

## **BUILDING FAQs : Updated December 2017**

### *Current Status*

#### **Where are we in the process?**

Although this past year has been very busy for the Building Renewal Project, we can't report as much progress as we would wish. We are regrettably still waiting for the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) hearing to be completed. What started out as a one-day hearing has expanded to a third day of hearings scheduled for January 18, 2018. If we get approval from the OMB, we will hold a Special General Meeting at the Narayever to review the plan and discuss fundraising.

### *Goals*

#### **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 replacing.

### *Previous Options that We Discussed and Rejected*

#### **Can't we just stay the way we are?**

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. To honour our values, the building much change. We must also consider the sustainability 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 will still be small and warm and intimate but 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.

#### **In the 2015 plan, the elevator was to be located at the rear of the building. Why has the elevator been moved to the front of the shul in the current plan?**

Having the elevator at the back means that anyone using a mobility device has 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 our goal of inclusivity and ensures dignity for all members and guests.

Putting the elevator at the back may be cheaper, but not by a lot. Adding to the back of the building would still require a number of other changes such as wider stairs, wider doorways and corridors. We would still want to replace piping and heating and ventilation.

### **Why can't we just put a ramp into the shul to solve our accessibility problems?**

Differences in the elevation of the shul's floors mean that ramps are not feasible and cannot provide access to all floors of the shul.

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

Accessible and affordable space is not easily available in downtown Toronto. Moving would cost more since we would have to purchase as well as renovate for accessibility and other needs.

### **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 financial position to purchase them. Further, the cost to purchase and to renovate would be very high. Obtaining City approvals to convert a residential property for public use is also very difficult.

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

This option is 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.

#### *The Need for an Accessible Building*

### **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 required 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.

#### *Concerns Around Halakha*

### **What about Halakhic issues?**

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

After considerable discussion at the most recent Annual General Meeting (AGM) 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 from our traditional Halachic approach to Shabbat and Chagim regarding 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.

### *The Need for Space*

#### **Why does our rabbi need an office?**

Rabbi Elkin has many meetings each week with congregants. Currently, these are held either in the sanctuary or in the solarium. Neither location offers the privacy necessary for the kinds of sensitive meetings a rabbi has with community members. Rabbi Elkin maintains an office in his home – but having an office at the synagogue would be more convenient and appropriate for congregants. Moreover, future rabbis of the shul may not want to maintain an office at home.

### *The 4M dollar question*

#### **How much money have we raised so far?**

So far we have raised \$1.7M.

#### **The project cost of \$4M is a lot of money for a small shul. Why is this project so expensive?**

The project cost of \$4M is an “all-in” preliminary cost estimate including design, planning approvals, construction, upgrading of our heating and ventilation system, relocation, and moving. It is also based on a preliminary plan so it includes significant contingency costs. When we have OMB approval and approval by the congregation, we will review the plan with our architect and engineers and look for opportunities to reduce the costs.

#### **Can we save money by eliminating the new second floor in the front?**

Having the elevator in the front of the building means that we need to push the sanctuary further back to accommodate the elevator and vestibule. Moving the sanctuary further back means we lose the back office space. That change necessitates finding space for the admin office and the new rabbi's study somewhere else. That is the reason for the second floor.

#### **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. Members will be able to arrange their contributions over a period of several years. For now, an \$80 levy per person has been added to membership dues to pay for the development of the building design. In addition, we expect that a larger annual levy – perhaps for 5 to 10 years – will be required to support the project.

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

A naming policy and program has been established for major gifts. For mid-level gifts, recognition will be recognized through mounted plaques. All donations will be acknowledged in published form. Some donors may also choose to remain anonymous.

### *Obtaining Approval*

**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. The shul's appeal of that decision was heard by the Ontario Municipal Board at a June 2017 hearing. A third hearing is scheduled for January 18, 2018. 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.

**What is the delay in obtaining approval to go ahead with the project?**

Five neighbours are currently objecting to our proposed plans at the Ontario Municipal Board hearings. However, there are also other neighbors who support us or have no objections. In fact, the Harbord Village Residents Association supported our proposal before it went to the Committee of Adjustment and has raised no objections since then.

The planning process in Toronto is very complicated and, as we are finding out, approvals can take a very long time. The process we are going through is the process most building projects in the City are subject to. Our project requires nine minor variances from the zoning bylaw.

The first stage of applying for these variances is the Committee of Adjustment (CoA). At our CoA hearing in December 2016, we were given several minutes to present and eight neighbours also spoke for several minutes each. Unfortunately the Committee of Adjustment turned us down.

We then exercised our legal right to appeal that decision through the Ontario Municipal Board. Through the OMB hearing, the five neighbours who are objecting to our accessibility project have implied that they actually object to our shul in this location – not just the project we are proposing. The objectors feel our shul is an inappropriate use of space.

Councillor Joe Cressy offered to arrange mediation between the Narayever, the objecting neighbours, and the City. The Narayever indicated that we were interested and willing to participate in mediation as did the City. The five neighbours did not accept the mediation offer. As a result the mediation did not proceed.

We hope that the professional impartial hearing by the OMB will decide that our project is worthy, appropriate for our location, and that the variances we require will not negatively impact our neighbours.

**What are the neighbours' concerns?**

An issue that has been raised by our neighbours is parking. One challenge of our downtown location—like other downtown organizations—is the lack of parking. However, while we empathize with our neighbours on this issue, our renovation does not worsen the current parking situation.

Another concern involved a proposed second floor deck. This was removed from the current plan as was a bench in front of the building.

From the beginning of this project we aimed to work with neighbours to address their concerns about the project. We did that. Our architect developed a design that is sensitive to the existing streetscape and adds only a modest amount of space in keeping with the neighbourhood.

When we held meetings for the neighbours we distributed notices to 187 households. Several neighbours who attended the information meeting we had at the shul expressed support for our plans. So although the vast majority of our neighbours are not opposing, we are going through a long process because of five objectors.

For more information about the Building Renewal Project go here

<https://www.narayever.ca/building-renewal> More details about the January 18 hearing please contact Anna Pace at [buildingtaskforce@narayever.ca](mailto:buildingtaskforce@narayever.ca) .