

Community Meeting Minutes

September 21, 2025

Present

Gakyil members (online) Katya Schmookler, Marsha Ellison, Ellen Halbert and (in person) Jerry Miller

Community members (in person) Dominik Niceva, Helena Bankovic, David Hayes, Vern Harrington, Naomi Zeitz, and (online) Al Daggett, Robert Kragen, Martha Tack, Larry Howe, Carisa O'Kelly, Mark Alton-Follansbee, John La France, Cindy Thibeau, Kyu Kyuno.

Guru Yoga

Agenda:

Yellow report: (the full report was provided to all members before the meeting)

1. New to Yellow Gakyil, Jerry discussed his view of the job, need for more help and for additional members on all colors, need for an overall plan for the gar, and his desire to increase transparency.
2. In terms of budget we are sustaining ourselves barely, despite having great value on paper due to our real estate holdings (approximately \$1.5 million value). 87% of budget is for maintenance and 3% for programming (teachings).
3. Primary goal is to apply for grant money to restore schoolhouse, including renovating dorm, gonpa, kitchen; clearing out basement and office, upgrading security. Volunteers are needed to help write grant applications.
4. Fundraising for individual projects will be considered as needed.

Red Report: (the full report was provided to all members before the meeting)

1. Since the June Community Meeting only rotted gonpa doors have been addressed, due to lack of funds and focus on summer retreats. The most rotted door has been removed and replaced with wall. Remaining two doors have the same rot issue and need to be replaced with new doors soon to prevent spread of rot to floor.
2. Second floor fire escape door was mentioned by a member as in urgent need of replacement, and has been noted in previous reports. Difficulty in sourcing the appropriate replacement and lack of funds have delayed this, but it is a priority. New doors and installation cost is estimated at \$3,000-\$3500 each.
3. Volunteers are urgently needed to help clean retreat cabins for new renters on a rotating basis. One member volunteered in the meeting. Additional help will be solicited by email.

4. Tech support help is also urgently needed to support both in person and online programming, as we have lost key helpers. Volunteers will be solicited by email.
5. A previous member has agreed to stay at the schoolhouse from mid November through April, for security reasons, and to maintain building cleanliness, prepare for renters and do laundry. He will renew membership at the reduced rate.

Blue Report: (the full report was provided to all members before the meeting)

1. Money to hire a programming coordinator would be ideal, due to the time constraints and challenges of putting on programs. Marsha is ending her tenure and passing the reins, as well as the knowledge she has gained in this area while serving the past 3 years, to Katya.
2. Friends of Blue, the local Vajra Dance and Yantra Yoga instructors, and local community helpers were acknowledged and thanked for their crucial roles in programming success.
3. Importance of the online component in programs was highlighted as helping increase enrollment and making programs successful financially. This component was crucial in 2 of the 3 summer programs. The 3 summer events were successful despite many unforeseeable setbacks and changes.
4. Need for, and challenges to, creating programming for the North and South American time zones was highlighted, since most senior teachers are in Europe.
5. We need to be more open and welcoming of new people, to counter the perception that we are a closed group.

Acknowledgement of retiring and new gakyil members:

1. Thanks were expressed for the service of Al Daggett on yellow (6 years) and Marsha Ellison on blue (3 years) and their contributions were highlighted.
2. The experience and skills of new members Jerry (yellow) and Katya (blue) were highlighted and their willingness to serve was welcomed.

Suggestions from members:

1. Apply for a bank loan to finance projects and absorb debt rather than deplete reserves. Loans can be paid off long term.
2. Invest in a new gonpa on Khandroling rather than put money into the very old schoolhouse, and rent or sell the schoolhouse. Difficult winter accessibility for Khandroling was mentioned.
3. Explore possibility of grants for Shang Shung to improve schoolhouse, or combine Shang Shung and TE in grant applications.
4. Organize more events to bring in money rather than focusing on fundraising for maintenance projects.
5. Learn from other gars how they raise money, and start planning programs and soliciting teachers early (6 months to 1 year ahead)

6. Collaborate with and involve Dr Phuntsog more in programs, since she has wide range of knowledge and large online presence.