



PRE-DESIGN TASK FORCE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*We are standing at a crossroad.
This crossroad is full of potentiality.
Our responsibility does not lie in
picking the right choice. It lies in
clearly understanding what choice
we face.*

Seattle Insight Meditation Society

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The meditation hall is the focus of the center, but the other spaces really build community!

Overview

The Pre-Design Task Force was charged with accessing the needs of the sangha around the decision to find a new Dharma Center. We considered this to mean we were seeking to learn about and understand the kind of sangha the SIMS community wants to be; regardless of the building space we use. This report is about how people currently see SIMS and the potential they see in SIMS. The biggest take away from doing this project has been the level of enthusiasm and interest people have shown in their willingness to participate in the process.

Survey Of Sanghas Across The Country Highlights

Overall the Dharma Centers around the country that we contacted are very active. Nearly all were open 7 days a week and some had open sit times. Kitchens turned out to be the most important attribute of the centers, although garden space was equally valued. They all had various rooms in addition to their meditation halls for use as break out rooms and offices. No one's space was ideal or perfect, but everyone loved their center.

Online Survey and Three All-Sangha Meeting Highlights

The online survey had an excellent response rate. With 123 responses, we have a strong indication of the leaning of the overall sangha. There was a total of 20 meeting participants. Everyone who attended was willing to share their thoughts and concerns at all three meetings. Task Force members has some concern that the meeting results would be skewed because of the group discussions. To the contrary, the meeting responses were identical to the online responses. This adds a strong degree of trustworthiness to the information we have available and we should feel confident in relying on this information in making our decision.

Nonresidential Attendance Information Highlights

This is the attendance numbers for people who registered for nonresidential retreats between October 2014 and September 2017. The single most important factor in attendance at SIMS is location. One response stated it best – *“if it takes 45+ mins to get there; it's not worth it.”* Finding a central location is even more important. This data is very supportive in identifying what is meant by “central”. The information includes the attendance numbers for the top 20 zip codes, of which over half live within a 3.5-mile radius of the ship canal bridge area; making property around the ship canal bridge area the more central location.

Survey Of Sangha Across The Country

- **Pre-Design Task Force members contacted six Dharma Centers around the country.**
 - Insight Meditation Society, Redwood City, California
 - Durango Dharma Center, Durango, Colorado
 - Common Ground Meditation Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota
 - New York Insight Meditation, New York City, New York
 - Cambridge Insight, Boston, Massachusetts
 - East Bay Meditation Center, Oakland, California
- **We used the following criteria:**
 - The center about the same size as SIMS
 - They rented or own their own space
 - We knew the teachers
 - The centers were substantial organizations
 - Someone from the center was willing to talk to us
- **We asked everyone the same 10 questions:**
 - Who are we speaking with and what is your role in the sangha? How long have you been with the sangha?
 - How long have you been in your current location?
 - Is your facility every day or only for specific scheduled events?
 - Does your location have good public transportation nearby?
 - Is there parking on your property? If not, nearby? Do you have to pay?
 - Is there handicap access?
 - What was your previous location like? Descrip: Size, access, number of rooms etc?
 - Do you have visiting teachers or weekend events?
 - What is the average # of people that come to your weekly talk nights?
 - Number of people for weekend events? (Non-residential retreats?)
 - Number of people your space can accommodate?
 - How many people are in your total sangha?
 - What is the floor plan of the main building or meditation hall?
 - Have you discovered a good floor plan that facilitates the flow of people entering the meditation hall then registering for a dharma talk or day long meditation?
 - What does your dharma center offer the sangha besides a meditation hall?
 - Are your administrative tasks, cleaning of facility, repairs and maintenance handled by a paid staff or volunteers?
 - What do you think particularly works about your dharma center?
 - What do you think does not work about your dharma center?
 - Any other comments?
- What follows is a highlight of some of the information we received. To get a more complete understanding, please review the full responses.

Basic Information About the Sangha

All the sanghas have been in their current location for several years except for Durango who has only been in their space a year or so. They are all generally open every day except for NY Insight. They all have between 80 – 130 people attending their weekly sits. Their nonresidential range from about 30 – 100 with a median appearing to be about 50. All six centers are very active with a lot of events. They all offer more than one sit a week. Each sangha is unique in what they can offer their sangha. What stands out is the garden/park space for walking; personal practice time, children and parenting programs, space for potlucks.

Basic Information About the Property

Designated property parking is limited for all (except Durango) but they seem to make use of street parking. Good public transportation with subways and/or bus stop in front or within a couple blocks. They have limited bathrooms – 2 or 3. All have kitchens (except NY Insight). All have two meditation halls (main and smaller) (Redwood City has one hall and a community room for walking & spillover). All have library, at least one interview room and office (except NY Insight). Having a spacious entry/lobby seems very important.

Note: The NY Insight space is closest to our current space. It is primarily a large room in an office building in Manhattan.

What Doesn't Work

A couple of the centers noted that they were outgrowing space but mostly said little about problems with the space. Most shared comments about difficulties unique to their sanghas. Given that most had been in their space a long time, it seems like they have adjusted to whatever challenges and just feel home.

Closing Words of Wisdom

Having a building is invaluable in creating community and having freedom to offer the programs that benefit people – Redwood City

Once you own your building everything changes. Fundraising becomes a key part of the administration of the center – Cambridge Insight

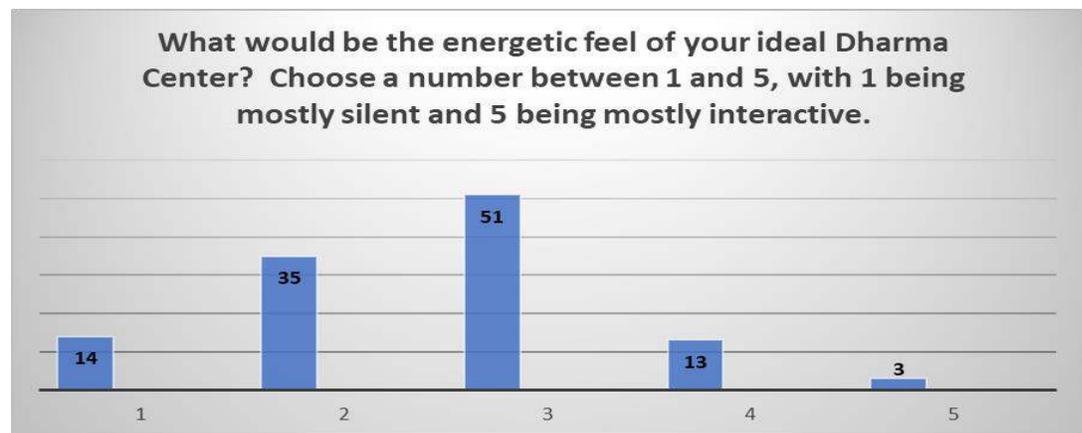
Online Survey Results

General Information

- We received a total of 123 responses.
- The survey was only open for a short window of 4 days (Wednesday 10/11/17 to Friday 10/14/17). By Friday we had received well over a hundred responses, so it is a safe bet that most of the people wanting to participate had an opportunity to do so.
- This report is designed to give a general review of the information we learned from the responses. To get a fuller picture, everyone should consider taking the time to read the comments made by a substantial amount of people.
- Overall the survey was relatively short. It consisted of the same 8 questions asked at the meeting and included a short explanation around the meaning and intention behind the questions.
- There were 3 types of questions at the meetings. There were written questions that provided participants time to reflect, write out and share their responses with others. There were wall questions that asked participants to identify their preferences along a spectrum between two points. And there was a single question that had people rank there 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th choices regarding the various options for selecting our new center property.
- This report attempts to keep that same feel of distinction but using the Word Cloud format for reviewing the written question, using the column chart for the wall (spectrum) questions and pie charts for the choice questions.
- Note: Word Cloud is a compilation of the words used in the written responses. The words are then accentuated by size and boldness based on the amount of time they are used. The more a word is used, the larger and bolder it becomes. This has some limitations because people may not use the same words to say the same thing. Even with this limitation, however, the direction the SIMS community is leaning towards seems very clear.
- Note: There was some concern on the part of the task force members that the results of the meetings and online survey would present differently. This was because the meeting participants were given an opportunity to share with other sangha members, could ask clarifying questions and could opening talk about their concern in greater detail. What is noteworthy, however, is the actual level of consistency between the two processes.
- When you review the results from both processes side by side, they are strikingly similar. As such, the results provide a strong indication of who SIMS is post-Rodney.

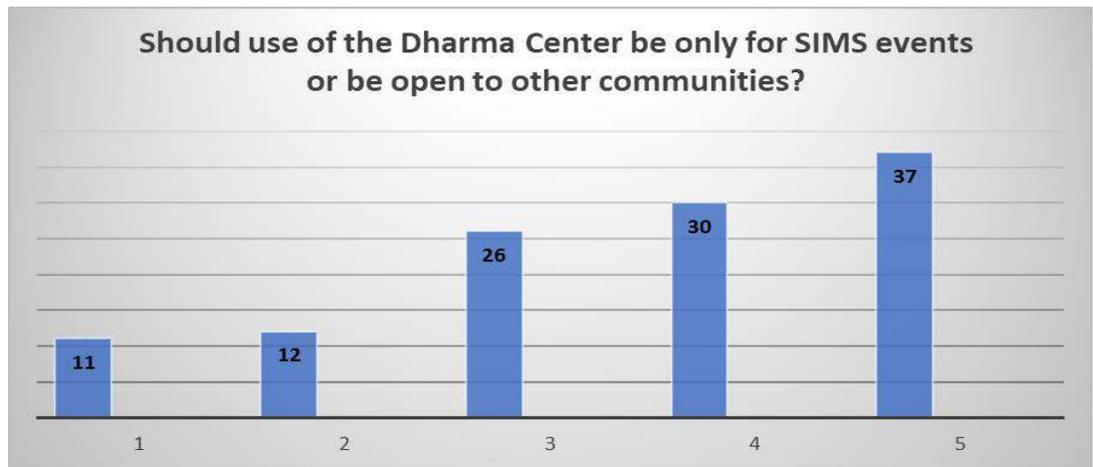
WALL QUESTIONS/SURVEY RESULTS**QUESTION 5:**

- This first spectrum type question may not have been very clear given people's responses to question 6b. There was even a lot of questions around this question during the meetings. The explanation connected with the online question was very short. For the purposes of this report, we will assume people understood that this question was about the feel of the overall center and its level of simultaneous activity.
- Our current center would fall on the mostly silent side. However, only 14 (12%) out of 116 responses, wanted the new center to be mostly silent (basically one meditative event at a time).
- By far most people want to see a more interactive center (99/116 or 85%).
- Another telling point is that most people picked 3 with the limited explanation. Most people at the meetings also picked 3.
- This means that the new center will need to be able to accommodate simultaneous events/activities without interfering with each other. It doesn't necessarily mean that there needs to be a lot going on, just more than just meditation.

**QUESTION 6A:**

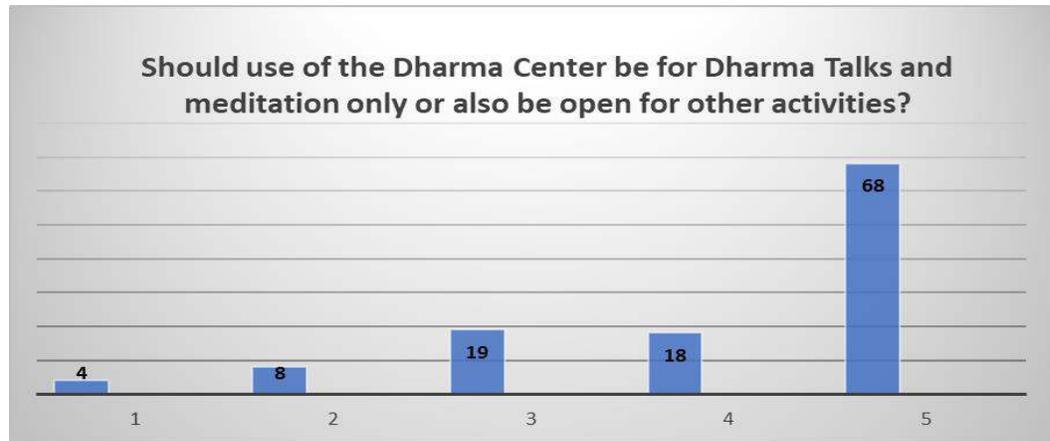
- Currently, SIMS uses its space solely for its own events and those it sponsors. This question asked simply if that should continue.
- This question also received 116 responses.

- Again, by an overwhelming margin (93/116 or 80%), people want to see the new center be open to other communities (responses 3+). This was also true for the meeting responses.
- The importance of the questions lies in whether we create rental opportunities for use of the center when SIMS is not using the space. This could create the possibility of additional financial support to cover some of the added operating costs.

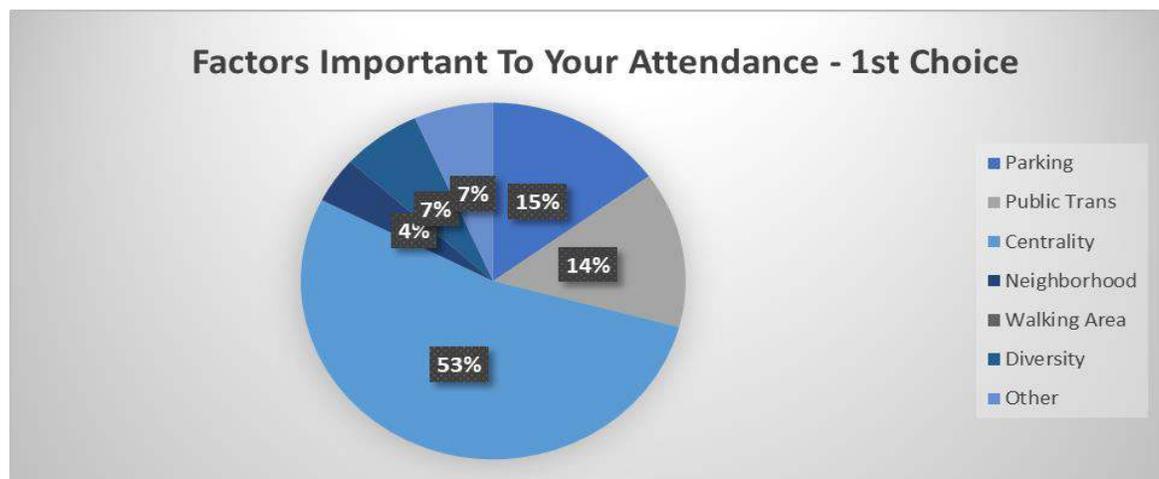


QUESTION 6B:

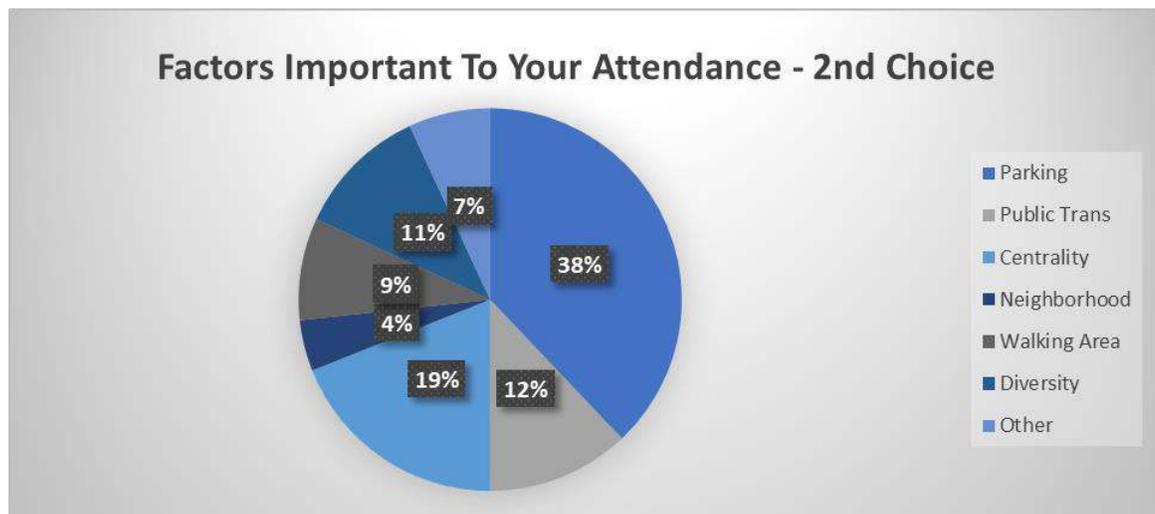
- Currently, SIMS uses its space for meditation only. This question asked if – going forward – SIMS should use its new Dharma Center for activities other than meditation.
- There were 117 responses and notably, 68 responses (58%) were emphatically yes.
- If you add in the responses 3 – 5 you have 105 or 89%.
- This was the same outcome of the responses at the meetings, including the minimal responses levels 1 and 2.
- This means that any new center we obtain must include space for non-meditative activities.
- If we look at this in conjunction with question 5 it means that any new space we obtain will also need to have more than one room.

**QUESTION 7:**

- This next question came out of the early discussions between the Pre-Design Task Force members. It was asked to get a clearer understanding of the kind of impact of certain factors. These 6 basic factors were tossed around a lot during our early meetings.
- There were 120 responses to 1st choice and 117 to the 2nd choice.
- It seems quite clear that the centrality of our new center will have the biggest impact on attendance by far (64 selections). The next closes response were parking and public transportation with only 18 and 17 selections respectfully.
- Again, it should be noted that centrality of location was the highest choice at the meetings.

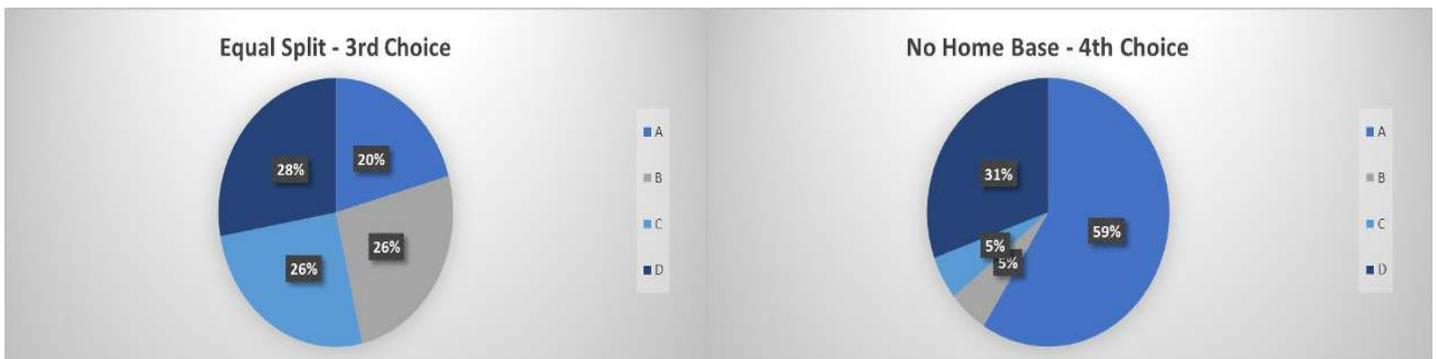


- The second biggest selection was parking. Whereas the meetings split the decision between parking and public transportation.
- The results of these selections seem to point the fact that people's ability to get to SIMS within a reasonable amount of time as having the greatest impact on attendance.
- It should also be noted that there were 39 "other" responses ranging from timing; safety; diversity; connectability; nature; live too far north; difficulties with darkness at night, etc.



SINGLE QUESTIONS/SURVEY RESULTS

- This final question is about whether we should purchase or lease property.
- Of the 106 responses, there are two aspects worth noting. First, a long-term lease was the preferred choice (45%) and second, no home base was the least favorable choice (59%).
- This was different that at the meetings. There the preferred choice was purchasing a property (60%) but no home base was still the least favorable (74%).
- This was the only question that demonstrated a contrast between the online responses and the meeting responses. It may be attributable to the fact that this question came at the end of the meeting after people had a lot of opportunities to talk with one another about the move.



FINAL COMMENTS/SURVEY RESULTS

- There were a lot of thank you, gratitude and appreciation for SIMS.
- Many people expressed concerned about our financial shape to purchase a bldg.
- There was a lot of emphasis on making SIMS more accessible to people living North.
- People seem to have said everything the needed to through the other questions because there was not a lot of new information in this final comment section.

Three All-Sangha Meeting Results

General Information

- There was a total of 20 participants (5-Thurs Noon, 2-Fri PM, 15-Sat AM)
- Although the turnout for the meetings seemed too low for the level of weight we intended to give the outcomes, the responses are very telling when viewed in relationship to the online survey's 123 responses.
- The basic format of each meeting was as follows:
 - Introduction
 - Sit (contemplate 4 written questions)
 - Write out answers
 - Group discussions
 - Explanation of wall questions (3 questions)
 - Time for wall questions
 - Time for single question around buying/leasing property
 - Questions and answers
- The information below is a general indication of the answers to the questions. Unlike with the survey answers, these results do not show how many people gave what answer.
- Moreover, the information in these written questions are not listed in order of importance. This is particularly true for the questions around the ideal Dharma Center and new activities/programs. The information provided here are simply grouped together by what seemed like similar themes.
- Also, the charts regarding the wall questions start with 2 because no one indicated a mark completely on the left of either question.

WRITTEN QUESTIONS:

What are the top 3 reasons you come to SIMS?

- Most people indicated at least one reason related to Dharma, teachers, nonresidentials
- The 2nd indicated response was around Sangha, practice support, friends, community
- There were many responses related to Buddhist practice around stillness, contemplative, meditation, spiritual home
- Other comments related to the energy people received from the environment such as safety, respect, confidence, encouragement
- Finally, a couple of people noted that they come to SIMS for the service and yogi jobs

What are the top 3 reasons you don't come to SIMS?

- The primary reason was as expected – transportation issues (traffic, too far, location)
- Another big reason was around time conflicts (family, busy, out of town)
- Many people also listed things like bad weather, too tired, laziness, time of the sit
- Interestingly, some people noted that they don't come because of whomever is the teacher, there isn't enough variety of practice & study
- Finally, some people noted that they don't come because they don't feel connected and because they miss Rodney

Describe your ideal Dharma Center?

- Quiet, beautiful, welcoming environment conducive to meditation
- Large meditative area with good acoustics and comfortable temperature
- Easily accessible with traffic, parking and location (urban, close to light rail, centrally located)
- Open daily (most of the time; 12/7; 24 hrs) for activities (book club, movies, groups, social)
- Garden (outdoor sitting space) area and space for walking, movement
- Additional rooms for activities, full kitchen, dining room, library, space to socialize
- Active, vibrant sangha members, diverse community with affinity groups, family center and senior center (more reflective of Seattle)
- More than just Dharma talks, multiple offerings, classes, study groups
- Community/social engagement activities, strong volunteerism, more opportunities to get to know people

What specific activities/programs would you like to see added in a new SIMS Dharma Center?

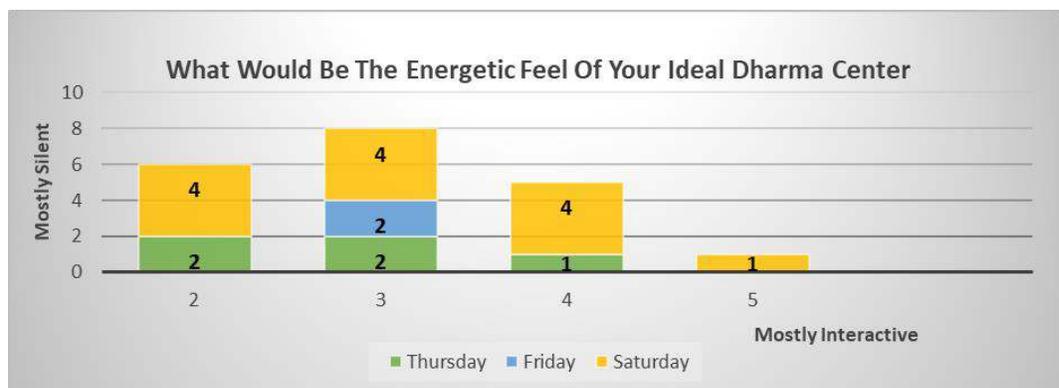
- Training series, study groups, more in-depth practice (i.e. yearlong and death & dying)
- More sits and weekend practice
- Affinity groups
- Mindful movies (monthly) with discussions
- Pre-sit tea, more socializing opportunities
- Cooking; sharing meal opportunities; monthly potlucks
- Outdoor space; Labyrinth; yoga and movement practices
- Open meditation opportunities
- Activities that draw non-Buddhists; Exhibitions to attract visitors

- Child care during events; Family events for non-practicing spouses and friends
- Multiple spaces for concurrent events
- National/global humanitarian response opportunities
- Care committee and coordination for sangha members in need

WALL QUESTIONS:

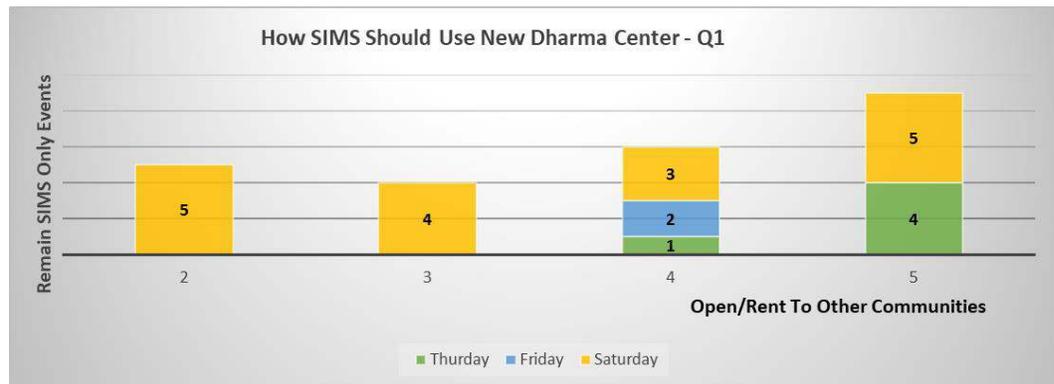
What would be the energetic feel of your ideal Dharma Center?

- This question was pretty confusing for people. The energetic feel relates to how many activities would happen simultaneously and the nature of those activities. Mostly silent means mostly one event at a time and that event would be some type of meditation. Mostly interactive means there could be several events happening at once and it could be anything from movement, discussions, classes, etc. and meditation. The assumption is that meditation would always be quiet events.
- There was a lot of discussion around this question at the meetings. People were very concern around the level of silence during meditation. Once people understood that the question assumed meditation sits were silent, people were ready to answer.
- The answers seem to point to the possibility of having more than one event happening simultaneously.
- **14 out of 20 wanted the center to lean towards mostly interactive.**



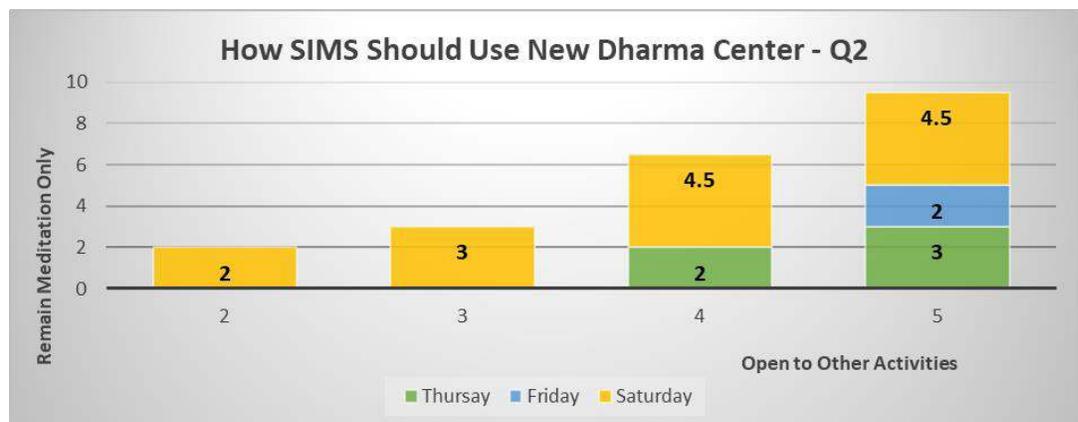
How should SIMS use the new Dharma Center – Q1?

- The next two questions consider whether SIMS should change its format. Currently, SIMS only hold SIMS meditation events (including meditation events sponsored by SIMS).
- This question relates to whether we should open the space to other organizations.
- **15 out of 20 people want to see SIMS open up to other organizations.**



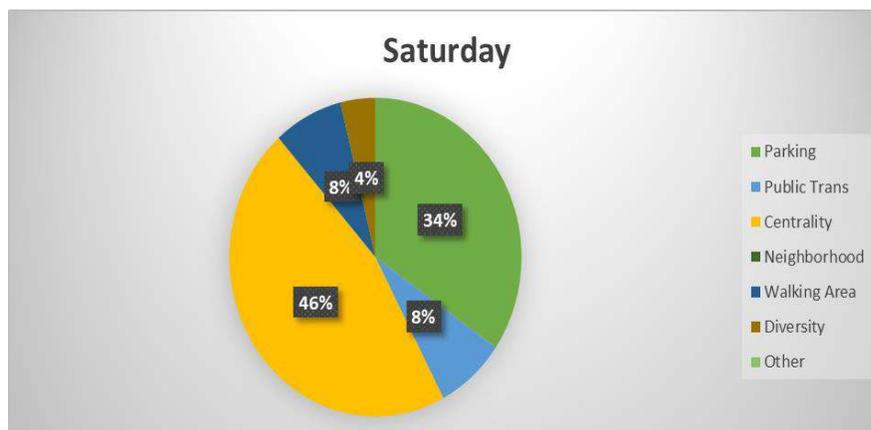
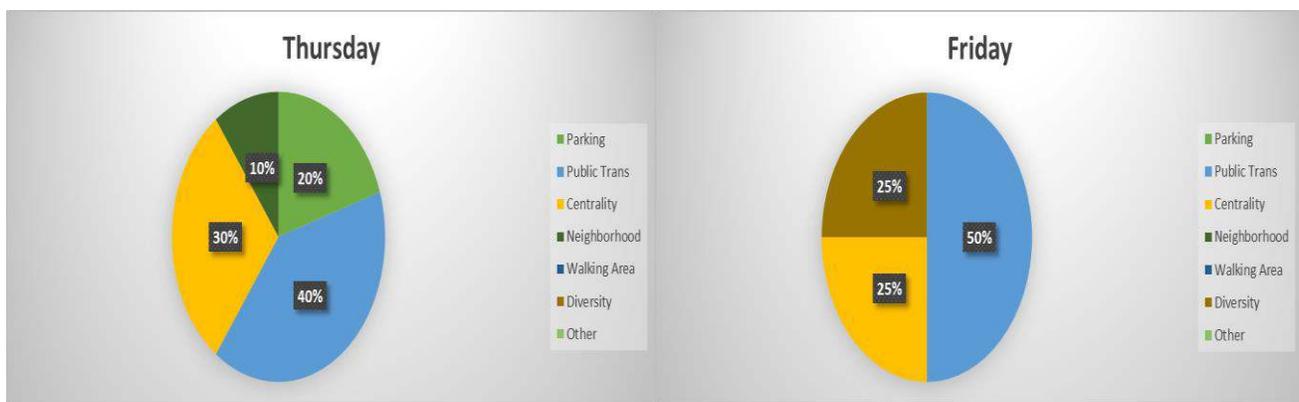
How should SIMS use the new Dharma Center – Q2?

- This second question is about whether we should remain just meditation.
- Without doubt the people at the meeting want to have activities beyond meditation.
- **16 out of 20 people want to see use offer more activities**



Which of the following are important to your attendance at SIMS (pick 2)

- This question was hard for people also. People would have preferred to pick all that applied but were willing to pick 2.
- ***Without a doubt public transportation, centrality of our location, parking will have the most impact on attendance at the new center.***
- These results, however, need to be taken in conjunction with the online survey to have any meaningful impact. For instance, Friday evening indicates 50% felt public transportation was key but there were only 2 people present. While Saturday participants gave public transportation an 8%. This is because Saturday was 13 people all of whom drove which means centrality of location and parking was more important.



SINGLE QUESTION ON BUYING/LEASING PROPERTY:

- This question was given at the end of the meeting. It was the last thing done before leaving which means the answers came after people spent 2 hours talking with fellow Dharma friends about what was possible.
- **60% of the participants chose buying a place as their 1st choice and 74% chose having no home base as their last choice.**
- Moreover, a long-term lease and co-ownership were about the same as 2nd or 3rd choice.



Nonresidential Attendance Information

General Information

- This information is being added for context and should not be used as representative of all SIMS events. This data is limited in that it only reflects the number of people who registered for nonresidential. It assumes that those who registered also attended the event. It does not consider the many people who attend nonresidential without registering nor the weekly Tuesday night sits and occasional Friday night sits.
- With the above caveat in mind, it does provide a safe guideline for determining what people mean by centrality by considering the neighborhoods SIMS frequently serves.
- The below data was collected from October 2014 to September 2017 (36 months). **The total number of attendees was 1771.** A lot were 1 or 2 from a particular zip code. Some interesting details about the top 20 zip codes: **395** are within a 3.5 mile radius from downtown Seattle but **553** are within a 3.5 radius of the ship canal bridge. **472** are from eight zip codes north of ship canal bridge (includes Queen Anne and Interbay)/**386** are from seven zip codes south of the ship canal bridge. **252** come from downtown, captiol hill, central district and madison park areas alone. **168** come from west of the city (including Bainbridge Island, Ballard and Magnolia). **771** come from zip codes other than the top 20.

ZIP CODE	NEIGHBORHOOD	ATTENDANCE
98102	Capitol Hill	69
98103	Fremont/Greenwood	140
98104	Downtown	19
98105	University District/Laurelhurst	45
98106	Beacon Hill	27
98109	Queen Anne	60
98110	Bainbridge Island	24
98112	Mountlake/Madison Park	76
98115	Ravenna	74
98116	Alki Beach	47
98117	Ballard	59
98118	Rainier Beach	64
98119	Interbay	40
98122	Madrona/Central District	88
98125	Northgate	25
98133	North Greenwood	25
98136	Fauntleroy	12
98144	Mt. Baker/Columbia City	43
98177	Shoreline	37
98199	Magnolia	26
	Total Attendees of Top 20 Zip Codes	1000

Recommendations

Overview of Recommendations

Recommendations are always pointing towards some outcome. They are based upon a specific set of assumptions and set forth a plan on how to reach the outcome in accordance with those assumptions. The outcome this report is pointing towards is a sangha that looks and feels closest to the themes brought out in the 143 participant responses. This is based upon three assumptions (1) that the nature of the sangha is separate from the building we practice within; (2) that our current programming does not adequately support the overarching needs of the SIMS community; and (3) we are willing to look for a new center that will allow us to develop new programming, practice opportunities and activities relative to what was expressed in this report. Based upon this, the Pre-Design Task Force makes the following recommendations:

Non-Negotiable Recommendations

Non-negotiables are things any new facility must have to follow through on the requests of the overall sangha.

Dedicated Property: The responses were clear that the “no home base” option was the least preferred by a wide margin of the community. Whether we lease or buy is less important than having a designated space. What is important is that we make more use of the space which could include more sats, classes, KM group gatherings, opening the space for use by other organizations or co-ownership.

Centrality of location: The responses were clear that this will have the greatest impact on the future attendance levels at SIMS events. The closer we are to the ship canal bridge the more central the location will seem. If we move too far north or south, we stand to lose a lot of attendance. Regarding parking, the responses didn't point specifically to our property having parking, just that parking needs to be available. Finally, the more central the location the greater the number of buses will travel through the area.

- A meditation hall:*** This is the main mission of SIMS. Having a large, spacious, quiet, protected space is a must. This was quite pronounced in the responses to why people attend SIMS events. Participants were also very concerned about having the hall be a separate. Separated from the entry/lobby area, walking area and other activities.
- Walking Area:*** Although this was not specifically mentioned as notably as many of the other recommendations, it was nonetheless mentioned. Walking is a necessary aspect of practice. Given the amount of nonresidential and beginning classes we currently offer – attention needs to be given to this as a non-negotiable aspect of any new space. There needs to be a designated area for walking.
- Community Area:*** Participants were clear that there needs to be activities other than meditation at a new center. It is a must that our new space has an area designated for socializing, sharing meals and/or simply gathering together. Having a designated area to share meals was very pronounced in many of the responses. This space could also substitute for a classroom and/or mindful movement practice space.
- Existing Amenities:*** Having a kitchen is non-negotiable but it doesn't seem to have to be a full kitchen. Practically speaking, our current kitchen seems too small simply because only one or two persons can be in there at a time. Library space is also non-negotiable.

Desirable Recommendations

Desirables are things we'd like to have in a new facility if at all possible.

- Dedicated Property:*** Finding a property in a diverse and active area is desirable. What stood out in the responses around participant's idea center was the level of vibrancy, diversity and engagement of the center. This will be more realistic if the center is located within a vibrant, active, diverse neighborhood. Currently people only come to SIMS if they know about

an event; having a vibrant, diverse active center would need to include opportunities for people walking by to walk-in and learn about us.

Centrality of location: Finding property close to the lightrail would be desirable. It is the best public transportation but making it non-negotiable may be too restricting. In the long run, the future Northgate, 65th and U District station would really support SIMS if it were close to a station.

2nd meditation hall: A second smaller meditation hall for personal practice, smaller sits, practice courses would be desirable. Many of the participants noted the need for more than just evening Dharma talks. Assuming these would be small practice opportunities, we would need a smaller space to add an element of intimacy. Although, there was a large request for more practice and study opportunities, this 2nd meditation hall is being listed as desirable because such practice/programs could be included in the current non-negotiable areas.

Walking Area: A garden would be desirable. Having any kind of outdoor space for walking or sitting in nature would support the overall practice, stillness and peace of the community. A way to understand why a garden is being listed in the desirable recommendations is because while walking in a garden is desirable; having a walking area is non-negotiable.

Living Room Area: A living room area for relaxing is desirable. The responses indicated a strong need for more opportunities to get to know people. This is non-negotiable but the space where socializing happens can be accomplished in the community area listed above. A living room area would provide a better environment for relaxing. Also, it would be desirable to have a movie screen.

Interview Room(s): According to the responses, SIMS is a significant part of many of the participant's practice. Practice support was also noted as one of the reasons people come to SIMS. While interviews are non-negotiable, having a designated room or two is more desirable.

Child Care Area: Having a space designated for children would be desirable. Currently SIMS doesn't have any way to accommodate children but with start-up of the Sunday sit it is likely that a need for a children area will become more and more important. Moreover, there was some indication in the responses that participants were interested in such programs.

Ideal Recommendations

Ideals are wish list things brought out in the responses although most likely we'd be unable to afford them.

The overall implication of the 143 responses seem to point to a SIMS that is open seven days a week for several hours each day. There would be a variety of practice opportunities and social activities. Something that came out of the discussions between the Task Force members and the centers around the country is that the growth of their organization came from the development of new and relevant programs. In this light, SIMS is about to start on a new beginning. It is a new beginning without Rodney. We are not sure where we are going or what it will look like when we arrive. All we have is a starting point – more, more, more.

SIMS' biggest work ahead lies in what we offer practitioners. This will also have the biggest impact upon us (financially, volunteerism and capacity) because we have no infrastructure to take on such a commitment. This Task Force's ideal recommendation is that SIMS look into what it would take to grow and develop opportunities that support the larger SIMS community.

We should be able to take whatever time is needed to work on this recommendation even within a property that closely meets the non-negotiable and desirable recommendations.

Pre-Design Task Force Members

- Tuere Sala, Chair
- Sooz Apel
- Danielle Sewell
- Matt Warming
- Michele Jackson
- Hayden Robinson
- Tom Jacob (Tom got off the committee to start a new job right at the end)