

# **Proposal to Combine Temple Beth Sholom and Nanuet Hebrew Center in a Shared Space Synaplex**

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**The Boards of Directors of Temple Beth Sholom and Nanuet Hebrew Center are in the process of exploring a shared space paradigm. We know that you will have many questions. Your input in the process is vital.**

We invite and encourage you to email any questions to us at [RocklandSynaplex@gmail.com](mailto:RocklandSynaplex@gmail.com) and to attend one or more of the congregational meetings that are being held to discuss the proposal. Working groups with congregants from both congregations will be formed to aid us in this process. We will also be providing periodic updates as the process evolves.

The FAQs below are organized in the following order under the following subheadings: Big Picture, The Building, Worship, School, Finances, Governance and Administration, Next Steps and Member Involvement.

### **BIG PICTURE**

1. Why should Temple Beth Sholom (TBS) and Nanuet Hebrew Center (NHC) consider combining into a shared space?
  - We are fortunate to have two vital, highly compatible, like-minded congregations led by Rabbis who have a strong personal as well as professional relationship. The joining of the two congregations under one roof is an opportunity to combine the best of each-creating a “Synaplex” that supports the individual Reform and Conservative communities in Rockland County and will be financially positioned to serve its current members for generations to come.
  - Both congregations would benefit from the opportunities created by a more robust community. By having the two synagogues come together in the same space, both will be able to maintain their identities and honor their respective traditions and customs. The combined congregations, with over five hundred households, will have the scale to offer diverse kinds of worship, learning, and community programming that better serve the varied interests and needs of our diverse community.
2. Why is now the right time for the congregations to come together in a shared space?
  - The changing demographics of our County along with the disturbing trend of an overall lack of affiliation with organized Judaism in America have placed our Conservative and Reform synagogues in challenging financial positions.
  - While neither congregation has an immediate need to do this, there is a clear advantage to staying ahead of national trends that put pressure on houses of worship. The best time to take on a momentous transition like this is when it is done voluntarily and from positions of strength.
  - Studies have demonstrated that the American synagogue paradigm needs an upgrade where we break down the walls of individual institutions and become more relational and engagement based. Our proposed model does just this while adding extra strength to each congregation.

3. What does “shared space” mean?
  - Religious groups sharing common space is becoming commonplace in the United States. Such arrangements can involve one congregation using another congregation’s building, religious organizations operating a joint facility, or using venues that are managed or co-managed by a third party. We are considering the third option.
  - By bringing the two synagogues together under one roof, we would be able to reduce the fixed overhead expenses that burden TBS and NHC. This would allow us to offer more at a lower cost.
4. How will the decision be made?
  - The decision will be made by the memberships of both synagogues according to their bylaws.
5. What would be the name of a new entity?
  - Both congregations will maintain their names and a third new entity will be jointly named.
6. How did the discussions between the congregations come about?
  - For some time, both Temple Beth Sholom and Nanuet Hebrew Center have been actively considering future options for their individual synagogues. During this time, the Board of Rabbis and the Jewish Federation of Rockland County began community-weaving efforts that sought new paradigms for Jewish life.
  - In the wake of these efforts, leadership (clergy and lay leaders) from both temples sat down to speak about new models that exist around the country in which Reform and Conservative synagogues partner together.
  - These ideas were reported back to their respective boards, who were already considering other options with other congregations. It became clear that a partnership between NHC and TBS was the most dynamic and forward-thinking vision.
  - The presidents each appointed a delegation of congregants to meet and learn more about each other. Those conversations evolved and the group felt that combining the congregations in a shared space should be explored.
  - It became necessary to determine whether there would be any issues that would prevent a proposal from being considered. This required a deeper exploration, involving a small number of additional congregational leaders to address issues such as operations – worship, education, finances, and facilities.
7. Who are the congregants currently involved in these discussions?
  - Temple Beth Sholom: Joan Lifson, Lauren Schimko (Co-Presidents); Jason Bernstein (Financial Secretary), Susan Marquith (past President), Rick Cole (Treasurer)
  - Nanuet Hebrew Center: Jeffrey Schragenheim (President), Adam Sayer (past President), Gail Kaiser (Vice President)

## **THE BUILDING**

1. Where will the new entity be located?
  - As of now, the assumption is it will be located at the current Nanuet Hebrew Center facility located at 411 South Little Tor Road, New City, NY 10956, *however* that is contingent upon a capital assessment of both buildings

## 2. How will the location be determined?

- A capital assessment will be performed. It will include an appraisal for both temples' current market value if sold, as well as a study to determine the costs necessary to do construction on the building if it were to house the three entities. A review will then be done to determine the most economical location before a final decision is made. Our goal will be to maximize the amount of money from the sale of whichever building is sold and put that in an endowment to allow both congregations to be viable for generations to come.

## RITUAL

### 1. How will ritual matters work?

- Each individual congregation will continue to be guided by their Rabbi and ritual committee.
- The autonomy of each community will be respected.

### 2. Do the clergy understand one and others' ritual concerns?

- Both Rabbi and Cantor at Temple Beth Shalom (Reform) grew up in more traditional environments. Rabbi Leiken grew up in the Conservative movement and Cantor Zhar grew up in Jerusalem. Cantor Kanarek of the Nanuet Hebrew Center (Conservative) was raised in the Reform movement and was active in the Reform summer camps for years. Rabbi Kurland, while Conservative throughout his life, worked for a number of years in a Reform/Conservative congregation as the Educational Director.

### 3. When will Shabbat worship take place?

- There will be both Reform and Conservative services offered every Shabbat. Rarely will services overlap. On Friday evening the Conservative service will be held at 6:00PM and the Reform service begin at 7:30PM. On Saturday morning the Conservative service will meet as usual while the Reform service will only be offered for a bar/bat mitzvah. In such case, the Conservative service will meet in the proposed enlarged minyan room/second sanctuary.

### 4. Would there be any changes in how we observe *b'nei mitzvah* and how will *b'nei mitzvah* be handled for families who have confirmed dates?

- If the congregations create the new shared space model, there would be NO CHANGES for *b'nei mitzvah*. All services would be conducted with our respective rituals and officiated by our respective rabbis.
- We will be communicating with all families so as to prevent conflicting dates.

### 5. Would there be any changes in how we observe the High Holy Days?

- Temple Beth Shalom has held their High Holiday Services at an alternative site. At this time, the plan is for that to continue.

### 6. How will Kashrut be handled?

- Both clergies are in agreement that in order to accommodate the entire community the following policy should be followed.
  - Only Kosher food will be stored and prepared in the kitchens.
  - All joint community events in the building will be kosher.
  - All food served at religious school events will be kosher.
  - Any personal food/snack brought in for individual consumption should be dairy or vegetarian.

- We are still working through additional items and open issues as it relates to kashrut and we will update both congregations once those items have been worked out.
  - A list of approved kosher caterers and vendors will be shared with all congregants.
7. Is the wearing of kippot required within the building?
- Wearing of kippot within the building is optional. However, each partner organization may request the wearing of kippot when hosting a program or event.

## **SCHOOL**

1. How will the “Synaplex” affect religious school?
  - Both clergies feel strongly that our religious schools should be combined into one religious school, as is happening with a number of communities around the country. Our Rabbis believe that we can have one school with two-tracks of learning for part of the curriculum.
  - Our clergy will work with the religious school director and staff to create a curriculum to make sure we meet the needs of our diverse community.
  - The plan is for Religious School to continue on Sunday mornings and Tuesday afternoons beginning in third grade.
2. Will there still be a nursery program?
  - The best pipeline for future membership and future growth for our joint community is having a vibrant extended day nursery program and the facility at NHC will allow us to do so.
  - Temple Beth Sholom’s nursery program is renowned throughout the County and the children in the program excel in public school environments and we will look to continue this program at our new location.
3. Would there be changes in the school faculty?
  - Staffing needs would be based on registration numbers for each school year. Faculty would be hired on a comprehensive evaluation of the teacher's qualifications, flexibility to implement any new curricular initiatives, and ability to create meaningful, engaging experiences in the classroom

## **FINANCES**

1. How will this change affect membership dues and religious school fees?
  - A joint working team would be established to create a single dues and fee structure.
2. How would combining the congregations affect the investment/endowment funds of each congregation?
  - A joint working group would be convened to recommend rules and policies for the new investment/endowment funds.

## **GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION**

1. How would the Board of Directors and officers be selected?
  - Under our new arrangement we will have three independent boards, one for each organization. Both synagogues will have their own boards per their organization's constitution and a third board will be created to run the third entity. This new board will consist of members from each congregation. Specifics for this board will be developed as the new entity is created.
2. How would combining the congregations affect office and maintenance staff?
  - The office and maintenance staff, along with the schools will be employees of the new management entity and decisions regarding staffing will be made by the board of the third entity.

## **NEXT STEPS AND MEMBER INVOLVEMENT**

1. When would the shared space arrangement take effect?
  - If the congregations decide to move forward, our goal will be that this new "Synaplex" would be launched as of September 2020.
  - Until the effective date, each congregation will continue to operate as a separate congregation, with the possibility of additional joint programming.
  - During the next 12 months, various joint working groups would be established to work out the many details necessary to integrate the communal, programming, financial, governmental and operational facets of active congregational life.

**Please note:** The information presented in the FAQ above was developed by a joint Exploratory Committee to convey preliminary basic understandings reached in good faith by that group and is not intended to create a legally binding document.