



Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery ('Sitavana')

Annual General Meeting – October 31, 2021

MINUTES – AGM 2021

1. ATTENDANCE

Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon), Teresa Wixted, Hazel Plumbley, Brent Styra, Rachel Telesmanick, Theresa Aspol, John Baser, Mary Dumka, Kathrin Jules, Mali Kannangara, Tissa Kannangara, So Mir, Leila Molina, Nimalka Ratnayaka, Arthur L. Robinson, Grant Smith.

2. MINUTES OF LAST YEAR'S AGM (OCTOBER 25, 2020)

The AGM 2020 Minutes were accepted unread.

Moved by Teresa Wixted, seconded by Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon). Motion carried: 17 approval votes (Unanimous).

3. MATTERS ARISING

None.

4. SPECIAL RESOLUTIONS APPROVED PRIOR TO AGM:

Several special resolutions came up for board consideration between September 2020 and June 2021. Special resolutions require an approval vote by at least four board members; the record of voting is shown below. Copies of all the approved Special Resolutions are attached to this report:

a) Special Resolution Approving Battery Purchase

Approved: Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon), Teresa Wixted, Hazel Plumbley, Leslie Hanrahan. Abstained: Brent Styra – RESOLUTION APPROVED

b) Special Resolution: Pole Mounted Solar System

Approved: Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon), Teresa Wixted, Hazel Plumbley, Brent Styra, Leslie Hanrahan – RESOLUTION APPROVED (Unanimous)

c) Special Resolution: Exterior Vihara Insulation

Approved: Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon), Teresa Wixted, Hazel Plumbley, Brent Styra, Leslie Hanrahan – RESOLUTION APPROVED (Unanimous)

d) Special Resolution: Kuti Renovations

Approved: Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon), Teresa Wixted, Hazel Plumbley, Brent Styra, Leslie Hanrahan – RESOLUTION APPROVED (Unanimous)

5. PRESIDENT’S REPORT:

a. Resident Monastics:

Ajahn Sona continues in his guiding role as Abbot of Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery. 2021 marked his 67th birthday and his 33rd vassa (rains retreat). As the COVID-19 pandemic enters its second year, Ajahn Sona has extended the closure of Birken Monastery to all visitors for the foreseeable future.

This continued closure of the physical monastery has amplified Ajahn Sona’s commitment to bring the Buddha’s teachings to more and more people around the world through our virtual monastery. The online library of over 175 YouTube video Dhamma talks and podcasts (up 25% over the past year) now provides teachings to a subscriber list of 15,000 viewers and practitioners as of the end of July 2021, an increase of more than 6,400 subscribers, or 43%, in the past fiscal year. At the time of this AGM, the number of YouTube subscribers is now nearly 16,000..

Our virtual [Jhana retreat](#) series, recorded in March 2020 at Birken and that began online in June 2020, concluded in August 2020 with weekly Dhamma talks and coffee time Q&A sessions on [Ajahn Sona’s YouTube Channel](#).

In addition to his YouTube teachings, Ajahn Sona was also invited in August 2020 to offer a virtual Dhamma talk for The Council of Thai Bhikkhus in the USA on the subject “How to Increase the Blessings of Your Life”.

From September 22-24, 2020, Ajahn Sona participated in this year’s International Elders Meeting (IEM) of the Forest Sangha which was held entirely online. Monastics from 48 countries around the world participated in this year’s gathering which is traditionally held every three years.

Our [first Live Teatime Q&A](#) was held remotely on October 14, 2020 from Whistler, BC and posted on Ajahn Sona’s YouTube Channel.

In December 2020, Ajahn Sona offered an extensive 10-day Virtual Metta Retreat, including evening [Dhamma talks](#) and live [Teatime Q&A](#), plus group meditations, chanting, daily reflections, guided meditations, and nature walks around Birken’s landscape. Approximately 420 people registered online in advance of the retreat and thousands more participated virtually on Ajahn Sona’s YouTube Channel.

Ajahn Sona’s previous book, *Bloom: Buddhist Reflections on [Serenity](#) and [Love](#)*, became an audio book narrated by Upāsikā Bodhipala. The first chapter was posted to Ajahn Sona’s YouTube Channel in February 2021 with subsequent chapters posted through April 2021.

For Vesak in May 2021, Ajahn Sona offered [a Virtual Dhamma talk and Q&A session](#) on his YouTube Channel.

Also in May 2021 Ajahn Sona’s newest book, [Life is a Near Death Experience: Skills for Illness, Aging, Dying, and Loss](#), was published worldwide by Amazon.

In July 2021 Ajahn Sona also posted a Dhamma talk on [Maranasati: Buddhist Reflections on Death](#).

Probably the biggest event in terms of our ability to share the Dhamma was the beginning of Starlink satellite service at the monastery in July 2021. This transformative addition to Birken's infrastructure now allows us to share livestream and superior quality video uploads through Ajahn Sona's YouTube Channel.

Sister Mon continues in her role as Senior Buddhist Nun.

Ajahn Jotipalo remains part of the Birken Sangha for the foreseeable future (his work permit is valid until June 2022.)

Tan Sid Udaggo will be away from the monastery beginning in November 2021 for an unspecified period of time to attend to some family matters.

b. Retreats and events held online

We give sincere thanks to all the many Birken volunteers and supporters who helped us to organize our many online retreats and events this past year (August 1, 2020 – July 31, 2021):

June 29 –August 2, 2020	6-week Virtual YouTube Series on the Jhanas, led by Ajahn Sona; following day coffee time Q&A with Ajahn Sudanto at Pacific Hermitage YouTube Channel
August 1, 2020	Virtual Dhamma talk on "How to Increase the Blessings of Your Life" by Ajahn Sona for The Council of Thai Bhikkhus in the USA
September 22-24, 2020	Virtual International Elders Meeting (IEM) with 48 monastic participants from around the world.
October 14, 2020	Live Teatime Q&A with Ajahn Sona from Whistler, BC
December 22, 2020 – January 1, 2021	10-Day Virtual Metta Retreat, led by Ajahn Sona
February – April 2021	Audiobook chapters of <i>Bloom: Buddhist Reflections on Serenity and Love</i> posted to Ajahn Sona's YouTube Channel
May 26, 2021	Virtual Vesak Dhamma talk and Q&A with Ajahn Sona
July 17, 2021	Maranasati Dhamma talk with Ajahn Sona

c. Renovations and construction projects (see accompanying photos below)

In August 2020 work began on a new stone and gravel garden in front of Nimitta House, transforming the existing roadway into a space for meditation and contemplation. This project also involved grading and widening the road leading to the back of Vihara which has improved access and drainage to that area of the property. Work continued in summer 2021 and nears completion in fall 2021.

Two Jotul propane stoves and two propane heaters were installed in September 2020 in the Vihara to reduce our dependence on wood stoves, both in terms of firewood preparation and manpower to keep the stoves going through the winter.

In October 2020 a generator back-up system along with four more lithium ion SimpliPhi batteries were installed on the property. This improvement has doubled the battery storage capacity of our solar energy system, and the interconnection of our Honda generator to the new inverter system allows for automatic backup charging in the event of failure of our main generator.

In June 2021 work on our Vihara insulation project began. The east exterior wall was completed in June with plans to insulate the remaining exterior walls over the coming year. This increase in our insulation will reduce our need for winter heat both in terms of propane and wood stove use.

Also in June 2021, thanks to a generous donation, a ground mount connected solar system, consisting of 24 additional solar panels, adjustable racks, charge controller, and hub increased the monastery's internal grid by 10 kW of energy, doubling our previous energy capacity. This increase will enable Birken to potentially store enough electricity for up to 2 full days which will be a boon over our long winter.

Major kuti renovations to Kuti 1 (K1) began in July 2021. These renovations, primarily funded by another generous donor, provide the addition of a very spacious interior washroom. Features include running water, toilet, shower, sink, and more storage space.

After 20 years, and many septic back-ups, we finally replaced our main sewer line from the Vihara to the septic tank in September 2021. At the same time trenching and extension of a water line was completed to Nimitta House for the future addition of a washroom and sink for residents' use.



VIHARA EAST WALL INSULATION



GROUND MOUNT SOLAR PANELS



NIMITTA ZEN GARDEN & WALKING PATH



KUTI WASHROOM RENOVATION

d. Other news & concluding observations

The prior year's purchase of a PHEV (plug-in hybrid electric vehicle) continues to enable us substantial savings on our automotive fuel expenses. In fiscal 2019-2020, our gasoline expenses were \$1,855.52; in 2020-2021 that total was only \$1,751.05. By utilizing just the monastery's charging station, we were able to fill up our PHEV with 420.583 kWh of free energy, which translates to approximately 27 round trips to Kamloops in the past fiscal year. These positive numbers continue to highlight the importance of moving towards an all-electric vehicle fleet at Birken in the coming years.

The first [Birken Online Upāsikā Program](#) for Dedicated Lay Practitioners around the globe launched in January 2021 with over 60 participants from 10 countries. Plans are to increase the size of the program to over 100 participants for the 2022 program.

The online Upāsikā program is a vibrant example of how the continuance of the pandemic can open doors to the Dhamma not imagined in any previous generation. Ajahn Sona plans to offer more virtual Dhamma talks, teatimes and retreats for the foreseeable future.

6. FINANCIAL REPORT

The COVID-19 pandemic forced closure of the monastery to guests in the latter half of the 2019-2020 fiscal year and this closure continued for the entire 2020-2021 fiscal year. Regardless of being unable to visit and practice on-site, Birken's supporters from around the world continued to contribute and the 2020-2021 fiscal year was remarkably healthy. The 10-day on-line Metta retreat held in December 2020 and new YouTube video releases throughout the year enabled Ajahn Sona to continue offering Dhammadana and donors expressed their gratitude by supporting as never before.

Overall, donations (not including those from other charities) increased by \$6,797.00 from the year prior. Donations from other charities increased by \$8,288.00 in this fiscal. Generosity manifested with a donation of \$401,054.00 that served as the foundation of the new Birken Endowment Fund. Other donors subsequently came forward to contribute an additional total sum of \$61,401.00 in the Fund's inaugural year (totaling \$468,557 at the conclusion of the fiscal year), and donations continue to come in monthly, primarily via the CanadaHelps donation portal. Total revenue was \$272,428, excluding the extraordinary donations to the endowment fund.

Externally driven costs related to the operation of the monastery such as insurance, accounting and legal fees, property tax and all utilities increased substantially from the prior fiscal. Occupancy costs, specifically building repair and maintenance, equipment rentals, all fuels and purchase of minor equipment related to video production of Dhamma for supporters also increased, while internally monitored costs such as grocery and household expenses decreased even further than in the prior fiscal due to monastery closure. Total expenses came to \$223,121.

Continued support from the friends of Birken resulted in a net income of \$49,307.00 for this fiscal year, not including Endowment Fund contributions.

No new debt was incurred in this fiscal, and Birken continues to pay off the long-term debt loan that purchased a plug-in hybrid electric vehicle in 2019. In the absence of guests, major infrastructure projects were completed, including kuti and Nimitta House upgrades, new solar panels and batteries, sewer maintenance and repair, landscaping improvements and continued superinsulation work on the vihara. Current assets increased from \$201,779.00 in 2019-20 to \$204,664.00 in the 2020-21 fiscal year and the result of the noted improvements increased the value of tangible capital assets held by Birken to \$963,026.00.

In closing, it is warming to understand that with the advent of the Birken Endowment Fund, there is promise that the monastery's future financial well-being will ensure the availability of refuge and support for Buddhist Sangha members and lay practitioners into the coming decades. As this is my last report as Birken's Treasurer before moving to my new role as a Director at Large (and volunteer bookkeeper), I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the support I have received from Ajahn Sona, Sister Mon, Secretaries Piyadassi and Sobhana, and Directors Leslie Hanrahan and Brent Styra.

The Financial Statements as circulated and presented were accepted.

Moved by Teresa Wixted, seconded by Thomas West (Ajahn Sona). Motion carried: 17 approval votes (Unanimous).

7. MOTIONS:

- That the Proposed Board of Directors (changes from previous term) be elected or re-elected:
 - Thomas West (Ajahn Sona) – President (*continuation*)
 - Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon) – Vice President (*continuation*)
 - Teresa Wixted – Secretary (*continuation*)
 - ***Teresa Wixted – Treasurer (*new*)**

- Brent Styra – Member at Large (*continuation*)
- Leslie Hanrahan – Member at Large (*continuation*)
- ***Hazel Plumbley – Member at Large (*new*)**

Moved by Teresa Wixted, seconded by Naruemon Teneralli. Motion carried: 17 approval votes (Unanimous).

- That Tombe Herrington Chartered Professional Accountants LLP be appointed our accounting firm for the next fiscal year.

Moved by Teresa Wixted, seconded by Brent Styra. Motion carried: 17 approval votes (Unanimous).

- That the 2022 AGM be held at Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery and/or virtually on Sunday, October 23, 2022.

Moved by Teresa Wixted, seconded by Thomas West (Ajahn Sona). Motion carried: 17 approval votes (Unanimous).



BIRKEN FOREST BUDDHIST MONASTERY ('Sitavana')

A Registered Canadian Charitable Society: BN 89263 5483 RR0001

E-MAIL: meditate@birken.ca | WEBSITE: <https://birken.ca>

ADDRESS: 7000 Smith Lake Forest Srv Rd. Knutsford, British Columbia ° Canada ° V0E 2A0 | TEL: +1-778-785-6059

SPECIAL RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF BIRKEN FOREST BUDDHIST MONASTERY

Resolved,

that we hereby authorize

- the purchase of (4) Simpliphi Power lithium batteries up to the price of \$15,000.

Date this 10th day of September, 2020

Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), President

Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon), Vice President

Teresa Wixted, Secretary

Hazel Plumbley, Treasurer

Leslie Hanrahan, Member at Large



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SPECIAL RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF BIRKEN FOREST BUDDHIST MONASTERY

Resolved,

that we hereby authorize

- the purchase and installation of 10.2 kW pole mounted solar system consisting of solar modules (panels), 4 panel solar pole mounts, hub, charge controllers, electrical supplies, and labour up to the price of \$39,130.

Date this 30th day of May, 2021

Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), President

Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon), Vice President

Teresa Wixted, Secretary

Hazel Plumbley, Treasurer

Brent Styra, Member at Large

Leslie Hanrahan, Member at Large



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SPECIAL RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF BIRKEN FOREST BUDDHIST MONASTERY

Resolved,

that we hereby authorize

- the addition of exterior insulation to the Vihara (main building) not to exceed the cost of \$11,717.

Date this 14th day of June, 2021

Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), President

Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon), Vice President

Teresa Wixted, Secretary

Hazel Plumbley, Treasurer

Brent Styra, Member at Large

Leslie Hanrahan, Member at Large



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SPECIAL RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF BIRKEN FOREST BUDDHIST MONASTERY

Resolved,

that we hereby authorize

- the addition of a full washroom, small counter area, and exterior painting to Kuti 1 (K1), plus renovations and upgrades to other kutis on the property not to exceed the cost of \$25,000.

Date this 14th day of June, 2021

Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), President

Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon), Vice President

Teresa Wixted, Secretary

Hazel Plumbley, Treasurer

Brent Styra, Member at Large

Leslie Hanrahan, Member at Large