

UPDATE ON COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

December 22, 2020

Dear Jewish Community Members:

**Mark Your Calendars:
Community Informational Meeting via Zoom
Tuesday, January 12 at 7:00pm
RSVP: Nicole@jfg.org**

As you may know, Temple Emanuel, Congregation Ahavas Israel, the Jewish Federation of Grand Rapids, and the United Jewish School (UJS) have been working together to explore ways of building a stronger and more vibrant Jewish community in Grand Rapids. The group has been considering the creation of a community collaboration to bring the community together.

This collaboration would put the two Congregations under one roof with some shared administrative resources and activities and programs, along with the Jewish Federation of Grand Rapids and possibly other Jewish community organizations. Each organization would maintain its individual identity while working more closely together on community-wide activities and programming. The idea is to create a more cohesive, more energized, and more financially sustainable Jewish community.

We conducted four town meetings where participants were very supportive of the idea of the collaboration. We fielded a survey of the community and received 176 responses. 85% of the respondents expressed that they are in favor of the collaboration with 13% neutral or unsure. Only 2% were against the idea. The three top reasons that respondents said were important reasons to move forward with the collaboration were:

- 1 The feeling of being one community
- 2 Having more/better community-wide programs
- 3 Having a more economically sustainable Jewish community

A Community Collaboration Committee with members from both Congregations, UJS, and the Federation has been discussing the possible locations for the collaboration. The Committee has retained an architect, Scott Vyn from Integrated Architecture (www.intarch.com), and a process facilitator, Karen Barth from Positive Pathways Consulting (www.positivepathwaysconsulting.com), who have been helping us work through the opportunities and challenges of each location.

The Collaboration Committee has decided to recommend that the community proceed with the collaboration at the Fulton Street location, the current Temple Emanuel property. After upgrades and renovations, the building would become a shared space with each Congregation a full and equal partner in the collaboration. The primary reason for this decision was the substantially lower projected cost of renovations at the Fulton Street facility (\$5-6 million) compared to the projected cost of renovating the Michigan Street site (\$7-9 million) or a third new site. Initial feasibility estimates suggest that the \$2 million additional cost of creating a similar quality facility at Michigan Street would likely exceed the fundraising capacity of the community.

With the architect's help, we developed some exciting preliminary plans for a renovated facility that would include:

- a second sanctuary
- a new kosher kitchen
- a kiddush/multi-purpose space for Ahavas Israel's use
- a more attractive and functional entryway
- a comfortable gathering space for adults/parents
- expansion of the school wing
- a teen programming area
- a coffee area
- better security
- renovations to the facility including upgraded restrooms

There may be other additions including some outdoor upgrades, a food garden, eco-friendly improvements, and additional parking. All of this is feasible at the Fulton Street site.

The Committee is aware that the biggest concern about the Fulton Street campus is the availability of parking, and we are looking into solutions for the small handful of times during the year when parking may be a concern.

The Collaboration Committee is not a decision-making group. The Boards of the two Congregations will have the opportunity to consider and vote on the recommendation and ultimately it will go to the Temple Emanuel and Ahavas Israel members for a final vote. The Federation Board will also take up the question of whether to support this.

We would like to hear your views on this idea and invite you to share your input at a Community Informational Meeting via Zoom on Tuesday, January 12 at 7:00pm. Please RSVP to Nicole Katzman, JFGR Executive Director, at Nicole@jfgr.org. In the meantime, please direct your thoughts and questions to us.

Most respectfully,



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FAQs – COMMUNITY COLLABORATION
December 2020

Why is the Collaboration Committee recommending the Fulton Street location?

The primary reason is the lower cost of renovation of the Fulton Street facility.

More of the space at the Fulton Street site is finished and ready to serve the joint collaboration. At the Michigan Street site, many of the spaces are not big enough or configured in the right way for the two congregations to exist under one roof. For example there would be a need to build additional classrooms and to renovate two sanctuaries.

Is there enough parking at the Fulton Street location?

There are several options under discussion to ensure that there will be adequate parking.

If we are concerned about the economic sustainability of the community, why spend \$5-6 million on a building at this time?

The \$5 million estimate is the projected overall expense but not the amount that needs to be raised. The costs would be offset by the sale of one of the buildings. Also, both buildings will need repairs of various kinds in the coming five years, even if there is no community collaboration. These repairs would be rolled into the cost of the renovations. The cost of the renovations will be partially offset by annual savings from not having to operate two buildings.

Several lead donors have expressed a willingness to contribute generous gifts because they would like to see the community set up for a successful and vibrant future.

Also, the \$5 million budget is only one initial scenario. A more modest option could be created if the full amount cannot be raised or if further design development finds that a smaller space can adequately support the collaboration.

What about the financial and legal aspects of the collaboration? For example, who gets the proceeds from the sale of the Michigan Street property and how will ownership in the Fulton Street property be determined? Will the congregations retain their separate endowments?

These issues will be discussed and have yet to be determined. Each congregation will retain their separate endowments.

Does this mean that our dues will go up? Will there be a required contribution to a building fund?

The plan is based on fundraising for the balance needed to make this project go forward. All community members will be asked for contributions, but there will be no required contribution. We anticipate there will be no increases in dues to pay for the project.

Will we have to change our religious practices in any way?

The plan is for each congregation to continue with its current religious practices under the guidance of its own rabbi and in accord with the guidelines of the movement to which they each belong.

Will there be changes to the policies concerning kashrut?

Each congregation will continue its practices regarding kashrut. There will be two kitchens in the renovated facility. One kitchen will be run according to the guidance of the Ahavas Israel rabbi and the other will be run according to the guidance of the Temple Emanuel rabbi.

What is the process going to be moving forward?

The process will include the following steps:

1. The Collaboration Committee will hold a community-wide meeting on Tuesday, January 12 at 7:00pm to answer questions and share concerns.
2. The Boards of the two congregations will vote on whether they would like to move forward.
3. The Collaboration Committee will appoint a small negotiating committee to create a “term sheet” that will outline the basic terms of the agreement in plain English.
4. The role of Federation in the Collaboration will be clarified.
5. The congregations (and possibly the Federation) will vote on the plan as outlined in the “term sheet.”

After that, if the project goes forward, there will a full project plan drawn up that will involve the creation of legal documents and architectural plans, with opportunities for community input into the final design. The project plan will include community planning and visioning to ensure that the final design is supportive of a broader community plan for enhanced programming, outreach, and engagement in the new facility.

