

Maplewood Jewish Center Prepares to Expand

By Sharon Mark Cohen

The Charles Kimmel building of the Maplewood Jewish Center (MJC) is getting a much-needed facelift. On November 28, the Maplewood Township Zoning Board of Adjustment unanimously voted to grant MJC a building permit for major renovations.

It began with a vision by Frumie Bogomilsky, the center's administrator and wife of Rabbi Sholom Bogomilsky, spiritual leader of MJC. With a master's degree in Early Childhood and Special Education, Bogomilsky cares for her growing family, home and shul, plus she runs the synagogue preschool and Hebrew School. The cornerstone on the brick structure on Parker Road shows that it was constructed in 1938. The MJC purchased the building in 2008. There are currently two classrooms for 2- and 3-year-old preschool students. The 4-year-olds attend classes set up across the busy thoroughfare in rooms attached to the rabbi's residence.

The new construction will allow the MJC to house all of the classrooms necessary to have 64 students enrolled in preschool at any given time. Notably, MJC will be providing Jewish early childhood care from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Kinder Gan Preschool, as well as the afterschool Hebrew school, will have classrooms on the first floor. The synagogue will be moved to the newly constructed second floor, with the addition of a Shabbat elevator.

The bottom floor will include a renovated and enlarged social hall. Two state-of-the-art kitchens for dairy and meat are part



Rendering of expanded MJC. (Credit: MJC)

of the plan. The installation of a mikvah, according to Bogomilsky, "completes the trappings of a community that provides all aspects of Jewish life. The eruv surrounds Maplewood, and now there will be a kosher mikvah in town, with Jewish early childhood care in a state-of-the-art facility, plus a beautiful shul." According to Bogomilsky, the closest mikvah is currently a 20-minute drive from Maplewood.

Following four other lengthy meetings over the past seven months, with testimony from experts, including an engineer, traffic expert and architect for MJC, the seven members of the zoning board listened attentively to members of the community in favor of and opposed to the project. Preschoolers' parents, neighbors and congregants spoke about Frumie, as Bogomilsky was warmly referred to, and the exemplary Kinder Gan Preschool.

Parents of students who have graduated from Kinder Gan stated that teachers in surrounding schools know which students attended Frumie's preschool by their willingness to learn and their good behavior. Bogomilsky added that aside from neighboring public schools, "within driving dis-

tance from Maplewood, there are many excellent options of Jewish education, all across the spectrum."

Much discussion ensued at the zoning board meetings about the new C-shaped driveway, noise, landscaping and lighting. Concerned neighbors had their turn to come to the mic and give sworn testimony. In his summation, Rob Simon, attorney for MJC, expressed the sentiments of Bogomilsky and MJC to make the construction and use of the building as friendly to the neighborhood as possible, noting that the rabbi, Frumie and their family live in the neighborhood, too. After considering all factors and agreeing that the construction will meet all zoning board regulations, the board members voted one by one to approve the expansion of MJC. After two years of working on this dream, a

large showing of MJC members were in attendance with the Bogomilskys to applaud the decision.

When the building is finished, elevators and ramps will be included to be in compliance with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, allowing all to come and participate. There will be a semi-circular driveway in which the children will be dropped off and picked up, alleviating the need to park cars on the streets and/or have the preschoolers and their caregivers cross Parker Avenue.

"It was heartwarming," Bogomilsky added, "to hear from so many people who love our shul and what it offers."

For opportunities to participate in this exciting project, contact Frumie Bogomilsky at admin@maplewoodjewishcenter.org as she prepares for the groundbreaking.