

BUILDING FAQs

What are the goals of the renovation?

There are three goals of this renovation.

- a. To add an elevator to the front of the shul to increase accessibility for members and guests.
- b. To add about 2000 sq feet of which 1100 sq feet is required for the elevator, lobby, and circulation within the shul and 900 sq feet is new programming space.
- c. To upgrade the building's electrical, plumbing and other critical systems that are aging and need replacement.

In a previous plan, presented to the congregation in 2015, the elevator was located in an expansion at the rear of the building. Why has the elevator been moved to the front of the shul?

Having the elevator at the back would mean that anyone using a mobility device would have no choice but to negotiate the pathway at the side of the shul and enter at the rear of the building. Therefore, our architects developed a plan with the elevator at the front of the building. This is in keeping with principles of inclusivity and equity, and ensures dignity for all members and guests. This plan requires major changes to the front of the building to provide a new, more welcoming entrance for all.

Why can't we just put a ramp into the shul and solve our accessibility problems that way?

The differences in elevation of the floors mean that ramps are not feasible and cannot provide access to all floors of the shul.

How many disabled people come to our shul anyway?

There have been many occasions when members and guests **of all ages** with mobility challenges have attended the shul and needed assistance with the stairs. We also know of specific members for whom the indignity and difficulty associated with negotiating the building are simply unmanageable, and who have decided just not to come. This is unacceptable in a public space in the 21st century.

How many wheelchairs and people will the elevator accommodate?

The plan includes an elevator that accommodates most wheelchairs and mobility devices.

What about halakhic issues?

The Congregation recognizes that certain devices that are widely used to achieve accessibility, such as assisted-hearing devices, automatic door openers and elevator service (among others), all require the use of electricity, which in the view of some comes into conflict with traditional principles of halacha when used on Shabbat and Chagim.

After considerable discussion at the most recent Annual General Meeting in June 2017, the membership of the Congregation approved a motion stating that the Congregation accepts that where necessary to advance accessibility for those with physical disabilities, the shul is prepared to depart in principle from our traditional Halachic approach to Shabbat and Chagim as we have historically defined it, specifically the prohibition against using electricity.

As a follow-up, the AGM approved a second motion, giving the Board the authority to determine how, when and whether to use certain devices to achieve accessibility. The Board's decision-making will be conducted in accordance with a set of guidelines developed by the Ritual Committee and the rabbi. Those guidelines are subject to review and change.

Our rabbi has been managing for years without an office at the shul. Why does he need one now?

A congregation of Narayever's size needs an office for its spiritual leader. Rabbi Elkin has many meetings each week with congregants. Currently, these have to be held either in the sanctuary or in the solarium, neither of which offers a level of privacy necessary for the kinds of sensitive meetings a rabbi often must conduct with community members. Rabbi Elkin maintains an office in his home – but having a study on-site at the synagogue would be more convenient for congregants and more appropriate. Moreover, future rabbis of the shul may not want, or be able, to maintain an office at home.

How much does this renovation cost?

The total cost of the project, including construction, relocation, contingencies and relevant fees, is \$4 million.

How much money am I going to be asked to give toward this project? How long will I have to pay it out?

All members of the shul will be asked to contribute to the best of their ability to help this project become a reality. It will certainly be possible for members to arrange to make their contributions over a period of several years. For now, an \$80 levy per person has been added to membership dues to raise funds to continue the development of the building design. In addition to capital gifts, we expect that a larger annual levy – perhaps over 5 to 10 years – will be required to support the project.

What kind of recognition are you planning to give to donors?

As part of the Capital Campaign, a naming policy and program has been proposed for major gifts. In addition, all donations will be acknowledged in published form, and for mid-level gifts, there will be recognition through mounted plaques. Some donors may choose to remain anonymous and that choice will always be honoured.

Wouldn't the congregation be better off just moving to another location that could accommodate our needs?

We are all aware of the great attachment the congregation has to this building and to this neighbourhood. In addition, suitable and affordable facilities are not easily available in downtown Toronto. It's likely that moving would cost more, since we'd have to purchase as well as renovate for accessibility and other needs, rather than renovate and expand the site we already own.

Shouldn't we try to purchase the properties adjacent to the shul so we can expand to the north or south as well?

Over the years, the properties to the north and south of our building have come up for sale but the shul has not been in a position to make the financial commitment to purchase them. Taking into account the cost to purchase and also to renovate, as well as the difficulty of getting City approvals to convert a residential property for public use, this approach would be very high risk.

Why not knock down our existing building and rebuild the shul from scratch?

This option would be at least as expensive as renovating. Also, since our existing building is defined as “legal non-conforming” for zoning purposes, we could potentially face more zoning difficulties with new construction than by renovating our existing building. Renovation has the additional advantage of providing a sense of continuity: we retain our current building yet enhance it.

What is the process of getting approval from the City? When does the congregation approve the plan?

The proposed building plan was turned down by the city’s Committee of Adjustment in December of 2016, and the shul’s appeal of that decision will be heard by the Ontario Municipal Board at a June 2017 hearing. Should the plan be approved by the OMB, the plan will then be presented for approval to the Congregation at a Special General Meeting or Annual General Meeting.

I heard that our neighbours are angry with us. Why?

The main issue that we have had with our neighbours is parking. One feature of our downtown location—like other downtown organizations—is the lack of parking. We know that the parking supply has been reduced as a result of changes on Harbord St. However, while we empathize with our neighbours on this issue, our renovation does not worsen the current parking situation.

I like the Narayever small, cozy and modest. Can’t we just stay the way we are?

We love our building. However, our values emphasize the imperative to welcome all members of our community to the very best of our ability. Currently, we exclude those who are mobility impaired. In addition, as society ages, more and more of our members, potential members, and visitors will face mobility challenges. For us to honour our values, our building must change. We must also consider the ongoing and future health of the congregation. The ability to attract new membership is vital. Having the space to accommodate congregants and run programming that is appealing to our community is essential. Our shul building will still be small and warm and intimate. It will also be able to meet our needs much more fully. We inherited a beautiful shul building from our Narayever forebears; now it is our generation’s obligation to bequeath a better shul building to those who will follow us.