

**Congregation Beth El of the Sudbury River Valley**  
**Virtual Board Meeting Minutes**  
**Extra Board Meeting**  
**Thursday February 24th, 2022 7:30pm**

**In attendance:** Ann Barysh, Barbara Miller, Carolyn Schwartz, Debbie Glass, Jerry Kazin, Jim Billings, Jocelyn Bailin, Josh Davidson, Judy Goldberg, Michelle Fineblum, Neil Frieband, Sabina Pestka, Steve Probst, Staff: Beth Schine, Shoni Aronovich, Rabbi Josh Breindel. Guests: Lizza Sandoe, Sarah Green-Vaswani, Matt Shedd, Lisa Breit

**Welcome:** Jim Billings – thanks for coming to a second meeting this month.

**CLI (Clergy Leadership Incubator) – Rabbi Josh Breindel**

Rabbi Breindel was invited last year to be part of a two-year leadership development initiative led by Sid Schwartz. RJB has been actively and deeply engaged with this process since last fall. For the past few months, he has been working in hevruta with a cluster of 2-3 other rabbis. The current project at hand is to identify a need in the congregation and then come up with a plan to address it. The need that RJB identified in our congregation is for community and connection. There are groups and silos within the community; additionally, longtime members and newer members don't have opportunities to connect with one another. Most of us don't know one another well at all, and we haven't been successful at engaging with one another. Many feel that leadership is difficult to break in to and that their skills and talents are not being recognized and utilized. The question RJB came to ask is: **How might we build new connections (and craft stronger ones) that foster a culture of caring and curiosity while empowering our congregants to actively participate and engage with one another in all aspects of our community's life**".

To explore this RJB pulled together a "CLI Design Team" of congregants who are out-of-the-box thinkers. Together they brainstormed, reached out to staff and community members, and reviewed the findings from both the Rabbi Search process and the Visioning Committee. The group envisions a future where congregants make deep, new connections with one another, bring their individual skills and personal passions to our committees and task forces, participate in new programs and interest groups that enhance our community. All of this, in addition to strengthening our existing community, will help us to welcome new members who were attracted to our sense of energy and pride in our community.

To this end the group is planning to hold a series of parlor meetings starting in May or June and running for 4-6 weeks. These will be small group (5-8 families) facilitated listening sessions, designed to facilitate community building and to find out participants' interest, talents, and desired participation in the Beth El community. The groups will be led personally by RJB and possibly other trained facilitators. Invitations and signup opportunities will be sent out the entire congregation. Those who do not participate in a small group parlor meeting there will receive a survey invitation. The survey will be designed to mimic the parlor groups as much as possible. Survey participation will be encouraged by the Board and lay leadership.

Once all data has been gathered the design team will process the data and report to the Board, in June/July. Design team leads will also go to each committee and present the information and encourage the facilitation of personal connections with congregants. There will be regular follow ups and ongoing review, and tweaking as necessary, of process and results. A programming committee will be constituted to put together programs that reflect the needs and desires of the community.

All work will be done in conjunction with the Strategic Planning Committee and regular reports will be made to the Board. At the one year mark the group will assess progress and explore future goal setting.

**Strategic Action Committee Presentation:** Sarah Green-Vaswani, Matt Shedd, Lizza Sandoe, Lisa Breit

Strategic action group outlined process, progress, and goals. Their starting point is the recently created vision statement, which is both aspirational and realistic. Their process is designed to be light, nimble, and flexible to the needs of the congregation, which may well change as the process unfolds. The large group meets and brainstorms ideas and identifies priorities. Subgroups work to develop actionable plans in these priority areas. The plan is to implement pieces of the Strategic Plan as they become ready, rather than wait for the entire process to finish and have a large report to implement all at once. SAG is working in parallel with the Rabbi's CLI initiative, both informing the other. Currently the SAG has two operational subgroups in their identified priority areas: Membership and Communications.

**Membership** is focusing on what we can do to attract and retain members. They looked at BE and asked, "Who are we missing"? Answer: empty nesters (55-ish folks) and young adults. Our marketing strategies should focus on those demographics. The group has been looking into questions around this: What are people looking for in a religious community right now? What differentiates Beth El from other communities? The younger demographic appears to want a community focused on social justice and equity. The older demographic appears to be concerned about costs. Both cohorts are looking for affinity groups around which to create a network of friends and support.

**Communications:** this group is looking into how we communicate, both internally and externally. External has been the initial focus – how are we communicating what Beth El is about to the outside world? Beth El needs a communications strategy, encompassing all the ways that we conduct outreach – website, social media, local advertising, etc. The group is in the process of putting together a proposal to hire a consultant to assist us with understanding our current communications structure and coming up with a solid plan.

**Timeline:** February: update Board on progress. April/May have budget items ready for FC and Board. September: update Board on progress. At the one-year mark the group will assess where things stand and develop plans to move forward.

The SAG very much **welcomes input from the Board**, *they would like for Board members to join either of these two subcommittees to work on further developing these goals.*

**Re-opening Beth El/Beth El security: Jim Billings**

**Re-opening:** With Covid on the decline we are looking forward to re-opening the building to in-person activity. We are already holding services in-person; the plan is that the school will return to in-person learning at the start of March as well, at least for grades 3-12. The Covid committee continues to monitor the situation and make recommendations accordingly.

**Security:** It is with heavy heart that we find ourselves in a situation where security is once again at the forefront of our concerns. The rise of antisemitism is real and is everywhere, even here in Massachusetts. Our school families have particularly been voicing concern over this. The office reached out to other congregations to find out what they are doing; to our surprise and dismay, we discovered that Beth El is the only liberal congregation in our geographic area that does not have armed security present when groups are present in the building. It has been determined that Beth El would need security present during services on Friday night and Saturday morning and school on Sunday mornings and Monday evenings. The cost is \$50/hour. We will still want community greeters – the armed security serves mostly as a deterrent and are available in case of emergency. A new security committee has been formed and will be looking into other ways that we can continue to keep Beth El a holy community that is both safe and welcoming.

**Motion:** to approve a budget of \$10,000 to hire security through the end of the fiscal year.

**Motion approved:** unanimously

**Financial Report – Steve Probst**

Steve presented a very detailed and thorough look at Beth El's finances, both historical and present. **Executive Session invoked.**

**Meeting adjourned: 9:35pm**

Respectfully submitted,

Jocelyn Bailin

Clerk, Congregation Beth El of the Sudbury River Valley