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SJC Congregational Update on Rabbi Search Project

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October 26, 2020

Dear Seaside Member,

We are sending this letter to update you on two important processes in our ongoing search for a "settled" religious leader for Seaside Jewish Community ("Seaside").

Earlier this year, we hired Rabbi Kevin Bernstein to be Seaside's interim religious leader. In addition to leading services and providing pastoral support, Rabbi Bernstein is trained in helping growing congregations identify their current and future priorities and in applying that knowledge to select their next religious and spiritual leaders.

Seaside's Board of Directors has been using the term "settled" religious leader to refer to two distinct processes: (1) Seaside's self-evaluation; and (2) Seaside's search for a religious and spiritual leader. We discuss each of these separate but complimentary processes below.

Seaside's Self-Evaluation

As Sussex County grows, Seaside is experiencing remarkable changes. Our growing membership required us to expand our building (in progress and nearly complete) as well as offer an evolving mix of religious, spiritual, educational, and other member services. Seaside is attracting younger families desiring religious education and B'nai Mitzvot training for their children, while aging members need a different mix of spiritual, pastoral, and educational support. The knowledge we gain from self-evaluation will help us identify the training, experience, and personality we want in our next religious leader.

Survey Results. Seaside's first major self-evaluation activity is the Membership Survey conducted last June and July. Developed by the Religious Leader Search Committee ("Search Committee") under Todd Hacker's leadership and with Rabbi Bernstein's support, 206 congregants responded out of nearly 515 individual paid-up adult members at the time of the survey – a very solid 40 percent response rate. The survey sought congregants' opinions on Seaside as a place of worship, a venue for Jewish education, a place of social

connection and gathering, a provider of pastoral care, and a source of and inspiration for social action. The survey results revealed substantial consensus on the following items:

- Members want more of just about everything Seaside offers – more Jewish education, more social events, and more pastoral care.
- About 85 percent of those responding view Seaside as their religious and spiritual home – both now and in the future.
- Most members support a modern English and Hebrew worship style with communal singing, rather than traditional Hebrew-based worship services.
- Those responding strongly support Seaside offering a wider array of pastoral services for members and their families and, in the future, to the wider Sussex County Jewish community.
- Members desire more adult education events focusing on topics like Jewish History and modern Israel.
- Many members view Seaside as a source of and inspiration for social action, both now and in the future.

We thank all of the members who provided their views on what Seaside means to them today and what they want in the future. If you are interested in viewing a more detailed online presentation of the survey results, please watch for a link in a forthcoming weekly e-Blast and the Newsletter. If, after reviewing the online presentation, you would like to see the raw survey results, please email Rabbi Bernstein at sjc.kab@gmail.com.

Based on the survey results, the Search Committee has reached several tentative conclusions as to what Seaside members want in their next religious and spiritual Leader. These include more pastoral care services, more adult education, a continuing focus on social action, an ability to lead services in different worship styles, embracing membership participation in worship services, and an understanding that Seaside is a membership-driven, membership-governed congregation.

Focus Groups. The next step in Seaside's self-evaluation will be to hold focus group meetings in which the membership can further explore the survey results and offer additional input on the preferred qualifications and experience of the next religious leader. Given the COVID pandemic, the focus groups will be held using Zoom. At least one member of the Search Committee will attend and participate in every focus group.

The focus group sessions will benefit Seaside's self-evaluation by adding a qualitative component to the quantitative survey results. This will help assure that the Search Committee effectively identifies what members want in their next religious leader. They may also further assist the search process by identifying any issues that Seaside, as a community, should explore in more detail, such as by learning how other Jewish communities resolved similar issues.

If you are interested in participating in a focus group, email Rabbi Bernstein at sjc.kab@gmail.com *no later than November 6, 2020*. Rabbi Bernstein will organize the focus groups by topic; *accordingly, please state in your email what topic or topics you want to explore in more detail*. The focus group topics are:

- **House of Worship and Spiritual Home.** Do members want more Shabbat or Holiday services? Do members want all worship services to be led by the religious leader, or should we continue to have some member-led services? Should the next religious leader conduct different services in different worship styles?

- **Source of Pastoral Care.** What specific additional pastoral care activities do members want: telephone calls from the religious leader to members and their families when hospitalized or in a rehabilitation facility or long-term care? Physical visits by the religious leader (post-COVID)? Regular visits to members in long-term care? Officiating at funerals and shiva observances?
- **Center of Jewish Education.** Should the next religious leader be more directly involved in B'nai Mitzvot preparation, religious school activities, and adult education?
- **Place of Social Gathering and Connection.** Does the next religious leader have a role in enhancing or expanding Seaside's social events and what should that role be?
- **Source of and Inspiration for Social Action.** How much of Seaside's next religious leader's time should be spent on social action causes?

The Search Committee anticipates holding the focus group sessions in November and December and *completing them by December 20, 2020*. Upon completing the focus group process, the Search Committee will finalize its self-evaluation conclusions and present them to the Board.

Religious and Spiritual Leader Search Process

The second part of Seaside's search for its next religious and spiritual leader is the actual search, as informed by the information and insights gleaned from our self-evaluation. The Board is committed to hiring a religious and spiritual leader who both embraces Seaside's traditions and has the training, experience and ability to enhance Seaside's services as its membership desires.

We recognize that soliciting, evaluating, interviewing, and selecting Seaside's next religious and spiritual leader may take some time. In normal times, religious leader searches can take up to two years; Seaside may face the additional complications of the limitations on in-person meetings and in-person worship services necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. For these reasons, the financial impact of a full-time position and our commitment to hiring the best possible candidate, we expect to on-board a full-time religious leader in 2022. Attached is the Search Committee's tentative schedule for completing the search process.

We appreciate the congregation's involvement in the Membership Survey, and we hope that all interested members will express their views through the focus group sessions. With your support, our next religious and spiritual leader will be the right individual to continue Seaside's growth and success in the coming years.

Respectfully,

The Seaside Board of Directors

Enclosure



SEASIDE JEWISH COMMUNITY RELIGIOUS LEADER SEARCH COMMITTEE

Planned Timeline for Recommendation to the Board of Directors

Seaside's Religious Leader Search Committee has established the following general timeline for completing its search for Seaside's next religious and spiritual leader. The timeline is tentative and may be revised as the Committee progresses through the search process.

October 26, 2020

- Send Religious Leader Search Update Letter to Membership
- Video Link Available to Presentation Discussing Survey Results and Tentative Conclusions
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqhXL0ZIIA&t=6s>
- Search Committee Drafting Job Description for Next Religious Leader

November 8 to December 30, 2020

- Conduct Focus Group Zoom Meetings
- Finalize Job Description with Input from Focus Groups and Board

January 2021

- Position Posted on Various Sites

February 2021

- Begin Reviewing Candidate Applications

March – December 2021

- Continue Candidate Application Reviews, Conduct Candidate Interviews and Candidate Visits to Seaside