

# Re: Development Quarterly



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## Welcome to "Re: Development"

By Rabbi Andy Shugerman

Welcome to Re: Development, a new quarterly publication for our Beth Shalom community about how we are transforming our already-robust culture of giving into a culture of philanthropy for the future of this synagogue and all that happens on its campus.

We are calling this new publication Re: Development for at least two reasons:

1. This new publication's name literally means "regarding development" and will focus on the information most relevant to how we are advancing the financial sustainability of Beth Shalom.
2. This title is also a play on the term redevelopment, which is key to our \$1 million matching grant from the State of Pennsylvania's Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) fund. This grant will help us do work on the exterior structure of our facility and then install a solar panel array on its roof. As its website explains, the RACP fund "is a Commonwealth grant program administered by the Office of the Budget for the acquisition and construction of regional economic, cultural, civic, recreational, and historical improvement projects." The grant awarded to Beth Shalom affirmed that our application, as the saying goes, "checked all the boxes" of those criteria.

Redevelopment is literally and figuratively central to the history of Beth Shalom's campus over the past century and especially since its facility took its present form in the late 1990s. Right outside my office, between the third-floor elevator doors and the Bride's / Nursing Room, we have a display case of artifacts from the ground-breaking and cornerstone-laying ceremonies in 1922 for our Community House (Beth Shalom's initial structure here on Beacon Street) and then in 1929 and 1930 for our Sanctuary (in the same location but definitely not the same original structure today!). Above that display case one can see photos from Beth Shalom's Fortieth Anniversary Gala in 1957, which I have been told set in motion the fundraising that would allow our property to expand over the following decade and for new building and renovation projects to unfold into the 1970s.



*Display case of artifacts from the ground-breaking and cornerstone-laying ceremonies in 1922*



*Photos from Beth Shalom's Fortieth Anniversary Gala in 1957*

Unfortunately, most of those campus development efforts would need to be repeated after the major October 1996 fire destroyed most of Beth Shalom's facilities and badly damaged our Sanctuary, even though the "bones" of that structure remained intact. That means what one sees today on Beth Shalom's campus – in every part of each structure - is entirely a story of rebuilding in stages upon what the founding generations of our synagogue's leaders established in the twentieth century here. So "redevelopment" may be a new term to some of us, but in many ways it is the essence of Beth Shalom's story at 5915 Beacon Street.

Indeed, this narrative was fundamental to our successful RACP application and to the kind of cultural transformation that we have undertaken during the past two years. Redevelopment means exploring how we can bring new kinds of philanthropic investment from a variety of sources to renew and to safeguard Beth Shalom's central role and location in Squirrel Hill and for the Jewish community of Greater Pittsburgh.

As we forge Beth Shalom's resilience for the decades ahead and secure its future here in Squirrel Hill, we are focused on redeveloping this campus with financial and environmental sustainability chiefly in mind. To do that, we need to develop a host of philanthropic resources to support our congregation and this entire facility. That's where you, dear reader, get to help us write the next chapter in this story!

Please speak with me if any of this new publication speaks to you, and may we be successful in this path.

**Rabbi Andy Shugerman is the Development Director at Congregation Beth Shalom and can be reached at [rabbiandy@bethshalomphg.org](mailto:rabbiandy@bethshalomphg.org).**



## Love and Philanthropy

By Rabbi Seth Adelson

Twice a day, in the morning and evening services, Jews invoke love, and it always happens right before the most essential statement of Jewish prayer, the Shema. In the morning, during the *Shaharit* service, we say, “*Ahavah rabbah ahavtanu.*” “God, you have loved us with a great love.” During *Ma’ariv* we say, “*Ahavat olam beit Yisrael amekha ahavta.*” “You have loved the people of Israel with eternal love.” While one traditional understanding is that God demonstrated love for us by giving us the Torah, we might also read this on a purely emotional level. We are in a loving relationship with God, and in emulating God, we have to share that Divine love with one another.

One idea that Rabbi Shugerman has been promoting within our community is that of moving from a culture of giving to one of philanthropy. What does that mean?

The word philanthropy comes to us from the Greek *philanthropia*, meaning a love of humanity. What is implied is that philanthropy is not merely charity. It is not simply donating money for an immediate need - food, clothing, shelter and the like. Rather, philanthropy is about building for the future in a way that benefits many people in a systematic way. It is about building the institutions which we need, the frameworks which support many, the new ways of inducing change in our society. The philanthropist thinks not only of what we need on the ground right now, but of the way we can build systems which will ultimately eliminate that immediate need.

We might consider the underlying meaning of the Hebrew word *tzedakah*, which we generally translate as charity. *Tzedakah* literally means righteousness, which we perform when we give because we are acting on the loving relationship between us and God. But *tzedakah* should also extend beyond the immediate. If we are truly aiming to be righteous, we must not only take care of needy individuals right now, but also consider how our institutions serve all the people in our orbit, and how we help those institutions work toward building a better society.

When we act philanthropically, we are truly sharing God’s love with each other and with the world. That is the ultimate form of *tzedakah*, righteousness.



**Maintenance Supervisor John Williams puts his hand through one of the HVAC units on the Beth Shalom roof**



**Cornices being replaced around the entire sanctuary building**



## Ponderings

By Debby Firestone

Reflection can be a good thing. It's been two years since my four years concluded as President of our congregation. It was a time of great activity which included, on the positive side, the 2017 Gala Centennial Celebration, and the hiring of important professionals including our current Executive Director and Development Director. But overshadowing much of my tenure were the Tree of Life tragedy, with its ensuing security issues, and the Covid-19 pandemic, with its fundamental challenges to synagogue programming. We had to change virtually everything that took place in our building, especially how services were conducted. Nonetheless, one of the positive results of the pandemic was that we were forced to use Zoom in so many new ways, which turned out to be a helpful way to make synagogue life more accessible.

While I wonder in hindsight if we might have handled some decisions differently, we accomplished a great deal during my four-year presidency through the stability of lay leadership (with its exceptional expertise), tenacious administrative personnel and clergy, and, of course, our deeply committed congregants.

Indeed, having the dynamism of Rabbi Adelson as our new senior rabbi and a membership wanting to move forward for change provided us tremendous momentum. This all came together in my four years from 2017-2021. Of course, Beth Shalom, like so many houses of worship, confronted many pressing financial issues and problems which were, and still are, difficult to resolve.

Finally, I'm extremely proud of our 2019 Strategic Plan which we've been using to navigate our future. The reorganization of our executive committee and board of trustees has also been a major factor in pushing us forward and streamlining our decision making processes. It's great to see many of our efforts, hires, and programs come to fruition. The Shul's physical structure is something each president had to deal with on some level. A comprehensive plan for repairing Beth Shalom's physical structure through grant writing and shortening our meetings is another way we've changed. Financially, we have always had to put off repairing things because we did not have the money to do them, but within the last few years a feasible comprehensive repair plan for the much-needed work with a workable timeline has been our overall strategy.



*Beth Shalom leaders & staff along with the governmental officials that aided us in acquiring the solar array*

We continue to have an excellent Early Learning Center, which helps with recruiting new younger members. Our tenants, New Light Congregation, Elegant Edge Catering, Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle, and La Escuelita Arcoiris (the Spanish Immersion School) help our Shul financially but also add to the success of Beth Shalom. Our Shul is also the place where new ideas can take place within Derekh programming and other ideas can really happen such as our Solar Roof Project. There's a positivity and energy which I see now that, with the commitment and help from our members, will make sure our Beth Shalom community continues to be a strong influence and center in our community.

**Debby Firestone is a past president of Congregation Beth Shalom, serving for four consecutive years, 2017-2021.**

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