

SANCTUARY UPDATE



Drapery is drawn to expose the ark during the dedication ceremony for BEKI's sanctuary in 1960.

“The Sanctuary was constructed from all the good which had been sifted out from every single Jew.”

So taught Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, as quoted in the booklet *Azamra*. Such is the mission of BEKI's sanctuary redesign project: to construct a design for our main worship space that incorporates and reflects “all the good” dwelling within our congregation — past, present and future.

“Our current sanctuary is familiar,” says synagogue Vice President Rachel Bashevkin, “but if we look at it objectively, its design no longer matches us. We're not crumbling like the seats; instead, we're vibrant and growing. Our services are not performances by a cantor on the bimah; they are led by a bounty of volunteers. We don't line up in neat rows; we debate and discuss issues. It's lovely to imagine that BEKI's sanctuary could reflect who we are today as a congregation.”

At a well-attended Zoom meeting in December, congregants learned about the possible scope of the project; met the architect, Michael Goldblum; and heard about results of November's congregational survey and how they align with BEKI's values of accessibility, inclusion, egalitarianism, participation, and environmental sustainability.

The congregation heard from Rabbi Woodward about how the sanctuary redesign embodies his vision for BEKI's future. Synagogue President Yaron Lew spoke about the wisdom of investing in the sanctuary rather than simply spending money to repair what we have, and addressed possible funding mechanisms. A separate group of volunteers will spearhead fundraising for the project.

Priorities for the congregation and the Sanctuary Redesign

Committee include:

- Seats that are more accessible and comfortable, in a layout that fosters our lay-led approach to services
- Improved climate control and air quality
- An accessible bimah and ark
- Better acoustics
- More natural light
- Increased energy efficiency

“What could be more important for us than to ensure that all members of our community can approach and access the Torah scrolls at the heart of our sanctuary?” asks Rob Schonberger, a member of BEKI's Executive Board. “The redesign will also enable us to install HVAC and windows to improve both comfort and efficiency. Energy-efficient windows would be a responsible green complement to the solar panels on our roof.”

The redesign committee is currently examining alternative seating layouts, getting congregational feedback on those, and bringing in a mechanical engineer to evaluate the sanctuary's HVAC needs. (The sanctuary has no ductwork, just four wall vents at the front of the room, and no ability to bring in fresh air from outside.) Future steps include considering possibilities for the bimah and ark, windows, lighting, and walls.

The committee plans to present two or three proposed conceptual designs in March, coinciding with Rabbi Woodward's installation ceremony. The group will gather congregational feedback, which may lead to revised proposals.

If you have questions or comments about the redesign, please contact the committee at sanctuaryredesign@beki.org.