

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION
Forward Together / Kadima B'Yachad
March 2021

What do we want to do?

We want the Jewish Community to move forward together by housing Ahavas Israel, Temple Emanuel, and United Jewish School under one roof. The Jewish Federation of Grand Rapids will also be housed on the shared campus. Other Jewish organizations and initiatives including Shir Shalom Choir and the Jewish Theatre may have a role in the Collaboration. Some administrative resources will also be shared, and there will be a greater emphasis on communal activities and programs. The organizations will maintain their individual identities, religious traditions, and structures while working together on community-wide activities and programming. The synagogue and temple took a step towards this vision of a shared campus more than 15 years ago when we combined the religious school programs and created the United Jewish School. We have a track record of successful partnerships across the community, demonstrating that we can share a building and support each other's differences while celebrating all that we have in common. Some other successes include the Scholar In Residence program and, most recently, online programs like bingo and the Purim Kahoot! trivia game.

What actions have been taken thus far?

A few months ago, the Collaboration Committee, a group of 24 Ahavas and Temple members, led by Karen Barth of Positive Pathways Consulting, **made the recommendation to house the Collaboration Project at Temple Emanuel on Fulton St.** This is a non-binding recommendation and has become the central aspect of the Collaboration. This recommendation, along with the Term Sheet currently being worked on, will be the basis for congregational votes. Members of both congregations will see the specific terms of the collaboration and will be voting later this year on the recommendation to place the collaboration at the Temple Emanuel site.

Why collaborate?

By coming together at one site, we can expand, centralize, and strengthen Jewish opportunities for our small community – socially, religiously, culturally, and educationally. Sharing a building also means that we can lower building operating and maintenance expenses, freeing up resources for more and better programming. Our community has long been separated by congregational affiliation or non-affiliation. Collaborating begins to remove those separations by bringing us together on one campus. The vision is to create a more cohesive, more energized, and more financially sustainable Jewish community. Our small community can support more meaningful Jewish programs if we work together. This is a *l'dor vador* project, a gift from one generation to another. We are building a campus to benefit not only ourselves, but our children's and grandchildren's generations. Ultimately, our children benefit by growing up in a more connected Jewish community.

Why now?

Congregations nation-wide are experiencing shrinking memberships, less member involvement, declining revenue streams, aging facilities, and duplication of programs and events. Our community is no exception, and our collaboration is not a new concept. We have been discussing this idea for many, many years. In addition, there are major donors who would like to financially support this project sooner rather than later, as they believe that a collaborative Jewish community is in everyone's best interest.

Why are we better together?

Our tradition teaches that each person is precious, created in the image of God. We want to engage every person connected to the Jewish community, whether by birth, by choice, by love, or by curiosity. Our vision is to build a more inclusive community that encourages greater engagement and allows us to better address changing needs and challenges. While each congregation will maintain its separate religious traditions, we can come together to enhance lifelong learning for all ages -- young children, teens, adults -- as well as create events available to a broader audience and expand the ability to do Tikkun Olam, working with those in need

(e.g. visitations, outreach, and social services). We aspire to build out Jewish West Michigan in a positive manner utilizing our community's strengths.

By moving forward together, we can expand, centralize, and strengthen Jewish opportunities for our small community – socially, religiously, culturally, and educationally. The collaboration will increase the strength of our Jewish community. Benefits include:

- Financial strength – more effective use of resources such as facilities and administrative functions
- Increased participation and engagement – more opportunities to be involved in our community as a result of greater choices
- Quality – improved quality of programming and utilization of staff to better align with their strengths

While the legal structure and operating details still need to be discussed and agreed upon, we are proceeding under the principle that the congregations will be equal partners with a fair division of costs and investment.

What's next?

The boards of Temple Emanuel and Ahavas Israel have agreed to move to the next step -- creating a term sheet explaining the basic outline for the collaboration including financial contributions, governance, ongoing cost sharing, etc. The term sheet will also outline the suggested roles of the Jewish Federation of Grand Rapids and other Jewish organizations. The Federation has been involved in this initiative since the beginning in a convener role, and The Federation board is in favor of the collaboration. Congregational votes will be scheduled for later this year once the terms of the collaboration have been agreed upon by both boards.