

Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation  
Annual Congregational Meeting  
May 24, 2020

**In Attendance:** 110 participants via an online Zoom session.

This meeting was rescheduled from the original date of May 17, 2020, due to technical difficulty with the Zoom platform.

**Religious School Siyyum:** The Religious School Siyyum, which ritually marks the closure of the school year, began at 10:00am.

Rabbi Rachel Weiss noted that JRC is essential and has continued to connect since physical distancing began. We have never closed our doors, just changed where those doors are. All clergy from Evanston Interfaith Action, of which JRC is a member, have agreed not to gather their communities in person before Restore Illinois Phase 4 (Revitalization) is in place, regardless of any national direction.

Cantor Howard Friedland led the Shehecheyanu blessing.

Rabbi David Eber thanked the Religious School teachers, madrichim, and families for their participation in the school. A video review of the year featuring Rabbi David and each of the teachers was shared.

Rabbi Weiss ended the Siyyum by thanking everyone for the year.

**I. Welcome and Call to Order – Elliot Frolichstein-Appel:**

Elliot called the Congregational Meeting to order at 10:22 am. He reviewed the meeting's agenda.

**II. Nominating Committee – Robin Trilling and Lou Weiss:**

Robin spoke on behalf of the Nominating Committee members: Co-chairs Robin Trilling and Lou Weiss, Carrie Elsberg, Michael Grossman, Linda Mathias Kaskel, Sandy Spatz, and Maria Tolpin.

She thanked departing Board members for their many years of service to JRC's Board (with the beginning year of their Board service noted):

Sandy Spatz (Immediate Past President, 2011)

Linda Mathias Kaskel (VP Strategic Development, 2011)

Rich Katz (VP Administration, 2016)

Barbara Pinzur (Secretary, 2013)

Adam Jaffe (Member at Large, 2018)

Gabriel Karsh (Youth Member, 2019)

Lou introduced the proposed slate:

Returning Board members continuing their terms:

President: Elliot Frolichstein-Appel (2019-2021)

VP Education: Robert Israelite (2019-2022)

VP Financial Development: David Block (2019-2022)

VP Membership: Hannah Shearn (2019-2022)

VP Ritual Practices: Marla Baker (2019-2022)

Treasurer: Jonathan Markowitz (2019-2022)

Member at Large: Debi Lewis (2019-2021)  
Member at Large: Anne Wildman (2019-2021)

Vacant terms to be appointed by the Board:

VP Tikkun Olam: TBD (term expires 2021)  
Member at Large: Carrie Elsberg (replacing Rebecca Sperling; term expires 2021)

New Board terms:

President Elect: Emily Harris (2020-2021)  
VP Administration: David Tabak (2020-2023)  
VP Strategic Development: Rebecca Sperling (2020-2023)  
Secretary: Michael Grossman (2020-2023)  
Member at Large: Lisa Servedio (2020-2022)  
Member at Large: Kyra Auslander (2020-2022)  
Member at Large: Carolyn Shapiro (2020-2022)  
Youth Member: Max Straus (2020-2021)

Linda Mathias Kaskel explained the remote voting procedure on Zoom. At the time of the vote, 111 Zoom screens were participating. Since more than one voting member could be present on a single Zoom screen, participants were instructed to use the Zoom feedback icons to vote as follows: “yes” = 1 vote in favor, “no” = 1 vote opposed, “go slower” = 2 votes in favor, “go faster” = 2 votes opposed, “like” = 1 vote abstaining, “dislike” = 2 votes abstaining.

**MOTION:** Approve the slate of new Board terms as announced. (Motion by Barbara Pinzur; second by Alan Gratch.) VOTE: 128 in favor (54 “yes” and 37 “go slower”), 1 opposed, no abstentions. PASSED.

Elliot thanked the Nominating Committee for their thoughtful approach in recommending the slate, everyone on the proposed slate for agreeing to serve, Linda and Barbara for orchestrating the vote, and all participants who voted.

### **III. Review of Past Year and Looking Ahead – Elliot Frolichstein-Appel:**

Elliot observed that much of the world has turned upside down since the COVID-19 pandemic began this past spring and in the spirit of Reconstructionist Judaism, JRC has evolved; yet, at its essence it continues to be the same community it has always been. Elliot reviewed the programming highlights of the past year, including a full range of in-person events pre-pandemic and adapted versions post-pandemic. Because the pandemic began late in this fiscal year, its financial impact for JRC will be limited this fiscal year. Financially, the coming fiscal year is too unknowable to make budget assumptions with any degree of certainty, so the Board chose to adopt a “standard” budget, and at the same time to prepare a set of contingency plans, which will allow for an array of potential changes, course corrections, and programming innovations. Forty-three ideas are currently being evaluated for timing, impact, and appropriateness so they will be ready for implementation as necessary. For the upcoming year, our shared learning theme will be “democracy” and committee chairs welcome input on related programming ideas.

### **IV. Budget – Sharon Diaz and Jonathan Markowitz:**

*(JRC Annual Meeting Financial Report FY20)*

Sharon reviewed financial highlights for FY 20 projected actual and FY 21 budget. Membership was consistent at 428 families in FY 20 vs FY 19, although FY 20 had an increase in Young Adult members

and a decrease in Early Childhood members. Enrollment in both Religious School and Early Childhood was lower in FY 20 than FY 19 (168 vs 180 for RS and 26 vs 37 for EC.)

The FY 20 year-end forecast, based on nine months of actual results, shows lower revenue compared to budget for Early Childhood (due to the lower enrollment) and for Donations and Fundraising (due to the necessitated switch to an online format for the annual gala). FY 20 Religious School revenue is projected to exceed budget (due to 15 families participating in Taste of JRC). On the expense side, FY 20 payroll is forecasted to exceed budget (due to the overlap in Executive Directors and continuing to pay all employees while the building is shut down), as is administration (due to outsourcing of bookkeeping). FY 20 forecasted expenses are expected to be lower than budget for communications (due to moving the website to a different platform rather than doing a full redesign), Religious School, Early Childhood, the gala, and for most of the other categories. FY 20 is projected to end the year with a deficit of \$46,070. Gala sign-up parties are still available for purchase and will add to revenue.

The FY 21 “standard” budget assumes no change in membership, Early Childhood enrollment, and Religious School enrollment and includes a reduction in office staff on payroll, resulting in a net surplus of \$5,598, although as noted by Elliot earlier, this may change based on contingency plans.

Jonathan thanked Sharon for her ten years of service to JRC and for ably handling the many challenges she encountered, including those related to this year’s pandemic. He also thanked the Board for pursuing the process of adopting a flexible, contingency-based approach for this year’s budget.

Jonathan reported that the goal is to retire the mortgage in February, 2022, when it is due for the next interest rate reset. He thanked Sandy Spatz and Reese Gratch for their work leading the Pillars of Chai Capital Campaign. Campaign funds raised will be used to pay down a large part of the mortgage this summer, with the aim of reducing the loan payments.

Jonathan suggested that members consider donating appreciated stocks to JRC to take advantage of donor tax savings. The JRC foundation has a holding account for this.

#### **V. Capital Campaign Report – Sandy Spatz:**

Sandy reported that the Pillars of Chai Campaign began in the fall of 2018 with a \$4.4 million building loan due in February, 2022. In partnership with Giving Tree Associates and the Pillars of Chai Committee, \$1 million was raised in the first phase of the campaign. A few months ago, two substantial gifts were made, motivating others to give generously, resulting in a total of \$2.7 million in new pledges and gifts. \$750,000 now remains to be raised. The generosity of donors is amazing. The Campaign paused soliciting in March, 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic and will restart when appropriate. Sandy and Reese are confident the goal of paying off the mortgage in 2022 will be met. Per the slogan, we will finish this together.

#### **VI. Early Childhood Center Report – Shelli Patt:**

Shelli shared that she had a wonderful first year as Early Childhood Center Director. She thanked everyone, including the teaching staff and families. This was an unusual year and not what she had expected, but the strength of community has kept everyone going. She reviewed the year’s programming, which included Zoom and at-home programming to adapt to physical distancing. Six new families were enrolled this year and Shelli will continue to explore the EC model and programming to expand enrollment going forward.

## **VII. Executive Director Transition:**

Elliot introduced Micky Baer, JRC's new Executive Director, who has partnered well with Sharon and, after one month, is deeply immersed in the work of JRC.

Elliot thanked Sharon for her long tenure at and service to JRC. She has handled many emergencies well over her ten years, has held JRC together, and leaves big shoes to fill.

Sharon commented that after working in a variety of congregations over 24 years, JRC was the highlight of her career. She is confident JRC will be in good hands with Micky. She acknowledged the many ways volunteers and lay leaders help to make JRC so special. She thanked the six Board presidents she worked with during her tenure, as well as the clergy, staff, and custodians. She will be around as she will remain a member of JRC.

## **VIII. Rabbi Rachel Weiss:**

Rabbi Weiss is grateful to have worked with Sharon and looks forward to working with Micki. JRC will have an in-person tribute to Sharon when the time is appropriate. She thanked Sharon, the Executive Director Transition Team, and the Executive Director Search Committee for facilitating a smooth transition.

Rabbi Weiss noted that this time is unique and it takes everyone to hold this community together. We are reconstructing Judaism now and recreating what it means to be a synagogue – a hard, scary, and stressful process. She thanked Sharon, Sandy, Elliot, their daily COVID-19 briefing team (which also includes Dr Kim Grahl and Dr Jordana Binstock), the office staff, the custodians (Louis, Miguel, and Frank), and her family (Julia, Hannah, and Nora), noting it is not easy to be the rabbi's family, especially when everything is happening inside their house. As we reconstruct, we are seeking to adapt and reach out in different ways. She encouraged people to email Elliot or Micky with any questions, with patience. We will not gather in person before Phase 4, since this is a high risk for spreading the virus and she would prefer to do Zoom services than do a funeral resulting from gathering too soon. JRC will continue to be essential and connected, but we need to share the burden and work. We are in the process of reimagining the work of JRC, determining how to realign staff and lay leader roles, and encouraging people to step up to offer what they can. Stay safe and thank you to all.

## **IX. Adjournment – Elliot Frolichstein-Appel:**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:14 am.

*Barbara Pinzur, Secretary*