

May 1, 2019

Chevre,

I am pleased to write to you in advance of our upcoming Annual Meeting on May 19th, when we will wrap up a busy and eventful year and then celebrate our move back into our newly renovated home at 1004 Watts St.

It has been an extraordinary year, and we have really shown that our community transcends our building. Countless volunteers have helped us to handle a variety of new programs and efforts throughout the year, and we have built important new relationships with other faith communities and community leaders that have enhanced us in good and difficult times this year. I am especially grateful that Alan Friedman joined us this year as our new Executive Director-- under Alan's leadership, we have improved synagogue systems, improved our management of congregational finances, and been able to complete a major construction project on time and on budget. He does many things around the synagogue every week to help us operate better, but even more importantly, many congregants have mentioned to me how warm and welcoming he is and how he has quickly become an integral part of our community.

I am also delighted to announce that at the Annual Meeting, we will be celebrating Sol Levine as our volunteer of the year. Sol has played an essential role this year during our stay at Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church, ensuring everything is ready and in its place for Shabbat services each week, and going above and beyond to make sure we are ready for special occasions at TAPC all year. He is a regular minyan attendee and buddy for the Bar Mitzvah class, and also has served as our resident photographer for many events, including documenting the building and our move. We deeply appreciate his commitment to our congregational life and his warm and enthusiastic spirit and are happy to honor him this year.

Budget Overview

At our annual meeting, the congregation will vote on our 2019-2020 budget. First and foremost, I'm happy to report that we had a very successful year financially. We are projecting that we will end the year with a surplus, largely due to the generosity of our congregation and continued growth in our membership. For 2019-2020, we plan to deploy some of our surplus from this year to make strategic investments in needs for the coming year. First and foremost, recognizing that as our membership grows, we are also adding substantial programming, we have posted a position for a Programming and Membership Coordinator. This position was first recommended by an *Organizational Review and Assessment* conducted by Leslie Winner, Robert Hill, and Abby Zarkin in 2017 and will be responsible for coordinating synagogue programs and the overall engagement, satisfaction and retention of Beth El members and will enhance the capacity of existing staff. We are also bringing custodial services in house to be a full-time staff position and continuing to enhance benefits for our staff. Finally, as you will see in the budget, we are continuing our program of modest annual dues increases as a strategy to smooth out needed increases and avoid unpredictable jumps in the coming years as our needs change.

This seemed particularly important knowing that the current year was unpredictable while we were out of the building and that we will learn about any changes in costs as we move into a renovated building.

Alan Friedman and Syd Miller, our Treasurer, will provide a more detailed overview of our budget at the annual meeting and we are happy to answer your questions. I am very grateful to Alan and Syd and our entire Finance Committee for their stewardship over the past few years, particularly during a period in which finances were more unpredictable as we moved out of our building and now are returning.

Security

In light of the events in Pittsburgh six months ago and at Poway Synagogue in San Diego recently, we have received many questions about safety and security at Beth El. Over the past year, several volunteers have worked closely with Alan to consider a more detailed security plan, and we have taken steps to implement some of their recommendations already. This summer, we will convene a more formal task force to ensure we have effective and appropriate safety measures in place by the Fall. In the interim, we will maintain our current plans and protocols and will increase the presence of uniformed security during Shabbat and events at the synagogue.

Security plans for the new building have been increased by adding 18 indoor/outdoor cameras, panic buttons, and more secured/electronic entry through the main and school entrances. We plan to train Shabbat ushers/greeters around safety and security issues - please feel free to contact Alan at alan@betheldurham.org if you'd like to participate. We continue to work with local Durham authorities and the Department of Homeland Security as plans are developed to ensure we are doing the best job of keeping our community safe. This summer, we will offer training workshops on emergency responses specifically related to evacuation and active shooter situations as they relate to our new building.

We are working hard to make sure Beth El has the best possible safety and security measures in place and hope you will continue to share your suggestions and time to contribute to this effort in the coming months.

Year in Review

At the beginning of the year, the Beth El Board committed to three goals: improving operations and systems, helping congregants build deeper relationships and engagement with one another, and increasing our commitment to conversations about critical issues in our community. I am very proud and thankful for the work that so many have led towards these efforts this year.

We implemented new Chavurot, and brainstormed a series of ideas at the Shabbaton that we are implementing to make our congregation more accessible and welcoming for new and ongoing members, such as name tags and guides to our services. We held multiple community dialogues on Israel, participated in interfaith dialogue with local Muslims, held meetings with

every single City Council member to learn about their priorities and share our work in the community, joined the HIAS Welcome Campaign, and built strong new friendships with members of TAPC and the River Church with several extraordinary programs throughout the year.

We also experimented with several new forms of Friday and Saturday Shabbat services that engage more people and are planning to implement those more regularly as we move back into our new building. Our High Holidays in the Carolina Theater were simply outstanding, despite the unfamiliar space, with many speakers and volunteers making it feel warm and special. Finally, we faced terrible tragedy this year and came together after the shooting in Pittsburgh to celebrate our faith. Even more heartening, we were blessed by expressions of support from all over the Triangle in ways that moved us.

I am really looking forward to 2019-2020, when we will dedicate the Snyderman Building at Beth El, enjoy many new programs in our new space, and continue to grow. Thank you to the many people that have led our construction effort and to the volunteers who are currently working to ensure that the new space is beautiful and that all of our donors and supporters, past and present, are recognized appropriately. Finally, while we will celebrate them again in September, I want to extend a special thank you to Sandy Berman and Drew Langsam, who have chaired our Building Expansion and Modernization committee, Nathan Bearman and Gary Zarkin, who have chaired our capital campaign, and the many volunteers that helped envision our expansion and carry out that vision over the past several years.

We are entering a new and exciting phase of life at Beth El and will move back into our building with strength, excitement, and a feeling of community that continues to grow and thrive. I look forward to seeing you on May 19th at our Annual Meeting.

B'Shalom,
Debbie Goldstein
President Beth El