

‘Anti-trustee’ meeting promises more openness

With apologies to Bob Dylan, “the times, they are a changin’” could very easily have been the theme of the Jewish Federation of Ottawa’s first-ever community-wide meeting.

It was certainly a less formal affair than many are used to.

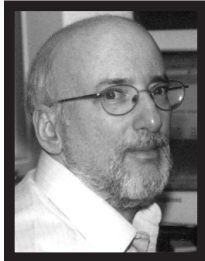
“An anti-trustee meeting,” Federation Chair Ron Prehogan calls it. The days of top down governance have become a thing of the past, to be replaced, according to Prehogan, with a governance structure based on community feedback.

“This is a new era, starting tonight. We want more feedback; it is the beginning of going out into the community. You will be seeing a lot more of that.”

The days of rubber-stamping may be over.

Under the new structure, five committees – Finance, Audit and Administration; Jewish Identity and Responsibility; Communications and Community Relations; Financial Resource Development; and Planning and Allocations – work on projects and then send them to the JFO Board. Each chair of the committee is a member of the board.

“The concept is that these committees [made up of between six to eight people] are making decisions and bringing those decisions to the board for ratification. Absent of something absolutely horrendous happening, for the most part, the recommendations will be accepted,” Prehogan promises.



Editor

Barry Fishman

His vision is to run the meetings as if it was “a Jewish shareholders meeting,” where people are told what is going on in the community, what the board sees ahead and are invited to comment and make suggestions.

If the first meeting is any indication, he may be on to something. Unlike previous meetings, a larger-than-usual audience asked and commented on many of the items on the agenda.

Of particular interest was the discussion led by Allan Moscovitch, chair of the Planning and Allocations committee, on the results of the 2001 census report. What was especially alarming to many was the rapid increase in intermarriage and non-affiliation.

It made for a lively debate. The discussion ranged from the importance of funding and supporting Jewish education to questions on what can be done to better reach the intermarried and the younger generation. Some thought the decision to hire the Jewish Outreach Institute was a good idea; others were

not so sure, instead calling for immediate action.

A former Jewish day school 20-something member of the audience noted the high cost of being Jewish and the feeling he sometimes felt synagogues and other institutions were more interested in his money than him.

As part of the move to get people more involved, in the next 18 months, the Federation is planning a special privately funded town hall meeting where, hopefully, all members of the community will be able to both express their view and give ideas on the direction they would like the community to go in.

Without a doubt, the new Federation is more open and transparent. So, will this new form of ‘bottom up’ governance work?

It all depends on us. If we supply our leadership with feedback, make positive suggestions on how to improve the community and, more importantly, make an effort to get involved, only then will the new Federation work for everyone.

The ball is in our court.

Disinvestment movement

The disinvestment movement by some Protestant churches in North America is still alive and well, according to Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Wiesenthal Center.

The rabbi recently held a press conference

in Ottawa with religious leaders and victims of terror to denounce the campaign, led by the Sabeel Center Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, a Protestant Christian organization in Jerusalem, to de-legitimize the existence of the Jewish homeland.

In a faxed letter to the rabbi, Wendy Gichur, the United Church of Canada, program co-ordinator, East and Central Africa and the Middle East, says the United Church of Canada supports the continued existence of Israel “as a secure and safe homeland for all peoples residing there, recognizing its uniquely Jewish character.” The church has called for Israel to cease construction of the security fence or, as they call it, the “Separation Wall” within Palestinian territory, “that restricts the development of a Palestinian state and significantly disrupts Palestinian life.”

The disinvestment issue, in all likelihood, will be discussed at the United Church General conference to be held in August 2006 in Thunder Bay. We will have more on this story in future editions of the *Bulletin*.

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We will also continue to cover the community’s response to the latest census report and introduce you to some of the not-so-well-known interesting folks who make up our community. We hope you have enjoyed the community-wide *Bulletin* and become regular readers. Happy Chanukah!