



Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery ('Sitavana')
Annual General Meeting – October 25, 2024, 1:00 pm PDT

MINUTES – AGM 2024

1. WELCOME, MEETING PROCEDURES AND ATTENDANCE

AT BIRKEN: Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon), Teresa Wixted, Brent Styra, Rachel Telesmanick, Hazel Plumbley, P. Carole McLeod, Noelle, Khoo, Christian Villegard, Cindy Gibson.

2. MINUTES OF LAST YEAR'S AGM (NOVEMBER 5, 2023)

The AGM 2023 Minutes were accepted unread.

Moved by Brent Styra, seconded by Naruemon Teneralli. Motion carried: 9 approval votes, 1 abstention.

3. MATTERS ARISING

None.

4. SPECIAL RESOLUTIONS APPROVED PRIOR TO AGM:

One special resolution came up for board consideration in September 2024. Special resolutions require an approval vote by at least four board members; the record of voting is shown below. A copy of the approved Special Resolution is attached to this report:

a) Special Resolution: Kia EV9 lease

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

5. PRESIDENT'S REPORT:

a. Resident Monastics

Ajahn Sona continues in his leadership role as Abbot and President of Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery. In April 2024 he turned 70 years old, and in October 2024, completed his 36th vassa (rains retreat).

In this post COVID landscape, we expanded the number of in-person guests to the monastery in the past year, allowing more overnight guests as well as day visitors and in-person dana meals. Ajahn Sona's online commitment to offer the Dhamma to more and more people around the world has also been sustained. At the end of our 2023/2024 fiscal year our online library of YouTube Dhamma talks and Livestream Q&As totaled 332, while our subscribers reached 29,100, an increase of 3,696 new subscribers, up 14% over the previous fiscal year. At the time of this AGM, the number of YouTube subscribers is now nearly 30,000.

Between July 2023 and July 2024, all 12 Dhamma talks from our May 2023 Pacific Hermitage retreat, "[The 37 Requisites of Enlightenment](#)", were uploaded to [Ajahn Sona's YouTube Channel](#).

Our livestream Q&A's were on hiatus for the summer and early fall of 2023. We started up again in October 2023 and continued through June 2024 when we again took a summer break from our weekly YouTube broadcasts.

On November 26, 2023, Ajahn Sona offered a live virtual Dhamma talk entitled "[Love Is But a Song We Sing](#)" for the 2023 Mettā Convention sponsored by the Mettā Centre in Sydney, Australia.

In early December 2023, Ajahn Sona joined Ajahn Kovilo and Ajahn Nisabho from [Clear Mountain Monastery](#), located in the greater Seattle area, for another interview on the [Clear Mountain Monastery Project YouTube channel](#). The interview continued on the subject of great interest to Ajahn Sona: "[The Earliest Western Buddhist Monks](#)".

Later in December 2023 Ajahn Sona also participated in an interview and live Q&A on the [Clear Mountain Monastery Project YouTube channel](#) on the subject of "[Hercules & the Buddha: The Legend Continues?](#)"

Ajahn Sona shared a Dhamma talk and participated in a Q&A with the Ottawa Buddhist Society via Zoom on March 1, 2024. The title of the talk was "[The Dhamma is a Strategy for Emotional Ease in the Midst of this Very World.](#)"

In April 2024, Ajahn Sona, Ajahn Sona's mother, and several Birken stewards travelled to Santa Fe, New Mexico and Portland, Oregon for an early spring getaway. During the trip, Ajahn Sona offered two livestream Q&A broadcasts on [April 7th](#) and [April 14th](#) from Santa Fe.

From May 4-12 and from May 18-26, 2024 Ajahn Sona led two one-week retreats at Birken for meditators affiliated with Pacific Hermitage in White Salmon, Washington. During the retreats, 12 Dhamma talks were recorded on the subject of "Keeping the Big Picture in Mind". Videos of those Dhamma talks will be uploaded in the coming months.

Meditators from Vernon, British Columbia, joined us in June 2024 for a weekend retreat at Birken.

In early July 2024, Ajahn Sona offered a Dhamma talk and participated in festivities with the [Kamloops Sri Lankan Society](#) which is located near Birken.

Ajahn Sona travelled to [Temple Forest Monastery \(Jetavana\)](#) in New Hampshire, United States, between July 13-19, 2024 for a gathering of abbots and senior monks from the seven Ajahn Chah monasteries in the Americas (now encompassing both North and South America.) He returned to Birken just ahead of the start of this year's vassa which began on July 21, 2024.

Sister Mon continues in her role as Senior Buddhist Nun. She travelled to Thailand between January and March 2024 for a long and well deserved visit with family and friends.

b. Monastic Visitors

Ajahn Jotipalo continues to stay with us at Birken on his Canadian work permit. He travelled to the United States between April and May 2024 to visit family and friends.

Ajahn Sudanto, Tan Dhammavaro, and Tan Cittapalo from Pacific Hermitage in White Salmon, Washington joined us between May 4-26, 2024 for the annual Pacific Hermitage retreat.

Bhante Soma, along with several supporters from Surrey, BC, visited us for a day in July 2024.

We were honoured to host Ajahn Sucitto, one of the most senior western monks in the Ajahn Chah tradition, at Birken for this year's vassa. Ajahn Sucitto resided in Ajahn Sona's kuti between July and October 2024 for a silent, secluded retreat.

c. Retreats and events held online

We give sincere thanks to the many Birken volunteers and supporters who helped us to organise our many online and in-person retreats and events this past year (August 1, 2023 – July 31, 2024):

July 24, 2023 – July 14, 2024	12 Dhamma talks from our May 2023 Pacific Hermitage retreat, " The 37 Requisites of Enlightenment " uploaded to Ajahn Sona's YouTube Channel
October 8, 2023 – June 23, 2024	Live from Birken: Weekly Dhamma Livestream Q&A broadcasts on Ajahn Sona's YouTube Channel
November 26, 2023	Live virtual Dhamma talk, " Love Is But a Song We Sing " for 2023 Mettā Convention sponsored by Mettā Centre in Sydney, Australia
December 3, 2023	" The Earliest Western Buddhist Monks ": Virtual interview with Ajahn Sona for Clear Mountain Monastery
December 20, 2023	" Hercules & the Buddha: The Legend Continues? : Virtual interview and Q&A with Ajahn Sona for Clear Mountain Monastery
March 1, 2024	" The Dhamma is a Strategy for Emotional Ease in the Midst of this Very World ": Zoom Dhamma talk and Q&A for the Ottawa Buddhist Society
May 4-12 and May 18-26, 2024	Pacific Hermitage two one-week retreats at Birken, led by Ajahn Sona: "Keeping the Big Picture in Mind"
June 7-9, 2024	Vernon, BC Group weekend retreat at Birken, led by Ajahn Sona
July 6, 2024	Dhamma talk and participation in festivities with the Kamloops Sri Lankan Society located near Birken
July 13-19, 2024	North and South American Abbots' Gathering at Temple Forest Monastery (Jetavana) in New Hampshire, United States

d. Dānā meals and guest totals:

This year, in addition to hosting in-person meditators at Birken, we also re-opened to day visitors and those wishing to offer [in-person dānā meals](#). We continue to be blessed with online generosity through our [Virtual Dānā Meal Fund](#) (please see our [Support page](#) for more information). Between August 1, 2023 and July 31, 2024, we received approximately 36 Virtual Dānā Meals. Between May 1, 2024 and

July 31, 2024 Birken welcomed 120 overnight guests, 12 day visitors, and 2 in-person dana meals to the monastery.

e. Renovations and construction projects

Work on our diesel generator shed was completed in October 2023.

Our major kitchen renovation continued through the final months of 2023 with a break in December 2023 and January 2024 due to labour shortages. The final re-imagining of our kitchen includes a new upright freezer, new energy efficient dishwasher, new commercial quality pot washing room, an expanded pantry area and Samma Vacca sala for stewards, relocation of our laundry room, and the addition of two large water storage tanks. Our previous downstairs cold room has been completely transformed into a refined guest utility room including another dishwasher, tea and coffee station, dish and cutlery storage, as well as general dry goods area for replenishing washrooms and other common areas of the monastery.

January 2024 brought bitter cold to Birken with temperatures hitting -40C. Our building water froze and our new Kubota diesel generator, purchased last year, broke down. Due to service delays, repairs could not be completed until October 2024. Fortunately, we were able to rent a powerful backup diesel generator to get us through the cold winter months. Our onsite portable generator took over after the warm weather again returned in early June.

As mentioned in last year's AGM Report, a big push for our Japanese stroll garden and north Vihara garden came in September 2023 when monastics, stewards, and guests completed nearly all of the landscaping work in just over two weeks. Included in this massive accomplishment are two bridges (including a curved Japanese bridge and one with set-in stepping stones), paved garden pathways, placement of large stones and boulders from around the property, fire safe gravel areas, and all garden plantings, including birch trees (Birken, by the way, means 'birch' in German), Saskatoon berries, evergreens, red twig dogwoods, lilacs, thyme, irises, forestland grass seed, wildflower seeds, and hundreds of daffodils.

The finishing touches on our extensive landscaping project ramped up again in June 2024 with expansion of the Ralph West Memorial garden, planting five new weeping birch trees, and adding a Bodhi leaf deck in the Japanese stroll garden.

Also from June through July 2024 we undertook wildfire remediation of areas close to the Vihara (our main building) that were recommended in a [FireSmart BC](#) assessment of the monastery. These remediation efforts included skirting the areas under and around building foundations, decks, walkways, eaves, and firewood storage areas, as well as adding tons of river stones and other decorative rock landscaping to secure the parameter of our main building and office complex, the nearby driveway and parking lot areas.

In September and October 2024, the final landscaping touch came with the relocation of our marble Buddha rupa (statue) from the sala (meditation hall) to the Japanese stroll garden. It was an engineering and creative achievement that took many people to plan, execute, and fulfill without damage to the statue or the garden.

Please see photos of these major projects below.

Downstairs Guest Utility Room



Fire Remediation – Deck Skirting & Stone Barrier



Fire Remediation – Eaves Protection



Vihara Japanese Stroll Garden



Garden Buddha Shrine



Garden Buddha Rupa



Bodhi Leaf Deck



f. Other news and concluding observations

As mentioned earlier concerning the Special Resolution to lease a 2025 Kia EV9, we traded in our 2019 Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV (Plug in Hybrid Electric Vehicle) as part of that lease. Now we have an all electric vehicle that can assist in providing not only gas free transportation to town, but a means to also aid in charging our off grid battery system to run the entire monastery (see photo below). Plans are to add another all electric vehicle to our fleet in the coming year or two.

New Kia EV9



2024 represents the second year of [Birken's Upāsikā Secluded Study Program](#), combining elements of our earlier in-person and online programs, as well as other resource materials from Ajahn Sona. At the start of the year, 125 participants, ranging in age from 18 to 76, joined each other remotely from 23 different countries around the world. After 10 years of formal Upāsikā training, Ajahn Sona has decided 2025 will be the last year of this unique training program. We're delighted to announce that this final group has 217 applicants from 23 countries, ranging in age from 17-79.

Now that major construction has been completed at the monastery, all of us look forward to settling into a future of more meditation, more introspection, and more time devoted to practice for all of Birken's monastics and resident stewards. 2025 represents the beginning of our third decade as a monastery to not only those who visit us in person, but also to the burgeoning garden of worldwide practitioners. Our expansive global outreach is thanks in large part to our Upāsikā program, Ajahn Sona's livestream broadcasts and his recorded talks. This year's in-person guest program was again fully booked with many people waitlisted throughout the summer months. Onsite visits also extended to day visitors and dozens of generous dana meal offerings from people across the region.

6. FINANCIAL REPORT

Our 2023/2024 fiscal year was one of more stability compared to the volatility of inflation and COVID's aftermath in the previous year. Fall of 2023 saw a big final push on exterior construction projects which required withdrawing assets from our healthy Nicola Wealth Endowment Fund. The winter 2023/2024 kitchen remodel also needed funding which we were able to provide through our regular bank accounts. The increased number of in-person guests provided an uptick in onsite donations and monthly CanadaHelps donations continued to increase offering us a level of financial security we haven't experienced before.

REVENUE

Total income for the year came to \$288,917, down 53% from our previous fiscal year when it reached \$612,637. Last year's high income total was due primarily to an extraordinary gift of \$300,000 from one very generous donor which went directly to our [Endowment Fund](#), our investment portfolio under the stewardship of Nicola Wealth Management. The Endowment Fund finished off the 2023/2024 fiscal year at \$893,004, down from \$986,212 at the conclusion of our 2022/2023 fiscal year. As mentioned above, we withdrew \$150,000 from the Endowment Fund in the fall of 2023 to complete the major construction projects around the monastery. We're glad to report that the fund has been replenished with donations and investment growth since the end of July 2024, thanks in large part to a \$100,000 donation made in August 2024. The fund balance as of October 17, 2024 stood at \$1,015,154.

As more guests continue to return to Birken, onsite donations are also continuing to flow into the monastery. In addition to in-person cash and cheques, electronic and wire transfers also provide us with sustainable and reliable income. The majority of our monetary gifts come through the online donation website [CanadaHelps](#). At the end of this fiscal year, our monthly CanadaHelps donors totalled 212, with monthly and one time donations on this platform reaching \$148,604 for the year, up from \$138,723 last year. This important revenue stream alone represents nearly 50% of our total income.

DEBT/CAPITAL ASSETS

We completed the fiscal year with no long-term debt, a major accomplishment for any charity in this modern age.

As mentioned earlier in this report, just a few projects were completed in the past year. These included our kitchen renovation, fire remediation around the buildings and nearby grounds, and completion of the garden area surrounding the Vihara. Total assets, including cash and capital improvements, and taking into consideration the reduction in our Endowment Fund as well as depreciation of property, plant and equipment assets over the years, came to \$1,791,797, down from \$1,959,137 last year.

EXPENSES

Inflation still plays a part in our day-to-day expenses, as does the increase in overnight guests and day visitors to the monastery. Food and Household expenses continue to be one of our largest line item expense categories. This year those costs totalled \$77,559, which is actually down from \$84,647 last year.

The other major cost centre is Building Materials, Maintenance and Tools, which is the cost centre for our construction and fire remediation projects. By the end of July 2024, these constructions costs as well as landscaping expenditures, totalled \$140,309, up from \$120,716 in expenses the previous year.

Total expenses for 2023/2024 came to \$460,117, an increase of 19% over last year's total of \$386,478. Based on a 10-year average of our total expenses, we've calculated the average daily cost to keep the monastery running. Last year that amount was \$552 per day. This year the new amount comes to \$635 each and every day to cover our expenses (please see our [Support webpage](#) for details and to learn more about where your donations actually go.)

NET INCOME

Due to the major push to complete our final construction projects, our net income for the year fell into the negative range, totalling (\$171,200) vs \$226,159 last year. Now that our building projects are behind us, we anticipate returning again to the positive in terms of net income. Please see the attached financial statements for more information.

SUMMARY

As we've mentioned over the years, Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery continues to operate thanks solely to the generous and sustaining support of hundreds of benefactors from around the globe. Every donation, whether it's \$5 or \$500,000, contributes to the benefit of our resident monastics and stewards, as well as the entire Birken community to whom it is dedicated.

Even though our building projects are now completed, the need for donations to keep the monastery doors open has not waned. Day-to-day expenditures, further development of our virtual monastery, maintaining our existing buildings and off-grid energy systems require sustainable monetary support.

Our Endowment Fund allowed us to pay for necessary materials and services last fall to bring these projects to completion. We see this fund as a safeguard should future emergencies arise; however, that fund alone cannot support Birken's daily requisites of food, medicine, clothing, and housing. The monastery has only continued to operate these many years through the benevolence of extraordinary donations, those of \$5,000 or more. Without such sizable gifts, Birken will not survive. These large donations, as well as our lifeline of monthly gifts through CanadaHelps, 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.

That the Financial Statements as circulated and presented be accepted.

Moved by Thomas West, seconded by Naruemon Teneralli. Motion carried: 10 approval votes.

7. MOTIONS

- That David Roth Bookkeeping be reappointed our accounting firm for the next fiscal year.

Moved by Thomas West, seconded by Naruemon Teneralli. Motion carried: 10 approval votes.

- That the 2025 AGM be held at Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery on Sunday, October 26, 2025 at 3:00 PDT

Moved by Teresa Wixted, seconded by Brent Styra. Motion carried: 10 approval votes.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery/s 2024 AGM.

Moved by Naruemon Teneralli, seconded by Thomas West. Motion carried: 10 approval votes.



BIRKEN FOREST BUDDHIST MONASTERY ('Sītavana')

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

Resolved,

that we hereby authorize the lease of a 2025 Kia EV9 from Kamloops Kia for a five year (60 month) term for monthly payments of approximately \$330-\$350 per month; this cost represents the inclusive trade-in value of our 2019 Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV and \$5,000 federal EV rebate.

Date this 29th day of September, 2024

Thomas West (Ajahn Sona), President

Naruemon Teneralli (Sister Mon), Vice President

Teresa Wixted, Secretary/Treasurer

Brent Styra, Director at Large

Joseph Aiello, Director at Large

Leslie Hanrahan, Director at Large