

OVERVIEW

It is hard to believe that it has been 12 months since the 2019 Annual General Meeting. Some boards are purely fiduciary, i.e. providing strategic leadership and setting direction in their responsibilities, while others in addition are involved in the day-to-day management of the organization. Your TAS Board is very much the latter. While the recommendations of the Task Force on Governance included the creation of an executive administrative position, the current financial situation of the Temple clearly does not allow for a new hire at this time. Regardless, the Board is effective; Board members are collegial and work well together. The learning curve has been steep. Early on two Board members, Janis Criger and Simon Granat, resigned for personal reasons, and more recently Bill Sugar has joined the Board. The relationship between the Board and Clergy has been solid and productive.

Early on in our tenure we recognized that the two major challenges facing the Temple are the poor financial situation and decreased membership. When we commenced our work, these were our top priorities to address. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and our world was turned upside-down. The Temple shut down. Yet, in spite of the challenges over the last year, religious services and other Temple activities have continued. Without the dedication, enthusiasm and efforts of Rabbi Cohen and Cantor Baruch this would not have been possible. We have managed to “stay-a-float” in these very rough waters.

PRE COVID-19

Implementation of New Governance Model

The first task of the Temple’s new Board was to implement a new governance model that had been recommended by the Task Force on Governance. In the new model, the Board is significantly smaller. Working Groups and Task Forces replace Board Committees, and Board members do not necessarily lead these groups. Chairs and members for the Working Groups were identified. The following Working Groups (with respective chairs) were established: Kehila & Bikkur Cholim (Doreen Korman); Building Maintenance (Kevin Sampson); Education (Joanne Warren); Cemetery (Carl and David Loewith); Social Action (Irwin Rodin); Succession Planning (Haim Goldstein); Income Generation (Marla Frank-Davis); Budget & Finance (Liora Malka); Outreach: General Community and Younger Generation (Simon Granat); and Clergy Liaison (Lorraine Cohen). Each Working Group prepared a document on their *Terms of Reference* using a standard template. Terms of Reference define the purpose and structures of a committee consisting of a collection of people who have agreed to work together to accomplish a shared goal. Ginny Levine helped each group with this process. The Working Groups meet regularly, and minutes of the meetings are kept.

Evolution of Working Groups and Task Forces

The Task Force on Governance identified that an issue which required attention was visiting the sick and those socially isolated. This function was previously covered by the Caring Committee and Clergy. This Committee morphed into the **Kehila** (community) & **Bikkur Cholim** (visiting the sick) Working Group. They immediately got to work with much enthusiasm. Highlights

include: participating in a workshop for volunteers providing compassionate palliative care; preparing soup and delivering it to needy congregants; and telephoning congregants “locked in” during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The **Income Generation Working Group** focused all their attention on the Gala scheduled for March 2020. The Gala was to be the major fundraising event for the year. The aims were to recognize past TAS presidents and to celebrate Rabbi Baskin’s 100th birthday. The co-chairs of the Gala were Marla Frank-Davis and Lubba Apel.

Carl and David Loewith took over the leadership of the **Cemetery Committee** from Martin Sniderman who had been Chair for 10 years. They quickly got up to speed and burial functions have continued smoothly with no interruption. The grounds and monuments are well maintained. The plans to sever a strip of land at one edge of the cemetery and sell it are still in process. There is a derelict house on the cemetery grounds which is a headache. It has been vandalized and squatters have lived in it. A plan has been developed to demolish the building.

The Outreach: General Community and Younger Generation Working Group never really got started in its work before Simon Granat, the Chair of the Committee, resigned from the Board. Even though the Board leadership recognized the importance of this Committee’s work, its attention was diverted by other issues. However, recognizing the importance of membership (see below), this Working Group has morphed into the **Membership Working Group** lead by Yves Apel and Marla Frank-Davis. This Working Group has shifted into high gear recently. They are tackling such issues as attracting new members, reporting on the status of a member’s dues and standardizing dues levels.

The new Governance model specified that a “task force” was to be struck to tackle a finite issue and then sunset when the work was completed. The **Human Resources Task Force**, led by Thomas Gorsky, has had a key role in the conduct of Temple affairs over the last year. The Board is very appreciative of the wise counsel provided by this Task Force. They helped negotiate a new contract for the Cantor, provided guidance for furlough of staff, developed a set of values for TAS and have developed a code of conduct for Temple staff and volunteers.

Our other Working Groups and Task Forces, such as Building Maintenance, Social Action, Israel Engagement, Education and Ritual, are all very active and have been meeting regularly to address their areas of specific responsibility for our Temple community.

Finally, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of our **Temple Board** which oversees the working groups and task forces. The Board meets at least once a month for 2½-3 hours each time. The Board held a successful retreat facilitated by Dr. David Shore on March 1st. The focus was how to work together effectively as a Board. Readings from the Torah and Talmud were used to provide a foundation for the discussions.

COVID-19

We watched with interest the havoc caused by the Covid-19 virus in China in December 2019. This seemed very far away. However, we began to realise that Canada would not be immune

when the pandemic took hold in Italy, the western United States and then New York City. The Government of Ontario declared a provincial emergency on March 17, 2020 under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. This resulted in the closure of the Temple building.

This did not, however, result in the discontinuation of worship. The Rabbi and Cantor immediately “pivoted” to virtual Shabbat services. In a very short time, many of us became very familiar with ZOOM virtual communication. I must confess that I found the first Shabbat on ZOOM very intimate and enjoyable (I paid much more attention than I usually do when attending in person). Not only did worship continue during “the lockdown,” but Religious School, Torah Study, Adult Education courses, our Community Passover Seder, B’nei Mitzvah tutoring, pastoral care meetings, youth programs and even some social programs have all successfully migrated online, and our Board, Working Groups and Task Forces continued to regularly meet virtually. Starting March 16th, Cantor Baruch conducted a wonderful virtual nursery school program called YOFI Connection on ZOOM. YOFI Connection occurred Monday through Friday from 9:00-10:00 AM from mid-March to May 1st. After that the Cantor segued to Friday YOFI SHABBAT CONNECTION, and this has continued every Friday since. My grandchildren have participated from the beginning and have enjoyed this wonderful program of songs and stories.

The closure of the Temple building due to the pandemic also meant that our three tenants shut down, which resulted in the loss of an important source of revenue for the Temple. As a consequence of the closure, there was insufficient work for Temple office and custodial staff. Hence, Joe, Doug, Karen and Jo-Anne were put on temporary leave. They were able to participate in the federal government’s CERB program. I appreciate the work of the HR Committee and their advice regarding the process of furloughing staff and I appreciate the understanding of our furloughed staff members. We applied and were approved for the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) and for the \$40,000 interest-free loan from the Federal government. Thank you to our Treasurer, Liora Malka who stickhandled these grants. Our Bookkeeper, Brenda McAlpine, has continued to work throughout the pandemic. She is responsible for financial matters and is now fielding phone calls and emails and taken on increased administrative duties, along with the Rabbi and Cantor, who both took a voluntary wage decrease. We are appreciative of all their continued efforts. With the arrival of summer, the Temple grounds required maintenance, i.e. lawnmowing and flower care. Initially, our Board member Gillian Burman and her family mowed the lawn, but then we decided that Joe should come in one day per week to keep the Temple grounds looking presentable. In July, when the Premier announced the beginning of a phased-in approach for Ontario society to return back to normalcy, the Temple building reopened on a very limited capacity to accommodate the re-opening of the Temple Playhouse Daycare. With the increased activity in the Temple it was decided then that Joe should come back to work full time.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the Gala was initially postponed until October. This was a significant blow to the Organizing Committee who had spent hundreds of hours planning the event. However, it soon became clear that it would not be possible to hold an in-person event at the new time. Therefore, a decision was made to hold the Gala as a virtual event on October 4th.

Thank you to Marla Frank-Davis and her team who have been tenacious in their drive to make this a successful event.

Despite the Province “opening up”, the decision was made to go virtual for the High Holy Days. A task force was quickly convened to work with the Rabbi and Cantor to plan for the High Holidays. In a relatively short time, a high-quality innovative program of events has been created.

Relationship with Beth Jacob

We are trying to find ways to remain sustainable throughout these trying times and we are exploring options for the future. One such option is cohabitation with the Beth Jacob Synagogue (BJS). The BJS is experiencing similar financial struggles. In March, leaders from both congregations met to determine whether there was interest in collaborating in some fashion to address the challenges. High-level informal talks occurred over the next several months and a vision for collaboration was agreed upon. The intention was for this vision to be presented to the Boards of both congregations for approval. On June 10th, the Board of Directors of BJS unanimously approved moving forward with detailed discussions for cohabitation with TAS in our Cline Avenue building. Their plan included selling their building on Aberdeen Avenue. On June 18th, The Temple Board passed a similar resolution to support discussions for cohabitation. The idea is to have the two congregations in one building, in order to find efficiencies by sharing some of the common operating and programmatic costs. We recognize this has to be a carefully planned and thought out process, that will take approximately 12-18 months.

It is the Board’s priority to ensure transparency throughout the exploration of this option. Our intention is to have regular communication and consultation with the congregation. The congregations will be required to approve any final decisions. Both BJS and TAS are committed to finding a sustainable cohabitation model, that will strengthen both the Reform and Conservative movements, resulting in a stronger Hamilton Jewish Community.

THE REALITY SEPTEMBER 2020

When the new Board started in September 2019, we were aware that TAS had financial challenges, but we did not fully understand the magnitude of the problem. The budget for fiscal year 2019/20 projected that expenses would exceed revenue by approximately \$200,000.00 and that the gap would be addressed by funds generated by the Gala to be held in March 2020. At the time I thought, what would happen if the Gala did not meet expectations? In addition, we learned that the debt (amount owed bank from cumulative deficit year after year) was in fact, between \$350,000 to \$400,000 and about \$30,000 was paid annually to the bank to service the debt. This data was a shock and reality check for the new Board. The Budget & Finance Committee led by Liora Malka has worked very hard to deal with the financial challenge. This starts with having very accurate data. The Board is now receiving regular financial reports. A proper budgeting process has been established where a cost centre has been established for a specific function within the Temple. Recommendations have been made to decrease expenses, e.g. \$10,000 for printing costs in the office (See Treasurer’s Report).

Early on it also became clear that we did not have a good handle on the “true” number of TAS members. The database was not up to date from a number of aspects. The actual number of paying units was not being captured. In many instances the contact information, i.e. phone numbers and addresses in ShulCloud, were incorrect. A review of the membership database by hand suggested that the membership was approximately 210. Ten years ago, it is reported to have been 380. This issue of a lack of an updated computerized data base continues to be an issue and hampers our abilities. This will have to be a priority for the coming year.

The decrease in membership is no one’s fault. The etiology is multifactorial: the Jewish population of Hamilton is decreasing; the TAS congregation is aging and expiring; and there is a tendency for young people not to affiliate. These issues are not unique to TAS. The decline in membership has meant a significant drop in revenue from dues. The truth is that our expenses are reflective of a time when we had many more members. This is not sustainable.

LOOKING FORWARD

The Temple is facing a number of significant challenges. The Temple’s current financial state and membership numbers are of great concern and very sobering. The COVID-19 pandemic has not helped and in part, has contributed to the sense of urgency. We have a number of options that are being explored and acted on for a financial recovery. The Membership Committee is working hard to increase revenue. Costs of operation are being reduced. Plans to generate revenue by the sale of cemetery land are in progress. Successful consummation of the deal for the co-habitation model with the BJ will result in reduced costs and added revenue. It is too early to report in detail on these strategies, but I would like to propose that we come back to the congregation in 3 months with an update.

In spite of these current realities, many positive things have happened at TAS during the past 12 months which gives us hope for the future. These include but are not limited to:

- The enthusiasm, innovation and dedication demonstrated by Rabbi Cohen, Cantor Baruch, and the Religious School Principal Dora-Ann Cohen Ellison in continuing programming.
- Although the Board is relatively small, it is hard working and committed.
- The organizational structure recommended by the Task Force on Governance has been successfully implemented with Working Groups and Task Forces meeting and delivering tangible outcomes.
- We have started to implement an organizational structure and change the culture of the administrative functions of the Temple, e.g. availability of documents and keeping written records.

Thank you to all the members of our Temple community for your continued support. We welcome your involvement as we make our way into an uncertain future. We are confident, however, that with the hard work and generosity of the many who love and value our historic congregation, Temple Anshe Sholom will recovery from the current challenges it faces and continue as a vibrant centre of Jewish life in Hamilton. I wish you all a *shana tova* – a happy and healthy new year.