



Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery ('Sitavana') **Annual General Meeting – October 30, 2022, 10 am PT**

MINUTES – AGM 2022

1. WELCOME, MEETING PROCEDURES AND ATTENDANCE

AT BIRKEN: Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon), Teresa Wixted, Leslie Hanrahan, Rachel Telesmanick, **ON ZOOM CALL:** Hazel Plumbley, Brent Styra, Echo Gao, Irma West, Dinko Simunovic, Martha Royea, Alissa Smith, Tiara Letourneau, Bob Slentz, Rose Ann Drouillard, Craig Edinger, Mary Winder, Cynthia Buitron.

2. BOARD OF DIRECTORS: The current Board of Directors is:

- Thomas West (Ajahn Sona) – President
- Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon) – Vice President
- Teresa Wixted – Secretary/Treasurer
- Brent Styra – Director at Large
- Leslie Hanrahan – Director at Large
- Hazel Plumbley – Director at Large

3. MINUTES OF LAST YEAR'S AGM (OCTOBER 31, 2021)

The AGM 2021 Minutes were accepted unread.

Moved by Teresa Wixted, seconded by Leslie Hanrahan. Motion carried: 16 approval votes, 2 abstentions.

4. MATTERS ARISING

None.

5. SPECIAL RESOLUTIONS APPROVED PRIOR TO AGM

Several special resolutions came up for board consideration between September 2021 and May 2022. 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: Remainder of interior/exterior Vihara insulation

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

b) Amended Special Resolution: Remainder of interior/exterior Vihara insulation

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

c) Special Resolution: Memorial Garden

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

d) Special Resolution: Tractor Shed/Workshop

Approved: Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon), Teresa Wixted, Brent Styra, Hazel Plumbley, Leslie Hanrahan – RESOLUTION APPROVED (Unanimous) – **due to a number of construction constraints in 2022, this project will be delayed until 2023.**

6. PRESIDENT'S REPORT

a. Resident Monastics

Ajahn Sona remains in his guiding role as Abbot of Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery. 2022 marked his 68th birthday and his 34th vassa (rains retreat). As the COVID-19 pandemic enters its third 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, and we were aided in this mission by the addition to Starlink internet service as mentioned in last year's AGM report. The online library of 236 YouTube video Dhamma talks (up 26% over the past year) now provides teachings to a subscriber list of approximately 21,400 viewers and practitioners as of the end of July 2022, an increase of about 6,400 subscribers, or 30%, in the past fiscal year. At the time of this AGM, the number of YouTube subscribers is now over 22,400.

Between August 5-10, 2021 the monastics and residents of Birken evacuated the monastery due to the encroaching White Rock Lake wildfire. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we were able to stay in very comfortable accommodations during that time; in fact one of the homes in Sun Peaks, British Columbia provided a backdrop for our August 8th livestream teatime Q&A, [*Equanimity & Activism*](#).

In September 2021 and again in January 2022, Ajahn Sona was interviewed by Ajahn Kovilo and Ajahn Nisabho from [Clear Mountain Monastery](#) located in the greater Seattle area. The first interview, [*Did Socrates Have Jhāna?: Dhammic Influence & Resonance Through History*](#) and the subsequent interview, [*Sleep, Psychedelic Therapies & Awakening*](#), may be found on the [Clear Mountain YouTube channel](#).

Also in September 2021, Ajahn Sona began a weekly livestream Q&A on his [YouTube Channel](#). The engagement with people around the world and the opportunity to ask questions in a live format has been a tremendous source of Dhamma outreach, thanks to our highly improved internet connection.

December 9, 2021 marked the premiere of Ajahn Sona's interview with John Cianciosi of The Theosophical Society of America; the interview was titled: [*American Buddhism: Reframing Eastern Principles for the Western World*](#).

From December 26 2021 – January 1, 2022, Ajahn Sona offered a 6-day Virtual Retreat on "The Highest Blessings". The retreat included evening [Dhamma talks](#) and [Live Teatime Q&As](#), group meditations, chanting, guided meditations, and nature walks through Birken's landscape. 431 people registered online in advance of the retreat and thousands more participated virtually on Ajahn Sona's YouTube Channel. Those who registered were from 33 countries and ranged in age from 18-70+; 69% of all registrants were between the ages of 50-70+.

On March 4, 2022, Ajahn Sona offered a Dhamma talk to the Ottawa Buddhist Society. The talk, [*We're Back to the 5th Century BC*](#), was later posted to [Ajahn Sona's YouTube Channel](#).

A new Dhamma talk from Ajahn Sona, [*Life is the Game That Must Be Played*](#), was posted on May 15, 2022 to [Ajahn Sona's YouTube Channel](#).

From June 8-13, 2022, Ajahn Sona led another Virtual Retreat from Birken, this time for 5-days on the subject of “The Natural Elements in Meditation”. This retreat included evening [Dhamma talks](#), [Live Teatime Q&As](#), group meditations, guided meditations, instructions on creating meditation kasinas at home, and nature walks through Birken’s landscape. 430 people registered for the retreat and countless others participated virtually on Ajahn Sona’s YouTube Channel. Registrants for this retreat were from 37 countries and again ranged in age from 18-70+; 71% of all registrants were between the ages of 50-70+.

Ajahn Sona offered a recorded blessing for The Theosophical Society of America’s Summer National Convention which was held July 15-17, 2022.

Sister Mon continues in her role as Senior Buddhist Nun.

b. Monastic Visitors

Ajahn Sudanto, the Abbot of Pacific Hermitage in White Salmon, Washington, arrived at Birken on November 1, 2021 for the last half of his year long sabbatical. He left Birken on April 1, 2022 and was joined on his journey back to the US/Canadian border by Ajahn Sona, Ajahn Jotipalo, Sister Mon, and several of Birken’s stewards. The trip served as a brief holiday for Ajahn Sona’s birthday, and an opportunity for him to visit his childhood homes and spend time with his mother and sister.

With the approved extension of his work permit, Ajahn Jotipalo plans to continue his stay and be part of the Birken Sangha until June 2024.

Ajahn Kovilo and Ajahn Nisabho from [Clear Mountain Monastery](#) visited us for three days in July just prior to the start of Vassa. They joined us for several teatime Q&As in the sala and also recorded interviews with [Ajahn Jotipalo](#) and [Sister Mon](#) which they have shared on their [YouTube channel](#).

c. 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, 2021 – July 31, 2022):

August 8, 2021	Equanimity & Activism : Live Teatime Q&A with Ajahn Sona from Sun Peaks, BC
September 20, 2021	Did Socrates Have Jhāna?: Dhammic Influence & Resonance Through History : Virtual interview with Ajahn Sona for Clear Mountain Dhamma
Beginning September 26, 2021 – May 29, 2022	Live from Birken: Weekly Dhamma Livestream Q&A broadcasts with Ajahn Sona
December 9, 2021	American Buddhism: Reframing Eastern Principles for the Western World : Virtual Dhamma talk by Ajahn Sona for The Theosophical Society of America
December 26, 2021 – January 1, 2022	6-Day Virtual Retreat: The Highest Blessings led by Ajahn Sona (Dhamma talks , Live Teatime Q&As)
January 24, 2022	Sleep, Psychedelic Therapies & Awakening : Virtual interview with Ajahn Sona for Clear Mountain Dhamma

March 4, 2022	<u>We're Back to the 5th Century BC</u> : Virtual Dhamma talk by Ajahn Sona for Ottawa Buddhist Society
May 15, 2022	<u>Life is the Game That Must be Played</u> : Virtual Dhamma talk by Ajahn Sona
June 8-13, 2022	5-Day Virtual Retreat: The Natural Elements in Meditation led by Ajahn Sona (<u>Dhamma talks</u> ; <u>Live Teatime Q&As</u>)
July 15-17, 2022	Ajahn Sona offered a video blessing for The Theosophical Society of America's Summer National Convention

d. Renovations and construction projects

Major kuti renovations to Kutti 1 (K1), which began in the previous fiscal year, were completed in October 2021. These renovations included the addition of a full washroom, nearly doubling in size the footprint of the 20+ year old kuti. Improvements included running water, toilet, shower, sink, and more storage room.

In October 2021 the Nimitta garden walking path and Zen rock garden were completed. Also trenching and extension of water lines to the north garden area and to Nimitta house were completed. The water extension to Nimitta House will allow for the future addition of a toilet and sink for residents' use.

Even with snow still on the ground, work began in February 2022 on the next phase of our Vihara insulation project. Windows were moved from the sala to replace the sliding glass doors in rooms 1 / 2 and rooms 5 / 6, other guestroom windows were covered over or reduced in size. A smaller triple-glazed window replaced the larger less energy efficient kitchen window and a similar window was added to the attic area.

Framing and exterior insulation began to go up in March 2022 and the project, which also includes repainting the entire exterior of the building, continues through July 2022 with completion expected in fall 2022. Delays due to supply chain shortages, an uncommonly cold and wet spring, plus unforeseen situations in the lives of our construction workers contributed to the project taking much longer than originally expected. Despite the setbacks, we're delighted that this dramatic increase in the Vihara insulation will reduce our need for winter heat both in terms of propane and wood stove use, and will also provide a consistently cool main building in the heat of summer.

In May 2022, we began the largest landscaping project in Birken's history: a full renovation and re-imagining of our existing Vihara garden areas, plus the creation of a new memorial flower garden near the former parking area. This project was begun thanks to a very generous donation by Ajahn Sona's mother in memory of this father, Ralph West. The Ralph West Memorial flower garden is now nearly complete. Irrigation and final plantings will take place in late spring 2023.

The front Vihara garden area will become a Japanese style stroll garden (a drawing of the plans is included at the end of this AGM report). Major excavation of the area, including a dry river bed, covered walkway to the Vihara, and aspen perimeter fencing were well underway by the end of July 2022. Our Nimitta Zen garden is also being re-imagined as a contemplative courtyard garden. Work continues on these projects into the fall and will finish up in summer 2023; photos are shown below.



Vihara Insulation Project – East Wall



Vihara Japanese Stroll Garden



Nimitta Courtyard Garden



Ralph West Memorial Flower Garden

e. Other news and concluding observations

With rising inflation, we have seen steadily increasing costs for our day-to-day expenses: groceries, construction materials, gasoline, and diesel. The purchase of our PHEV (plug-in hybrid electric vehicle) in 2019 continues to affirm the inevitable need for all electric vehicles at Birken, and undoubtedly the entire world, in the not too distant future.

Our second Birken Online Upāsikā Training Program for Dedicated Lay Practitioners around the globe began in January 2022 and will conclude at the end of this year with 108 participants from 18 countries. Including this online group, there will now be approximately 225 Graduate and Online Upāsikās, a milestone for a program that began just over seven years ago.

This also represents our final Online Upāsikā training program which included interactive engagement with Ajahn Sona and other Upāsikā trainees. Ajahn Sona has decided to conclude his active participation in the Upāsikā program at the end of this year. Instead there will be the launch of a pilot Upāsikā Secluded Study program starting in January 2023. Details about this next phase of our Upāsikā program may be found on [Birken's Upāsikā Secluded Study Program](#) webpage.

The online Upāsikā program, as well as the burgeoning numbers of virtual retreats and weekly livestream Q&As, offer excellent examples of how the continuance of the pandemic can open doors to the Dhamma not imagined before in history. Ajahn Sona plans to continue to offer more virtual Dhamma talks, teatimes and retreats in the years and decades that lie ahead.

7. FINANCIAL REPORT

We entered our 2021/2022 fiscal year with not only the continued closure of Birken due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also forest fires pervading all of British Columbia which, as Ajahn Sona mentioned earlier, led to the evacuation of Birken in early August 2021. The fiscal year ended within a climate of inflation and recession concerns mounting around the globe. Yet in spite of these worldly conditions, Birken continued to thrive thanks in large part to Ajahn Sona's unwavering commitment to his YouTube channel as a valuable lifeline of Dhamma to thousands of viewers and listeners around the globe. The outstanding generosity of donors, stewards and other supporters remained strong through all these conditions and Birken concluded the year in a very positive economic position.

REVENUE

Donations overall (not including the extraordinary donation in January 2021 of \$401,054.00 that served as the foundation of the new Birken Endowment Fund) increased by \$83,364 from the year prior. Although we received several large donations during the year, donations from other charities decreased by \$27,346.00 in this fiscal. The Endowment Fund, which started the year at \$462,607, grew to \$565,972 by year's end, an increase of \$103,365 (22.3%) thanks in large part to continuing donations of \$64,815 as well as strong balanced investment earnings.

Another important area of growth was in our CanadaHelps' donations, primarily thanks to the large influx of monthly donors from CanadaHelps' March Monthly Giving program. Overall this culminated in a 22% increase in donations from this online source. Total revenue was \$423,141.

DEBT/CAPITAL ASSETS

No new debt was incurred in this fiscal, and the monastery will pay off in full our plug-in hybrid electric vehicle in the first months of the new fiscal year. As mentioned earlier in this report, the addition of a full washroom to K1 (Kuti 1) was completed and several major projects were begun, including the full exterior insulation of the Vihara, a re-imagining of the entire landscaped area in front of the Vihara, as well as a new memorial flower garden and courtyard garden. Although our cash assets declined from \$184,454 in 2020-2021 to \$133,401 in 2021-2022 due in large part to these project costs, the results of these sustaining improvements has increased the value of our tangible capital assets to \$1,013,570.

EXPENSES

Inflation, supply chain issues, and other external factors resulted in increased operation costs in many of our expense categories. One prime example is groceries, which represents our largest day-to-day expense throughout the year. This year those costs rose 39% over the previous fiscal year. One important new program began in the past year to help offset our grocery expenses: [Birken's Virtual Dana Meal Program](#). Thanks to the generosity of donors around the world we were able to honour and memorialize loved ones through approximately 60 dana meals during the fiscal year.

Similar expense increases were experienced with automobile fuel (up 115%), property insurance (up 18%), bookkeeping and accounting fees (up 69%). Other costs areas increased due to changes in our monastery conditions around COVID-19 and our fire evacuation, i.e. monastic medical, dental, and optometry appointments, which had been put off for two years due to the pandemic, were addressed this year, and resulted in an increase of 1,334% in expenses over the previous year. Restaurant and hotel/meal costs increased 402% and 137% respectively due to our evacuation and other short trips. However, other areas showed expense decreases, i.e. internet costs due to our transition to Starlink (down 64%), auto insurance (down 13%), and monastic clothing and personal expenses (down 41%).

Based on a 10-year average of our total expenses, we've found that it costs \$500 each and every day to keep Birken running (please see our [Support webpage](#) for details and to learn more about where your donations actually go.) Total expenses for this year came to \$288,849, an increase of 21.6%.

NET INCOME

Thanks to the generous and continued support from the friends of Birken, our net income totaled \$134,292 for this fiscal year. Please see the attached financial statements for more information.

SUMMARY

Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery operates today thanks solely to the generous and sustaining support of lay benefactors from around the world. Every donation, regardless of size, contributes to the benefit of not only the resident monastics and stewards, but for this same lay community to whom it is dedicated. It is still uncertain as to when Birken will again open its physical doors to practitioners, yet funds will continue to be needed for day-to-day expenses, further development of our virtual monastery, and to maintain and improve the existing buildings and off-grid energy systems.

Looking ahead, we envision our Endowment Fund as a safeguard should future emergencies arise; however, it is only through extraordinary donations, those of \$5,000 or more, that the monastery has been able to survive this long. These large donations, as well as our sustaining monthly gifts, must continue to grow to ensure the preservation of the monastery for its lay community, and thereby enable Birken's monastic sangha to live and share the Dhamma with us all for many years to come.

The Financial Statements as circulated and presented were accepted.

Moved by Teresa Wixted, seconded by Ajahn Sona. Motion carried: 17 approval votes.

8. MOTIONS

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

Moved by Ajahn Sona, seconded by Leslie Hanrahan. Motion carried: 16 approval votes, 1 abstention.

That the 2023 AGM be held at Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery and/or virtually on Sunday, October 29, 2023.

Moved by Teresa Wixted, seconded by Sister Mon. Motion carried: 17 approval votes.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery's 2022 AGM.

Moved by Teresa Wixted, seconded by Ajahn Sona. Motion carried: 17 approval votes.



BIRKEN FOREST BUDDHIST MONASTERY ('Sītavana')

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 addition of interior and exterior insulation for the remainder of the Vihara (main building) not to exceed the cost of \$20,000.

Date this 17th day of September, 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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ADDRESS: 7000 Smith Lake Forest Srv Rd. Knutsford, British Columbia ° Canada ° V0E 2A0 | TEL: +1-778-785-6059

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

Resolved,

that we hereby authorize

- the addition of interior and exterior insulation for the remainder of the Vihara (main building) not to exceed the cost of \$50,000 (inclusive of \$20,000 earmarked grant received in 2022).

Date this 10th day of May, 2022:

Thomas West

Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), President

Naruemon Teneralli

Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon), Vice President

Teresa Wixted

Teresa Wixted, Secretary/Treasurer

Brent Styra

Brent Styra, Director at Large

Hazel Plumbley

Hazel Plumbley, Director at Large

Leslie Hanrahan

Leslie Hanrahan, Director 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 memorial garden and renovation of existing garden areas around the monastery property not to exceed the cost of \$100,000 ((inclusive of \$80,000 earmarked donation received in 2021)).

Date this 10th day of May, 2022:

Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), President

Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon), Vice President

Teresa Wixted, Secretary/Treasurer

Brent Styra, Director at Large

Hazel Plumbley, Director at Large

Leslie Hanrahan, Director at Large



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

Resolved,

that we hereby authorize

- the construction of tractor shed/workshop not to exceed the cost of \$50,000.

Date this 10th day of May, 2022:

Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), President

Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon), Vice President

Teresa Wixted, Secretary/Treasurer

Brent Styra, Director at Large

Hazel Plumbley, Director at Large

Leslie Hanrahan, Director at Large



Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery
Japanese Garden Plan