

Elders' Council – Mandate, Responsibilities, Composition, Process & Relationships to Other Councils

Elders' Council Mandate

- The Elders' Council is responsible for collectively holding knowledge and understanding of the customs, practice traditions and core Zen teachings that have been established at DRZC. This body of knowledge includes the Soto Zen lineage teachings and traditions presented by the temple's founders, Kyogen and Gyokuko Carlson, as well as customs, traditions and teachings that have evolved within, and are supported by, the larger DRZC Sangha. It is especially important that the Elders' Council provide stability and a thread of continuity during times of change in the temple, and serve as a conservative force if change seems to be happening too abruptly, too quickly, or if the changes are inconsistent with the vision of the temple's founders.
- The Elders' Council has the primary responsibility to assist and advise the Board in finding, recruiting and selecting candidates for a new position in the Abbacy.

Elders' Council Responsibilities

Elders' Council has Stewardship of the following areas:

Continuity and Stability of Vision

- Holding knowledge and understanding of the customs, practice traditions and core Zen teachings that have been established at DRZC within the collective memory of the Council members.
- Providing stability, a thread of continuity, and a conservative viewpoint on key organizational and issues of succession.

Assistance and Advice in Selecting a New Abbot

- Assisting and advising the Board in finding, recruiting and selecting candidates for a new position in the Abbacy after an Abbot has died, become incapacitated, retired or resigned. (Bylaws Northwest Zen Sangha, Section 7.2)

Elders' Council has Oversight in the following areas:

- Providing advisory input to other Councils and to Temple Officers when requested to do so.
- Providing unsolicited advisory input to other Councils and to Temple Officers when it is believed that a critical situation exists affecting the long-term viability and lineage integrity of the Sangha. This should first be done informally and privately, but if this does not resolve the issue the Council's position may be made a matter of public record.
- Monitoring the Board's adherence to its mission and to the Temple's long-term strategic plan.

Composition of Elders' Council [through 2007]

- The Council is currently composed of 10 members: 6 regular members, 2 alternate members and the 2 *ex officio* members, the Abbots. The Council has no set number of individuals.
- The Abbot(s) select candidates for Council membership, and the process may include discussions with the current Elders' Council members.
- Criteria for membership include a long-term involvement in and commitment to DRZC, a maturity of practice, and an understanding of DRZC's lineage traditions.
- Members of the Council are selected to reflect all components of the sangha and currently include an ordained monk, lay teachers, lay disciples, and other sangha members.
- Council members have no term limits *per se*, but the Elders' Council membership is renewed annually by the Abbot(s).

Composition of Elders' Council [beginning in 2008]

- The Elders' Council shall be composed of between 5 and 11 members.
- Criteria for Elders' Council membership shall include active membership in DRZC for at least 10 years, a long-term involvement in and commitment to DRZC events and activities, a maturity of practice, and an understanding of DRZC's lineage traditions.
- Once elected to the Elders' Council, a member may serve indefinitely. At an annual Council meeting each January, Elders' Council members will formally renew their commitment to serve on the Council for the coming year. The Council chairperson will report the Elders' Council membership for each year to the officers of the Board within one week of the January Elders' Council meeting. Members of the Council who are not actively participating in Council affairs may be requested to vacate their Council position by a consensus of the majority of the Elders' Council.
- The Elders' Council shall select new members to the Council as soon as practicable after a vacancy occurs.
- When nominating Elders' Council candidates, the existing Elder's Council will strive to maintain a Council membership that represents all components of the sangha, i.e., ordained monks, lay teachers, lay disciples, and other senior sangha members.

Elders' Council Process [through 2007]

- The Elders' Council has been developing an organizational process by which the Council would operate to meet its responsibilities. When the Elders' Council completes this process the Council will present its suggestions to the Board for approval.
- The Elders' Council does not meet on a regular basis. However, there has been an informal consensus among members that the Council should meet at least annually.
- The Council has no officers, only a coordinator whose responsibilities are to collate meeting notes, distribute communications, and arrange meeting dates and meeting places.

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Elders' Council Process [through 2007], continued

- To date the Council has reached decisions through the process of informal group discussion and majority voting.

Elders' Council Process [beginning in 2008]

- The Elders' Council shall hold scheduled, mandatory meetings twice each year, in January and in September. When a Temple situation arises that may require the timely involvement of the Elders' Council, any Council member may petition that the Elders' Council chairperson convene the Council. The chairperson will contact Council members and set a meeting time and place at his/her discretion.
 - The Elders' Council shall elect a chairperson who will arrange and chair meetings, distribute communications and represent the Elders' Council when coordinating with other councils and with Temple officers. The Elders' Council chairperson shall serve a two-year term with the option to renew with the Council's approval.
 - The Elders' Council will maintain ongoing, informal communications with the Temple Abbot. This may be accomplished by occasional, informal meetings between the Abbot and the entire Elders' Council, between the Abbot and a delegation representing the Council, and between the Abbot and the Council chairperson.
- If requested by the Board, the Elders' Council may present progress and activity reports to the Board or the Sangha.

Relationship of Elders' Council to Other Councils

- The Elders' Council is an advisory body available to other Councils and to Temple Officers.
- The Elders' Council serves as a resource and reference point for the Sangha, and its opinions are respected. Therefore, concerns, conflicts and impasses within both the Board of Directors and the Dharma Council are escalated to the Elders' Council. These escalations should be rare, and a formal escalation procedure will be developed that can be followed in these cases.
- In its oversight capacity, the Elders' Council, in rare situations, may find it necessary to "provide unsolicited advisory input to other Councils and to Temple Officers" (see above). The Elders' Council does not have direct power over any other Council or Temple Officer (except within established Escalation procedures), but has the option to make its position public (known to the Sangha), and thereby use its influence indirectly.

Possible Guidelines for Finding and Selecting Candidates for the Abbacy

- If the Abbots position were to become vacant without a Board-authorized successor because the previous Abbot suddenly died, became incapacitated, resigned, or otherwise suddenly left the abbacy without a successor, then the Elders' Council would immediately meet to plan a course of action to assist and advise the Board in the finding, recruiting and selecting of candidates for the vacant Abbacy. This course of action would be finalized when it becomes necessary to do so and it may include the following guideline suggestions.

- The Elders' Council would assist the Board in contacting and consulting with possible outside advisors about the Abbot selection process as necessary. Outside advisors may include other American Zen abbots familiar with our Temple and previous Abbots, members of American Zen Teachers Association and the Soto Zen Buddhists Association of North America who are familiar with our Temple's style of practice.
- The Elders' Council would assist the Board prepare a "Notice of Available Position" that would be distributed within the American Zen communities. The Notice would include the following:
 - A description of the Abbot's role including duties and responsibilities
 - The Temple's compensation statement including the proposed range of salary and description of non-monetary compensations
 - A description of the Temple's candidate selection process including (1) the procedures for candidates' review, evaluation and hiring; (2) a listing of the Board's evaluation and selection personnel including any outside advisors; and (3) communication procedures for potential candidates during the evaluation process.
 - A list of candidate evaluation criteria that will be followed during the selection process.
 - A candidate selection timeline that could include milestone dates for (1) the formal advertising of the vacancy, (2) submittal of applications or statement of interests, (3) review of applications, (4) interviews, (5) internal evaluation period, (6) candidate notification and negotiation, and (7) formal announcement.
- The Elder's Council would initiate and oversee the preparation of an information packet that would be distributed by the Board to all serious potential candidates. This package would include items such as: (1) The Elders' Council Statement of Lineage Tradition and Temple Culture; (2) a history of DRZC; (3) a description of membership composition and physical assets; (4) the Temple Organization model with a description of the duties of temple officers and councils, (5) the latest approved annual financial statement, and (6) other information items as appropriate.
- While the Abbacy is vacant, the Elders' Council would function administratively in the role of interim Abbot for the Temple.
- The Elders' Council would assist the Board with communications and presentations to the general sangha, informing the sangha of the candidate selection process and of any decisions reached during the Board evaluation. The Council would also assist the Board with communications to the American Zen community in general, the Portland Buddhist community, and the local public at large.