

Board of Trustees Meeting

October 21, 2020

6:15p via Zoom

Minutes

Chair: Jon Herstein ♦ Minutes: Arlene Rosenberg ♦ Timekeeper: Andy Oliff

Attendees

Board

Julie Feuchtwang
Laurie Friedman
Scott Haber
Jon Herstein
Marilyn Hollinger
Ware Kuschner
Andy Oliff
Gene Podkaminer
Jason Pollard
Alison Poggi León
Betsy Rosen

Arlene Rosenberg
Lisa Rosenthal
Eric Schlezinger
Maria Yarmolinsky
Stuart Zussman

Absent

Linda Citron
Jenna Fisher
Roger Lazarus

Staff

Rabbi Liora Alban
Rabbi Lisa Delson
Rabbi Dan Feder
Ayelet Shapiro
Allison Steckley
Karen Wisialowski
Cantor Anna Zhar

Guests

Betsy Magen

Jon called the meeting to order at 6:20 pm.

1. Welcome (*Jon Herstein*)
2. D'var Torah (*Andy Oliff*)
Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tsivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah
3. Blessing for Community Service
Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tsivanu la'asok b'tzorchay tzibur
4. Clergy Update (*Rabbi Feder, Rabbi Delson, Rabbi Alban, Cantor Zhar*) Inform
 - Rabbi Feder:
 - The High Holy Days ("HHD") gave PTS clergy and staff the opportunity to meet the needs of our community at a time when congregants are feeling spiritually needy and isolated.
 - This year's unique circumstances allowed the clergy to start from scratch when imagining what the HHD could be. They received helpful support in this process from the professional organizations of clergy affiliated with the Reform movement: the Central Conference of American Rabbis ("CCAR") and the American Conference of Cantors ("ACC").
 - In making decisions about the HHD, the clergy and staff were guided by a desire to make the programming feel relational and community-building while also providing a top-notch aesthetic experience. The clergy also selected sermon themes that they felt were appropriate to our current moment, such as the value of the synagogue, the need for self-compassion, and the importance of reaching across divides.
 - Rabbi Feder noted that the final "product" that congregants experienced on the HHD reflected a joint effort of the entire PTS staff.
 - Rabbi Alban:
 - Rabbi Alban described the youth workshops that she and Madeleine Steckley conducted on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The Rosh Hashanah workshops focused on the theme "Living Our Values," while the Yom Kippur workshops focused on the theme "The Power of Our Words." The HHD also

- o featured teen programs that were written and co-led by the PARTY Board.
 - o Rabbi Alban reported that the Youth Education school year began three weeks ago and has been running smoothly so far. In addition to regular classes, the program now offers optional electives such as cooking, Bible stories, art, science, and dance. In addition, families can sign up to receive monthly Shabbat kits and can participate in a school-wide book club.
- Cantor Anna:
 - o Cantor Anna agreed with Rabbi Feder that this year's HHD were unprecedented and exceptional. She also agreed that the clergy's goal during the HHD was to create a feeling of community, and that achieving that goal required the efforts of PTS's entire staff. She was happy to find so many musically-talented PTS congregants and enjoyed collaborating with PTS's three rabbis.
 - o Cantor Anna has enjoyed working with B'nai Mitzvah students.
- Rabbi Delson:
 - o Rabbi Delson reported that preparations for this year's HHD began 1-2 months earlier than usual, as the clergy worked to condense the HHD services into one-hour time blocks to accommodate shortened video attention spans.
 - o Rabbi Delson briefly described how she created spreadsheets of the service outlines, as well as Power Point slides that allowed prayerbook pages to be projected onscreen.
 - o Rabbi Delson described some of the innovations introduced this year, including a guided meditation with Rabbi Eric Weiss from the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center; written reflections during the Yizkor service; an introduction to the Rosh Hashanah Seder tradition on Erev Rosh Hashanah; and the distribution of HHD kits.
 - o Rabbi Delson noted that as we evaluate this year's HHD services, we should reflect on what we will put back when we return to in-person services and what we will allow to fall away to make room for new ideas and practices.

5. Membership and HHD Appeal Updates (*Karen Wisialowski*) Inform

- Karen noted that after the HHD, she and her staff came away with the feeling that we can do anything!
- HHD Appeal:
 - o Karen complimented Jon's wonderful, and very personal, HHD Appeal message and noted that the community responded to it very positively.
 - o Karen reported that following the HHD, she received messages from several congregants who found the services meaningful and who, in recognition of PTS's increased financial need during these challenging times, offered donations above (in some cases, significantly above) their usual contribution levels. Karen expects to receive more messages and contributions along these lines.
 - o HHD Appeal numbers:
 - As of 10/21, we have received \$294K in pledges from 168 donors; at this point in 2019, we had received \$276K in pledges from 234 donors.
 - In past years, 49% of HHD Appeal donations have come in after the HHD, so Karen expects that we will be receiving more HHD Appeal donations in the months ahead.
- Membership:
 - o For the first time this year, we began the membership renewal process with online renewal notices and followed up with paper renewal packets only for households that did not renew online. (In prior years, we have sent paper renewal packets first and followed up with online reminders.)
 - o Also new this year: We are automatically renewing all households that engage in any type of transaction or interaction with the synagogue (e.g. picking up a HHD kit, enrolling a student in Religious School; making a donation), even if that household has not formally renewed.
 - o Through September 30, we have collected \$701K in membership commitment, which is better than our performance in the prior two years.
 - o As of today, 126 households have not renewed and will receive more follow-up. These families contributed \$175K in membership commitment last year, and Karen estimates that approximately 100 of them are likely renewals.

- In addition to membership commitment, we received about \$97K in COVID Recovery Fund donations in connection with the membership renewal process.
- Karen alerted Trustees to a change in the way that Tzedakah Circle contributions are reported on PTS's financial statements. In prior years, we have separated Tzedakah Circle contributions into "Membership Commitment" and "HHD Appeal" components. This year, we are reporting the total amount of Tzedakah Circle contributions as part of Membership Commitment.

6. Finance Committee Report and Budget Update (*Jason Pollard*) Inform

- 2019-20 financial results:
 - Revenue:
 - Actual 2019-20 revenue was about \$4.3M, compared with budgeted revenue of \$4.6M.
 - Membership Commitment and HHD Appeal were about on target.
 - Preschool revenue was down considerably because the school was closed for three months. The impact of lost preschool revenue was not as severe as we had projected in May, however, because we received \$117,000 in donations in lieu of tuition from many parents.
 - The revenue associated with the Payroll Protection Program ("PPP") loan is not reflected on our 2019-20 income statement.
 - Expenses:
 - 2019-20 expenses were below budget, but not by as much as revenue.
 - Karen and her staff did a great job of cutting expenses where possible.
 - Retiring the mortgage has been a tremendous help.
 - Other expense reductions included (i) significant savings in credit card processing fees as people switched to making payments through automatic bank account deductions; and (ii) reductions in building operating costs and janitorial costs because the building has been mostly closed.
 - We incurred higher legal fees than expected because of activities associated with reopening the preschool (such as drafting operating guidelines and updating personnel practices).
 - Deficit: We ended 2019-20 with a budget deficit of \$106K, which will be filled by drawing on our Operating Reserve Fund. While this deficit is greater than the \$41K deficit anticipated in our original 2019-20 budget, it is less than the \$177K deficit that was projected in May.
 - Balance Sheet: Our year-end balance sheet is strong, with a good cash balance (that includes the proceeds of our PPP loan) and a strong investment portfolio.
- Our current working forecast for 2020-21 reflects the following changes that have occurred since the budget was approved in May:
 - Preschool enrollment is below expectations due to natural attrition due to COVID and because of COVID-related government mandates that cap enrollment at 115 students.
 - We were able to hold summer camp in July and August.
 - We have received \$97K in donations to the COVID Recovery Fund.
 - We anticipate that our entire \$490K PPP loan will be forgiven.
 - The preschool recently received a \$92K grant from the Jewish Federations of North America.
- Looking to the future: While we are reasonably optimistic for this year, we need to start planning for future years when our preschool enrollment might remain low and we will not have the benefit of assistance such as the PPP loan. We will be forming a task force consisting of both Board and non-Board members to engage in this planning. Jason encourage Trustees to let him, Jon, or Karen know if they are interested in joining this task force.

7. COVID-19 Task Force Update (*Laurie Friedman*) Inform

- Karen and Ayelet have collaborated with Marilyn Hollinger to build a COVID page on the PTS website that will collect all information and communications about COVID in one online location. (<https://sholom.org/covid-19-updates/>)
- In addition, the entire congregation received a communication on October 14 that (i) explained why PTS is not yet holding on-site worship or Youth Education; and (ii) contained a link to PTS's guidelines for B'nai Mitzvah

ceremonies. Laurie noted that in designing PTS's response to COVID, the task force has been guided not only by state and county standards, but also by what feels right and makes sense for our community.

- Laurie reported that to ensure a safe environment when we welcome people back into our building, we have updated our HVAC system and added air purifiers.
- The task force will reconvene in the beginning of November to consider issues such as:
 - How PTS will respond when San Mateo County moves into a less restrictive tier in the state's four-tier COVID classification system and the synagogue faces more pressure from congregants to open up;
 - How PTS will handle upcoming holidays;
 - Which small groups PTS will welcome back to our building and what protocols will be required when we do so;
 - How we can safely have chanting and singing;
 - What kinds of outdoor activities we might be able to do;
 - What kinds of testing procedures will be required for Youth Education teachers and staff; and
 - What kinds of signage will be needed when we reopen.

8. Investment Committee Report (*Gene Podkaminer*) Inform

- Gene noted that the stock markets have been volatile this year due to COVID and election uncertainty.
- Happily, PTS's main investment portfolio has recouped the losses it suffered early in the year and is now recording a modest gain on the year. The Lokay Security Fund, which is invested more aggressively than PTS's other funds, is flat on the year.
- The investment committee has determined that there is no need to rebalance the portfolio at this time. However, our investment manager is considering swapping out one of our ESG funds to get improved performance.

9. Preschool PTO Update (*Betsy Magen*) Inform

- The preschool parent community is extremely appreciative of the school's teachers and staff and happy that their kids get to be in school. Their top concern is safety, and they support the school's safety measures like the daily health questionnaire.
- One challenge facing the PTO is how to sustain warmth and community in the preschool when they are not able to gather in person. The PTO has been hosting Zoom events for parents and has been striving to build community within the classroom pods. They also hosted their annual family pizza party virtually and hope to conduct similar events in the future.
- Another challenge for the PTO is fundraising: They have held successful fundraising galas in the past, but obviously cannot do that this year.

10. High Holy Days Recap and Feedback (*Jon Herstein*) Discuss

- Jon noted that the responses to the Board HHD survey were generally very positive. Trustees were particularly positive about the music and unanimously agreed that the length of the services was just right.
- Jon shared several examples of notes and emails that Karen and the clergy received from congregants about the HHD. Rabbi Feder noted that they received many more communications this year than usual and that the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Jon will post transcriptions of all of the feedback received in Box for Trustees to review at their leisure.
- Jon invited Board members to share noteworthy feedback they received from family and friends.
- Jon noted that we are likely to be in a virtual world, and then in a hybrid world, for quite a while, so feedback on the HHD services will be very helpful as we plan for other holidays and for future HHD.

11. Board Survey Results (*Jon Herstein*) Inform/Discuss

- Jon noted that the Board Self-Evaluation survey responses indicated a desire among Trustees for (i) better orientation for new Board members; and (ii) more education about Trustees' fiduciary duties and responsibilities. We will try to improve in these areas this year.

12. Board Packet Q&A

Discuss

- Ware reminded Trustees to sign up on Signup Genius to deliver the Board Welcome at Friday night services. He thanked those Trustees who have delivered the Shabbat welcome many times, including Laurie Friedman, Lisa Rosenthal, and especially Marilyn Hollinger.
- Ware also announce that we are planning to conduct a Board-led Shabbat service in early in 2021. The precise date will be announced soon. Ware thanked Jenna and Marilyn, who have agreed to work with him to put the service together.
- Jon reminded Trustees to sign up on Signup Genius to deliver a D'var Torah at a future Board meeting.

13. Consent Agenda

Vote

Includes last month's Board minutes, approval of new members, and approval of any administrative resignations.

- Consent agenda approved.

14. Concluding Prayer

Meeting adjourned at 8:36pm.