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## Meeting on planned Hillel Academy changes gets earful from both sides

By Bob Karlovits

Councilman Corey O'Connor moderated a contentious communal meeting at the JCC in Squirrel Hill last week, fielding questions over proposed changes to Hillel Academy's campus.

Specifically, efforts to modernize the school and accommodate a growing student body will alter both the Beacon Street and Bartlett Street portions of the campus. Construction facilitating a new science laboratory and gymnasium will elevate the Beacon Street side of the main building while either demolition or restoration of an adjacent building — the former Congregation Kether Torah — will facilitate a new boys' high school on the Bartlett Street side of the campus. Additionally, efforts to improve traffic conditions near Hillel Academy's Beacon Street entrance will be made, according to plans revealed at the meeting.

The gathering included remarks from Joel Aaronson, a partner at Reed Smith; Dan Rothschild, founder and CEO of Rothschild Doyno Collaborative, an architecture and urban design firm located in Pittsburgh; Bartlett Street residents; Hillel Academy parents; and Ray Baum, president of the Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition.



Aaronson and Rothschild, who are both working with Hillel Academy, provided an overview and illustrations of the proposed renovations.

"We have to do what is best for the school," he said. "This is important for the health of the school — this isn't [just] some nice thing. We need to educate the students in a first-class way. What we're proposing allows us to do so in a rational way."

Rothschild echoed that point and noted, "We're not adding to the footprint, we are improving traffic flow, doubling parking capabilities, and modernizing a great Squirrel Hill institution."

Calling Hillel Academy "an essential part of the community," Ray Baum, president of the Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition, took a nuanced approach in his remarks.

"We believe that schools improve property values," he said. "We believe that the Orthodox Jewish community has a hugely important role in Squirrel Hill."

Baum praised the Jewish community's efforts to support the city of Pittsburgh.

"The Jewish community invested over \$50 million in the community 20 years ago," he said. It "intentionally kept institutions in the city of Pittsburgh. It keeps children, families and seniors in the city."