

**Clouds in Water Zen Center
Special Board Meeting and Council Reflections**

March 23, 2014

Attending: Carla Breunig, Karin Aguilar-San Juan, Kurt Errickson, Sosan Theresa Flynn, Carol Iwata, Byakuren Judith Ragir, Nathan Thompson, Rachel Vilsack, Wally Waranka

Not attending: Angus McDonarld, Sergio Valverde

Facilitator: Mariann Johnson

Council Reflection Questions:

1. **Collaboration.** Do we want to actively pursue collaboration as we search for a new space - and be open to that collaboration changing how we look for space?
2. **Neighborhood/location.** What is our value/preference around moving into a neighborhood where we could potentially make a big difference for the better (such as an economically depressed neighborhood, or one with a high crime rate)? What are our reactions to lower income and/or culturally diverse neighborhoods?

Final Question, Discussion Format (for this meeting or a future meeting):

3. **Risks/Benefits of Buying vs. Leasing.** We thought it would be fruitful to discuss the benefits, risks and ideas for mitigating the risks for each of the two options (buying or leasing). And that as we have this risks/benefits discussion, we keep in mind the first two issues, which are related to this.
 - Leasing: What are the benefits/opportunities? What are the risks? What could we do to mitigate the risks?
 - Buying: What are the benefits/opportunities? What are the risks? What could we do to mitigate the risks?

Council Sharing for Question Number One: Collaboration

- Hard to put into the mix another group. Merger discussions with Compassionate Ocean (CO) in the past, but are there active and open discussions currently? My gut says pursue a space on our own. Be open to other forms of collaboration.
- Ditto above, add: if group or org would appear with similar intention, affinity with Clouds in Water then we could see, but not actively pursue.
- May slow down our process if we “Actively” choose to collaborate and worried we would lose momentum. Support/”Am open to” CO collaborations in many forms. We have talked to them about space collaboration, but this is not the time to pursue with them. Dharma Field and MN Zen Center – we have discussed with both of them as well. We should be open to, but would not be my #1 criteria or hope for the search. Ongoing and informal collaboration discussions are good, but not necessarily about space. We need to move forward.
- Not closed to it, we need to be clear on our core beliefs and functions – I don’t see any gapping holes in the area of collaboration that we need to fill.
- May be old school about this... but unless broken or we are missing something, space collaboration is not needed. A form, a building, a temple for Clouds in Water is important. We should get the most out of a space ... yet a Zendo has a vibe and its echoes... need to be careful about space collaborations. We need to protect our Zendo/space. If space we find is too large for our needs, then we can carefully look into collaboration.
- More inter-relationship is needed in the Zen community. Too many redundancies. We need to see the long view – especially if we buy, we need to be flexible. Don’t want to be a “Community of Elites” – we have been working against this. As an ingredient in the search, “Collaboration” is important, we otherwise might become “Privatized.” Outreach with other communities is important. Spirit of collaboration should remain vital at Clouds in Water.
- Support others’ comments. Based on our specs, we can certainly find what we want and either buy or rent. We can go on our own. Seeds of collaboration in other areas are strong and will grow, given current activities. Too complex to merge with another group. Like Clouds in Water the way it is, don’t want to rework our priorities. No to space collaboration, yes to other and ongoing collaborations.
- Clouds in Water space and place needs to be kept as a Clouds in Water space. We collaborate well now and should continue to share and partner in other areas. Important we stay in the moment with the changes. Open to all ideas, however, keep spirit and space of Clouds in Water intact.

- Our intention should be collaboration, but we need to look for our own space first.
- Bias for collaboration and towards relationships. Relationships are crucible of our practice. I hear a fear of collaboration. A range of things is possible. We need to bring dharma to all people, not just invite them. Collaboration can include everything from sharing programs, co-hosting retreats elsewhere – maybe we wouldn't need as much space – as well as sharing teachers, sharing space, all the way up to merging. We need to protect the Zendo and interconnections are critical. There is an intention to collaborate and for active collaboration. We should be open to what the universe might provide with collaboration as we pursue our space.
- There is a history of our community collaborations with other Zen Centers. There are now new leaders and new opportunities. Over the past 8 years, Clouds in Water has been a much better collaborator. Must be mutual. Many collaborations are possible other than space. Fiscal viability of a space may require some form of collaboration. Teachers at Clouds in Water don't have a lot of energy/time to collaborate beyond current activities.
- New idea we should find out more about: a community member spoke about possibly forming an LLC with other investors and purchasing a space that we could then rent from Buddhist friendly investors.
- “Creeped out” by privatization AND we need to protect our Zendo's space and place.
- Why is it so complicated? Buying a building is not that hard.
- What are we doing to support collaboration with CO Dharma? Sad that a sister sangha struggles. We/Sosan came up with ideas to help them. (Gave examples)
- “Center of Gravity” for Clouds in Water will increase after the move. Bottlenecked now due to current space and neighborhood developments. Expanded capacity to collaborate with others in the future. For now, we need to focus on finding a space for our sangha.
- Collaboration – we should stay open to possibilities but not as a requirement for the search. Requiring it will mean lose of control and momentum. We need to continue the search.
- Concern about the 2015 date for the stadium for the Saints – we have a deadline looming.

Mariann's summary of the above and themes from the COLLABORATION Circle sharing:

A strong sense that the board is not interested in actively looking for a collaborator, but is interested in other ongoing collaborations with local Zen centers. If a collaboration opportunity presents itself, we will consider it but not hold up the search for space. The board is very interested in collaboration as a value and a practice.

Specific spaces may have requirements (i.e., large space, etc.) that may require Clouds in Water to consider a collaborator(s). If a space-dependent-collaborator needs to be considered by the board, criteria will be developed for space collaboration. Priorities will include: shared values, wise discrimination/discernment and protection/caring for the Zendo.

Council Sharing for Question Number Two: Neighborhood/Location

- Survivor of crime. Members come to the Center early in the AM and leave late. Would not like to live in a high crime area. Safety is important.
- Implied issue of safety in the question of neighborhood/location. Continuum of options – want balance. Space committee will be mindful of balance. Don't know what's out there. "Perfect" location won't probably happen – need to see what's out there and then weigh choices.
- Different kinds of feeling safe? What is meant by, "Making a Big Difference" in the neighborhood/location question?
- We helped this current neighborhood a great deal. Not the highest priority for us to "Make a difference." This may naturally happen. "Cultural Diverse" - what is our conditioning? As a sangha, are we willing to lose members?
- We need a "Relatively Safe" space. We need to include the topic of "Safety" in our teachings, with our sangha... what are our opinions... "Is that so?"
- St. Paul has pockets of problem neighborhoods, but not "high crime." More discernment will be required over whether location is appropriate given considerations other than crime. We should remain open to all neighborhoods in our search.
- Learned street smarts from growing up in an inner city. Increased my perspective and perceptions. We should be aware of our sangha's safety needs. We do good work now with

diverse communities. How do we/will we come into the new neighborhood? Very important. We should hold open houses. What do we offer the community? How will we develop relationships? Neighbors and neighborhoods may help care for the Center.

- Economically disadvantaged neighborhoods – Clouds in Water may be able to contribute to these neighborhoods/communities. How will we go in? Educate them about us; practice if they don't want us?! Won't know until after we have moved in. This is a potential – not being welcome.

- There are examples of Centers meeting with resistance and of working in creative ways to work with and integrate with the communities. We can learn from others.

- Sometimes concerned that when we talk about safety, non-white is on a different side of that meaning than white middle class. What is the meaning of "Safety"? It can mean different things to different groups. For people of color or low-income people, it can mean feeling out of place, like an alien in neighborhoods where there are few of us.

Do we protect ourselves too much - not choosing to live in a community where not feeling safe?

- Payne Avenue: would we fit there? Better "Fit" in Lowertown for example. Think in big picture – would the majority of people feel safe most of the time? Have parking close by. Distractions can be challenging (for staff, etc.) when housed in a neighborhood with high needs.

- What could we learn from a neighborhood that we move into? Lots of people could teach us many things. Excitement over the possibilities. Cool if we end up in a neighborhood. Interesting and exciting potentials.

- People of color and [Access](#) to the space/location is important. Especially public transportation. Full spectrum of transportation and how late the transportation runs, especially at night if we want to be open to all.

- Start the conversation with the sangha now. Wherever we move will be different. "Flexibility of Mind" will be required. Introduce and plant the seeds now. Consider the readiness and preparation needs of our sangha. Communicate now.

- Space in a strip mall would be challenging for accessibility. It would be hard to tell one place from another. Massive parking lots to navigate is another accessibility problem. Accessibility would be difficult for many after being dropped off by public transportation.

- Need to develop a plan to engage the local community, wherever we end up.

Mariann's summary of the above and themes from the NEIGHBORHOOD/LOCATION Circle sharing:

Finding and creating a safe and accessible space for the Zendo and Clouds in Water members is important. Board members expressed an interest in looking at a broad range of St. Paul neighborhoods and communities, and some excitement about being in a new community/meeting new community members.

Board members did not express a strong concern about neighborhood/community safety, or see a need to limit the search to specific neighborhoods. Care will be taken by the search committee to include Clouds in Water member safety needs in the search, as well as considerations for a safe and appropriate location for the Zendo.

How to engage the new community was discussed. Board members expressed an interest in active community participation and being good neighbors.

Mariann's Summary: Brief Discussion Regarding Risks/Benefits or Buying or Leasing

There was not time for an in- depth discussion on this topic, although at this time board members did not express a strong preference for buying or leasing. Economic constraints and concerns were shared, and questions were asked about the status of the capital campaign. The choice was also framed as the financial "Ability" to buy or lease.

The search committee requested guidance from the board so that they can work with real estate agents, etc., in locating appropriate options for Clouds in Water to consider.

An article on the merits of buying vs. leasing will be sent out, and board members and teachers were asked to read it prior to the next board meeting.

NEXT STEPS

- 1) The board will meet on Sunday April 6th at 11am to discuss the third question:
 - Leasing: What are the benefits/opportunities? What are the risks? What could we do to mitigate the risks?

· Buying: What are the benefits/opportunities? What are the risks? What could we do to mitigate the risks?

2) Board members and teachers were asked to read the article on buying vs. leasing prior to the meeting. The search committee will also send board members and teachers the current search criteria, and any other documents that may help to inform the discussion, prior to the April 6th meeting.

3) The board discussed an interest in beginning discussions with the Clouds in Water community regarding the impending move, changes and possible choices/decisions that will have to be made. Preparing members for change, and seeking their input, was identified as a current and ongoing need.

Minutes submitted by Mariann Johnson.