

## **Synagogue President's Remarks Yom Kippur 2009 / Kol Nidre By Brad Long**

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Six years ago, a small committee was formed to evaluate options for our ailing Tifereth Israel Synagogue. The condition of the building was the original impetus for that committee and many options for improvement have been considered since that time. I was a member of that committee and have been involved in some way ever since.

The same problems we had then, still exist today, but have worsened. Take a look around. Everywhere you see results of the deterioration. An unusable balcony, an unusable restroom, sub-par heating and air-conditioning, water stains, peeling paint, and damage is evident everywhere you look. The list goes on and on. And more importantly, the costs go up and up. There is no doubt that we need to do something.

We have been somewhat side tracked for the last 3-4 years looking at various options, including a possible merger, or a joint facility with the Temple. It has become obvious that such a plan will not work. The time is now for Tifereth to take care of ourselves, our needs, our wants, and move forward with a solution that will propel Tifereth Israel into the future.

The board of directors created a building committee with the daunting task of finding alternative solutions to our crumbling structure. The committee is co-chaired by Jodi Jacklin and Ken Waltman. They investigated six options and they are as follows:

1. Rent of an existing facility for services
2. Purchase an existing church in Urbandale and convert it for our use
3. Convert the Dave Walters home in West Des Moines
4. Restore Tifereth in some part or as a whole
5. Build an entirely new synagogue on our Polk Boulevard site
6. Build a new synagogue on the same Ashworth site location we considered 3½ years ago

After much review and discussion of the possible options, the conclusion of the committee and subsequently, the Tifereth Israel board, was that the only truly viable options were to either restore Tifereth (in some form) or to build a new synagogue on the Ashworth land. As of last week we also learned that if the congregation is able to raise the funds, a portion of the land will still be donated by the Pomerantz family.

If you recall, building a new synagogue on Ashworth is what the congregation had considered, and overwhelmingly approved, 3½ years ago. However, even after this congregational vote, many congregants wanted to further consider the option of restoring Tifereth as well as the option of a less expensive, smaller building as an alternative for the Ashworth property. The goal being that the new facility needed to be significantly less expensive than the original estimate of 12 million dollars, yet still meet our needs.

As a committee, we broke the potential restoration of the synagogue into 3 areas, with distinct cost estimates for each, as well as a total to do all three sections. This breakdown gave us the opportunity to determine what restoration efforts would be feasible and more importantly, affordable. The 3 sections are: the sanctuary and chapel, the main atrium including the social hall and kitchen, and the school wing. The current cost for the restoration of the sanctuary and chapel is estimated to be \$4.6 million, the atrium/social hall restoration estimate is \$800,000 and the school wing is estimated to be \$1.4 million. To restore everything as we know it (and yes, that includes all new roofs, seating, heating and air conditioning, lighting, sound systems, carpeting etc.) is \$6.8 million dollars.

So what about the option of a new, smaller facility on Ashworth? Could that be affordable and meet our needs for many years to come? In an effort to keep the costs down on a new facility the committee and the board, supported a different idea of utilizing an existing plan

of a synagogue that has already been built. It was felt that if we could emulate a great design, adapt it to meet our specific needs while at the same time preserve our identity, we could save a considerable amount of time and money on the design process. We could virtually eliminate the architect fees which are typically 6-10% of the total cost of a project! It would also speed up the process of building a new synagogue by eliminating the time, thus money, required to create an original plan. That design, that facility, which comes very close to our needs and site considerations is, Beth Israel Synagogue in Omaha, Nebraska.

If we were to use the Beth Israel design and adapt it to our needs, and utilize the same general contractor that built it (The Weitz Company), the cost would be \$4.5 million dollars which includes classroom space on the lower walkout level. This is considerably less than the 12 million that was proposed some 3½ years ago for the original Ashworth project.

If we take into consideration the amount that we could get for the sale of the Tifereth property, the true cost of a new facility would be reduced by 1-1.5 million dollars. Without question, \$4.5 million for a new facility that meets our needs, versus \$6.8 million to completely renovate Tifereth makes good sense. I think the choice is clear.

In all previous discussions of building new on Ashworth, whether for a joint or merged facility, no consideration was given for a plan “B” should plan “A” fail. I know that we need to think positively about the next step – the fund-raising process. Some would argue to not even mention a plan “B,” but as your president I would be remiss in not providing an alternative, a backup plan based on what we can afford. We spent close to 4 years pursuing alternatives, and fell short of approval in each case and we kept getting further and further behind. We can no longer do nothing, waiting idly for repair costs to outpace our budget and financially cripple our synagogue.

So now what, what is plan “B?” The plan “B” option that has been considered and recommended by the board is primarily based on cost. The plan is to tear down the existing sanctuary (which indications are that it is not feasible to keep), to tear down the school wing, and to rebuild the atrium social hall area to fit our needs. We would utilize as much of the remaining structure and salvage as many of the key elements as possible. The social hall would be re-designed to be used for services and have the capability of efficiently converting back to a social hall. Included in the design are a new cantor’s office, a new chapel, a new roof, movable seating, structure repairs, new heating and air conditioning, new lighting, fire control and a new sound system. That’s just to name a few. The cost for plan “B” is \$2.2 million. This plan should be considered as a last resort. For example, it should be considered if we as a congregation are unable to raise the funds for the more desired alternative.

I know that all of you must have a lot of questions. In order to address your questions, we are planning two informational meetings in the month of November where you can ask those questions, see what the two most viable options looks like and get more details than time allows tonight. We are also gauging the giving potential of the congregation in terms of monetary support of each plan. We will then schedule a congregational vote sometime in December. This will give us direction and a plan on how we will move forward. Communication will be sent out with the specific dates. A fundraising chair and committee assignments would then be announced in December, with the efforts of that committee starting in earnest January 1.

There have been a lot of changes over the last several months, our wonderful Rabbi Edelman-Blank was hired, a re-commitment by Cantor Bletstein was signed, and a new board and executive committee have been seated. There is a sense of vitality; a new excitement is in the air of what can be, not what has been. Can you feel it? The new year gives us the opportunity to

reflect as Jews and consider ourselves, our flaws, our lives, our hopes, our dreams, and our commitment to move forward with the progression of Tifereth Israel Synagogue. The opportunity for positive change is limitless this year. We must all pledge to work together with forethought and vision to renew our commitments, restore our courage and then move forward to many more new years to come.

Shana Tova.

May you and your family be inscribed for a good and peaceful year.