert, and is looking to raise \$5000-\$7000 this year. Baruch Fellner added that the goal is to raise \$25,000 over 3-5 years, and thus we are interested in pledges from donors to contribute funds over this period of time.

Gary noted that we need to add two new members to the board. His two proposals will be considered at the next meeting.