

Jewish life made easier with unveiling of 'eruv

By Philip Sean Curran
Staff Writer

Maplewood joined communities nationwide that have made life a little easier for its Orthodox Jewish community. On Dec. 21, members of both local Orthodox synagogues helped unveil the first "eruv" in Maplewood.

An eruv, found in Jewish law, is a virtual boundary that allows Orthodox Jews to "carry" on the Sabbath. It is almost often created using existing utility poles and wires.

Mayor Fred R. Profeta Jr. joined in a ceremony at the foot of a utility pole at the intersection of Prospect Street and Parker Avenue, just across the street from Congregation Beth Ephraim-Maplewood Jewish Center.

Aside from Beth Ephraim, Maplewood is home to one other Orthodox synagogue: Congregation Ahavath Zion, located on Boyden Avenue. For local Orthodox Jews, the eruv will make their lives easier.

Jewish law prohibits carrying outside the home on the Sabbath. The prohibition would apply to everyone from a father pushing a baby stroller to a senior citizen needing a walker to get around. That can pose a hardship for families wanting to attend synagogue on Friday night or a Saturday morning. The approval of the eruv project in the ward was a first. U.S. law, as required under Jewish law, representatives of both synagogues approached the Township

an eruv. The Township Committee granted the request. That might have been the easy part, however.

In the time since, money had to be raised; arrangements worked out with the utility companies; and the roughly 350 plastic wire coverings called "lechies" had to be installed on poles across Maplewood. The process even required hiring a rabbinic expert.

Verizon and PSE&G also had to approve the plan before allowing the wire coverings.

"Big day, two years in the making," said Steve Bauml, president of Congregation Beth Ephraim, on Dec. 21. Maplewood joins other communities across the state and the nation with an eruv. West Orange, Livingston and Cherry Hill are on that list. So are Los Angeles, Philadelphia, New York and Chicago, among other places.

Whether a community has one is one factor that Orthodox Jews consider when deciding where to move, said Jeff Kingsley, a member of Congregation Beth Ephraim-Maplewood Jewish Center.

Rabbi Sholom Bogomilsky of Beth Ephraim said the eruv is "99.5 percent" complete. Each Friday, the Eruv will have to be checked to ensure there are no breaks in the wire. The Beth Ephraim-Maplewood Jewish Center will have a map of the eruv.

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Rabbi Sholom Bogomilsky is joined by outgoing Mayor Fred R. Profeta Jr. at the unveiling

Photo By Barbara

Maplewood shuls mark erection of Shabbat bou

by Johanna Ginsberg
NJN Staff Writer

Two years and \$20,000 after gaining approval, Maplewood's two Orthodox synagogues celebrated the completion of an *eruv*, or Shabbat boundary.

On Dec. 14, members of Congregation Beth Ephraim-Maplewood Jewish Center and Congregation Ahavath Zion gathered in front of Beth Ephraim on the corner of Parker and Prospect avenues.

They were putting up the last plastic strip, or *lehi*, on a telephone pole, and offering "pay-

ment" in the form of a silver dollar to Maplewood Mayor Fred Profeta for use of the township property.

Also present at the festivities were Assemblywoman Mila Jasey (D-Dist. 27) and West Orange Mayor and Assemblyman John McKeon (D-Dist. 27).

The *eruv* now forms a boundary of existing cable hung on utility and telephone poles that surrounds 90 percent of Maplewood, running from above Wyoming Avenue on one end to the Clinton Avenue station on the other, from close to the South Orange border to the Millburn town line.

Under Jewish law, the *eruv*

defines the area within which Jews may carry or push objects out of doors on the Sabbath, from books and prayer shawls to baby carriages.

Although the construction of an *eruv* has proved controversial in some communities, the Maplewood Township Committee approved the synagogues' proposal with little objection. "Maplewood really stands out for being so inclusive of all groups that live in this area," said Rabbi Yehoshua Lebovic of Ahavath Zion.

Profeta also attixed the final symbolic *lehi*, told NJN, "We pride ourselves on being an inclusive community. This is the

kind of thing that slides under the radar. When you don't provide this kind of fence, in effect you're not allowing some people to live here."

The cost of the *eruv* includes payment to a rabbi to supervise the project and the fee for a cherry-picker truck to install the *lehis*. While the synagogues raised close to \$20,000 through private fund-raising, they said they are about \$5,000 short of their goal. The final sum would pay for maintenance of the *eruv*.

Dovid Tzubeli, a rabbi from Lakewood, has supervised the pro-



Mayor Fred Profeta to nail in the wood *eruv*. Bogomilsk



Maplewood Mayor Fred Profeta receives *kinyan kesef*, a symbolic payment of a silver dollar for use of the town's poles for the *eruv*. Photos by Johanna Ginsberg

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ject since his mentor, *eruv* expert Rabbi Shimon Eider, passed away in September. Technical work on the *eruv* was completed two weeks ago.

Ahavath Zion, which recently celebrated its 40th anniversary, has 15 member families. Beth Ephraim, nearly moribund just seven years ago, when it had dwindled to seven to 10 member families, now has 40 member families. It includes a range of activities from a preschool to holiday workshops, speakers, and Shabbat services.

Not everyone in the synagogue community requires the *eruv*, according to Beth Ephraim member Jeff Kingsley, who has spearheaded the project. In many communities, however, the *eruv* is seen as a way to attract Shabbat-observant Jews as residents.

"We're a mixed group. Maybe 50 percent will need it. But we're looking forward to an increase in



Profeta affixes the last *lehi* to complete the Maplewood *eruv*.

membership in our congregation," he said. "People who know there's an Orthodox shul and an *eruv* in Maplewood will come. Messages regarding the status of the *eruv* will be posted at www.maplewoodjewishcenter.org.

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eruv. And it's a selling point for the town because it will bring young professionals here."

In the relatively rare instances when eruv construction is challenged, some opponents object to what they describe as an influx of religiously observant people whose religious practices separate them from the community and who send their children to day schools and yeshivot rather than to public schools. But, Semel said, "we are

not anticipating a flood of people coming in. I do not think Maplewood will become Teaneck South," referring to the growing Orthodox neighborhood in the Bergen County town.

Other New Jersey communities with an eruv include West Orange, Highland Park, New Brunswick, Paramus, Passaic, Lakewood, and Englewood.

The idea for a Maplewood eruv was first planted in the mind of Rabbi Sholom Bogomilsky of Beth Ephraim several years ago, he told *NJ Jewish News*. A Maplewood resident stopped the rabbi on the

steps of the Maplewood post office. As Bogomilsky recalled, he expressed some disagreement with the idea of placing a menorah in the town's Ricalton Square, and then added, "But if you want to put up an eruv, well, that's something I'd support. I said, 'Really, why? Are you *shomer* Shabbos [Sabbath observant]?' He said, 'No, but my children are. I said, 'Okay, I'll keep it in mind.'" And he did.

Bogomilsky was approached several more times by people within the community but still put the idea on hold. "Interestingly enough, I found there were a lot of people asking about it, both people living in Maplewood and people thinking of moving to Maplewood."

Finally, according to Bogomilsky, a call came from the office of Maplewood's mayor, Fred Profeta, Jr., suggesting an eruv. Calls to the mayor and members of the town council were not returned in time for this story, but Bogomilsky said after the push from the mayor came, he started the committee and asked Bauml to lead it.

Kathleen M. Leventhal, a township committee member, told *NJ Jewish News* in a telephone interview, "The presentation gave us a really good overview and answered some of my specific questions. It was a very interesting I'm interested in voting for.... There are



Little opposition is expected in the application for a Maplewood eruv, but use of utility polls and other public amenities (as with this Boston eruv) has been litigated in some places as a violation of town ordinances.

already people living all over town who are behind this and want to see it happen."

The cost of erecting the eruv will be about \$20,000, according to Bogomilsky. While he could not put a timeline on the fund-raising involved, once the money is raised, he estimates that it will only take a few weeks to put it up.

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Kathleen M. Leventhal, a township committee member, said people "already people living all over town...want to see this happen."



An eruv closes off Ricalton Square by an congregation and Ephraim Jewish Center means congregants can use strollers on Shabbat — a drawing point for young Orthodox families.

Maplewood votes to approve Shabbat boundary proposal

by **Johanna Ginsberg**
NJJN Staff Writer

With little opposition, the Maplewood Township Committee approved a proposal to erect an *eruv*, or Shabbat boundary, to accommodate observant Jewish worshipers in the town.

Meeting Dec. 20, the committee voted 4-1 to approve the proposals, with only Vice Mayor Ian Grodman voting no. Only one person raised any objection to the resolution during the time reserved for public comment.

Mayor Fred Profeta Jr.

embraced the resolution, which allows a committee from two local Orthodox congregations to mark existing telephone poles and wires to create a symbolic boundary around the town of Maplewood. Jewish law forbids observant Jews from carrying objects or pushing strollers beyond their homes outside such a boundary on Shabbat.

In public discussion, Profeta said he thinks the law required the town to pass the resolution. But he went further, adding, "I find it good policy for Maplewood and consistent with the culture of

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Maplewood expected to approve proposal for Shabbat boundary

by Johanna Ginsberg
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The Maplewood Township Committee will vote on a proposal Dec. 20 on whether to allow a group representing two Orthodox synagogues to erect an *eruv* in the community.

There has been no opposition to the proposal to erect the *eruv*, a largely symbolic Shabbat boundary, and all involved expect the proposal to pass.

Steve Bauml, president of Congregation Beth Ephraim-Maplewood Jewish Center, spearheaded a six-person committee that presented the issue at a township committee meeting on Dec. 6. The committee included members of Beth Ephraim and of Maplewood's other Orthodox synagogue, Congregation Ahavath Zion. The rabbis of both synagogues are associated with Chabad-Lubavitch, the hasidic outreach movement.

An *eruv* is a symbolic "boundary" of strings, existing wires, and fencing that defines an area within

which Shabbat-observant Jews may carry objects or push strollers. Rabbinic law prevents the carrying of objects outside such boundaries on Shabbat.

An effort to gain town approval for an *eruv* in Tenafly has led to years of litigation between proponents, who say it is a nearly invisible legal fiction, and opponents, who say its use of utility polls and other public amenities to attach strings is a violation of town ordinances. The two sides of the Tenafly conflict are expected to finalize a settlement next month after six years of litigation.

Irwin Semel, a member of Ahavath Zion who sits on the Maplewood *eruv* committee, said he was not expecting any opposition. "Maplewood is a very progressive town. I would be surprised to have any opposition." He believes, instead, the *eruv* will only benefit the community. "The Orthodox synagogues will attract young professionals in Brooklyn who would like to come here if there were an