

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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