

2014

COMMUNITY UPDATE



PRACTICING
TOGETHER
IN THE FOOTSTEPS
OF THE BUDDHA

MISSION STATEMENT

Common Ground is a community meditation center dedicated to the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the practice of being present with the moment and learning to be at ease with the unfolding conditions of life. With practice, mindfulness reveals deep wisdom, compassion, and freedom. Common Ground is an independent center founded on the teachings of the Buddha. The Center follows in the spirit of Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts and Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Woodacre, California and is part of the greater insight meditation, or vipassana, community in the West. Common Ground welcomes skillful means from all Buddhist traditions, as well as other spiritual traditions dedicated to wisdom and compassion.

Opportunities for Wholehearted Community Based Practice

There has been a slow, steady growth in the number of people showing up for the morning open sitting practice. We are grateful to all of our morning practice leaders.

Besides the open sitting practice and many ongoing study programs at the Center, we continue to offer regular meditation retreats of different lengths. There are monthly half-day and daylong retreats, as well as four residential retreats each year and the non-residential, four-day year-end retreat. The residential retreats almost always have more people interested than spaces available, so spots in the retreat and the waiting list are determined by lottery. Check the Center's weekly email list to learn when registration is opening and be sure to register before the lottery is held.

There are also two Community Practice Intensives scheduled each year in June and December, and this past June, 50 people participated in the 17-day intensive. In addition, about 30 people participated in our second annual Experienced Practitioner's Retreat at the end of March. During the last few years, Shelly Graf and Gabe Keller have also offered a quarterly retreat for young adults.

Teachers

As a Buddhist practice community, we have had the good fortune to have many wise teachers with different backgrounds and life experiences offering the teachings. See the Common Ground website for information about our ongoing and visiting teachers. If you are not already receiving our weekly emails, contact the Center.

We are particularly grateful this year for the teachers of our children's programs, who have helped this become a regular offering. They provide valuable experiences to children of all ages that allow them to connect with the practices of mindfulness and kindness in ways that make sense in their lives. Without them, many families with children would find it harder to participate.

These teachers are Shelly Graf for the Teen Group; Erica Schultz and Ha Vo for the Preteen Group; and Francie Haerberli for the Young Children's Group.

Accessibility and Safety

Leaders at the Center are committed to developing deeper sensitivity to issues of cultural difference and emotional safety. Our goal is to learn how to do a better job providing programs that are welcoming to people from different backgrounds and where people feel safe doing the deep and liberating work of this path of awakening. The Inclusivity Circle, now in its third year, meets monthly to examine a variety of personal and systemic experiences of inclusivity and exclusivity. There is also an Unraveling Privilege community group looking more specifically at the limitations and harm that can be perpetuated from unrecognized experiences of privilege. Several community groups have formed to support the dharma practice of people who might appreciate the increased

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LETTER FROM GUIDING TEACHER

Once a year the Board of Directors and other leaders at Common Ground Meditation Center create this community update to inform the wider community about important events and developments at the Center. As many of you already know, Common Ground took a big step last year with the purchase of a small farm that will be developed into a retreat center for the community. Other activities at the Center continue to evolve as we adapt to serve the practice needs of our changing community, some of which we outline in this update. Please contact the Center if you have any questions.

*Peace,
Mark Nunberg*

SUPPORTING THE TWIN CITIES MINDFULNESS MEDITATION
COMMUNITY SINCE 1993

support and community found in a group with others of similar backgrounds. Common Ground is committed to learning how to become an inclusive community practice home for all those interested in waking up.

Community Engagement

Several community leaders are facilitating ongoing conversations at the Center. Nicole Taras and Tyler Frank have committed to keeping a conversation around “Humans, Animals, and Non-Harming” happening at least once a year. Mimi Jennings and Kaia Svien have been supporting the ongoing conversation and reflection on how best to use our practice to relate wisely to global climate change.

The Center also continues its practice of quarterly community reflection and recitations of the traditional Buddhist Refuges and Precepts near the solstices and equinoxes. This recitation coincides with a community potluck, followed by a quarterly work day.

The Festival of Giving continues with a new name, The **Fourth Annual Common Ground Music Festival: A Day of Community Appreciation**. This is a community highlight, not only for those who practice at the Center, but also for anyone interested in good music and food and in helping support the good work of the non-profit organizations selected this year. This year’s event is **Saturday, September 13, 11-3 p.m.** Everyone is welcome.

Common Ground’s Office Staff

Because of the community’s generous financial support, we are fortunate to have three paid staff members. Mark Nunberg works full time as Guiding Teacher and Executive Director. He is assisted by Shelly Graf, who works twenty hours per week as Office Manager, coordinating programs and communication, and Gail Iverson, who works eight hours a week as Bookkeeper. Shelly and Gail are also regular teachers at the Center. The paid staff is supported by dozens of committed volunteers. Without their skills and good efforts, this Center could not continue.

Common Ground Community Groups

These small, peer-led groups meet at the Center, as well as in homes and other community venues, to explore the path of awakening in terms of issues that are real in people’s lives. These groups support practice, study, and the deepening of supportive friendships with others. See the Community Groups page on the website for information. Experienced community members can explore starting a new community group by contacting Mark Nunberg at mark@commongroundmeditation.org.

2013 BOARD TREASURER REPORT

ON BEHALF OF THE Common Ground Finance Committee and the Board of Directors, I am happy to report that the Center continues to benefit from the community’s consistent generosity. The overall financial health of Common Ground Meditation Center is good. During the 2013 fiscal year, total donations (dana) were \$248,788 (not including contributions for the retreat property), a decrease of 7% from 2012. Common Ground’s operating expenses were \$160,161, an 8% increase from the previous year. The net income for 2013 was \$88,627.

In October of 2013, Common Ground purchased a retreat property for \$243,000. At the time of purchase we had \$210,000 of dedicated contributions on hand. In addition, the Board of Directors allocated \$64,000 of the Center’s cash reserves for the purchase and operation of the new property. The Board further approved a monthly retreat operating budget of \$1,350 per month for 2014. Both our practice and retreat centers are mortgage free.

Because of your generosity, the Board has offered our Guiding Teacher and Executive Director, Mark Nunberg, a compensation of \$66,300 for 2014. This includes salary, housing, professional development allowances, and retirement. Mark asked the board to move \$5,000 of that money to the retreat property, which the Board approved.

The Finance Committee constructed an expense budget of \$186,339 for the fiscal year 2014. It is our policy to have cash reserves at least equal to our expense budget. Our budget estimates costs for repairs, insurance, administrative costs, programs expenses, guest teacher stipends, and staff compensation. Compensation is the largest component in the 2014 budget, and we estimate that we will spend \$134,268 in 2014 to support our three paid staff and our many visiting teachers.

I deeply appreciate my colleagues on the Finance Committee – Kay Christianson, Dave Halsey, Gail Iverson, and Mark Nunberg – as their guidance on financial management oversight is invaluable. Thank you to our Deposit Team volunteers, Steve Burt, Mimi Jennings, and Amy Searing, who put in many hours each month to insure all the donations are counted and correctly entered into our accounting system.

With gratitude,
Douglas W. Swanson, *Common Ground Meditation Center Treasurer*

Revenue & Expense Statement, FY 2013*

	2013 ACTUAL	2012 ACTUAL	2014 BUDGET
Total Income (Dana)	248,788	266,406	244,532
Expenses			
Administrative	4,222	4,639	4,080
Building Related	5,427	7,093	6,380
Communications	2,911	2,622	4,161
Equipment - Furnishings	5,714	1,984	1,200
Insurance - Liability	1,682	2,994	3,300
Insurance - Workers Comp	726	817	1,450
Programs	15,911	14,143	15,960
Repairs	0	258	540
Compensation	123,568	113,294	134,268
Total Expense	\$160,161	\$147,844	\$171,339
Other Income/Expenses			
Festival of Giving Event			
Total Donations (offered to selected charities)	\$ 10,924	\$ 9,615	
Event Expenses (paid by Common Ground)	\$ 1,963	\$ 2,095	
Prairie Farm Retreat Property			
Total Donations	\$ 83,270	\$127,000	

* If you have any questions, feel free to email info@commongroundmeditation.org, Attn Doug Swanson.

PRAIRIE FARM RETREAT PROPERTY

UPDATE



Mission & Values

As lay people living busy lives, we can all appreciate the value of a quiet, natural setting to support the calming of the mind and the deepening of insight. Retreating is more than just a break from the complications of daily life, it supports the arising of wisdom and compassion that help us live our lives with greater skill. The primary purpose for this retreat property is to provide a supportive setting for community members to deepen their meditation practice.

All aspects of the operation will be grounded in the community values of mindfulness, non-harming, sustainability, and simplicity. It is our intention to create a beautiful retreat place that is inclusive and welcoming for all. How this vision manifests will depend on the financial support offered by those interested in this project, as well as people showing up to work and practice on the land, and our ongoing intentions to infuse the place with mindfulness, wisdom, and compassion.

What We Bought

The retreat property consists of 46 acres of land, $\frac{3}{4}$ of which is wooded hills and the rest open fields. There is a large fenced-in garden and about eight fruit trees. The living area is a 5,000 square foot pole building built in the late 1980s by Amish farmers. It includes five bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, and bathrooms all on one level. This building has a large open workshop/garage area that could be developed into a meditation space. The barn, built in 1989, is in good shape. There is also a storage shed and another small structure that is currently being converted into a sauna. The retreat property is located 85 miles from Common Ground in an area of small farms and rolling hills north of Menomonie, WI. See the website for directions to the property.

Current Use

Given the limitations of the existing septic system and other factors, we are restricting the number of overnight retreatants to no more than seven people. Typically we will have one to three overnight retreatants at a time. Once the change of use has been approved by the county and sufficient funds have been donated, we will improve the septic system and bathrooms to accommodate more people and improve accessibility. Over time, as we receive the necessary support, we will consider developing the property to be able to accommodate as many as 25 people for a meditation retreat. This would require adding additional bedrooms, cabins, and tenting spaces, as well as additional infrastructure.



Criteria and Guidelines for Use of the Retreat Property

Because the primary use of the retreat property will be for independent practice, the leaders have developed clear criteria and guidelines in order to maintain a suitable retreat environment. The guidelines are structured around traditional teachings of the Buddha, including the precepts for ethical conduct and renunciation. There is also a daily retreat schedule that is designed to balance each retreatant's need for flexibility with the structure necessary to support group harmony.

5:00 a.m.	Wake up
5:30 – 6:00	Walking, sitting, or mindful movement practice
6:00 – 7:00	Group sitting
7:00 – 8:00	Breakfast
8:00 – 11:30	Personal retreat practice or work time
11:30 – 12:00	Group sitting
12:00 – 2:00	Main meal, clean-up, and rest
2:00 – 5:30	Personal retreat practice or work time
5:30 – 6:30	“Tea Time” (light meal)
6:00 – 6:30	Practice discussion (three times per week)
6:30 – 8:00	Personal retreat practice or study time
8:00 – 9:00	Group sitting
9:00 p.m.	Beginning of quiet time, ending after breakfast

Supporting the Development of the Retreat Property

Consider making a financial contribution (of any amount) as a way of directly supporting the development of the retreat property. How this property is developed depends completely on how the community decides to support it. If the money and the leaders come forward, then we can be assured that something good will manifest down the road. If you wish to contribute, please designate your gift for “Retreat Property.” Contact the office if you have any questions about supporting the retreat property.

Getting Involved

In addition to raising the necessary funds to develop the property, we need volunteers and leaders who have the time, practical skills, and the depth of practice experience to care for both the retreat land and the retreatants on the land.

We currently have work groups in the following areas, with community members coordinating the efforts of each group:

- ▶ Registration
- ▶ Housekeeping
- ▶ Maintenance and Construction Projects
- ▶ Garden and Grounds
- ▶ Mowing

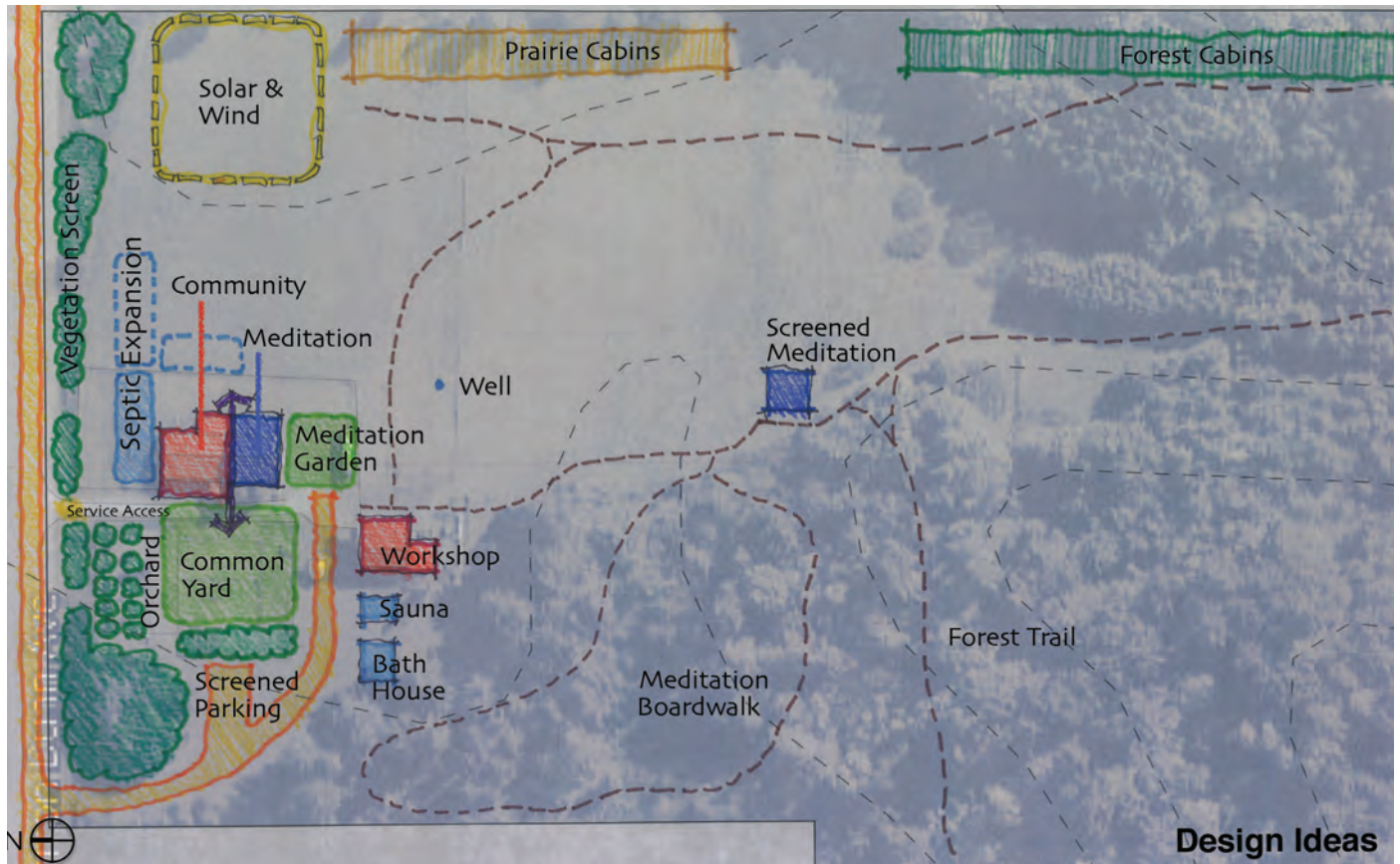
If you are interested in being involved, please email Karen Kraco at retreatproperty@commongroundmeditation.org. You will receive emails about work weekends and other opportunities to volunteer and support the development and maintenance of the property.

Registration Procedure and Questions

Leaders are developing an online registration process that should be available for use by the fall. In the short term, email retreatproperty@commongroundmeditation.org if you are interested in applying for a retreat on the property or have any questions.

COMMON GROUND RETREAT PROPERTY

DRAFT SITE PLAN



Planning Process to Develop Master Plan

THE RETREAT PROPERTY Planning Committee, which consists of architects and other community members, along with Mark Nunberg, has been developing long-term plans for the retreat property for the past six months. The committee initially spent considerable time on the core values, vision, and guiding principles for the property, then created an initial draft of conceptual and site use plans. These plans were presented and discussed at the recent Common Ground volunteers meeting and will be presented twice in September for more community input.

After the community meetings, the committee will modify the plans based on input received, and present the modified versions later in the fall. Finally the committee will fashion the modified plans into a submission to Dunn County, Wisconsin, to apply for approval of our intended use of the property.

Once we receive approval from Dunn County, hopefully in early 2015, we can begin to estimate costs and prioritize projects. For example, we want to provide facilities for meaningful practice, but we also realize that the septic system needs upgrading, so we will need to choose where to begin. At each stage, the committee plans to provide opportunities for community involvement.

This is an initial drawing of the conceptual and site use plans for the retreat property. It shows general areas of use that support the identified retreat activities and follows the vision we developed for the property. We are fortunate to have many options on how to design the property. Please share your thoughts and ideas!

ATTEND OUR UPCOMING COMMUNITY MEETINGS

There will be two community meetings in September to present the planning committee's initial thoughts on the long-term development plan for the retreat property and get input from community members. These meetings will take place at the Center in Minneapolis on Tuesday, September 9th from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. and Sunday, September 28th from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m.

OUR COMMON GROUND BOARD

What is the Common Ground Board?

When people talk about the Common Ground Board, they are generally referring to the Board of Directors, which consists of the Guiding Teacher, Mark Nunberg, and five members of the Common Ground community.

What does the Board do?

The Board supports Mark in his role as the Guiding Teacher and Administrator of Common Ground and provides oversight.

The Board sets the higher level policy for Common Ground, in line with our Guiding Principles and Practices, and works to ensure that all aspects of Common Ground's operation reflect these values.

The second main role of the Board is financial oversight. The Finance Committee prepares the annual budget, which the Board approves, as well as biannual financial statements, which the Board reviews in detail. In addition, the Board approves major purchases or the sale of assets.

The Board creates committees as needed to perform specific tasks. The current Board committees are:

- ▶ Ethics
- ▶ Building
- ▶ Finance
- ▶ Compensation
- ▶ Nomination (of new Board members)
- ▶ Retreat Property Planning

Finally, it is the Board's responsibility to reflect deeply from time to time on the long-term health of the Center and our community of Buddhist mindfulness practitioners.

How does the Board do its work?

The Board meets at least four times a year, but lately we have been meeting almost every month. We hold an annual meeting in March and schedule a yearly retreat attended by current and emeritus Board members and paid staff.

The Guiding Teacher, Chair, and Vice Chair determine the agenda, based on current events and needs. The Board has a general schedule of items to consider each time, including the budget, financial review, program review, Board officer elections, etc. The minutes of all Board meetings are public.

In addition, the Board committees help with various aspects of the management of the sangha (such as tracking our finances) and bring reports and recommendations to the whole Board.

How is the Board formed?

One position is always reserved for the Guiding Teacher.

All other positions are voted on each year at the Annual Meeting. Board terms are three years, and members can be re-elected for an additional term.

When there is a vacancy on the Board, the Guiding Teacher provides a list of candidates whom he believes have deep commitment to the spiritual values of Common Ground. (Other candidates may also be considered.) The Board creates a nomination committee that considers the following criteria, as identified in the Nomination Procedure Policy:

- ▶ Length of practice
- ▶ Regular participation in practice at Common Ground
- ▶ Buddhist meditation retreat participation
- ▶ Commitment and service to dharma organizations
- ▶ History of volunteer service
- ▶ Skills and experience relative to the needs of the Board

There is no set quota for diversity, but the Board values and seeks balanced representation.

Nominees are voted on by the Board and election requires a three-quarters majority.



Who is on the current Board?

Guiding Teacher: Mark Nunberg

Chair: Louise Delagran

Vice Chair: Gayle Prest

Secretary: Nancy Vivian

Treasurer: Doug Swanson

Building Committee Chair: Mark Young

Learn more

- ▶ Board minutes are all kept in the three-ring binder on the shelf below the bulletin board in the lobby.
- ▶ Other Board communication to the sangha includes the annual Board letter, periodic updates on the retreat property planning, and sharing information at community gatherings.

Please feel free to send any questions or comments at any time by talking to a member of the Board or emailing the Board at board@commongroundmeditation.org.