December 14, 2018

Dear HEA Members,

For a number of years, the Security Committee of the congregation has been working with representatives of Homeland Security, the Denver Police Department, and the Anti-Defamation League to assure a safe environment for members of our congregation and community. This past May, a representative of Homeland Security conducted an extensive walk through of our campus known as a “CPTED Assessment.” This observation is based upon the principles of anticipating the thought processes of a potential offender and thus, creating an environment that discourages follow-through. Following this report, a number of practices to “harden” our site were implemented.

Following the terrible tragedy at Tree of Life Synagogue, the committee met and implemented a number of procedures during this traumatic time. Access to the building, which had always been restricted during the week, became limited seven days per week. Additional training for staff and volunteers was implemented, and long-term plans have begun to coalesce.

After working with outside consultants, as well as government officials, the Security Committee made a number of recommendations to the Board of Directors. At the November 27 Board meeting, the options of restricting access to our buildings, purchasing an extensive camera surveillance system, reinforcement of windows and doors, a permanent guard, security training for all staff and lay-volunteers were all explored and thoroughly discussed.

At the conclusion of the Board meeting, it was agreed that the following actions will take place:

1. A more robust entry policy is to be initiated, including the observation and questioning of all who want to enter the building. This will include ID badges for Preschool Families, staff, and all who are in the building on a daily basis. A more sophisticated camera and entry system has been ordered and should be installed by mid-December.
2. A multi-camera system that will monitor all interior and exterior areas of the synagogue and Goldberger Youth Center will be installed. This system will be monitored in the synagogue, and if necessary, the Denver Police will be able to access the system externally.
3. 3M Security Window Film will be installed on all selected windows to prevent window shattering and delay illegal entry to the building.
4. We will be installing electronically controlled doors that will limit access to the preschool hallways and classrooms.
5. Additional panic buttons will be installed in more locations in the building.
6. All staff will be able to be in constant communication through walkie-talkies and smart phone advanced communication apps.
7. Staff will be involved in more extensive security training, as well as advanced first aid preparation.
8. Drills to familiarize staff and students with emergency procedures will take place on a regular basis.
9. We are recruiting more people to greet and observe people entering the synagogue on Shabbat and other times that a large number of people enter the building at the same time. If you would like to join this group, please contact Mark Samuelson at mark@samuelsonassoc.com. This group of volunteers is critical to our ability to make the HEA a welcoming and safe environment.
As you can see, having a permanent guard was not part of the Board decision. There are thoughtful and well-researched reasons for this important decision. As discussed at an ADL Security Talk on December 5th, there is no research and no historical data that proves the success in the deterrence of attacks by virtue of having a security guard on site. Rather, monitoring and controlling access to buildings is the single and most effective way to provide a safe environment. Further, security guards may offer optics of a secure site, but more often than not, it is a false sense of security. Security guards have not been fully effective in preventing the very rare occurrence of violent attacks against schools, hospitals, shopping centers, or religious institutions.

Our Board made an important and deliberate decision regarding the stewardship of our HEA community. As a Board, it is their duty to oversee and manage our resources. With this in mind, the Board agreed that our financial investment should be spent to provide greater security, not to just provide an image of it.

To fund these safety precautions and equipment, the Board has implemented a Security Assessment for calendar year 2019. We are asking each membership household to pay a $10 per month ($120 per year) fee to cover the initial costs of these upgrades. We are also having an additional assessment in the Preschool of $20 per month per student or $30 per month per family if they have more than one child in the Preschool. Of course, if members would like to contribute additional funds for the security of the facility, this financial support will be greatly appreciated.

In addition to funding these security improvements through the assessment, we will be applying for a Homeland Security grant in 2019 (our 2017 grant application was not approved).

We will keep the members of our congregation and community updated as security improvements are made. We strive to be both a welcoming and safe community.

L'Shalom,

Lynn Geller, President
Rabbi Bruce Dollin
Mark E. Alpert, Security Committee Chair
Jody Meyer, Operations Director
Neal S Price, Executive Director