Dear congregation,

Last year at the holidays, I spoke of working to create a united community. Since

that speech, I have had the opportunity to listen and learn from both

congregations about their concerns and hopes fo r making this a reality. Shortly

after the holidays a steering committee was formed of approximately 18 leaders

from both congregations to begin this important task. We met on numerous

occasions, even having a facilitator on a conference call. The committee laid out

the important items that would need to be addressed, rituals, cemeteries,

artifacts preservation, facilities, governance, and financials and most importantly

going to the congregations to see what they wanted. Subcommittees were

formed, and they began meeting. Presidents of both congregations have been

part of this process as have several board members, as have many congregants

that are not on the steering committee but have called with their ideas and

support. We have had town hall meetings at both congregations, plus numerous

coffee gatherings, phone calls, and emails.

The governance committee took bylaws from both congregations, and under

The leadership of David Shapiro and Michael Victorson formulated what would be

the working bylaws of this united community. This took a lot of time and effort,

and with the help of this committee, the bylaws were finished and will

be presented for your consideration.

The rituals committee, with strong input from Rabbi Urecki and Rabbi Cohn, made

sure that we could continue to celebrate the same rituals that we have always

celebrated in the same way. Every member should be assured that nothing will

change as far as rituals, and the rabbi delivering them. Nothing

The what do you want committee, led by Betty Stern and Sharon, went to

numerous meetings from Jews and Brews, to Sunday school parents, to minyan

goers, seniors at edgewood summit and many more. They graphed and

established the important items that would be needed to make this successful.

Of course one of the most important committees, the financial, led by Ken

Kleeman and Rick Rubin, looked over our investments and income and expenses,

and gave us projections of what amounts we would have to do new construction

or renovations to the existing facilities and still maintain our financial security.

In the course of the commitees work, we also had synagogue design teams come

in to present what work they have done in the past, and what we could expect

our community home to look like. The team from Philadelphia has agreed to

return, so that they will present to the entire congregation, their ideas.

As a community if you choose to come together it is important that we establish a

new home that reflects our new community so that everyone will feel like it is

their home. We made that promise to everyone, and that promise will be kept.

But we also will incorporate all those items that mean so much to us. The

beautiful art work at the temple, the stained glass at the synagogue, a special

place to conduct the daily minyans and a much needed new mikvah.

We are building a community together. One of the most difficult tasks that is still

pending is the decision of which facilty would best meet our needs. It was

determined that the cost of property acquisition and building something new

would exceed our financial capabilities, so the faciliites committee led by Duke

Bloom and David Thalheimer, worked hard to look at both facilities. An

architect was employed, Aric Margolis, and he surveyed both places and

presented drawings of what could be done based on the recommendations of the

what do you want committee. In the next few weeks, the steering committee

will review the findings of the facilities committee, and vote on their

recommendation.

This year, there have been meetings going on the entire time. Over 65

congregants have been involved in this process. There have also been concerns

among some that as this work was being done, everything was not disclosed.

First, I would like to thank those people for sharing their concerns, we have grown

by your input and I want to assure you and the entire congregation that

everything I have mentioned will be presented to you, and you will not, and I

repeat will not be asked to vote on anything at the meeting where your questions

will be answered. We will have a meeting where each committee presents their

information, and questions wlll be answered, and then sometime at a later date

a vote will be held .

 I am convinced now more than ever that this is the right course for the

continuity of the jewish community of WV. It is very realistic to think that in a

few years, , with the exception of Morgantown and possibly Huntington, we will

be the beacon for Judaism in the state of WV.

From Charlotte, to Pittsburgh, to Lexington and Columbus, we will be the only

chance for Jews to practice their religion, participate in services, have a rabbi at a

funeral, or at a birth. From the temple consideration, it is anticipated that in 15

years they will have less than 50 families, struggling to have a service or

meaningful programs, and from the Bnai Jacob side, our financial treasurer,

Greg Silverman projects in 10 to 12 years we will have serious financial

challenges, our dues continue to decline as does our membership, and with

significant costs to put in air conditioning upstairs, water problems in basement,

and many more challenges, and with a deficit of close to $300,000 per year,

these are challenges that can’t be left or possibly overcome for the next

generation.

If this effort is approved by the congregations we will need the help of many

talented people. Designing a new sanctuary, protection of our most important

treasures, programs, rituals and many more We didn’t have room to add

everyone to the steering committee, but we will need your help

This could not have happened without the leadership of the rabbi’s. Rabbi Urecki

has been invaluable and always present and willing to discuss every aspect of this

movement. He is a leader and visionary and we are lucky to have him. If we

can have the most vibrant community possible with financial stability and rabbis

willingness to stay another 20 years, we can have something special for our

future. We need a better future, we are in a state that is losing population, a city

of under 50,000 people and a shrinking a jewish community challenged for the

future, we can and with your support, and enthusiasm and critical input,

make the jewish community special and with a better future.

Thank you for your prayers, hopes, criticisms and patience during this time.

Change is not easy, but necessary and can be rewarding by creating something

special together. A new exciting, vibrant , fiscally sound community, where we

can pray as we always have, and come together for social, educational, and

community events with 250 families.

I can’t thank enough those many members both on and off the committees and

rabbi urecki for your help.

Hundreds of hours have been spent on presenting the best efforts of those

involved, but ultimately you the congregants get to decide on your future and the

future of the next generation. I can assure you that everyone has given their best

efforts, gaining respect as the process went forward. It hasn’t been easy, and

people have asked why is it taking so long and others have commented why are

you rushing this. The answer is somewhere in between. Over 50 meetings have

taken place and yes now is the time, our resources are dwindling, the Jewish

communites average age is 65, and right now we have the energy, committed

people to create a united community. The opportunity will not be here in a few

short years.

I believe God has provided us with the will and strength to continue our religion

throughout thousands of years, and whether we were located in the desert , or

Israel or on Elizabeth St or Kanawha Blvd, we have always provided for the next

generation. We can’t fail those people that deserve what we have had.

Sharon and I wish you a happy healthy new year, and the gift of peace.