

Summary Report

Community Meetings, Ancient Dragon Zen Gate, August 2020

At the direction of Ancient Dragon's Board of Directors, three meetings were held on August 10, 15, and 23, 2020 to have conversation and receive input about **two subjects**:

- How is the online experience of sangha going and how can it be improved?
- Shall we renew our lease at the end of this year, or let it go?

A total of 47 different individuals attended the 3 meetings, and 17 of these people attended more than one meeting, totaling 64 people on screen.

A straw poll was taken at the end of each meeting, asking whether participants thought we should **keep our lease or not**. We allowed people who attended more than one meeting to vote at each meeting they attended, and not everyone voted, so the results below don't add up to the participant list, but the input to the board from the sangha community is clear: **48 no, 1 yes, 5 abstentions**.

Themes around the online experience

Positives

- Participation is broadly distributed in a variety of our current offerings
- There's a high level of enthusiasm for what is being offered
- People attend from outside Chicago and even outside the U.S.
- Zoom is a bit awkward, but much better than nothing
- There's a good variety of speakers doing dharma talks

Negatives

- Zoom doesn't work for some who already spend too much time on the computer in their work life; for those without adequate wifi; for those with kids; for those who feel anxious about being onscreen
- Discussion time after dharma talks is very different, more formal, less spontaneous, not everyone is able to participate as freely as they might in person
- Everyone misses in-person relationships and conversations
- Many miss ceremonies, oryoki, sewing, social time
- Chanting doesn't work very well (see below)

Improvements

- Offer classes, seminars (i.e. Buddhist/Zen foundations, Dogen, etc.)
- Chanting could be pre-recorded multi-track to provide a "chorus" for the one chanting, to give the sense of it being a group

- Strong support for ½-day and full-day sittings online, with participants going in and out of screen time during the day
- Somehow do ceremonies - this is muchly missed
- Bring back Practice Commitment Period
- Way-Seeking Mind talks via podcasts
- Small groups on Sunday/Monday for a portion of the discussion time
- Train more hosts for Zoom meetings

Themes around our lease and physical space

- Virtually all see that it is good stewardship to let go of our lease instead of paying for a place we are not using long-term
- Nonetheless, many feel sorrow about the possibility of losing what has been an important place in their lives
- Most also recognize moving on is an opportunity to save money over the months/years ahead, consider a better/bigger space in the future, and live into the teaching of impermanence and change
- There is a strong desire to eventually return to a physical space; it is important to have a stable place for practice, teaching, community
- Many are enthusiastic about purchasing our own building, but questions remain about feasibility
- Some feel strongly about having a ceremony to mark the end of our use of the current space at the end of the year
- When we get a new space, Zooming our physical gatherings should be continued for those who are unable to attend in person

Other themes, ideas

- A dharma-buddy (or small group) system could be good, in-person as possible
- Can we be in touch with one another in a more systematic way?
- Enthusiasm for outdoor programs
- It's important and surprising for some to see the financial realities; this should continue

Next Steps

Ancient Dragon's Board of Directors will meet on Sunday September 13 to take this input into account as they 1. Plan for improvements to our online offerings and community, and 2. Make a decision whether or not to renew the lease on our space. The lease is currently due to expire on December 31, 2020.