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Harriet Markell

SUMMARY

Harriet Markell discusses her life in Bellingham and her involvement, eventually as vice president, in Congregation Beth Israel. She describes the scene in Bellingham from poetry to politics, including stories about COVID-19 and political challenges within Congregation Beth Israel.

Martina Lancia: Okay, so today is November 22nd, 2021. Welcome. And thank you for giving me this time. Giving us this time. Talk about and discuss your experience and any really anything you would like to share with us today. So my first question would be to tell me briefly about your background, your story, whatever you feel comfortable with. Well.

Harriet Markell: Um, how far back do you want me to go?

Martina Lancia: However far back you feel comfortable talking about.

Harriet Markell: Sure, sure. All right. So, I moved to Bellingham about four and a half years ago to retire, having lived around the Bay Area, in Portland, and in Seattle. I've been a nomad for most of my life, following my career around. Um, came up here to retire, and the thing that I do when I move always is that, I mean, the first thing I do is go find the Jewish community and figure out, you know, usually it's a bigger community, and there's more synagogues, etc., but here in Bellingham, there's not a lot of choice. So I sought out the Congregation Beth Israel and immediately joined the care committee, which, um, uh, was a similar committee I chaired at a synagogue in Seattle in the late 90s. And so I kind of know the ropes of what that function is, and figured I could just get involved and start meeting people and get connected to the community. So I did that about a year or so later. The chair, the woman who had been chair for years, decided to step down, and another member and I decided to share, kind of step up as co-chairs. So, I've been doing that for about three years. And then I got a request to join the board, and I did that. And then I got a request to step into the vice president position. So I did that. And so that's where I sit now. I'm one of two vice presidents of the congregation, and I was originally filling the seat of somebody who had to step down. I think I'm in my first full year of the vice presidency. There's another year. And then the question about whether I'd become president, I haven't decided. My involvement in the Bellingham community has been primarily centered around the congregation. I've done a lot of other volunteering for the synagogue, and then Covid happened. And so my attempts to or my thinking about reaching out to other parts of the community got put on hold. So I'm pretty involved at this point. And that's where I sit.

Martina Lancia: So, what would you say is your relationship with Bellingham in a broader sense? I mean, you've already talked about your involvement in the community, of course, the community can be part of it, but, more generally, like how has it been for, you since you moved and, you know, specifically Bellingham for, for a reason, um, like, um.

Harriet Markell: Like, why did I come here?

Martina Lancia: Um, yes. And no, like what? What, like your relationship and just with the place you live in.

Harriet Markell: Okay. Sure, sure, sure. So, um, and it has to do a bit with why I came here, which was I was looking for a visually beautiful, progressive community with a Jewish community, with enough culture, kind of, you know, good theater, play performances, literature and music and all of that stuff, to me, so that I would, in my retirement, get to do the things that I love to do, most of which I was had previously been doing in large cities. So, Bellingham fit the bill. And it has proven to be even with

Covid; it has proven itself. And in addition, there are so many outdoor activity opportunities. I live a ten-minute walk from a huge falls that has a Works Progress Administration stone bridge going over it. There are tons of forests around here. There are hiking trails everywhere. The city has done an incredible job of creating and maintaining hiking trails that just snake throughout the city and then down the coast along Bellingham Bay, and that was also appealing, and I have been able to take advantage of a lot of that. I have a dog, and we go out walking. I walk on my own. There's a beautiful lake, just up the street from my house, a huge lake that I've walked around part of. There's another lake that I walk around part of with a bunch of women from the synagogue. So I've gotten my outdoor needs met. I've gotten. I have a good friend here who I knew before, who's kind of the poetry maven of the community. She and her partner organize all of the poetry events, and she posts a poem that she writes daily. And she's an incredibly creative woman. And, has kind of been my avenue into the literature and poetry community here. And I go to book readings and poetry readings and all of that. I'm in a chorus. I used to sing in high school, and I haven't sung since, so there's a wonderful chorus here that I've joined, and we just started rehearsing again in September, since COVID stopped everything, and we are planning a concert now. We're in negotiation with the synagogue to do a concert in the synagogue. So, it's been fun, and it has met a lot of my needs. And it feels like I spent a lot of time in the late 60s, early 70s in Berkeley, and was very involved in lots of women's movement and antiwar stuff and all that, and a lot of really pretty progressive politics. And Bellingham, also in the midst of a relatively conservative county, is a breath of fresh air and, really, in so many ways, reminds me of Berkeley back in the old days, which is terrific.

Martina Lancia: So that sounds lovely.

Harriet Markell: Is that what you were looking for?

Martina Lancia: Yes, yes. Where? Yeah. There's no right or wrong answer. Like, um.

Harriet Markell: I wanted to answer your question.

Martina Lancia: Question, right? No, but like, you know, don't worry about whatever you think. You think. The answer would be it's what we're looking for. So, you said you moved to Bellingham four and a half years ago. More or less. Annette, during this time, but even maybe relevant to some events you were told about, what would you recall being the most important event or events in the history of the community?

Harriet Markell: The last four and a half years? You know, aside from the absolutely un. Not previously experienced rain that we had about a week ago, which just flooded the whole city. That was seriously an event. I would say, you know, the onset of COVID and what it did to life in this community. Life had been going on before that. And there I don't, I'm not recalling anything particularly notable. I just kind of walked into the stream of life in Bellingham and went on, and then Covid happened, and the town shut down, and the Jewish community shut down. Like boom, shut down, and changed life for all of us.

Martina Lancia: So that. Really. Oops, sorry.

Harriet Markell: Sorry. I'm kind of surprised at my emotional reaction, but really, that was huge, as you can imagine. And I think that's the kind of main idea about this interview: it impacted every phase of everybody's life. And, so yeah.

Martina Lancia: Yeah, I know it has been hard for me, I'm not from here. So I lived the pandemic away from my family, from everything, from everyone. So I get that feeling. It was emotionally hard for everyone of us in different ways. It was. And I'm very sorry to know that it was. You know, you always hope it wasn't as hard as it was for you, for someone else. You always hope they had it.

Harriet Markell: You know, I keep thinking, oh, I'm fine, I'm fine, and I did fine, and I'm okay. And I was doing consulting, back in California. So, so much for retirement. Before COVID, I would be flying down to various places in California about every six, eight weeks for about 3 to 5 days. And I was doing some consulting in Portland early on. And the biggest change that I was kind of really cognizant of was that my travel stopped, and all the work that I was doing was remote, but a great deal of it was remote anyway. It was on-site with people, but a lot of computer work, looking at documents and writing reports, and blah, blah, blah. So, other than my travel shutting down, it didn't in some ways feel that much different. Several friends and different groups of people fairly quickly set up routine Zoom get-togethers. So, you know, weekly or monthly or every other week or whatever they were, so I was maintaining contact with the people that were important to me in various ways, and the synagogue committees and all that sort of thing on Zoom fairly quickly. So it was just in the moment, it didn't feel that terrible. But looking back on it, I kind of get how significant it was.

Martina Lancia: So I imagine it really impacted your Jewish community as well. Like, everything was so. How? What happened to celebrating? Celebrating any holiday. How? What happened to celebrating events together?

Harriet Markell: I have a little chronology here. That's great. I could briefly go through. Yes, yes. About how we, as the Jewish community or the engaged Jewish community. I think there are a lot of Jews in Bellingham who are not involved in the synagogue. So, you may already know this, there are only two formal Jewish kinds of organizations here. There's us, um, Beth Israel, and there's Chabad. And so the majority of people who are Jewishly engaged are members of the synagogue, or at least, attend services with some, you know, holidays, and then maybe for some events or whatever. And so I speak for those folks. And not Chabad. I'm not that familiar with what they've done. So the last we had two final events, really, before everything just really shut down. Purim was happening. So that was spring of 2020, right? Right. Spring of 2020. Um, we had a big one; we always have a big Purim celebration. They read the Megillah. Everybody comes in costume. There's hamantaschen and bourbon and, you know, um, people just hanging out, yakking. There's a costume contest and, always, a debate about hamantash and latkes, I think, is the debate, a formal debate up on the bima, and so we had that event, but we were already aware that things were not looking so good, so they served the food. People served the food to you. You didn't take it out of the plate; they had gloves, a couple of pieces of hamantaschen put in plastic bags, and tied up. They gave you, you know, the food. You'd go over to the beverage table, and whatever you wanted, bourbon or otherwise, was served to you by people who were gloved. And they did and Purim spiel. So they did the Purim spiel, it's hysterical. Always is. And then they did the Purim costume contest and all of that. So we did all of that. No masks at that time. And that was the last big communal event that we had. We also about a week later. Or someone who was a very beloved member of the congregation passed away, and they decided to do her Shiva A1A1 event in the synagogue. And so again, it was, you know, it was not a large group of people. Food was prepared ahead of time, brought on platters, served, served to everyone, packaged, etc., and they, you know, people got up and spoke, and it was like a memorial service. And that was it, and then everything went dark. Uh, the rabbi, nobody even came into the office and, um, uh, so that went on through a good part of the summer and, uh, because Zoom became so ubiquitous so quickly, we were able to shift onto Zoom for Shabbat services on Friday nights. The rabbi kind of trimmed it down to 45 minutes. He, you know, did it from his house. Our cantorial soloist was in her house, and they figured out how to switch back and forth, and they would do Friday night services, which, interestingly enough, were better attended on Zoom than in person, that I remember. Sometimes it wasn't clear that we'd get a minyan on Friday nights in person. And now, you know, sometimes 30 people, 40 people show up for Friday night. So we were doing that, and then, um, sometime, uh, in the I think it was in the fall of 2020. We put together a COVID task force. We brought in a nurse. We brought in people who are on our facilities committee, a representative from the board, and I was on it for a while, and then it was like too many committees, I dropped off. But, they started researching what it, you know, it was starting to look like maybe at some point down the road, we're going to reopen a little bit. And how can we do this? What do we need supply-wise? What do we need to put in place in terms of contact tracing? Do we want to check? Do we want people to have been tested? How frequently? How soon before they show up at the door? Do we want to limit the number of people they are dealing with? All of these questions and getting recommendations from the CDC, you know, following CDC guidelines, State of Washington guidelines, and any mandates that were coming down from the governor. And, uh, you know, kind of putting a very elaborate plan in place, which ultimately we didn't have to implement as elaborately, but they met kind of on an as needed basis as things changed, as mandates changed, as the, volume of cases changed, etc., and, would put out communiques, if you will, in our weekly newsletter for people, no services yet. You know, the building is still closed. Oh, the rabbi and the office administrator are now in the building on Fridays. If you need anything, you can go into the building. They'll let you in, and wear a mask. So it was kind of like this progression of slowly opening up that they were orchestrating. Last spring. The rabbi and the cantorial soloist were conducting b'nai mitzvah classes on Zoom with the kids. They were doing the Sunday school on Zoom. They said they got that set up so they could do Sunday school classes on Zoom. I think each teacher from their own home and their classes, you know, logging in, and by last spring, I guess, when things were starting to lift a little bit and look better before the delta variant, um, we decided to do hybrid services so people could log in by Zoom, or they could come to the synagogue. We would. We did them outside on the patio. We have a large patio set up the sound system and the video out there, and did services that way. And people did come to the in-person services. And, you know, they had to sign in. They had to wear a mask when people were starting to get vaccinated. I think we put out a request that nobody attend unless they've been vaccinated, and we were just taking people's word for it, and then there was the first in-person bar mitzvah. I think it was a bar mitzvah. I was trying to remember who it was, but what I didn't go, oh, because the first ones were just the rabbi, the cantorial soloist, the bar mitzvah kid. Their family, and they're their bar mitzvah class, could attend in person. And that was it. No friends. If extended family had come in, they could come, you know, into town. But I remember, I don't remember if it was at that event or the first high holiday service. The rabbi was so ecstatic about being back in person that you could see it in his face. He was practically in tears. He, you know, it was just really an emotional event for everybody. So, you know, they came to the service, there was no reception, there was no, you know, party afterwards, blah, blah, blah, and what families did on their own, I'm not even sure, so that was happening. And then slowly they were opening up those events to, um, more extended family and friends, I think and I started going actually, and then over the summer, uh, the we had a, we have an audio visual committee, task force, whatever it is that came to the board with a proposal for actually doing a whole streaming and sound system setup, like we're now a TV studio. And so the board authorized the money. They had gotten a ton of input from experts, and they got to work because we wanted to do a full streaming event for the High Holidays. So they put cameras on the walls, they set up the electronics so that everything could be maneuvered from computers that were either in

actually in the sanctuary or a little room behind the Bima. The sound, the video, and they could manipulate everything so that whoever was getting it was all funneled through Zoom. So anybody who was getting on to Zoom could see the full Bima rather than just the rabbi's face. And they could see people walking with the Torah around the sanctuary and, um, and it, you know, tracked from the rabbi to the cantorial soloist and to whoever was in the middle doing, uh, you know, Haftorah or whatever. Um, so that was a huge step forward. We probably had, for High Holidays, we probably had 50, 60 people in person. It's a 230 family unit membership. We have, and I may be underestimating it. And it varied, you know, of course, were heavily attended first day of Rosh Hashanah but we had a good, solid attendance in person for the High Holidays. And we can now continue to use that technology, and we continue to have hybrid Friday night services. And Saturday, we only do Saturday morning services if there's a mitzvah. So, when we do, then we use that technology, and we're teaching some high school kids and some local college kids how to use the technology so that they can come and volunteer and go to the service and manage the technology. So it's been very successful, and we're very pleased that we made that investment. It was not cheap, but it also had the other thing about it was that it would meet the needs of people who ordinarily, anyway, wouldn't make it to services because they live too far away, because they're infirm. After all, they happen to be ill this week, or, you know, just people who otherwise would be significant barriers to getting to the synagogue, um, can now get on Zoom. And because I didn't meet more than half the congregation before all this happened, because not that many people come to services. Um, now, I see on Zoom, I know people's names. I know who they are. So, that's great.

Martina Lancia: That sounds great. I'm very happy it was successful and that so many more people had access to services during the holidays. That's great. That's so nice so now that you mentioned traditions and holidays within your community, do you have a sense of how if most people attend, if they, they if they observe Shabbat, if they, for example, have a Kosher diet, if they can read and speak Hebrew or if the community is very diverse, diverse in the sense that some people maybe don't or not all the time.

Harriet Markell: Well, because we are a congregation that has to cater to everybody in the community and all of their history, they bring with them their traditions. I would say that we have a pretty diverse community. The congregation started 125 years ago, I think, as an Orthodox congregation, and over the years, as more people have moved into Bellingham and brought reform and conservative, and more alternative ritual and practices that it has had to expand and change. And there was a split some years ago, as I understand it, before I got here, people who were more observant and more religious didn't like the more conservative direction that it was taking. And so they split off and created their congregation. But ultimately, I don't know how it all happened. They came back. So we do have a contingent of people who are much more traditional, much more religious. I'm sure that there are people who keep Kosher. We do a weekly, a monthly Leyland Conservative Minyan for people who want a more traditional service, because we are now officially reformed and use the reform URJ or whatever it is Siddur, and it's not enough Hebrew for people. It's not their old melodies that they still relate to. Um, and so, um, a chunk of people just kind of decided, somebody suggested, Why don't we do this? And now that happens once a month, and people just volunteer for all of the different parts of the service and the Torah readings and the Aaliyahs and all of that stuff. Um, so that gets anywhere from 15 to 25 people in attendance. And, there are some people, I think, who just are not satisfied at all. And just who knows? Now that there's Covid, they may be able to stream into their old synagogue where they grew up. You know, I did that once, and I found myself in the middle of Shabbat services in Cleveland. I was like, Oh, wait a minute. And the rabbi saw me, and he said, Harriet, hi. It was so funny. But I thought, well, I could do this regularly because it's a conservative synagogue. And that is how I grew up. And I love that service, and I love that rabbi, even though it's been many, many years. And, um, but it was like 3:00 in the afternoon. I'm not going to do it, so again, I think. A good more than half of the members probably read Hebrew and can join in the service when they come in Hebrew. Um. Uh. Attendance, as I said on a Friday night in non-COVID times, was a bit sparse. Saturday mornings, if we had those services, were heavier duty because it was an event, and people wanted to come for friends, friendship, and family reasons. Um, people come. Big holiday events. So we do the Hanukkah party, especially for the kids. We do the Purim evening, and also usually a Purim carnival for the kids, obviously. High holidays are the best attended of all historically. What am I forgetting? Oh. actually, they did on Zoom this year, and they unfurled the Torah. They set up tables from one end of the sanctuary, all the way through the social hall to the end of the social hall, and doubled up the tables, and they unfurled the Torah all the way. And then they took the computer, and they walked us along the whole thing. Um, but under normal circumstances, people come, and they unfurl it in a circle, and everybody's holding it and touching it. You know, the usual thing. But, um, you know, that's mezzo. Mezzo attended. Um, we do, um, some other kinds of programming. Um, sometimes we have Jewish musicians coming in, particularly if they're in Seattle, the Seattle area. They come in and do concerts. Those are always well attended. So, you know, my feeling when I first got here was, oh, my God, nobody comes to synagogue. I felt bad for the rabbi. It's gotten better. Even before Zoom, it had gotten better. So I think, um, I don't know it. We'll see what happens after, you know, things open up a bit more again. But, you know, it seemed like, um, you know, people were attaching more to the community and to the ritual and all of that. Nobody's taking attendance. We're not counting, so I don't know. But yeah. Yeah.

Martina Lancia: So in terms of again, staying in the tradition and holidays, let's say topic, do you, do you have any comparison that you can do between your community, um, and other communities in the area or around, in other towns or in a region more in

general that, you know, maybe not. I was just wondering if you have, um, a recollection of, like, if you attend, if they attend different holidays, if they have different traditions. The community in Bellingham is very inclusive, and there's a variety of diverse, uh, people that attend. I would say that yours is very inclusive. So, there's a higher chance you celebrate more. So you give everyone the chance to be part of the community. But maybe you have more insight.

Harriet Markell: It's, you know, it's hard to compare to anything because we're such a geographically separate community. It's not doable to travel to Seattle if you want to affiliate with a conservative congregation or an Orthodox congregation, of which there are several of both in Seattle, so people are stuck, if you will, with Beth Israel or nothing, or Chabad, and Chabad really is more for students. And there are a couple of people that I know who do go to some events, but we're talking fewer than ten. You know, we're not talking about a huge group. the rabbi there keeps trying to pull me in. He brings me. He brings me a Rosh Hashanah round. He brings me. So. But they do that for a lot of people in the community; it's not like they're singing. Yeah. But. So they do that. I mean, that's Chabad. They do the outreach. That's their thing, so a few people attend some things there, but otherwise it's us or nothing. Now, unless you, as I said, can get on Zoom and find your old synagogue or find a place in Seattle you like better, or go up to Canada. I'm sure there are congregations in Vancouver. I don't know what they are. I know there's a Jewish population up there. I don't know how big it is. Um, and that actually is a faster drive than going to Seattle. Uh, for any number of reasons. It's closer, and there's not as much traffic typically. Um, so I don't know what people do. There is a Havurah here. That is a, um. Oh, what am I? Why do I always stumble on this? The alternative new strains of Judaism? Um. They're the more kind of, um, do your thing kind of pull together from different traditions, add a little bit of humanistic psychology and lots of dancing and singing and all of that stuff, gosh, this is embarrassing. No. That's okay.

Martina Lancia: Um.

Harriet Markell: Somebody will recognize what I'm talking about. Um, that's a relatively small hobby, and they. I don't even know what they're doing during COVID. And I think they, you know, they maybe got 30 or 40 people on a Saturday morning, for Shabbat. So not lots of comparison.

Martina Lancia: That's okay, that's fine. So, considering all of you told me about and all of the interesting views that this community has, and so inclusive, so, so welcoming, where do you think the community will be going in the future? Where do you see it? Where do you see it going?

Harriet Markell: So, we are gaining membership. Even during COVID. We've been kind of pleasantly surprised, you know, not hordes, but consistently 2 or 3 families almost every month. So that's been encouraging. We have lost 1 or 2 for various reasons, but the net, the net is that we're gaining. We have also. Made a conservative effort. And the rabbi has to reach out to the LGBTQ community. And, he's working with mostly youth to develop activities and opportunities to get together. Uh Jewishly. For those kids, and I think that because Bellingham is such a kind of alternative community in general, a bunch of aging hippies here that will probably grow and expand as it gets better known, and we're delighted about that. We don't have as, as we understand it, we don't have a lot of Jews of color in this town, although we are doing a whole bit of programming on Jews, race, and justice and thinking about what we might do as a congregation to be more welcoming, even despite the numbers, um, how we might, uh, do some things differently. I think people, we also built a new building. I don't know if anybody's told you, but we moved into a new building. We had historically been down in, in the middle of town in a really old building, and it was freaking falling apart. And I got here just as the new building was being built. Everybody was anticipating the move. I got here in April, and by December, we were in the new building, and it's a work in progress. But I think that has been an opportunity for people to feel more comfortable. It's a very different style building, and some people like it and some people don't. It's pretty modern, not my taste, but it's what we've got, and we're continuing to make it feel more comfortable and homey. And as we have money to furnish and decorate and all of that, and work on the landscape. And I think that's more welcoming. There's plenty of parking. It's easy to find. I think it's a more welcoming, physical environment for people. And, um, as things open up again, we've got we're putting in a commercial kitchen, we're going to be renting the facility out to community organizations that might want to use it for various events, and I think that will bring people into the space and get to know us better. So, you know, I think, I think we're, you know, we're just going to continue to grow and expand as the community does.

Martina Lancia: Yeah, that sounds nice. It's always promising, so you mentioned that, you know, that at some point there was a split in the community. History. Do you were you told when you moved in? Anything about the history, and the community that built the first? Sorry to say it again. The community was before it split. Um, and kind of like. I know we're talking about a long time ago. Um, a very long time ago, but how did the new community start from the split?

Harriet Markell: Yeah. You know, I heard the history and drips and drabs. I asked some. Some people have been here. There are a lot of people who have grown up here and whose families have lived here. So, whose actual grandparents were here, and probably I don't know if it was the grandparent generation or great grandparent generation, maybe even that who were among the first

Jews in Bellingham. And so they know the history like the back of their hand. And they've told me little bits and pieces, and I don't even remember exactly where the first, that first group of Jews came from, but I think they came. I my understanding, I think they came to take advantage of the Alaskan gold rush and to do the kind of provisioning of the teams of people that were going up there. So the clothing and the shoes and the tools, and implements, and all the things that people would need. I think that's what was the first attraction, that there was a business opportunity and people could make a living, and, you know, likely because they came from. Eastern European stock, you know, immigrants. They were likely fairly traditional. And still, 125 years ago, there was Reform Judaism, but I don't even know if there was Conservative Judaism. And most people were still pretty traditional. And so it was an Orthodox community, but as more people moved in, that started to morph, and I don't know. I think it just I think there was something about a rabbi or a cantor or something that people said, you know, the music, we don't know the music. We don't know the prayers anymore. We're going to go do our own thing. We're traditional, you know, you guys won't come with us. We're going to go. And I don't know much about how acrimonious it was or not, really, but I would bet that there's a bunch of information in the Jewish Historical Society because we, um, we have a ton of historical stuff, you know, on our walls, pictures going way back. And I believe that we've got, files in the historical society that go back quite a way. So I suspect all of that is there.

Martina Lancia: Okay.

Harriet Markell: So. Yeah.

Martina Lancia: So I don't have any more specific questions. Um, but I was wondering if there is anything else that you would like to, um, share, different, or similar, or about anything that you would like to add? Um, it can come from your personal experience, from your personal history. Um, as far as is it relevant to you that you would like to keep in this interview?

Harriet Markell: Um, a couple of things about our life. We have a wonderful rabbi who is relatively young, um, and dedicated to learning, and to creating a welcoming community. He is a big part of his love of Judaism is about community. And so he eagerly looks for opportunities to bring people together, for whatever reason, to create community within the congregation. And, I think people appreciate that because even if you're not so religiousor, knowledgeable or educated about Jewish history or Jewish law or any of that stuff, the opportunity to come together with fellow Jews and celebrate the holidays and just hang out with people with religious whom, there are a lot of questions you don't need to ask. Um, I think it's appreciated. Um. And I believe that we struggle some about navigating the tough issues about mixed marriage, mixed religion marriages, although we've decided that one. And some people are not happy about Israel and all the BDS issues and all the stuff that's going on now politically about Israel. About all the issues that are being raised, you know, from the Black Lives Matter movement that has morphed into Judaism, looking at Jews, looking at their participation in civil rights, and Jewish white privilege and all of those things. And, those are the hard conversations, and we're, we're tiptoeing into them. We're trying. And the rabbi is making a yeoman's effort to try to create conversations, opportunities for conversation in a variety of ways, to discuss some of those issues among people who, um, who are committed to civil discourse. And I think that's, um, that's one of the, you know, central values that the board has that the rabbi has. And, making that happen is the challenge because people have such strong feelings and emotional attachments and histories and all of that. So, uh, no, no small task, but we're, we're taking baby steps. We're doing it. So that's good.

Martina Lancia: I'm pleased that that sounds so. It's an ongoing discussion. It's still open, and the community hasn't decided.

Harriet Markell: Well, I don't know that the community ever is going to decide as a community. But the issue is, can we create opportunities for people to come together and talk about their perspectives and hear each other? And, you know, maybe some people get swayed one way or the other that way or this way or whatever. But the point is, can we not have a split in this community, and not that we're anywhere near anything like that? I don't believe, but to be able to talk. But I think a lot of things just get avoided, you know, because people know it's so fraught. So if we can tiptoe into the conversations and foster civil debates and civil conversations and just let people participate and say what they have to say and listen to other people and, um, and, and that will, you know, over time, I'm sure, and it's not going to be tomorrow. Over time, we'll, you know, navigate the direction of that congregation.

Martina Lancia: That sounds very positive. I'm glad that there is, even as you were saying, most in most cases, people try to avoid very, uh, you know, topics in which you can end up having a crisis, um, among the people that are discussing. So they're just avoiding beginning it at all. But, um, you know, I'm, I'm glad to hear that in this case, people are trying to engage this conversation that needs to happen, um, without avoiding it. So I'm very glad. Um, so if there's nothing else you wish to add to our conversation, I'm going to stop the recording now.