



PHOTOS BY CANDACE BARBOT / HERALD STAFF

STAYING PUT? George Albo and Rabbi Joseph Korf walk past their synagogue, Hollywood Community Synagogue Chabad Lubavitch. The synagogue has been embroiled in a dispute with residents.

Feud over synagogue: 'It's been a nightmare'



'We aren't an office. We are a house of worship. We are part of a mosaic of a community.'

— JOSEPH I. KORF,
Hollywood synagogue's rabbi

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Heidi O'Sheehan says there are days when the noise from a nearby Hollywood synagogue filters into her living room when she is watching television or trying to get her three young children to sleep.

"It's like there are 80 people in my backyard having a party," said O'Sheehan, who lives directly behind the synagogue.

The dispute over Hollywood Community Synagogue Chabad Lubavitch operating out of two houses in the residential Hollywood Hills neighborhood has been going on for years. And it looks as if it won't end any time soon.

"Since Day 1, it has been a nightmare," said Joseph I. Korf, the synagogue's rabbi. "We have been harassed, supervised and overlooked."

Residents have called code enforcement and the police and fire departments about trash, noise, parking and the number of people at the synagogue, which previously had an occupancy limit of 60. One day, resident Jamie Mardis said he and another neighbor filmed and counted 136 people going into the synagogue.

The synagogue's rabbi has disputed that number.

"We have drawn a line in the sand and we are not going to back down. No matter how tired we are," said



'If we are so anti-Semitic . . . then why weren't we trying to get them out when they were two blocks away?'

— HEIDI O'SHEEHAN,
Hollywood Hills resident,
with husband Edward, above

▶ PLEASE SEE SYNAGOGUE, 2B

Battle over synagogue: no end in sight

▶ SYNAGOGUE, FROM 1B

Mardis, who lives on 45th Avenue, a block away from the synagogue. "You have to fight for what is right."

On June 4, Hollywood's City Commission is scheduled to review a city board's decision allowing the synagogue to permanently stay at the two houses at 2215 and 2221 N. 46th Ave., as long as the synagogue meets certain conditions.

Some residents, including O'Sheehan, say it doesn't belong in the neighborhood.

"I think if you buy a home completely surrounded by single-family homes, you have a reasonable right to expect it to stay that way," she said. "It's not like every commercial property in the city of Hollywood is full."

The rabbi insists the congregation is a good neighbor and other properties aren't feasible for the "blue-collar congregation."

"We aren't an office," Korf said. "We are a house of worship. We are part of a mosaic of a community."

He admits the synagogue has made mistakes: "We aren't angels."

He says there are other houses of worship on residential streets in Hollywood Hills. Those houses of worship are completely surrounded by homes. His synagogue is close to commercial property on Sheridan Street, not in the heart of Hollywood Hills, he said.

The never-ending feud has been heard by the city's Development Review Board and the City Commission on six occasions.

Two of the city meetings have lasted more than 10 hours, ending about 6 a.m.

Why has it taken so long? O'Sheehan blames the city.

"The city keeps granting them more and more," she said. "They have no intention of leaving, until forced to do so."

Korf says there are other reasons the matter has taken so long: Some residents won't change their mind about the synagogue, and Commissioner Sal Oliveri, a staunch opponent

SYNAGOGUE BATTLE BREAKDOWN

Here are some key events in the Hollywood Community Synagogue Chabad Lubavitch debate:

May 10, 2001: The Board of Appeals and Adjustment grants conditional approval for a special exception to allow a place of worship at 2215 and 2221 N. 46th Ave.

Sept. 12, 2001: Commissioner Sal Oliveri appeals to the City Commission, which grants a conditional approval of the special exception for one year.

Sept. 12, 2002: The Development Review Board, formerly called the Board of Appeals and Adjustment, conditionally approves a second special exception for six months.

Sept. 13, 2002: Commissioner Oliveri files for a City Commission review of the board's decision.

Oct. 16, 2002: The City Commission votes 4-3 to deny the review. The Development Review Board's decision and conditions remain intact. The approval expires March 11, 2003.

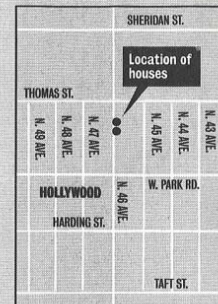
March 13, 2003: The Development Review Board grants a special exception for the synagogue to use the site permanently as a house of worship, with certain conditions.

March 17, 2003: Commissioner Oliveri files for a City Commission review of the board's decision.

April 9, 2003: The City Commission votes 4-3 to review the board's decision.

June 4, 2003: The City Commission is scheduled to review the board's decision at 6 p.m.

SOURCE: City of Hollywood



of the synagogue's request to stay, is fanning the fire.

"This has become to him a crusade," Korf said. "He has taken it so personally, you can see it on his face."

Oliveri disputes that. "This is not a crusade," said Oliveri, who represents the area. "This is a matter of residential integrity and holding up the laws of the city of Hollywood."

Many charges have been lobbed back and forth from both sides, including anti-Semitism. "I'm definitely beginning to be under that impression from some people," Korf said.

O'Sheehan bristles at that idea. She says her stepmother's family is Jewish and she respects people's freedom to practice their religion. But she believes the synagogue is infringing on the rights of homeowners.

"If we are so anti-Semitic . . . then why weren't we trying to get them out when they were two blocks away?"

The synagogue had been located in the Post Haste Plaza on Sheridan Street for about a decade, until it moved into the two homes in mid-August 2001, the rabbi said. The Orthodox Jewish synagogue outgrew the old spot and was looking for a location close to Sheridan Street, he said.

According to their religious beliefs, congregation members cannot drive to services during the Sabbath. Many members live in the area.

Korf said the other sites the synagogue has scouted are either too expensive, too far or not the right fit for the congregation. A former synagogue president had purchased the two homes on North 46th Avenue, and the first idea was simply to hold classes and have

congregation members meet with the rabbi at the location, the rabbi said.

"We originally did not want to move in here," Korf said. "In the end, we had to get out of Post Haste. This was the perfect venue."

For close to two years, the neighbors and the synagogue have battled at City Hall. On June 5, the fight arena changes to Broward Circuit Court.

There, a hearing will take place in the lawsuit that O'Sheehan's husband, Edward, has filed against the city and the synagogue, claiming the city board's decision to grant the synagogue a six-month special exception was illegal. Several neighbors have also joined the lawsuit, Edward O'Sheehan said.

Homeowner Tina Glangenberg said she wants city commissioners to stand by their 2001 decision to have the Chabad stay at the 46th Avenue location for a year until it finds another spot.

"I want to put my faith and confidence that they are going to stand by their initial resolution," Glangenberg said. "That is the bottom line."

TALK TO US

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