

Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association Chicago Chapter Submitted to Sangha in 2014 – Plan for the Purchase of a Permanent Center

I. Reasons for Buying a Permanent Center for DDMBA-Chicago

Our key reason for wanting to purchase a permanent center in the Chicagoland area is not just because of lack of space or facility at our current location – such issues are certainly real but we can solve them just as well by renting a larger place.

Instead, the most important reason for our desire to have a permanent center here is because of **our vows to spread Dharma and Chan Buddhism in the Midwest region in America, to both Chinese and Westerner populations**. And to do so, we must make sure DDMBA-Chicago is here to stay for the long haul, while providing conducive environment and facility to realize our vision:

DDM overall vision: “To Uplift the Character of Humanity, and To Build a Pureland on Earth”

DDMBA-Chicago Chapter-level vision (2012): “Within the next 5 years, Chicago Chapter will be a vibrant and sustainable community by encouraging spiritual growth and promoting happiness”

Chicago is uniquely different from the East and West coasts in the following ways:

- We do not have as large of a Chinese population as the coasts. Some see this as our disadvantage – we actually see it as our **advantage!** Because this situation forces us to go out and build a community with people of all ethnicities and of all languages. We have been offering regular English programs for many years now (Chan Workshop, English chanting). We have had English-speakers on our leadership team for many years also, including a Caucasian American as our last President. We are bilingual even when communicating amongst many of our Chinese members. We believe our Shifu, Master Sheng Yen, did not come to the USA only to deliver overseas Chinese – he came here to bring benefits of the Dharma to Westerners and English-speakers also. Chicago is truly a melting pot of a diversity of people – an ideal place to realize Shifu’s vows.
- Out of all Midwest cities, Chicago is widely recognized as the most metropolitan and well-developed city. In fact, Chicago is the third largest city in the United States – only New York City and Los Angeles City are more populous than Chicago. We are also at the crossroad of America – a transportation hub. We have a diversity of businesses and industries here – we have technology companies like on the West Coast and financial institutions like on the East Coast, but we also have many other types of businesses here. In addition, we have world class academic and research institutions here, such as: University of Chicago, Northwestern University, Argonne National Laboratory, etc. –

ideal channels for spreading Dharma benefits to young adults & students. A strong DDMBA foothold in the Chicagoland will touch many circles of people, bringing benefits to them and in turn spreading Dharma further through their diverse circles.

- There are definitely interests in Buddhism in this region, as evidenced by the number of Buddhist temples and centers here from all denominations, and a Buddhist Council of the Midwest organization. In terms of Chinese Buddhism: Fo Kuang Shan purchased a place about 40 miles southwest of Chicago some years ago; Tzu Chi purchased a place about 33 miles west of Chicago 5-6 years ago; Pure Land School is also active at a location close to Tzu Chi; and Avatamsaka Vihara is located on the southwest side also. In addition, there are many Buddhist temples and centers in the Vietnamese, Thai, Japanese, and Tibetan traditions, as well as some non-orthodox centers, here in the Chicago area. DDMBA-Chicago's current rental place is located ~39 miles northwest of Chicago – we are the only Chinese Buddhist organization on the north or northwest side of Chicago, and we have been at this rental place for over 10 years now.

Can we accomplish Shifu's vows by continuing to rent instead of purchase? We believe by having our own place, a place that all our members can identify as their "Dharma home", is important for our mission, because:

- We will feel a stronger sense of belonging and commitment
- With a rental place, we are subject to the uncertainty of whether next year the landlord will still want to continue our lease or not, and we also face rental fee increases
- With a rental place, we do not own the place and thus there is a limit to how much we can physically re-design the space to best fit our needs and we also would not wish to spend a lot of money doing so
- In purchasing and owning a place, a lot of manpower would be needed, which means we must build up a more substantial and sustainable community through better programming, better promotion, and better organization, as well as strengthen our volunteer recruitment and training. And all these, in turn, mean we will be able to benefit more people – as Shifu would have wanted. It will also send a clear message internally and externally that we are committed to setting down our root, to be here in the long haul
- In addition, only by owning our own property will we be qualified to eventually apply for a DDM Venerable to reside here, which will allow us to provide more regular Dharma activities and better support for our members' needs, building a stronger foothold here, and attracting a stronger following. We understand that just by purchasing a place does not guarantee that we will be assigned a Venerable in the short run, but it is a mandatory and crucial step to prepare us to work towards that goal
- **Only with great vows will great actions be taken!**

Throughout our New Home effort, we will keep the following teachings from Shifu close to heart:

- **“Benefit people with Buddha Dharma first, before asking them to protect the Dharma (support us)”**
- **“While we should not constantly dream about wanting to own a center, we should, however, make preparation for it”**

In preparation for Chicago’s New Home planning, we have spoken with leaders from the DDMBA Los Angeles, San Francisco, New Jersey and Ontario Chapters, to ask for their advice and learn from the experience they gained during their journey towards purchasing their centers in recent years. This plan has incorporated some of those lessons. As we execute our New Home purchase plan in the next few years, we will keep in touch with these other Chapters and continue to learn from them.

II. Shortcomings of Our Current Rental Place – As Reference For New Center’s Requirements

As we look at choices for a permanent center, it is helpful to see what are our current rental place’s shortcomings compared with our current & future needs:

(1) Lack of Adequate Space and Facilities

For regular activities, we currently have adequate space. However, at our recent experience of Guo Gu’s 5-day meditation retreat as well as Guo Fang Fa Shi and Guo Ming Fa Shi’s 1-day Chanting Chan, we were extremely cramped and had to turn people away because of lack of space. During Chan retreats, in addition to sitting meditation, we also do 8-Chan Movement, Yoga, and Fast Walking, all of which require adequate space for participants. Thus, our current Chan Hall limits us to at most about 20-25 retreat participants before it becomes too tight - bumping into each other or not allowing us to do any fast walking, etc.

In addition, our Center only has 2 bathrooms (one male, one female), no showers, and no real cooking allowed. This presents a problem especially with multi-day retreats, both for during the day-time, and also for those who opt to stay overnight to enhance their practice. And food must be cooked at home and brought in, rather than being able to be prepared on-site.

The lack of facilities to accommodate more overnight practitioners has also been a hindrance to out-of-town attendees who may not have enough financial means to stay in hotels – we usually only accept regular local practitioners to stay overnight at the Center (sleeping on the floor) due to lack of facilities while the other participants have to pay for a hotel room nearby.

Living quarters for visiting teachers (and eventually for resident Venerables) are also unavailable right now.

(2) Not a Multi-functional apace

Our current center is not divided in a way that is conducive to holding more than one event at the same time – such as one Chinese group and one English group. It is also difficult to provide child-care services without disrupting practitioners in the Chan Hall – ability to offer child-care not only helps parents to attend our practice more often, but also allows us to teach children Buddha Dharma while caring for them. Also, our library and office/reception shares one small space – it’s hard for someone who wants to quietly read books to do so in this space.

(3) Location is Not Convenient by Public Transits

We have lost potential members from Chicago city who expressed interest in what we offer but cannot make their way out to our suburban location because it is difficult to reach us via public transportation. There are also members who don’t have a car, or who don’t drive, or who are not confident in driving at night, and thus they need to rely on others to give them a ride which limit the number of events they can attend.

Although there is one suburban train station at about 20-25 minutes’ walk away, there is missing side walk that makes it dangerous to walk from there to our center, and the trains don’t run very frequently, plus Chicago’s winter can be brutal for someone to walk that far.

It would be ideal if we are located closer to Chicago city. There are suburbs that are more convenient to the Chicago population while still not too far from many of our current members. Being close to Chicago city means closer to a much larger population, as well as closer to young adults from colleges.

III. Wish List For Our New Center

	Ideal Space	Additional Notes about the Ideal Space	Current Space
The Whole Center	8,000 – 10,000 sq. ft. (internal space) Additional outdoor space also desired (see below)		~2,000 sq. ft. (internal space)
Chan Hall	50-60 seated meditation, or 120 chairs		20-25 seated meditation, or 60 chairs (800 sq. ft.)

Meeting Room/ Classroom	30-40 people	Separate room with its own door. At least one such room; two even better. <i>Could be used to hold parallel events with the Chan Hall, and/or act as babysitting room.</i>	<i>No separate room – book study held in open area, can seat at most 20 (including adding chairs along the walkway)</i>
Library	20-30 people	Separate room with its own door preferred	<i>5 people would fit tightly, shared with office/reception</i>
Office / Reception	5-10 people		<i>Shared with library</i>
Kitchen	Full kitchen – able to prepare meals for 50 people		<i>Cooking not strictly allowed. We have a microwave, a toaster oven, a fridge and a sink</i>
Sleeping Quarters	2 rooms for Venerables	If there are additional sleeping quarters for 40-50 retreatants, that would be ideal, but we know this would be challenging to find	<i>None – at retreats, overnights on Chan Hall & reception floors, or nearby hotels, or go back home</i>
Storage Space	At least double our current storage units' combined size		<i>2 small units right now</i>
Parking Lot	At least 50 dedicated parking spots for our Center		<i>~30 spots but we have to share with other building tenants</i>
Bathrooms	At least 3-5 stalls for each gender (maybe more stalls for female), with shower facilities		<i>2 (one male, one female)</i>
Outdoor Space	A grassy space (as part of our center, or very nearby) would be a bonus	For outdoor walking meditation	<i>We go across the main road to a nature preserve area for outdoor walking meditation</i>

Location	Quiet but convenient to public transportation, including for those coming from Chicago city, while not making it too far to travel for our current regular members. Not too close to other Buddhist centers	In Chicago area, unless you are right next to China Town, there are no communities with significant concentration of Chinese population. Thus, no need to constrain ourselves to only locations that are close to Chinese population – it just needs to be convenient to get to.	<i>Not convenient to public transportation. Must drive here or be driven here, unless someone would brave the unsafe 25-minute walk from the nearest train station. Quite far from Chicago city (40-50 min drive on a good traffic day; longer on bad traffic days).</i>
Budget	Target: \$1,500,000 (hopefully enough to also pay for any repairs and reconstruction)	Ideally, we can fund-raise full amount and pay in full upfront – this will mean no mortgage payments needed over time. However, if we cannot fund-raise the full amount prior to purchase, then we will supplement donations with loans from individual members that we will pay back over time.	<i>\$1,975 per month (triple net rent, includes property tax and maintenance fees but excludes utility, phone, etc.)</i>

Purchasing an existing religious building would be ideal if it also meets the above requirements, as it would alleviate re-zoning issues.