



## Woodstock Area Jewish Community Congregation Shir Shalom Vermont

ANNUAL MEETING

AUGUST 22, 2021

4:00 pm – Zoom only

**In attendance:** Rabbi Ilene Haigh, Phyllis Forbes, Jen Anderson, Shari Borzekowski, Mike Brown, Sue Brown, Leone Bushkin Merle Bushkin, Judy Danna, Carolyn Dashef, Stephen Dashef, Margie Elsberg, Mickey Elsberg, Barry Feinberg, Susan Feinberg, Phyllis Ginstling, Walter Golub, Dan Gottlieb, Shirley Grambling, Jeffrey Kahn, Rachel Kahn, Tess Kahn, Larry Kasden, Peggy Kasden, Helene Linn, Paul Rosenberg, David Rosengarten, Laura Schneider, Michael Shir, Arthur Skerker, Roni Skerker, Bob Steinberg, Muriel Steinberg, Lee Tabas, Nancy Tabas, Carol Trachtenberg, Howard Trachtenberg, Rich Windish, Nitzah Winter

**Call to order:** Congregation President Phyllis Forbes opened the meeting at 4:03 pm by welcoming everyone and noting that this is the congregation's 33<sup>rd</sup> year. Phyllis announced that the quorum requirement of 25 attendees has been met.

**Approval of 2020 Annual Meeting Minutes:** Arthur Skerker said the minutes were posted online.

***Walter Golub moved to accept the 2020 Annual Meeting minutes as submitted. Helene Linn seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.***

### **Address from Rabbi Ilene Haigh:**

Rabbi Haigh observed that the Annual Meeting comes just 14 days before Rosh Hashanah and spoke about the past year and a half when the congregation was forced by the COVID pandemic to shift all gatherings online. She said she is thankful that we have begun gathering in a tent on the synagogue grounds while still making it possible to attend gatherings on Zoom. "When we got together on Zoom, we got together and connected with more people than ever before," Rabbi Haigh said, making it possible to hold services on every shabbat as well as holiday observances and celebrations. She applauded the Caring Committee's outreach efforts throughout the pandemic. "The pandemic has stretched us and made life difficult in many ways," she said, adding that when she heard the choir practicing for the High Holidays at the synagogue for the first time since early 2020, she was moved to tears. Rabbi applauded the hiring of Leah Gawel as our new school director, announced that more than 20 families have recently joined Shir Shalom, and said she is joyous that so many b'nai mitzvot have been celebrated recently, with more to come soon. She urged everyone to help blend those who are new to Shir Shalom with those who have been with the shul for a long time and reminded everyone to "accept that risk and failure are all parts of growth." Rabbi Haigh remarked that her relationships with those in leadership positions and especially with Phyllis Forbes are inspiring. She welcomed new Board members and praised all who have worked hard for years to bring us to today. "Thank you beyond words," she said. "May this year bring joy and love and wonder and health."

**Shofar:** On the call of “T’kia!” Rachel Kahn blew the Shofar, a sound Rabbi Haigh said everyone should hear on every day of the month of Elul as we approach Rosh Hashanah.

**President’s Address:** Phyllis Forbes thanked Rabbi Haigh and Rachel Kahn. She announced that in spite of the pandemic-driven challenges that forced programming and services online for more than a year, Shir Shalom managed to collect more revenue, attract more volunteers and welcome more new members than she could recall. Phyllis spoke of shared sadnesses as well, including the death of Judy Intraub. She said she’ll miss seeing Stuart and Antoinette Matlins and Sue and Carl Wulfestieg in person now that they no longer live in Woodstock, and hopes they’ll stay in touch. Phyllis praised Rabbi Haigh for helping us celebrate Shabbat every week, holidays and other programs through the pandemic, and for making sure we all felt sheltered and supported. Phyllis loved keeping Rabbi’s surprise birthday video a secret and thought it was great that 96 members filled the video with birthday messages. She thanked Carly and Becca for enhancing services, congratulated everyone who helped with the search for our new Religious School director, Leah Gawel, and thanked the musicians who’ve joined to making our services more beautiful. School registration has begun, including a program for children under 5 years old, and Phyllis invited everyone to come see how wonderful Leah and others have made the school and outdoor play areas look.

Phyllis offered a long list of last year’s successes: Three adults and five teens celebrating b’nai mitzvot, Zoom programs on Israeli-US relations, a wonderful new sukkah, Torah study, Hebrew and trope classes, a new Founders’ Shabbat program, a Social Justice speaker series Racial Diversity, a new teen program and a 20s-30s-and-40s program, a suicide prevention program, the Women’s Book Group, knitting and blanket-making, and a terrific Scholar-in-Residence program with Rabbi Ellenson. Phyllis said the pandemic challenged us to be creative on Zoom and we rose to the occasions: the weekend program in honor of our Holocaust Torah was excellent, there were movie nights, we lit candles and celebrated in lots of ways on all 8 nights of Hanukkah, the CinderEsther Purim play was “hilarious,” and the summer fundraiser on Zoom turned out to be the most successful one ever.

Phyllis praised the Buildings and Grounds Committee for repairing the Rabbi’s house and added that we’ve installed a new database, hired a new office manager, and unveiled a new website and logo. More than 80 have responded to our survey on services and programs, and the Caring Committee called the check on everyone in our community during the pandemic’s stay-at-home period. She announced that there were more donors and more volunteers during the past year.

Phyllis said she’s excited about the new Board members, about our new school leadership, and added that she hopes to hire an assistant for Rabbi Haigh. She hopes this year’s gala will be in-person and hopes for a robust social action program. She said Leah hopes more congregants will offer to help in the school, and added that we need volunteers to help with technology. Phyllis’ conclusion: “We really did a lot this past year!”

**Treasurer’s Report:** Barry Feinberg reviewed the Treasurer’s Report. Though we had many unexpected expenses this year, we saved money on Occupancy because we had no in-person programs at the synagogue. In addition, Shir Shalom received a Pandemic Relief check for nearly \$25,000 from the federal government, money we will not have to return to the government. Barry said we were able to cover all of the year’s expenses.

Barry reviewed the Temporary and Permanently Restricted Funds and noted that the largest fund in our budget is the General Fund, which includes all programming, administration, occupancy, and rabbi

compensation. The Endowment Fund total is almost \$580,000. Barry added that that amount does not include unrealized capital gains which total “probably another \$185,000.” (Rabbi Haigh offered “a huge shout-out to the Endowment Committee.”)

Barry explained that the Budget for the coming fiscal year (July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022) has been approved by both the Finance Committee and the Board. The Budget, he said, must be approved at today’s Annual Meeting. The Budget, he said, requires a 17% increase in contributions, and includes a \$15,000 transfer from the Edith Linn Fund to support the school. Barry said he expects we will spend nearly \$30,000 on the building this year. The Scholar-in-Residence program is already funded.

In response to comments—mostly in praise of Barry’s financial stewardship—and questions, Barry said, “Everything we anticipate is in the budget. The congregation has met the challenges for the six years I’ve been Treasurer. I anticipate that we will be able to fund what we need.” He said Building Fund expenses are being covered by transfers from the Operations Fund, and added that he expects that the Endowment Fund will grow this year.

***Bob Steinberg moved to accept the Budget as presented by the Treasurer. Sue Brown seconded the motion. The vote in favor of the motion was unanimous.***

**Caring Committee Report:** Sue Brown said the Caring Committee had carried out robust programs throughout the year, including making almost 80 calls and writing cards to people to see how they’ve been doing during the pandemic. Committee members have made blankets for new babies, knitted gifts, and delivered soup and food. She said the committee is working well because each committee member volunteers to take a month to ensure that the committee responds to a range of needs. There are four new comm members, Sue said, but she hopes for more volunteers.

**Hebrew School Report:** Roni Skerker said school programs had been shifted completely to Zoom, noting that it was challenging to engage younger children online. The school sent “Care Packages” home to families for each holiday, including lots of interactive activities. For Hanukkah, for instance, there were games, songs, candles, gelt, and menorah coloring supplies, all designed to enhance learning for parents as well as children. Roni said the school has purchased lots of items for a new Pre-School program, and she praised the hiring of a new Hebrew teacher as well as the appointment of Leah Gawel as Director of Family Education. Roni said Leah “will be leading our school into a new generation!”

Roni announced that 39 students have enrolled in the school so far, and said she expects the number will grow. The school, she said, is looking for a Pre-K teacher.

Roni thanked Rabbi Haigh, Phyllis Forbes and Barry Feinberg for their guidance and understanding throughout the difficult pandemic year, and she thanked the teachers as well as “our he wonderful parents and kids” for their interest and contributions to the success of the school. Leah Gawel noted that there are 14 new families who have signed up for school, including teens, and she praised Roni for “bending over backwards” to help with the transition to the new school year. “I can’t thank Roni enough,” she said. Phyllis added that “Roni did a magnificent job” under difficult circumstances. She said she is glad that Roni and Leah have succeeded in attracting new families to enroll in the school.

**Thanks to retiring leadership members:** Phyllis Forbes, Leone Bushkin, Dan Gottlieb, and Tom Beck offered tributes to several people who have made enormous contributions to Shir Shalom:

- Retiring Board members Carol & Howard Trachtenberg
- Retiring Vice President of Finance Walter Golub
- Retiring Treasurer Barry Feinberg; founding members Barry and Susan Feinberg
- Founding members Stuart and Antoinette Matlins who have moved to Europe.

**Nominating Committee Report:** Tom Beck, chair, presented the Slate of Officers and Board members for the Nominating Committee—Leone Bushkin, Margie Elsberg, Shirley Gramling, and David Kraemer. The following nominations are to be presented and voted as a slate:

**Officers for 2 years:**

President: *Phyllis Forbes*  
 VP Caring & Membership: *Susan Brown*  
 Secretary: *Margie Elsberg*  
 VP Education: *Roni Skerker*  
 Treasurer: *Larry Gavens*  
 VP Facilities: *David Rosengarten*  
 VP Ritual: *Arthur Skerker*

**Directors for 3 years:**

*Helene Linn* (1st Term)  
*Tess Kahn* (1st Term)  
*Michael Sher* (1st Term)

***Tom Beck moved to approve the Slate, Jeffrey Kahn seconded the motion, and the motion was approved unanimously.***

**Treasurer authorization:**

***Michael Sher moved to authorize Larry Gavens, the duly elected Treasurer of Shir Shalom Vermont, the Woodstock Area Jewish Congregation, to 1. Open bank accounts and accounts with other financial institutions on behalf of the congregation 2. Engage in financial transactions with the institutions including drawing checks and depositing funds with those institutions, and also to engage in trades and purchase and sales of securities as may be required, and 3. To allow the President and the Treasurer to designate such other persons as they deem to be in the best interest of the corporation to carry out the functions otherwise delegated to the Treasurer. The motion was seconded by Helene Linn and passed with 25 votes in favor and 3 opposed.***

**Closing remarks:** Leone Bushkin thanked Phyllis “for being an extraordinary president. You have been a blessing to all of us and seeing you and rabbi work together is another blessing. Todah Rabah.”

**Adjournment:**

***Susan Feinberg moved that the meeting be adjourned. Bob and Muriel Steinberg seconded the motion. With a unanimous vote, Phyllis adjourned the Annual Meeting at 5:43 pm.***

Respectfully submitted,  
 Margie Elsberg, Secretary