

Temple Beth El Strategic Plan 2023-2024

Introduction:

Temple Beth El leadership approved the synagogue's last strategic plan in 2010. It was a typical strategic plan, laying out a number of laudable goals as well as some ideas on how to achieve them.

Since then, much has changed. The demographics of our local Jewish community - and of Temple Beth El - are very different. The overall population is smaller, while fewer individuals and families are choosing to affiliate with a synagogue. The population is also older, with different needs.

Meanwhile, fewer rabbis and hazzanim are graduating from Conservative Jewish educational institutions, making finding professional congregational leadership a greater challenge. That stresses the time and energy of the staff already in place.

Add to that the Covid-19 pandemic which kept us away from communal worship and social gatherings, and dramatically altered our habits around synagogue attendance.

For all these reasons, a different type of strategic plan is now proposed. This new strategic plan focuses on ensuring that Temple Beth El has the appropriate personnel, structures and strategies in place to implement new goals and new directions. This type of plan is even more imperative as the synagogue moves to enact the proposals that won Temple Beth El a \$1 million grant from the Farash Foundation, a grant that if used to its full potential will reshape the future of our synagogue and its role in the Greater Rochester Jewish Community.

How Conclusions were Developed

The leadership of Temple Beth El came to these conclusions after analyzing the research conducted to develop this strategic plan. That research project was led by congregant Leah Goldman, working closely with national consultant Bob Leventhal. The research, conducted over several months, included:

- Focus groups involving diverse groupings of the congregation
- A survey sent to all congregants
- Analysis by officers, board members and others of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
- Review of the mission, vision and values statements, both of which remain valid

From this work, some basic themes/congregational goals emerged.

- Congregants want to be better connected - to each other, to leadership and to clergy.
- People are seeking more and varied opportunities to be engaged in synagogue life, beyond attending services
- Members are demanding better, more transparent communication from synagogue leadership about what is happening at TBE.

Three strategic planning subcommittees did preliminary work around these areas, largely brainstorming different ideas and possibilities. This strategic plan takes that preliminary work and calls for the creation of new task forces (detailed below) that formalize the process they began, as well as an oversight Strategic Plan Implementation Steering Commission, so that appropriate programming, activities and other structures can now be organized and implemented.

Responding to more recent developments, this plan also calls for creation of another task force that would support implementation of the ideas laid out in the proposal that won the Farash Foundation grant.

Next steps

Temple Beth El continues to be guided by our mission, vision and values statements.

Mission: Temple Beth El is a vibrant and inclusive community of Jews who join together for prayer, education, celebration, mutual support and comfort, tikkun olam and acts of loving kindness. We are guided by Torah and the principles of the Conservative movement. We are committed to our community, the State of Israel, and Jews around the world.

Vision: Our vision is that Temple Beth El will be an inspiring center of Conservative Judaism in which meaningful experiences and memories take root and grow.

Values: We are a welcoming and inclusive congregation. We value and respect each congregant and his or her personal journey in Judaism. We foster a sense of connectedness with our community. We value participation in all aspects of synagogue and Jewish life. Our congregation will be here for the entire Temple family now and for future generations.

To remain true to these statements, and deliver on some of the congregational needs identified in this planning process, this strategic plan calls for establishing new task forces, one for each of the major areas of focus noted above. Further, a new task force would be established as a high-level Steering Commission that would oversee that these task forces are working and have the tools and resources they need to achieve their goals.

Each of the four task forces would be chaired by a board member, with membership made up of half board members and half congregational volunteers, and staffed by a member of the congregation's professional staff. Size of each task force would be determined by scope of the work. To start, task forces would meet monthly for the first six months, then move to quarterly meetings aimed at gauging progress and making future plans.

In summary, these task forces would be:

Strategic Plan Steering Implementation Commission: Led by a board officer, this commission would consist of the chairs and assigned professional staff of the four task forces listed below, plus the executive director. This commission would meet to ensure that the work of the task forces is progressing and evolving in a way that supports the other task forces and overall goals of TBE. The chair will report to the TBE Board regularly on the progress of the four task forces.

Welcoming and engaging: This task force will create and implement a plan for approval by the board aimed at creating an environment that ensures congregants and newcomers both feel unconditionally welcome at TBE and thus want to engage in our synagogue life. Their aim should be a mix of programming, educational offerings, social events and congregational religious observances, some for the general congregation, others targeted at specific groups - 20- and 30-year-olds, young families, families with school-age children, b'nai mitzvah students and families, families with older teens, and empty nesters. The task force should also suggest and encourage roles for Sisterhood and Men's Club to help achieve these overall goals.

Important to this work will be addressing a key congregational request for more and better engagement with clergy.

And in keeping with a larger vision, the task force should identify and implement ways to collaborate with congregations sharing Beth El building space now and in the future.

Goal: Present a first-year implementation plan to the board which will include details on how to measure success and how to determine focus in the second year.

Identifying Key staffing: This task force will work to identify the key full-time and part-time managerial and clerical staffing needs of TBE, including creating job descriptions to be used for hiring. Job descriptions will include defined, measurable goals for each position, and must focus on helping TBE achieve its congregational engagement and educational roles, as well enhancing connections to the Greater Rochester Jewish community. The task force will seek suggestions from the executive director as to the staffing needs. Its recommendations will be sent to the board for review, and must be able to be supported within the budget or through philanthropy.

This task force will also collaborate closely with any congregational search committees to ensure consistency around job descriptions and strategic goals.

The task force should also develop a database of members interested in volunteering in various aspects of synagogue life. These volunteers can augment and support staffing needs.

Goal: Committee should identify the job titles we are seeking and draft descriptions, with the various search processes to commence as soon after as possible.

Communication: This task force would establish guidelines that would improve important transparency and enhance two-way communication between leadership and congregants, with a goal of increasing engagement and philanthropy. Task force would act in an advisory capacity to a full-time staff person responsible for communications.

Goal: New routine communications have launched and will be monitored and adjusted as needed for a full-year.

Preserving and Advancing Conservative Judaism in Rochester

Demographic shifts and changed habits brought on by the pandemic have synagogues seeking new approaches to attracting and retaining members, as well as building community.

Temple Beth El wants to create and sustain an environment where Conservative Judaism is celebrated and shared among a diverse, inclusive and engaged community. This task force would be charged with learning how people want to observe, celebrate and embrace our faith, as well as developing methods of honoring our history and planning for our future.

The task force's work would also be instrumental in carrying out the promise of the Farash Foundation grant by working on a plan to engage the congregations sharing building space, including collaboration among clergy and leadership, as well as ways to preserve and honor the heritage of each congregation.

Goal: Create a plan for engaging leadership (lay and clergy) of the synagogues, with a goal of one or two communal programs over the coming year. We recommend this task force include congregants from the other two synagogues within TBE building, as well as their clergy, when appropriate.

Timeline and deliverables

1. As soon as the Board has approved this strategic plan, the officers of Temple Beth El will appoint leadership of each of these five panels, and will provide appropriate briefings, trainings, staffing and resources so they can carry out their work.
2. Each task force will provide the Implementation Steering Commission with regular updates of its meetings and progress toward developing and implementing its work plan.
3. At the appropriate time, but not to exceed six months after approval of the strategic plan, each task force should provide an implementation plan for the achievement of its stated goals first to the Implementation Steering Commission and then to the full board for its approval.
4. Each task force's work will be reviewed by the board prior to the Annual Meeting with a report to the congregation at the Annual Meeting by the Strategic Plan Implementation Steering Commission Chair.

Goal: Committee updates will be included regularly in board meeting agendas, and a one-page highlight of each goal will be present and in use at all board meetings. The board will conduct a preliminary progress review at six months and 12 months, and then annually thereafter, with a goal of launching a new strategic plan process in 2025 for completion in 2026.