

Congregation Beth El of the Sudbury River Valley
Special Board Meeting
June 29th 2023 7:30pm

In attendance: Michelle, Rabbi, Ann B, Debbie, Judy, Jocylyn, Toby, Rachel, Neil, John, Jim, Barbara, Bridget, Shira, Fern, Allison

Gender Neutral Bathroom conversation recap: Michelle

This discussion has been going on for the past two-three years. On June 1 2023 finally got an estimate. \$75k, way much more than we had anticipated or can afford. The bathroom timeline does not fit into the regular budget cycle. A very energetic conversation at the Annual Meeting led to a congregational meeting about this topic 10 days ago. Fabulous meeting, people were really open, honest and respectful, and spoke their minds in a loving and inclusive way. Many people came around to support the concept of gender-neutral bathrooms, working through their own discomfort. Michelle has been receiving emails both in support and opposition.

RJB

We need to be respectful of the needs of every single member of our community, want people to be as comfortable as possible. Torah: story of Baalam and Baalak. Mah Tovu comes from this parasha. What is so special about our tents? The doorways of our tents do not directly face those of one another, you cannot see into another tent. Jews understand the necessity of privacy in close quarters. All Israelites had a place that was private. This is important for the health vitality and honor of every single member of our community. These are Jewish values. How do we bring this forward for everyone to have their space and privacy? We are still struggling to internalize the living Torah of trans folks in our community. To have only gendered bathrooms sends the wrong message both publicly and privately. RJB has been leaving his office door open and unlocked for people to use the bathroom there for about 6 months. Not everyone is going to be comfortable with any solution. If we are going to have multi use rooms we need to have a single use room available. In this holy home we need to help everyone feel safe and accepted and loved.

Gender Neutral bathroom details: John Harper

Please refer to the PowerPoint presentation that was sent out to the Board prior to this meeting. Jerry and David Waldman have been the power folks in this endeavor. This is the 4th meeting this month on the topic. The existing bathroom in the rabbi's office dictates where the new bathroom will go in order to take advantage of plumbing. The current cantor's office is right there, therefore the bathroom will be constructed in that space. A new Cantor's office will be next to bathroom and will be slightly larger than the existing office.

To make existing bathrooms gender neutral- cannot do a complete reconfiguration because we would be required to bring everything up to code. Therefore we are looking at replacing the existing doors and panels. The new doors/panels will have tighter margins (current ones have a gap between panel and door). Will also build panels around the urinal. There will be new signs and locks on the stalls themselves. Cannot put a lock on the main door – this is illegal. Electric door openers for handicapped access will be installed on main doors. Jerry and David are gathering quotes, work can be done this summer, panels can be delivered in as little as 2-3 weeks. Single-use bathroom will take a while to be built; Rabbi's bathroom available for single gender usage.

Some questions from Board.

Q: Will the new stalls be private – will our youngest and oldest community members be protected from seeing other people and other people seeing them?

A: Yes. Nothing is 100% foolproof but the new configuration will be as privacy respectful as possible. For those still concerned, the rabbi's bathroom will be available.

Q: Will the traditional gendered bathrooms return to being gendered once the single use bathroom is built? If not, then this is not a transitional plan, it is a permanent change.

A: We will not go back to gendered bathrooms upon completion of the single use bathroom. Anyone who feels uncomfortable in a multi-use bathroom will be able to access the single use all gender bathroom. And the rabbi's bathroom will continue to be available, effectively making two single use bathrooms. This should be enough for most times.

Comments:

Need to make the availability of the Rabbi's bathroom very clear and well known throughout the community. Also need to make it very clear that *this is not a transitional change, this is a permanent change*.

RJB: there is ZERO tolerance for sexual assault in this community. If anyone hear of it happening here every one of us is mandated to report it.

Abusive people are not stopped by signs. They will harass no matter what.

An open culture reduces harassment overall because it changes and normalizes the culture of the place. Because nobody can harass anyone who they think "don't belong" in this particular bathroom.

The Finances of the matter: John Harper

New estimates:

Single use bathroom 66k (for bathroom, project room and cantor's office), redoing existing bathroom about 6k.

Challenging to have special dues assessment. . No grant sources have been identified.

Kitchen renovation formula was 50% Beth El funds, 50% fundraising.

Proposal: 36k from existing funds – 10k from Building Fund, request 26k from FFF

36k from fundraising. Short fundraising campaign. Direct asks, then general ask.

Currently have pledges for 19k of the 36k already lined up.

Nothing will happen until the funding is identified. Need funds for converting existing bathroom by the end of next week 7/7. Funds for new bathroom in the bank by mid-July. If we can accomplish this then we can get a majority of the work done by the high holidays.

Currently have pledges for 19k of the 36k already lined up.

We have congregants who will help with the physical construction (reconfiguration) of current bathrooms conversion; costs are for materials only.

Q: Why no special assessment?

A: the reserves belong to Beth El, they came from every member of the community. The reserves are vital and is a way to show the support of our community. By asking for donations all who want to participate can do so.

Motions:

Motion #1

Rescinding the motion taken at the June 22nd Special Board meeting. *Determined that it is unnecessary to rescind since the original vote was not official.*

Motion #2

To honor Beth El's continuing commitment to embrace full inclusion, address the need for all-gender bathrooms within our building, and taking the congregational conversation into consideration, the Beth El Board of Directors approves the construction of a new, single-use occupancy ADA-compliant all-gender bathroom and the re-assignment of the two current single-gendered bathrooms into two all-gender bathrooms.

Discussion:

Funds:

We only have 3 years of CTF funds left. By using other funds we might have 4 years left.
It is a Jewish value that we survive; I am concerned about our financial survival.

Rabbi: the bathroom is essential to our survival. If we do this we will be the only congregation in MetroWest to have exclusively all gendered bathrooms.

If we go down – die a financial death - we will at least go down living our values.

Motion approved: in favor – 11

Opposed – 1 (for financial reasons only)

Motion #3

In furtherance of the motion to construct all-gender bathrooms, the Beth El Board of Directors approves the allocation of \$10,000 from the Building Fund, requests the Allocation Committee allocate \$26,000 from the Fund for the Future, and supports a dedicated congregational fund-raising effort for the remaining funds, provided that no construction shall begin on the single-occupancy ADA-compliant bathroom until all of the funds have been raised.

Motion approved:

In favor-11

Opposed- 1 (for financial reasons)

Details:

The congregation needs to vote on the capital expenditure, will need to call a special congregational meeting for this, middle of July (after the holidays).

Important that the Board all donate to this effort. If for some reason you cannot make a contribution speak confidentially to the Rabbi and he can help make this happen.

Meeting adjourned 9:06pm

Respectfully Submitted,

Jocelyn Bailin, Clerk. Congregation Beth El of the Sudbury River Valley