

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

Elders Council Mandate

- The Elders Council collectively holds the knowledge and understanding of the customs, practice traditions and core Zen teachings that have been established at Dharma Rain Zen Center (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 teaching approaches that have evolved within, and are supported by, the larger DRZC sangha. It is especially important that the Council provide stability and a thread of continuity during times of change within the temple, and serve as a conserving force if the Council assesses change as occurring too abruptly or too quickly, or if the changes appear to be inconsistent with the vision of the temple's founders. The Council may also serve the temple in times of rigidity as a source of adaptability, emphasizing the creativity and ingenuity of the temple's founders.
- The Council has the primary responsibility to assist and advise the Board of Directors (Board) in finding, recruiting and selecting candidates to fill a vacancy in the abbacy.

Elders Council Responsibilities

1. Stewardship – The Council has stewardship of the following areas:

A. 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 traditional, long-term viewpoint on key issues of organization, function, and succession.

B. Assistance and Advice in Selecting a New Abbot

- Assisting and advising the Board in finding, recruiting, and selecting candidates to fill a vacancy in the abbacy after an abbot has died, become incapacitated, retired or resigned. (Bylaws Northwest Zen Sangha, Section 7.2)

2. Oversight – The Council has oversight in the following areas:

- Providing advisory input to other DRZC councils and to temple officers when requested to do so.
- Providing unsolicited advisory input to other DRZC councils and to temple officers when the Elders Council believes a critical situation, trend, or context change has developed that may affect the long-term viability, core traditions, or lineage integrity of the sangha. This unsolicited advisory input would first be offered informally and privately, but, if this first effort cannot resolve the issue, than the Council's position may be made a matter of public record.
- Monitoring the Board's and Dharma Council's adherence to DRZC's mission and to the temple's long-term strategic plan.

Composition of Elders Council

- The Council shall be composed of between 7 and 11 members.
- Criteria for 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.
- The temple's abbot(s) is/are not eligible for Council membership.
- Once elected to the Council, a member may serve indefinitely. At the annual Council meeting each January, Council members will formally renew their commitment to serve on the Council for the coming year. The Council chairperson will report the Council's membership for each year to the officers of the Board within one week of the January 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 Council.
- If Council membership falls below 7 members, the Council shall select new members to the Council as soon as practicable after a vacancy occurs. Additional Council members up to 11 total members may be added at any time at the Council's discretion.
- When nominating Council candidates, the existing 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.
- In the case of a vacant abbacy, any member of the Elders Council who is actively being considered as a possible candidate for the position of new abbot would be excused from the process of finding, recruiting, and selecting candidates to fill the vacancy.

Elders' Council Process

- The Council shall hold scheduled, mandatory meetings once each year, in January. When a temple situation arises that may require the timely involvement of the Council, any Council member may petition the

Council chairperson to convene the Council. The chairperson will contact Council members and set a meeting time and place at his/her discretion.

- The Council shall elect a chairperson who will arrange and chair meetings, distribute communications and represent the Council when coordinating with other DRZC councils and with temple officers. The Council chairperson shall serve a two-year term with the option to renew with the Council's approval.
- The Council will maintain ongoing, informal communications with the temple Abbot. This may be accomplished by occasional, informal meetings between the Abbot and the entire Council, between the Abbot and a delegation representing the Council, and between the Abbot and the Council chairperson.
- If requested by the Board, the Council may present progress and activity reports to the Board or the sangha.

Relationship of Elders Council to Other Councils

- The Council is an advisory body that is available to other DRZC councils and to temple officers.
- The 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 and the Dharma Council are escalated to the Council.
- In its oversight capacity, the Council, in rare situations, may find it necessary to "provide unsolicited advisory input to other councils and to temple officers" (see above). The Council does not have direct authority over any other council or temple officer (except within established escalation procedures), but the Council has the option to make its position public (known to the sangha), and thereby use its influence indirectly.

Appendix

A. Guidelines for Finding and Selecting Candidates for the Abbacy

If the Abbot's 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.

1. The 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.

2. The Council would assist the Board to 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.

3. The 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.

4. While the abbacy is vacant, the Council would meet and work jointly with the Board and other temple councils to ensure that the temple operations continue to operate normally. During these times of change and uncertainty, the Council would maintain its oversight responsibilities to ensure the stability of the temple’s culture and the processes that maintain it.

5. The 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.