**Background**

The historical Beth El Temple, centrally located on the corner of Ruckle and 34th Streets in the Mapleton-Fall Creek (MFC) neighborhood, represents a unique opportunity to at once eliminate blight, establish a new community anchor, and preserve a landmark building that has contributed to the spiritual and cultural life of the Mapleton-Fall Creek neighborhood for generations. The temple served as the house of worship for Beth El Zedeck Congregation from 1925 to 1958 and has subsequently served other Jewish and Christian congregations, most recently being used for worship by Deeper Life Christian Church. Now abandoned, the temple is rapidly approaching a state of significant disrepair and blight due to long deferred maintenance. However, many of the historical features from the Congregation Beth El remain intact, and the building is in a position to be stabilized, renovated, and repurposed. In addition to preserving and celebrating this piece of Jewish history, adaptive reuse of the former Congregation Beth El Temple will help to further stabilize the community and encourage additional investment in this revitalizing neighborhood.

**Progress to Date**

In 2011, members of the Jewish community, in concert with the Mapleton-Fall Creek Development Corporation (MFCDC), Indiana Landmarks, and the neighborhood at large formed a working group to begin the process of acquiring and stabilizing this historic asset. Our ultimate goal is to develop and implement a self-sustaining adaptive reuse strategy that includes an interfaith cultural center and a touchstone for the history of the Indianapolis Jewish community. As with similar community-driven development projects, we have proceeded in a steady, if metered fashion. The successful redevelopment of the temple property will occur in several distinct phases: acquisition and stabilization, renovation for a yet-to-be-finalized end use, and finally, ramp-up toward self-sustaining ongoing operations. Toward this end we are in the process of establishing, with the help of Todd Janzen and Plews, Shadley, Racher, Braun Attorneys, a new Indiana non-profit organization, Temple Heritage Center, Inc., and organizing a board of directors that brings the *commitment* and *experience* necessary to shepherd the Temple Heritage Center project to fruition. Initial Temple Heritage Center, Inc. board members include:

Mark Dollase, Indiana Landmarks

Tyson Domer, MFC resident

Leigh Evans, MFCDC Executive Director, MFC resident

Alan Goldstein, Congregation Beth El Zedeck

Todd Janzen, MFCDC board member (Trinity Episcopal Church appointment)

David Kosene, Congregation Beth El Zedeck

Isaiah Kuperstein, MFC business owner, Congregation Beth El Zedeck and MFCDC board member (at large)

Jackie Nytes, MFCDC board member (at-large), MFC resident

David Resnick, Congregation Beth El Zedeck

Rabbi Dennis Sasso, Congregation Beth El Zedeck

Rabbi Sandy Sasso, Congregation Beth El Zedeck

Additionally, through a $5,000 grant from Indiana Landmarks administered by MFCDC, we have engaged Browning, Day, Mullins, Dierdorf Architects (BDMD) to assess and document the existing conditions of the temple building and prepare cost estimates for urgent repairs, exterior stabilization, and interior renovation. We have also asked Jonathan Young and Jonathan Hess of BDMD to pool their collective expertise in historic adaptations and museum design to provide a preliminary study of potential reuse concepts for the temple property. We will use the BDMD report (due end of March) to conduct a facilitated charrette in order to brainstorm and further develop feasible reuse strategies that can integrate the historical Jewish legacy of the property with our goals of creating a financially self-sustaining entity that also serves the Mapleton-Fall Creek and greater Indianapolis communities. A crucial objective for the brainstorming charrette is to reach the full spectrum of stakeholders that will have a vested interest in the future of the Temple Heritage Center. We have invited Al Polin, longtime MFC resident and advocate affiliated with the Indiana State Fair, and Jay VanSanten, a resident of the adjacent Historic Meridian Park neighborhood who has been active with planning and implementation of the recent Mid-North Quality of Life Plan, to participate in our discussions with BDMD. We also anticipate reaching out to representatives of the Mapleton-Fall Creek Neighborhood Association, the Mid-North Church Council, the Jewish Federation and other partners, such as the Indiana Historical Society as we work to refine our development and operating strategies.

**Development – Acquisition, Stabilization & Renovation**

**Acquisition**

Despite significant efforts over the past year, we were unable to acquire the synagogue property directly from its previous owner, Deeper Life Christian Church. However, the property has subsequently been acquired by the City of Indianapolis due to non-payment of delinquent property taxes. We have had productive initial discussions with representatives of the Marion County Commissioners (Auditor, Treasurer, Assessor) regarding the potential of the temple working group to acquire the ‘county surplus property’ for minimal consideration. Pending our successful request and a favorable recommendation from the Metropolitan Development Commission in mid-April, Indiana Landmarks has agreed to take possession and hold the property on an interim basis (1-3 months) until Temple Heritage Center, Inc. is officially established as an independent non-profit organization. Indiana Landmarks has committed to taking ownership of the property only if the temple working group has the resources to immediately perform the work necessary to stabilize the property and prevent further deterioration toward blight.

**Stabilization**

Based on recent assessments, the temple building is structurally sound except for the rapidly deteriorating roof. Since initially inspecting the building in late 2011, when the roof materials were already beyond their serviceable life (daylight was visible through the roof in the sanctuary), the membranes and flashings have further deteriorated to a point that without immediate intervention, the ongoing decay of the temple building will accelerate rapidly. The potential for uncontrolled rainwater to attack and severely compromise the structure and historical details of the temple building cannot be overemphasized, especially when considering the potential increases in total renovation costs due to additional water damage. The financial feasibility of adapting the temple building to *any* future use, even when considering minimal acquisition costs, is directly tied to immediately stabilizing the roof to prevent further damage. In July 2012 Superior Roofing Services, Inc. thoroughly inspected the temple roof and estimated costs for complete replacement at $91,220 to $102,000. Temporary patches without stabilization (may last one season, no guarantees) could potentially be accomplished for~$10,000, but will not satisfy Indiana Landmarks provision that the temple working group stabilize the building. There are significant funds available through a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), awarded to MFCDC and administered by the City of Indianapolis, which may be used to assist in stabilizing and renovating the temple property. In order to secure a commitment from MFCDC and the City for CDBG funds, we are actively soliciting additional outside funding while we refine an appropriate reuse strategy and the attendant development and operating budgets. A commitments in the amount of $10,000 from the Efroymson Family Foundation has been made to this end.

**Renovation**

An ad hoc committee, together with David Kosene of Kosene & Kosene Development and BDMD, has prepared a preliminary budget and scope of work for the stabilization and restoration of the Beth El Temple building befitting its proposed designation as a national landmark. The BDMD report and the preliminary budget are available upon request. The goal of the committee is to raise private funds which, together with the CDBG grant funds, will be sufficient to renovate the building.

*Include BDMD budget estimates and brief descriptions here…*

**Operation – Reuse & Financial Sustainability**

Our principal goal is to renovate the temple for purposes of creating a living historical heritage of Jewish life in the Mapleton-Fall Creek neighborhood. Additionally, the center will be integral to the fabric of the neighborhood, and support neighborhood functions and activities which may include:

library

charter school

venue for weddings, performances, “Town Hall” civic dialogs and public lectures

musical performances

community convocations

interfaith programs

We will develop preliminary budgets outlining ongoing operating expenses for various potential uses as part of our brainstorming charrette. We also foresee establishing a professional staff that will develop and administer programs and activities and manage ongoing maintenance of the building and its grounds. Developing a reuse strategy that is financially self-sufficient will be key to our fundraising efforts, especially for the purpose of creating an endowment that will help to support the facility into the future.

*Include description of planned brainstorming charrette here to highlight community input…*