

Mishkan buys \$5M stake in KI

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The Jewish Advocate, vol. 207, No 16, April 15, 2016



BROOKLINE – Congregation Mishkan Tefila estimates it will contribute \$3-to-5 million to Congregation Kehillath Israel’s renovation and expansion when it relocates July 1, according to Paul Gershkowitz, president of Mishkan Tefila.

“The addition of Mishkan Tefila’s resources will help us achieve our goals, but we are not stopping fundraising,” said David Williams, president of Kehillath Israel.

Kehillath Israel has already collected \$10 million toward its \$15 million goal. Williams said construction plans are not definite yet and the amount that the synagogue is aiming to raise could change.

Gershkowitz did not describe the new arrangement as a merger, saying the two congregations will remain separate institutions, with their own spiritual and lay leaders; however, they will share some services and resources, like religious schools, accounting and building maintenance.

The synagogues have not yet decided where in the building Mishkan Tefila will take up residence, but its leadership is involved in the construction and renovation planning process. Mishkan Tefila will have its own sanctuary; collections from the synagogue’s museum and library, and yahrzeit plaques will also move to Kehillath Israel.

“We are going to be like a life tenant,” Gershkowitz said. “We are investing in the infrastructure of the campus, we will have autonomy, but we’ll also be part of a greater whole.”

Kehillath Israel is currently undergoing renovations and plans to build expansions to the building that will house an assisted living facility, offices for Jewish nonprofits and start-ups,

and educational programs.

Combined Jewish Philanthropies may collaborate with the synagogues on programming and in other ways, said CJP President Barry Shrage. He said, "It's wide open," whether CJP will contribute financially.

"KI ought to be congratulated on doing something new and creating a new way of looking at congregations," Shrage added.

Mishkan Tefila sold its building and 23 acres of land to Boston College in August. Synagogue leaders did not disclose the price of the sale, but a 2015 assessment of the site values it at more than \$20 million.

Forty-two members of Mishkan Tefila, consisting of trustees, past presidents, and the executive board, participated in the vote to join the Kehillath Israel on April 6. Thirty-five voted in favor and one person abstained.

When Mishkan Tefila announced plans to sell its building, 240 families belonged to the congregation. There are now 200 families. Mishkan Tefila will probably lose more people when it moves to Brookline, Gershkowitz said, but the relocation to an urban area is part of his synagogue's strategic plan to attract families with young children who live in the area and in surrounding places like Cambridge, Somerville and Jamaica Plain.

He did not comment on whether the two coexisting synagogues would compete for members.

Many of Mishkan Tefila's congregants are Newton residents who will drive to Kehillath Israel, Gershkowitz said. Concerns about the availability of parking on the street may precipitate a carpool service between Brookline and Newton on Shabbat mornings, he said.

Rabbi William Hamilton of Kehillath Israel said the two synagogues would ensure their independence due to their different approaches to Judaism. "Mishkan Tefila represents an expression of Judaism that is at the heart of Conservative movement," he said. "Kehillath Israel embraces a practice that is more traditional."

"What is the mishkan?" Gershkowitz said. "It is a place where God can come in and where Jews could celebrate their religion. If you look at it from a biblical place, mishkan was a mobile place. So the concept of mishkan moving from one place to another is relevant biblically and relevant for Mishkan Tefila."