Bright Way Zen

Board Meeting & Annual Retreat — Minutes

Meeting called to order: 10:31 a.m. Pacific (per Domyo's call to order, "May the 9th")

Duration (per transcript): approximately 5 hours 48 minutes, including a one-hour lunch break

Format: Zoom (recorded; AI Companion transcription enabled)

Location: Domyo Burk's personal Zoom meeting room

Attendees

- Domyo Burk — Guiding Teacher
- Guzan James Gregg, Chair
- Linda Brown, Treasurer
- Anjo Mark Wiliams
- Yoly Suarez — New board member (welcomed)
- Dan Forester — New board member (welcomed)

Missing

- Ellen Tea (could not attend due to health issues)
- Mick Stukes

Agenda Overview

The meeting combined a quarterly board meeting with the annual board retreat. The agenda included opening Zazen and check-ins, executive session, approval of prior minutes, old and new business, the property update and Memorandum of Understanding, the budget report, the attendance and membership report, committee reports, and — in the afternoon — a review of the strategic plan, a Rose/Thorn/Bud reflection exercise, and prioritization of initiatives for the coming year.

Morning Session

Opening Zazen and Check-Ins

The meeting opened with a brief period of Zazen, followed by a personal check-in around the room. Domyo welcomed Yoly and Dan as the newest board members and described the customary meeting format for their benefit. Check-ins touched on work stress, family, health, political concerns, and ongoing post-sesshin practice momentum. The tone was warm and personal.

Executive Session

An executive session was opened per standard practice so that any sensitive matters could be discussed off the public record. No items were raised; the session was closed immediately.

Approval of January Board Meeting Minutes

- **Motion:** Approve the minutes from the January 14 board meeting.
- **Outcome:** Approved.

Old and New Business

The only item carried over was the heat pump at the current rental building. The board had previously agreed to share the cost of a replacement heat pump head with the landlord (the older units are no longer manufactured). After weighing the awkwardness of the pending move, the board concluded that contributing was still wise — it preserves good will and makes the building more rentable if Bright Way Zen leaves.

- **Decision:** Bright Way Zen will contribute $1,500 toward the new heat pump head. The owners are not to be told yet about Bright Way's plan to move.
- **Status:** Payment has not yet been made; the installation is in progress.

Property Update and Memorandum of Understanding

Domyo provided a comprehensive update on the proposed purchase of the Oleson Road property. The current plan is for Domyo and her husband John to personally purchase the property (with the intent that Bright Way Zen will eventually buy it from them) so that the Sangha will have a long-term home.

- Purchase price: approximately $985,000 (a short sale; the existing $715,000 low-interest mortgage with PennyMac will be assumed by Domyo and John).
- The original offer was contingent on the conditional use permit being in hand; that contingency has been removed and the closing date target has been pushed to July 31.
- A second private lender is being negotiated with separately; the realtor is handling that conversation. Because this is a short sale, all debtors must sign off.
- Conditional use permitting is progressing well. Initial meeting with Washington County raised no major red flags; the proposed religious-institution use is allowed. There is no minimum parking requirement.
- The county requires a mailing to neighboring property owners (~93 addresses) and a neighborhood meeting; the target neighborhood meeting date is June 15 (Zoom).
- Once the conditional use application is complete, the county has 120 days to render a decision.
- Pat Evans (Bright Way Dharma brother, retired land-use professional) and a separate contact in Washington County Land Use have both expressed optimism that the permit will be granted.
- Stormwater/runoff requirements were raised as a future concern; the strategy is to make no physical changes initially so this requirement is not triggered.
- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU): Domyo and John's purchase is explicitly not for financial gain. The MOU on the website (which Yoly and Dan have not yet seen) commits to a 15-year lease back to Bright Way Zen on the path to eventual purchase by the Sangha. A real-estate lawyer (pro bono, via Jill Long) will draft the legally binding lease once the property is acquired.

Property Mailing — Action Items

- Linda will finalize the draft of the neighborhood-notice letter and deliver it to Dan and Domyo by tomorrow night.

- Dan will prep the mailing (envelopes, printing, postage). Envelopes are likely sufficient on hand.
- Sign at the property must be posted at least 20 calendar days before the neighborhood meeting. Jen confirms she can take it on.
- Board agreed to do neighbor door-knocking on a Saturday before the meeting to flush out concerns in advance. Cultivating the Scandinavian/Norwegian center across the street was identified as particularly worthwhile.

Budget Report

Linda presented the budget report. Overall finances are healthy: income is roughly $1,500 ahead of expectations and expenses are in line. The fall fundraiser will need to be larger than in past years, but the board agreed Bright Way is on track.

- Sesshin: actual income $12,420 vs. budgeted $18,000; expenses $11,340. Sesshin essentially netted to a wash (about a $1,000–$1,500 surplus), versus an expected ~$3,000 net.
- Electricity costs (under the new lease, paid by Bright Way) have come in higher than budgeted at ~$1,556; this will inform next year's budgeting and is not expected to improve over the summer.
- Contributions overall are up. Pledge structure (regular contributions vs. charitable foundation pledges) was reorganized for clarity in donor tax letters.
- **Action:** Domyo and Linda will issue a revised budget report (correcting the sesshin-income line back to approximately $14,000 and showing the expected $3,000 net) and email it to the board. No board motion was required.
- **Note:** Guzan requested a separate breakdown of sesshin food vs. facilities costs vs. prior years so the board can assess whether food spending was higher than necessary. Domyo will pull this from the Oral Hull contract since QuickBooks lumps the categories together.

Attendance and Membership Report

Domyo presented attendance and membership data, which surfaced a pattern worth attention. Total membership has grown steadily, but local (Dirt Zendo) attendance and membership have been essentially static since COVID, with cloud membership absorbing most of the growth.

- Cloud members: 66; Local members: 54. Cloud now exceeds local.
- Active participating members: ~105 (88% of the total).
- Average monthly pledge per donating member: ~$48.75 overall. Local average pledge is roughly double the cloud average (~$64 vs. ~$35).
- Average monthly pledge income: ~$5,849.83.
- Pre-COVID Sunday Dirt attendance was around 21 and Tuesday around 19; those numbers have not returned in three-plus years.

Discussion centered on visibility, signage, and the welcome experience as factors. The board acknowledged the rule of thumb that of every 10 first-time visitors, roughly one returns, and of every 10 of those, one stays long-term — making both better visibility and better retention important. The new property is expected to improve both physical visibility and the sense of "real-temple" legitimacy that several members admitted had been a barrier to their own initial impressions of Bright Way.

Visibility Committee Report (John Butler)

Guzan summarized John Butler's detailed report. The committee has been posting on YouTube, Facebook, and local outlets (about 1–2 posts per week), with limited engagement. John's primary recommendation is to pursue Google's Ad Grant program (up to $10,000/month in search-ad credits) by hiring Cause Inspired Media to handle qualification and management. Two service tiers were proposed: Essentials ($289/month) and a $489/month option.

- **Decision:** Defer the paid engagement until after the property purchase; budget cannot support it now. Idea logged for the future "possible activities" list.
- **Action:** Linda will follow up with John and the visibility committee on bandwidth and next steps, and will serve as board liaison to the Visibility Committee.
- **Action:** Intro to Zazen and CloudFormations YouTube videos remain unfilmed; moved to "possible for the future" rather than 2026 measurable goals.

Other Committee Reports

- **Sangha Care:** Leah and Soki are the active members. They met May 1; some success in matching isolated members. No major crises this period. Both will be out for retreats; activity will pick up after.
- **Bodhisattva Action Circle (formerly BUMP):** Now run by Jeff Prudhomme as a circle (not a committee). Trying to hold monthly meetings on the second Thursday. Hope to develop a local arm that organizes service projects and protest attendance under the Bright Way umbrella.
- **Sangha Buddies:** Jessica Ryan is currently a committee of one. She is updating the website page and surveying paired-up members on whether the program is valuable.
- Sangha committee proper: Effectively dissolved into Sangha Care, Sangha Buddies, intro workshops, and Discord. Domyo voiced a desire for the umbrella role to be revived (perhaps a twice-yearly check-in) so that the pieces are seen in the big picture. Jessica is revising the Sangha Buddies page on the site to help make it clearer for those who would want to be a mentor and those who like a mentor. She will reach out to the people who are currently paired up with a Sangha Buddy to find out if they are actively meeting and if they find it valuable. Getting input on the process and how it's going.

Lunch Recess

The board adjourned for one hour for lunch, agreeing on a three-hour afternoon block for the retreat exercises.

Afternoon Session — Annual Retreat

Strategic Plan Review

The board walked the 2024 strategic plan, goal by goal, updating status and noting items to move forward, table, or strike. Three overall goals were reviewed:

- Goal 1: Making the Three Treasures accessible to all (visibility, inviting offerings, reaching beyond white-centric circles).
- Goal 2: Deepening engagement with the Three Treasures (warm and inclusive Sangha, deepening practice, Bodhisattva vows beyond the walls).

- Goal 3: Ensuring the Sangha thrives long-term (financial sustainability and teacher support, physical Zen Center ownership by 2035, transmission of Soto Zen tradition, environmental resilience).

On Goal 3 / Strategy 2 (physical Zen Center ownership by 2035): the board agreed Bright Way is comfortably ahead of schedule given the property opportunity. On Goal 1 / Strategy 2, Domyo announced her intention to start a Zoom-based support group for practitioners with chronic illness and pain, in collaboration with Leah, with a leaderless peer-check-in format and a roster of hosts.

Board Liaison Assignments

The board reaffirmed the importance of board liaisons to committees, after observing that several liaisons had lapsed during board turnover.

- Visibility Committee — Linda B
- Sangha Care — Yoly
- Other liaison assignments to be confirmed when the new board configuration is settled.

Rose / Thorn / Bud Exercise

The board used a shared Lucid whiteboard (with some technical friction) to record what is going well (roses), what is challenging (thorns), and new ideas to elevate (buds). Common themes emerged on each axis.

Roses (what is working well):

- Strong path-of-practice offerings: Jukai, Zaike Tokudo, precept study, Song of Voices series, Sangha members' student talks.
- Cohesive Sangha and diverse perspectives voiced within it.
- Tangible momentum toward ownership of a permanent home; well-led capital effort to date.
- Cohort programs — book group, podcast discussion, Transatlantic group, Saturday peer check-ins, Sangha Buddies pairings.
- Strong sesshin program.

Thorns (challenges):

- Static membership and local attendance for five years; retention of new visitors is low.
- Small core of volunteers handling most of the work; limited bench for Sangha practice roles.
- Cloud-vs-dirt separation has not fully resolved despite ongoing effort; the new building will not automatically heal community challenges — deliberate care will be needed.
- Lapsed board liaison structure for several committees.
- Website is hard to navigate; needs an overhaul.
- Current physical space is not welcoming or accessible; this constrains daily Zazen, hospitality, and people with disabilities.

Buds (ideas to elevate):

- More guest teachers and Sangha-member talks on Sundays

- Special public-facing events (author talks, panels across traditions, lecture series by Sangha members on their expertise, Tai Chi / Qigong, etc.) to draw newcomers and feed social media.
- Daily morning Zazen at the (future) new space.
- Spanish-language Zen offering when the right host can be found.
- Recovery Dharma group hosted at Bright Way.
- Children's programming once the new space is open.
- Train-the-trainer workshop so multiple members can deliver intro-to-Zazen instruction.
- A new-member recognition ritual or semi-annual new-member tea, modeled on practices at other centers, to mark the threshold of joining.
- Active relationship-building with another Sangha (e.g., Heart of Wisdom teachers) to share space and Dharma.
- Community garden, rainwater collection, and environmentally focused activities at the new property.

Priorities and Action Items for the Coming Year

Drawing from the Rose/Thorn/Bud output, the board agreed that the current year's prioritization should be lean and realistic, recognizing that the property purchase, move, and conditional use process will absorb most of the available bandwidth.

- **Property and move:** Continue as the board's top priority. Complete the neighborhood mailing, hold the June 15 neighborhood meeting, and target a July 31 close.
- **Chronic illness/pain support group:** Domyo to launch with Leah; format is a Zoom-based, leaderless peer check-in with rotating hosts. Hokoji members welcome to volunteer as collaborators.
- **Guest-teacher and special-event programming:** James to spearhead with Domyo — schedule one to two notable guest events between now and the next retreat (author conversation, panel, or community-of-Oregon teacher exchange).
- **Morning Zazen experiment:** Soki to host in-person morning sittings in July and August on a trial basis, contingent on identifying co-hosts so the calendar commitment is reliable.
- **Intro-to-Zazen train-the-trainer:** Domyo to design and run a day-long workshop with Soki helping coordinate; record one canonical version for YouTube once ready.
- **Visitor sign-in / newsletter opt-in:** Yoly to develop a sign-in process (in-person and cloud equivalent) that captures email consent so first-time visitors can be added to the newsletter, with emails handed to Chris Macher.
- **Website improvement:** Linda has begun an analysis and will share with the board; consider a member survey on the website.
- **New-member recognition:** Explore a semi-annual welcome tea or simple initiation marker as a way to acknowledge people who have crossed the threshold of membership; bring back as an agenda item next meeting.
- **Board liaison structure:** Linda to Visibility; Yoly to Sangha Care; remaining assignments to be finalized in the next meeting.

- **Items deferred or moved to "possible for the future":** Google Ad Grant engagement with Cause Inspired Media; CloudFormations YouTube videos; Awakening to Whiteness re-launch; environmental/peace-and-justice formal committee structure.

Closing

Guzan moved to adjourn the board meeting and retreat. Domyo led the closing dedication of merit and closed the meeting.

Notes for the Record

- The Rose/Thorn/Bud whiteboard from Lucid is saved separately and can be reviewed for the full set of individual entries.
- The revised budget report will be circulated by email and is to be considered an attachment to these minutes.
- The Memorandum of Understanding between Domyo & John Burk and Bright Way Zen is posted on the Bright Way Zen website under board policies.
- Guzan will distill the Lucid output into a structured document for the board.