

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

The Dharma Council assists and advises the Abbot and Godo in determining matters of liturgy and teaching, and giving direction to the membership on these matters. It pays attention to strategic planning for the future function and evolution of the temple, in cooperation with the Board of Directors. The Dharma Council pays particular attention to the Teaching (Red and Blue) side of the temple, and to the training of people who could be qualified to serve as temple officers in the future.

Dharma Council Mandate

- The Dharma Council works with the Abbot and Godo to ensure that the temple fulfills its Primary and Secondary Purposes, as defined in the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, to the best of its ability.
- The Dharma Council assists and advises the Abbot in determining matters of liturgy and teaching, and giving direction to the membership on these matters.
- The Godo facilitates the Dharma Council.

Dharma Council Responsibilities

Dharma Council has **Stewardship** of the following areas:

(**Stewardship** is defined as *caring for, monitoring, and cultivating*)

Vision

- Fulfillment of mission statement (as defined in the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws).
- Strategic planning for future function and evolution of the temple, in cooperation with the Board of Directors. Dharma Council pays particular attention to the Teaching (Red and Blue) side of the temple, and to the training of people who could be qualified to serve as temple officers, teachers and sangha leaders in the future;

Presentation of the Dharma

- Content, tone and presentation of Dharma as manifested at DRZC, in Associated Groups and by Associated Teachers;
- Adaptation of content, tone and presentation of Dharma as needed to address emerging needs of the Sangha and greater community; for instance, using skillful means to adapt Dharma vocabulary as appropriate for children and other religious groups;
- Compatibility of temple programs with the Soto Zen tradition;
- Coordination of the Dharma aspects manifested in programs, roles and functions, throughout DRZC, in Associate Groups and by Associated Teachers;
- Maintenance of the Dharma Calendar.
- Track and preserve the written, audio, and video archives of the Temple's Dharma teachings (i.e. *Zen Roots*, Blue Book [*Training at the Zen Center*], Chant Book, *Ethics and Precepts in Sangha Relationships*, *Six Realms*, etc.). Examine, change, and share information and decision-making with the Elders Council.

Teacher Training and Responsibilities

- Training and qualifications of instructors, sitting group facilitators, workshop leaders, and team leaders in the Sangha and in Associated Groups. The Dharma Council establishes criteria used to evaluate candidates for these roles. Specific criteria are necessary but not sufficient. The Leadership Development Team gives information and advice to the Dharma Council about who is qualified to teach at what level. This information is held in confidence. Authority to instruct in various roles follows Dharma Council approval or delegation of approval to appropriate team leaders.
- Assignment of Dharma Teaching responsibilities, including coordination of workshops, introductory retreats, Dharma talks and classes, and team leadership roles.
- Dharma Council may take remedial action, including suspension of instructional responsibility, depending on circumstances and after consultation with other Councils as appropriate. In a case of such concern, the person(s) involved will be invited to present their point of view to the Dharma Council. They will receive a decision in writing, and the Board of Directors will be notified. Appeals can be made to one or more Councils.

Public Dharma Relations

- Care and maintenance of DRZC's public image;
- Official relationships to Associated Groups and Teachers;

Internal Communication

- The membership of the sangha is apprised of the date and agenda of upcoming Dharma Council meetings via multiple communication pathways. Members are invited to bring concerns and items for consideration to the agenda. Meetings are open to the membership except during discussions of personnel issues.
- Regular communication with the Sangha regarding mission and vision, strategic planning, policies, and the status of associated teachers and groups. Such communication should include a summary of business and decisions, new policies, the posting of agendas and meeting times, calendar planning, and the opportunity at each Dharma Council meeting for members to present concerns or participate in discussions.
- Such communication may be delegated to a member serving to facilitate council communications with the sangha.

Dharma Council has **Oversight** in the following areas:

- Major changes to Mandala Model (changes also require approval from the Board of Directors)
- Red and Blue Buddha Family decisions where 1) policy is being made, 2) precedents are being set
- Decisions in any Buddha Family that raise concerns in one of the Dharma Council's areas of Stewardship
- Compatibility of the content, tone and presentation of groups or individuals renting or using DRZC's facilities with Soto Zen and with DRZC's public image

Composition of Dharma Council

- 7-9 members; the Abbot may also join the Council. Four positions are appointed by the Abbot: Godo, Tanto, a monastic disciple and a lay disciple. Five positions are elected, and candidates for those positions are selected by a Nominating Committee appointed by the Mandala Council, in consultation with the current Dharma Council.
- Dharma Council members must have practiced at DRZC for at least 7 years.
- Each year in late summer or early fall, the Dharma Council will poll its members to see whether any are planning to step down, and shares numbers and demographics of candidates needed with the Mandala Council. As vacancies arise in elected positions, the Mandala Council will inquire of the DRZC Disciples, via multiple communication pathways, whether any have interest in serving, and/or approach individual Disciples asking them to serve. Nominees may be suggested by any Sangha member (including her or himself) or the Dharma Council; nominees are then subject to election by DRZC Disciples. The Mandala Council verifies the eligibility of candidates.
- Elections: From name(s) submitted, the Dharma Council will draw up a slate of nominees to the elected positions to present to the Disciples to approve or disapprove by line-item vote (yes or no vote required for each candidate). Elections are held before the end of the year, through an electronic election or survey service. Elected candidates must receive a majority of the total votes cast to be approved. If any candidate is rejected, then a new slate will be submitted for a vote. Unanticipated vacancies will be filled by Dharma Council appointment until the next election, and may not include candidates who failed to receive majority approval.
- Members are elected by DRZC Disciples, rather than the general membership, 1) to ensure that those voting are very familiar with candidates, and 2) to ensure that those voting are very familiar with and committed to the Dharma as held in this lineage.
- Dharma Council members are asked to serve a minimum of two years and are expected to attend at least 80% of the scheduled meetings. There are no term limits.
- Composition of the Dharma Council is subject to annual review by the Board of Directors and the Elders' Council. If both the Board and the Elders' Council agree, a Dharma Council member can be asked to end his/her term.
- If possible within the confines of the eligible pool of candidates, one person would ideally hold no more than one voting membership position in the following three Councils: the Board of Directors, the Dharma Council, and the Mandala Council. Members of any of the White Family Councils must be recused if a conflict of interest arises during an Escalation Process due to membership on more than one Council.

Dharma Council Process

- A quorum is at least 50% of members.
- The Godo and Abbot have authority to reverse decisions (after review and consultation). If a disagreement persists, a majority of the remaining Dharma Council (not including the Godo and Abbot) can vote to escalate the disagreement to the Elders' Council or the Board of Directors, depending on the issue.
- The Dharma Council operates by Consensus Process.
- Certain exceptions to Consensus are possible, including:

- a. Standing Aside, where one or more members is recorded as abstaining or as casting a dissenting vote, but accepts the majority decision (and may explain their position to the larger membership)
- b. Blocking, where one or more member has such grave concern about a decision that they refuse to accept consensus and discussion continues
- c. Escalation, where a majority of the Dharma Council can vote to escalate the disagreement to the Elders' Council and the Board of Directors

Relationship of Dharma Council to Other Councils

- The Dharma Council escalates concerns to the Elders' Council or the Board of Directors, depending on the issue. **The Elders' Council addresses Dharma issues. The Board of Directors addresses operations-type issues.**
- Except in legal and financial matters, the Dharma Council functions at the same hierarchical level as the Board. **The Dharma Council is concerned with policy regarding individuals and departments. The Dharma Council recognizes the Mandala Council's authority to manage the working life of the temple.** The Board and the Dharma Council will need to be mindful of each other's areas of stewardship, respectful of each other's areas of oversight, and attentive to situations in which consultation and cooperation would be helpful.
- Although the Dharma Council oversees the Red and Blue families and the Board oversees the Yellow and Green families, family "boundaries" do not apply when the Board or Dharma Council are addressing concerns within their own areas of Stewardship or Oversight.
- The Mandala Council may escalate concerns to the Dharma Council (or the Board, depending on the concern).