

# Planning for the Life of a Community: Temple Shalom of Milton

Paul Etkind

Immediate Past President

Spokesperson for Temple Shalom

# Our Goals

Following a three year strategic planning process begun in 2005:

- Remain in the neighborhood
- Hire a full-time Rabbi
- Increase the size of the congregation
- Keep our ties with the Campbell School

# What Was Our Responsibility?

- The Officers, Board and New Home Committee were responsible for exercising due diligence in planning for the future of the synagogue
- We also had a fiduciary responsibility to secure, as best possible, the Temple's financial future
- We wanted a solution that is best for the Temple, the neighborhood and the town.

# What Options Did We Consider?

## Stay where we are and do nothing

- This is a plan for the death of our congregation, not for sustaining the life of the congregation. It is not an option.
- We estimate that we can continue for about one year longer under current conditions. This property will be sold, either under residential, commercial or overlay zoning as being proposed.
- **THERE IS NO “DO-NOTHING” OPTION**

# What Options Did We Consider?

## Merge with other Temples

- Non-Milton congregations merge into Temple Shalom within our current building
- Find a new location within Milton for the new congregation
- Merge with another Temple and move out of town

# What Options Did We Consider?

## Merge with other Temples

- We spent a year pursuing this
- Contacted 6 Temples in area re: interest in merging
- Did a questionnaire with each and a committee visited each
- Two indicated an interest – Quincy and Braintree
- Held social programs and religious services together for a year
- A committee discussed issues that would be dealt with in a merge – whose Rabbi would stay, dues structure, which prayer book would be used, etc., etc., etc.
- None of us was willing to leave their building or community, so we stopped the process

# What Options Did We Consider?

## **Sell the Upper Parking Lot**

- Stay where we are; sell the upper parking lot; use the money to renovate the building
- Problems:
  - Will not provide us with enough funds to adequately rehab the current bldg and bridge our financial gap
  - Will require costly removal of ledge, leaving less of a buffer

# What Options Did we Consider?

## **Temple Develops Upper Parking Lot**

- Build Town Homes in Upper Lot, similar to Episcopal Church in Quincy
  - They demolished the rectory and built ten townhouses on their remaining one acre
  - One townhouse was given to the minister – the other nine were sold
- Would require dense development to make it financially viable and zoning change

# What Options Did We Consider?

## **Sell the Lower Parking Lot; Build a smaller Temple on the upper lot**

- Problem: Will not provide enough funds to build a new building and bridge our financial gap.

# What Options Did We Consider?

## Sell the entire property

- Buy property elsewhere in Milton; build a new Temple – suitable property not available; difficult to afford and build
- Buy and renovate an existing building in Milton (e.g., Milton Women's Club; church)
- Sell *almost* the entire property; build a smaller Temple on part of the property

# What Options Did We Consider?

## Housing

- Residential Single Family
- Elder Housing
- Affordable Housing

# What Options Did We Consider?

## Residential Single Family

Problem:

- The site preparation costs appeared prohibitive, making it financially unviable unless dense housing is built
- Impact on town services

# What Options Did We Consider?

## Elder Housing

- Spoke with elder housing professionals in the area
- Little interest; no market
- Current excess of units locally and nationally

# What Options Did We Consider?

## Affordable Housing

Problem:

- Under 40B high density housing, there would be little, if any, oversight or input by the town or neighborhood
- Little oppity for infrastructure improvements
- High stress on town services and neighborhood (traffic volume, safety, etc)

# What Options Did We Consider?

## Other Options Considered

- Nursing Homes-No interest
- Banks- Closing, not opening
- Restaurants-High turnover, liquor, late hrs, noise
- Food Markets- No interest
- Academic Institutions- No interest
- Land donations/swaps
- Dance Studio

# What Options Did We Consider?

## **Conversations with Developers**

- Two developers interested, including Coffman Realty – both said pharmacies were very stable businesses that pay higher rents
- Both thought a pharmacy would be interested in the size and location of the land
- Both said that another or other tenants would be needed to make this development economically viable for them – a pharmacy by itself would not offset high site engineering costs

# What Options Did We Consider?

- **Residential C**

- Not financially viable, possibility of no sale and abandoned bldg, impact on town services, lack of infrastructure improvements, no Temple or preschool

- **Residential 40 B**

- Higher traffic, greater impact on town services, no control over development, lack of infrastructure improvements, no Temple or preschool

- **Commercial**

- Little town control and oversight, including future turnover, Temple and preschool remain, tax revenue, amenities, jobs, less town services needed

- **Overlay**

**BEST OPTION:** Temple and preschool remain, tax revenue, **infrastructure improvements, increased town oversight now and in the future through special permitting process, greater role for neighborhood input**, amenities, jobs, less town services needed

# Summary of Options

## Residential

### Residential C

- Not financially viable
- Possibility of no sale and abandoned bldg
- Impact on town services
- Lack of infrastructure improvements
- No Temple or preschool

### Residential 40(b)

- Higher traffic
- Greater impact on town services
- No control over development
- Lack of infrastructure improvements
- No Temple or preschool

# Summary of Options

## Non-Residential

<h3>Commercial</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Little town control and oversight including future turnover</li><li>• Temple and preschool remain</li><li>• Tax revenue</li><li>• Amenities, jobs</li><li>• Less town services needed</li></ul>
<h3>Overlay</h3> <h3>BEST OPTION</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Temple and preschool remain</li><li>• Tax revenue</li><li>• Infrastructure improvements</li><li>• Increased town oversight now and in the future through special permitting process</li><li>• Greater role for neighborhood input</li><li>• Amenities and jobs</li><li>• Less town services needed</li></ul>

# DOING NOTHING IS NOT AN OPTION

**Over the next year, we will be selling the property. Options:**

- Sell for commercial development through overlay (our preference) or commercial re-zoning
- Re-zoning denied: Keep residential zoning and sell to the highest bidder
- We are unable to sell property - left vacant until such time we can sell it

# What Options Did We Consider?

## Wrap-up

- The overlay approach means we are requesting a process that demands extensive public scrutiny and input every step of the way:
  - Favorable recommendation of the PB
  - Favorable recommendation of the Warrant Committee
  - 2/3 of TM
  - Back to PB and the neighbors for every detail
- The overlay approach allows maximum town and neighbor oversight, now and into the future

# Why Did We Take So Long to Inform Our Neighbors?

- There are those who feel that the Temple had a fully-formed plan before we “went public” - has unfortunately resulted in anger and upset toward the Temple.
- Temple Shalom is a member organization that operates according to a set of by-laws
- The by-laws are explicit that any plan to sell the property can only be approved by a vote of the congregation. We had to make a recommendation to the congregation before we could go public.
- However, the congregation did not go on a straight line from where we were in 2005 to a decision to sell the property in 2008
- Congregation began a strategic planning process in the summer of 2005
- Focus groups, surveys, large meetings, small meetings
- We established our four goals

# Why Did We Take So Long to Inform Our Neighbors?

- Hired a full-time Rabbi in 2007
- Pursued our preference of merging in Milton with another congregation
- Merge didn't work - looked at the many other options described earlier: THIS EXHAUSTIVE PROCESS TOOK A LONG TIME, ALL BY VOLUNTEERS

# Why Did We Take So Long to Inform Our Neighbors?

- As information was gathered and options narrowed, we got to a point in the Spring of 2008 where the New Home Committee recommended to the Officers that we sell all of the property and build a new Temple on site
- Officers unanimously agreed
- Recommendation was carried one month later to the Board of Directors – they agreed with a 20-1 vote
- Their recommendation was brought to a Congregational meeting in July 2008, which agreed by a vote of 68-2
- Our by-laws were clear – no sale could be approved until the congregation approved it – no approach to the neighbors until the congregation approved what that approach could be
- The first meeting with the neighbors, called by a neighbor/congregant, was held within one month of the Congregational vote

# Informing the Community

- We have held two large community meetings
- We held a small meeting of neighborhood Town Meeting Members
- We attended a small house meeting
- We have discussed the project with individual neighbors
- We have spoken informally with many town leaders
- We have communicated in the newspapers and with Town Meeting members
- We are a small group of volunteers; there is only so much that we can do. We do not have the wherewithal for a large, extended campaign.

# The Process

- We are presenting a proposal and a rationale for an overlay district – if we succeed in this endeavor, what ultimately is placed on the property, what it can look like, and how it will work, will be largely in the hands of the PB with extensive neighbor input. We think it’s a “good thing” for the PB to help manage this process.
- Some people demanded to see what this development will look like – those specifics do not exist yet. The pictures we have shown have simply indicated several but not all possibilities – we are open to options

# Final Thoughts

- We are not happy that we must redevelop our land. We wish that things could remain the way they are. But that's impossible. Our property WILL BE SOLD in the coming year.
- We believe that a situation where the Temple and preschool can co-exist together with small-scale commercial development is the best option we have. The Temple will necessarily be committed to ensuring that the property remains safe, relatively quiet, attractive, and well-maintained because our house of worship will be there, and so will children.
- We believe that commercial zoning leaves little protections for the neighborhood in the future.
- We believe that leaving the property under the current residential zoning will render the property vulnerable to dense housing, or the possibility of vacancy because of the critical economic housing and building climate. Police Chief Wells is most concerned about this real possibility.
- We are not asking that you merely trust us – we are asking that you work with us to help create a mutually beneficial future