

Minutes of the Zen Desert Sangha Board of Directors meeting

Saturday February 23, 2008
3226 N. Martin Avenue
(from notes by Martin Munro)

A visit from a large inter-faith group from St Phillips in the Hills Episcopal Church delayed the start of the meeting slightly, and the board soon moved into the zendo as a more private area for discussions, but did not exclude members who wished to participate. Board members had also to stuff and address the envelopes for the pledge letter mailing, but decided to postpone this until after the formal meeting. Dan Dorsey reminded everyone of the new procedures to limit discussion times, and was acting as timekeeper. Joe Montani chaired the meeting, Pat Hawk was present for the entire proceedings, Kim Howell, Martin Munro, and Sue Weimer also attended from the Board. Jim D'Elia attended from the membership, joined later by Helen Amerongen and Bob Wallin.

1. TREASURER'S REPORT

Kim distributed printed copies of a comparison between the accounts for the period January 1 to February 22 this year and the same period in 2007 as a profit-and-loss comparison and as a balance summary. She drew attention to the balance sheet, showing a very generous donation of \$1400 to the building fund, and hoped the Building Committee would meet soon to discuss some pending projects. The checking balance on the balance sheet was \$18691.55, much too high relative to actual checking account balance of \$17328.51 reported by the bank yesterday evening. Delays in manually entering transactions within the accounting software might explain the discrepancy, but it was the largest she had seen in her term as Treasurer and worth further investigation. Membership dues payments had declined from \$2185 in 2007 to only \$830 this year, but that might be a consequence of the late mailing of the annual pledge letter; some people made a single large payment each year, and delayed it until the letter arrived. Actual membership did not seem to be in decline: there were more members at the end of 2007 than at the end of 2006.

A majority of the Board had approved the new wording of the pledge letter earlier in the week, and Kim had already made copies, but to formalize the process Dan proposed that the pledge letter be accepted as written and sent out as soon as possible; Martin seconded, and everyone approved the motion.

Kim had an additional question from the Building Committee. The stuccoing work and roof repairs had cleaned out the Building Fund; there was now more money in this fund (so this Committee did not need to draw on the general account for maintenance), but it had nevertheless run into the \$400 spending limit on its budget. Could the Board vote to re-set its budget? Dan asked if the budget was for both new projects and repairs, but at that point the discussion ran out of time. Joe proposed (and Dan seconded) that it be continued

by email and other means within the Building Committee, to be presented as a report at the next Board meeting, and all agreed. [but note the later discussion under the committee reports]

2. TRAVEL EXPENSES FOR ZDS EMISARIES

Joe introduced the topic: a group in Green Valley had asked ZDS to send someone to address them, and Sue had offered to go on Sunday February 24; since she was acting as an emissary for ZDS, would the Board consider providing her travel expenses? Dan asked if this was an attempt to establish a standing policy, and Joe replied that it was more an attempt to set a precedent from this one case (which could guide future cases, but be re-visited as necessary) than to start some involved policy discussion. Kim noted that the bookkeeping software already had a category for travel expenses (although the only use so far had been Nelson Foster's plane tickets).

Dan asked Sue if she was getting a stipend: she said she was, and further explained that she hadn't made this request on her own account, thanking Joe for bringing up the matter.

There was some discussion about the recordings the Green Valley group made of talks, whether they were for sale, and if the proceeds of the sale were split with the guest speaker. Sue thought a \$30 stipend from the group would cover her gas expenses, but then realized there might be additional expenses for printing and supplies; any decision might be a precedent for other trips within southern Arizona. Dan proposed that the discussion be tabled, a report with a specific proposal be submitted to the next meeting, and that any decision made then was to be retroactive to include Sue's trip; Joe seconded this, and there was no dissent. Whether or not to allow recording was a personal choice for Sue to decide.

3. REPRODUCTION COSTS

Helen Amerongen followed up a conversation from three weeks previously, asking if ZDS could pay for copies of the scrapbook that had recently been presented to Pat, to be sent to other sanghas. There were five other sanghas, and reproduction costs were \$40 for each copy.

Kim proposed that Helen be paid for the copies, Martin seconded, and everyone agreed.

4. STANDING COMMITTEES

Joe asked if there were any updates to the report on the composition and function of the standing committees presented at the previous meeting. Dan replied that there was nothing further on the function of the committees, but asked if this was the time for routine committee reports.

4.1. HOME REPAIR / MINOR IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE

Kim reported that Dan had accounted for most of the activity of the committee in the last few weeks with his efforts to stop roof multiple leaks. The water in the zendo the previous week was a different problem: it was dripping from the duct, as had happened once before with a particular combination of wind and rain. Dan asked if anyone had noticed any leaks in the latest rain, after he had spent about three hours patching all places that had leaked previously with the tar mixture, but no one had. His next plan was to patch a few more locations with the same material, then buy about 15 gallons of the white Cool-Coat to cover the entire roof, which theoretically should last us the next few years, after which it might be time to re-do the whole roof.

Referring back to the Treasurer's report, Kim interjected that the \$719 was mainly materials for Dan's work on the roof, and that most of the materials for the stuccoing were paid for previously. Dan thought the stucco work was already almost completely covered, so the outstanding item would be the paint. Kim again mentioned the problem with the committee reaching its \$400 spending limit. Dan made the motion that the Home Repair/Improvement Committee could spend the rest of the money in the fund for finishing partially complete projects, such as the stuccoing of the storage room, as well as urgent repairs, such as the roof. Kim seconded this, and there was unanimous approval. Later there was a mention of the need for a fire extinguisher in the kitchen and replacement smoke detectors for the building, but that discussion was moved back to the committee (to come up with specific recommendations for a future Board meeting).

4.2. GROUNDS COMMITTEE

Kim said that there was nothing to report from the Grounds Committee, apart from the need to install the newly-purchased bike racks. The racks themselves had also been charged to building maintenance, and the concrete in which to set them was already bought: it only remained to dig the holes and finish the work.

4.3 LIBRARY COMMITTEE

Joe noted that Josie Ahumada de Savelli had the process of tracking borrowing well in hand, and was now looking for suggestions to acquire new books and other library materials; Sue commented that an email announcement about this from Josie might be helpful.

4.4. SEWING COMMITTEE

Kim said she needed to talk with Mary Adde: they would be proposing a zabuton stuffing party at some point, but it was too early to schedule this yet.

4.5. SUPPLIES COMMITTEE

Martin said that supplies had risked being short for sesshin: he had replenished the paper towels but neglected other supplies including tissues and liquid soap. Helen and Bob had filled in most of the gaps, however, and Sue had checked before sesshin, finding reasonable quantities of everything except jam. Joe asked if a good storage area would

make it easier to track supplies, and Martin replied that it wasn't clear if this came before or after better general organization. Kim asked if shortages could be reported directly to the committee; while this was supposed to work, Helen noted that there should also be a notice or shopping list posted in a public area where people could record and date the shortages as they were noticed, and everyone agreed that this should be introduced.

4.6. MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Arriving just in time to be asked to give a report, Bob Wallin explained that the orientations were going fine. Many people arrived and were briefly enthusiastic, but soon stopped coming, however this was how it had always been; some new people had nevertheless remained. There were two aspects to gaining members: recruitment and retention. Recruitment was going as well as possible, given that people tended to be interested in Zen and actively seeking somewhere, rather than dropping in casually off the street with no knowledge of meditation; from comments by recent newcomers the web site was most important for this, followed by direct personal recommendations, but advertisements in papers or the Yellow Pages were probably not worth the expense. For retention it was most important that people feel welcomed; Bob recommended that sangha members greet people they had not seen before, even if it turned out that they had been coming for years.

At this point the time for committee reports had run out, but Dan moved that it be extended by a minute to allow a sesshin coordinator report; Kim seconded, and all agreed.

4.7. SESSHIN COORDINATOR

Helen reported that there had been a sesshin the previous weekend and a zazenkai was coming up at the end of March. She was seeking guidance on some financial issues: how the sangha charged people and how it offered scholarships (who makes the decision?). In addition, she wanted to clarify the process of sesshin officer selection: did Pat get to make this decision? Kim explained that in the past although a majority of people had paid the full amount, in some cases they had been permitted to make partial payments, and Martin confirmed this, saying that in his period as sesshin coordinator people who declared financial need had been allowed to pay less, in some cases referring them directly to the Treasurer. Helen worried about the inequities of very poor people paying the full amount while the relatively better off applied for scholarships. Kim thought this was an unavoidable consequence of the choices people made. Joe mentioned that in a recent email he had asked whether or not the retreat announcements should include a mention of scholarships: it would not do to have too many scholarship applications, but people should be aware they were available. No one objected to the idea that the retreat announcements should contain a unobtrusive mention of a sliding scale of payment to cover cases of financial need. Helen asked about the pro-rated payments by part-timers at retreats: this was done on the number of blocks of sitting they attended, and was generally clear, but the cautions were an anomaly. People

should be encouraged to attend the cautions if possible, but they could save money by skipping that block. Kim suggested not charging for cautions, Helen wondered if a \$10 charge for cautions be could included automatically, whether or not people could attend. At this point Dan reminded everyone that these kinds of details were not to be hashed out in Board meetings, but in committees (in this case the suggested committee was at least Helen with Kim, and possibly Martin or Bob as well). The the committee would make a specific proposal at a Board meeting.

5. PROPOSED DATA AND COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

Martin proposed that he gather material for a report on communications and data to be presented to the next Board meeting (this would be only descriptive, before suggesting any changes). Email, postal mail, telephones, and document archiving would all be covered, with a perspective limited to active or potential problems and disaster recovery. Dan seconded this, and there was no dissent.

6. PEER-DELIVERED TALKS

After a short introduction by Joe, Dan read from the proposal he had earlier circulated by email.

"This is a specific motion or proposal for 'peer delivered talks'. I would suggest we call these talks not dharma talks, we will call them 'Talks on Zen Buddhism' with a question and answer/discussion period.

I propose these talks, question and answer, and discussion will be:

- * offered once a month on Saturdays starting at about 10:40 AM and they will be here in the zendo.
- * take the place of the usual Saturday morning orientation on that one Saturday per month.
- * last a maximum of 40 minutes.
- * be informal and relaxed - after a short talk by the presenter for the morning it will be a chance for both peers and new students to meet, ask questions, make comments on practice issues, etc.
- * be widely announced before the event on the e-mail tree, flyers at ZDS, made a regular part of the ZDS calendar for a trial period of six months.
- * people who would be willing to give of their time to give these talks would sign up ahead of time on a list.

The prerequisites for a person giving these talks would be:

- * have been a member or associate of ZDS and practiced at least fairly regularly at ZDS for a minimum of six to eight years.
- * must consider themselves to be practicing in the 'Diamond Sangha' Zen Buddhist tradition or a tradition closely associated with the 'Diamond Sangha' tradition.

* have a regular sitting practice at home and be studying with Pat Hawk Roshi; perhaps studying with another recognized Diamond Sangha teacher might be acceptable as well."

Dan added one more requirement: on months when Pat Hawk Roshi gives talks or Q and A this could replace the peer-delivered talk.

Kim commented on her email exchanges with Brad Stroup, who had been interested in presenting some talks, but found himself over-committed. Perhaps he could be encouraged to do this in the future, and the Board could function as a committee to beat the bushes to flush out other potential speakers. Joe asked Dan if he would be willing to serve as point person for this function, and Dan said he would, and could speak to Brad again about a single talk. Helen had misgivings that people would be setting themselves up as teachers, even if the word "teacher" was not explicitly in the proposal. She suggested being explicit that teachers were not delivering these talks, or have Pat assign the people to do it. She also wondered if the talks were being targeted to the curiosity of beginners, if they would not be better served simply by encouraging sitting. Kim wondered what Pat thought of this. Pat commented "I think it's a good idea for peers to share their views of things. I think if it's presented on that level, I don't see any problem. I don't think people can mistake what's going on. ... and it can be a learning experience for anyone who wants to do it: there's an old cliché that you never really learn anything until you try to teach it. If you give a talk it can be just an informational kind of thing on a particular topic."

Helen wondered if "Peer" could be in the title. The current title was "Talks on Zen Buddhism", so "Peer Talks on Zen Buddhism"? Joe remarked that the topics could be as diverse as haiku poetry, painting, or tea; perhaps the misgivings about occupying a teaching role were what had prevented anything similar being organized in the past.

Martin had been worried about taking one of the orientation times for the talk, but Bob (who ran most of the orientations) said that anyone who turned up could simply be invited to the talk, and offered the orientation on another Saturday. Kim thought giving people a chance to research a topic was a good thing, and might eventually encourage a real apprentice teacher. Bob asked about a question-and-answer period, and Dan explained they were part of the proposal. He envisioned a relaxed informal setting and 10 to 15 minute talks on a topic such as "Why do we bow to the figure on the altar?", followed by 15 to 20 minutes for discussion.

Kim and Martin were initially for an immediate vote to approve Dan's proposal as it stood, but a flurry of discussion favored changing the title to "Peer Talks on Zen Buddhism".

They withdrew the original motion, and submitted one to accept the proposal with the amended title, which then passed unanimously. Dan offered to start organizing the talks for next month.

7. KEEPING SAMU IN ZDS PRACTICE

Joe was inspired by a couple of articles in the Honolulu

Diamond Sangha newsletter on the importance of samu, and wanted it to retain a central place in practice at ZDS. In the short term, he asked Kim if a samu day was planned soon.

Kim said it was waiting on the weather, and on Dan to finish his work on the roof, but that she favored forming a samu committee. Joe and Kim then agreed to serve on this jointly, with Kim commenting that Joe might consider giving one of the new talks on samu. Kim then proposed that the specifics of the next samu day be handled by the new committee, which would report back to the Board, Dan seconded this, and there was no dissent.

8. TRANSFER OF PAT'S SABBATICAL FUND FROM SEVEN THUNDERS

Kim didn't currently have the documents that Seven Thunders had sent, having passed them on to Len Scheff for legal advice. She had not yet heard when he would return them, but wasn't about to pressure him, since his advice had been free, and he was hoping to have someone else who worked in his office look at them, an expert in legal issues for non-profit organizations. But she could relay Len's initial comments to the Board. She had already forwarded the relevant email to the Board, but in case anyone needed a reminder she summarized what was happening: Jane Huyer from Oregon had approached Kim, suggesting that because they no longer got to see Pat there, it might be better if someone here took over the sabbatical fund.

Len's initial reply after receiving the documents from Oregon and a little research was that there was some good news and some bad news. The good use was that there was nothing wrong with having the sabbatical fund and using it to pay for Pat Hawk's flights etc. The bad news was that it could not be designated for a specific person, that is, we could have something called the "professional advancement fund". It might end up only being used for Pat, which was all right, however its purpose would have to be stated broadly, something like: this fund is established for the education and advancement of staff and employees of the Zen Desert Sangha. Donors could not be officially assured it would be used for Pat's benefit. There is an IRS case in which Mormon parents gave money to the church to pay for their child's two years of proselytizing. The court held that this was not deductible, since it was for the benefit of a specific person. This also answers the question about what to do with the money if Pat passes away.

Kim had then briefly questioned Len about how Oregon had managed to operate the fund despite these constraints. His response was simply that so far they had not been caught. The constraints arise from the requirement that the fund be tax-exempt and contributions to it tax-deductible. Sue wondered if Pat's being a member of a religious organization counted for anything (Len would be considering that) and commented that Oregon had many lawyers of their own who might have had input when the fund was being set up there. Kim's final comment was that we were in a holding pattern at

this point, awaiting further advice from Len and his office-mate. Dan wanted to be reassured that there would be no interruption in service for Pat requesting funds: Kim confirmed that Oregon was still managing the fund while the negotiations took place. Joe asked if the tax-exempt status of the fund was the main constraint: Kim confirmed that it was. Joe asked if there were any legal fees, and Kim confirmed that all advice had been pro bono until now.

9. NEW BUSINESS.

Bob proposed that there still be a Membership Dinner this Spring to keep up with our tradition and have it in either April or early May, but make it fairly low-key, inexpensive food, possibly even a pot-luck rather than being catered from a place such as Tanya's Mexican Delicatessen. Kim asked if this was not the tenth anniversary of moving into the building, and Bob confirmed this fell on May 1, and that we could note that at the Membership Dinner and have it as some kind of special occasion, but keep it low-key. Dan asked if Bob would be willing to be the committee to organize this. Bob agreed, and said he would also like to continue the tradition in the fall with the Gala. Normally the Gala is the more important event, but it had been eclipsed last year by the 25th anniversary celebration and Pat's 65th birthday party, but Bob wanted to continue. Dan made the motion that Bob, starting out as a committee of one, plan this Membership Dinner and that he come back with a specific proposal of cost, menu and date. Kim seconded, but Joe objected, wondering if he could be specific in so little time, given that the Board was not even guaranteed to meet during March. There was a quick discussion of possible conflicts at several different dates, and Saturday May 3 emerged as the clearest choice. Dan then made a motion that Bob be given permission to plan the Membership Dinner on the evening of May 3 with inexpensive Mexican food, and that he would bring to the Board at the next meeting an estimate of the cost of the food and any other details. Kim seconded it, and it passed unanimously.

Discussion turned to the date of the next meeting. Kim noted that there were five Saturdays in March, Sue said to avoid March 23, and Joe questioned if there was any need for a meeting in March at all, since the February meeting had been so late in the month, but the prevailing opinion was for the Board to meet once a month. Kim summarized the options: March 22 and 29 were tied up, leaving the 15th as the latest possibility. Dan said he would not be free on that date, but would be free on the 8th. Kim had both the 8th and the 15th free. There was some uncertainty when Michael Bolton would be in Tucson around that time. Martin initially moved that the next meeting be on the 15th, seconded by Joe, but Kim was worried that with people unable to come on the 15th the meeting might end up without a quorum if anyone else fell sick. Joe then proposed that the meeting be on the 8th, seconded by Kim, and everyone agreed.

The meeting adjourned after one hour, nine and a half minutes.