

TRANSCRIPTION OF 7/10/85 BETH EL MEETING TAPE

This is an explanation of what we, the Building Development Committee, believe are Beth El's needs and what we have been considering for some period of time.

Beth El is a Congregation with about 375 families and over 1200 people. We have been at this location for 23 years. We started with a building which is now the Social Hall and School built in 1962. In 1978 we did expand which basically doubled the size of our facilities. We have somewhere around 35,000 square feet. We had 18,000 in our initial building. We added the facility we are in now as well as the sanctuary, reception area, and sisterhood room.

Our original building consists of what is our present social hall, the restrooms, chapel, stage and kitchen. Then we also have a school building which is a two-story building of 7,000 square feet, 3,500 square feet on each floor. At the present time we have 150 students in our religious school; the Solomon Schechter School which has scheduled for next year over 50 students from kindergarten through fourth grade. We have a nursery school which meets five days a week and which has somewhere in the neighborhood 40 to 50 children attending its various different programs, including the toddler program.

The Jewish Community Center uses our facility and has a small room that doubles as a classroom which is used as an office. The JCC does programming on Sundays and operates a day camp in the summer. We have a very large youth group, 110 to 120 children. So between the various groups we have over 350 children using those facilities.

At least four nights a week there are one to five different meetings of various committees. On Tuesday nights we have bingo (150-225 people) and duplicate bridge (50-60 people). Our religious school meets Monday through Thursday and two evenings and on Sundays. The School of Advanced Jewish Studies has about 35 students meeting one night a week. We will send about 65-75 children to the School of Advanced Jewish Studies in the city. There will be three nights a week and four afternoons a week and Sunday mornings used for religious school. They are used five days a week for the Solomon Schechter School. Sunday morning next to Tuesday is probably our busiest day. Every room is being used on Sunday morning,

our cloak rooms and stage double as class rooms. We have religious services every morning and every evening, except Sunday evening. Our main service every week is Saturday morning and there will be anywhere from 60 to 300 people attending. On Friday night there will be a service. We may have an early service, but generally it is a late service. We have something called Early Sabbath prayers that perhaps 75 to 100 people attend and on Our late Friday night service will have 50 to 100 people depending upon the time, the speaker or program at that particular time.

The building is used 7 days a week, it is generally open from 6:45 a.m. to 11 p.m. Besides the things that I just described we have a sisterhood gift shop, that is open maybe 20 hours a week during times when religious school is open or during times when there is a lot of activity in the building. Certainly on Sunday. Our administrative offices are very cramped. We have offices for a full-time youth director, a full-time school director, we have a full time administrator, a full-time Rabbi, we have secretarial and office staff in our facilities. We have 3 full time maintenance and custodian workers. They are cramped as well. Looking at what our priorities are, our committee has determined as follows.

We have determined that our social facilities are greatly outdated and outmoded. There has been no work done other than an expansion of the kitchen which never was completed but was part of our overall building expansion 10 years ago when we doubled the size of the kitchen. We never relocated equipment and the additional space in the kitchen has been used primarily for cold storage and dry storage and for dishes and things of that sort. It is not used in the most efficient way.

Our restroom facilities basically are 23 years old. They were designed for a 200 family congregation. At the time there were only 125 families when it was built. It certainly is not suitable for 375 families or larger.

Our No. 1 priority is to upgrade our social facilities. If we are able to seat only 300 people in the room in which the acoustics are terrible because the room doubles as a gym. I forgot to mention that we have aerobic dancing, the children at the Solomon Schechter, the youth group, using the social hall. It is too multi-purposed. The acoustics are terrible. If there is a single complaint about this facility that is upper most in people's minds, it is that the acoustics are terrible. Many events, weddings, bar bat mitzvahs are not

held there because it is not attractive. We have decided that our social facilities is our number one priority.

Our No. 2 priority is the need for at least three, possibly four additional classrooms. The Solomon Schechter School is adding one grade a year. It is concentrating on the elementary age children, whereas, our religious school is primarily used in grades 3 through 7, as Solomon Schechter expands, for instance, they have 20 kids in kindergarten, it takes two large rooms to handle them, whereas, if you have 14 or 15 kids in a classroom for two hours, you could end up using a small size classroom will suffice, but you would also need larger desks, different kinds of equipment, we are now reaching a point where we need science equipment and laboratory rooms in order to keep the school accredited so it can meet all the state requirements. So there is a need for additional classrooms.

Our No. 3 priority is the need for athletic facilities, a gymnasium. Some kind of place, a small gym which could be used by our youth group, for aerobic dancing, volleyball, basketball, and various other activities sponsored by the Schechter School and the synagogue, the Jewish Community Center. Then perhaps we could make the social hall appropriate for the social events.

Our 4th priority is our need for for additional administrative space. We have no storage space. Because everything is multi-purpose, we have to take down and put back and store in between. For example, our library is used not only as a Library but for meetings, a nursery, as well as a Chapel. Rarely is there an opportunity for someone to come in who just wants to sit down and read a magazine or book because this place is always being used. We are critically short of clerical space. We need a room for the Executive Director, a room for our Rabbi's Secretary, etc. On some Saturdays we will have four different services being conducted, three for different parts of our religious school on any Saturday morning. We do have a separate chapel that is part of the older facility which recently has been redone is in very good shape.

Our fifth priority is for a larger sanctuary. We find that there will be a need for additional seating. We now seat 280. When we use our reception area we can add an additional 120, that brings that up to 400. While that satisfies our need in most situations, somewhere down the line we want to be sure that the sanctuary can be expanded to add an additional 150

seats. It is expanded to the point where weddings and other events for 400 to 450 people, we would like our social to be able to handle a sufficient number of people so that you could have a function with 400 to 450 people to be comfortably seated.

The sixth priority is to house elderly. While our congregation is still a young congregation, we do have a number of families who are now 65 or older. They are often parents of younger families who would like to move to our area. We feel that we could fill up about 30 to 40 apartments with members of the congregation who would like to be adjacent to our facilities.

Looking at a map you will see the property that the congregation has. We also own 3/4 of an acre along Roessler Road. All together we have over four acres. We also have shared rights to all the parking. We leased seven acres to Manor Oak which is the office building. We have shared parking, they do all the maintenance on the parking. We have parking for about 450 cars. Our parking is adequate except on the high holidays. Right now we use 3/4 of this parking lot on our high holidays. We will eventually use all of it. We have the best parking in Pittsburgh for our high holidays. We do have adequate parking.

We think that the congregation will continue to grow. It has been growing at 10, 15 to 20 families per year. Not rapid growth but steady growth. The school population, however, has not been growing. In fact, the school population has been declining indicating that there are fewer and fewer children. At one time we had 185-190 students, very close to 200 students attending religious school. As our Solomon Schechter school grows it takes away children that might be attending the synagogue religious school. These children are going to school for eight hours a day they don't want to come to the afternoon religious school. The needs of the Solomon Schechter school even the projected expansion may soon outgrow this congregation, there is no guarantee that the Solomon Schechter school will be here in three to five years. It is independent, it now rents space. If we can't provide them with space, they will go somewhere else. As the school grows, there is the question as to whether or no they will stay here or choose to go elsewhere. We believe, however, we could get a long-term commitment if we can provide adequate space.

I would say that in the long range we look for the congregation to have 650-700 families, eventually, over the next 10 to 15 years. The sanctuary itself, if you have seating

for 420 that that will handle a congregation of 700 families,  
for most needs except high holidays. At high holidays we may  
end up going to two services in order to seat all of the  
people. Right now, we seat on the high holidays, close to  
1,000 people.