

BOULDER FRIENDS MEETING
Threshing Session on Building Use
November 3, 2018

After a period of silent worship, the Clerk read from Ludwig Wittgenstein, “We have landed on smooth ice where there is no friction; so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but just because of that we also can’t walk. We want to walk, so we need friction. Back to the rough ground.”

Summary from the handout:

I. Proposed Goals

1. A Building Use Policy that Friends are in unity with, and can accept and support.
2. A policy that is clear and simple. (Clarifying policy does not necessarily mean changing the policy. Increased clarity can reduce confusion and anxiety.)
3. Reduce stress on members of our spiritual community who serve us.

II. Process So Far

Subcommittees of Building and Grounds (B&G) and Peace and Social Justice (P&SJ) Committees have met and discussed current policy and possible changes, and proposed a sponsorship program for organizations which our Meeting supports. A Program Hour was held on September 23 to inform Friends of these changes.

III. Today’s Topic

“How much do we want to open the Meetinghouse to outside groups and for what purposes?” There is a wide range of possible options, such as: use by our Meeting only; Quaker-hosted groups only; current community groups, such as AA 12-Step; Quaker-sponsored groups; open to neighborhood events that give us visibility.

We want everyone to have a chance to hear what has been done, and to have a say going forward. A threshing session is more open than a business meeting or worship sharing. There is no burden to make a decision. Please speak directly to the clerk. Hoping we can move towards clarity, let us begin.

Some of the concerns and suggestions Friends shared included:

- * What groups currently use the building? Weekday nights are quite busy, with both Quaker and outside users. During the day, there is not much use outside of AlAnon. The Subud (Sufi chanting and dancing) group comes two nights a week. A quilting group meets monthly. Another outside group includes breast cancer survivors.
- * How much work does the building use coordinator do? Stewart Walker said he comes here a couple times a month to show groups the building and describe the requirements for its use. He takes some emails. The past year and a half has not seen any problems that disturbed him. Sometimes Quakers are hard to deal with. Outsiders are not. There was some small damage from Quaker use that wasn’t reported right away and some kitchen cleanup issues after Quaker events. B&G is comfortable with the current level of use.
- * Our building is a place of worship. Anyone using our building should recognize and respect that this is our place of worship. We don’t want others to take their use of the building as our endorsement of what they are doing. One Friend thinks of our ownership and use of this building as our prayer.

* How will the building and Friends be protected, such as cleanup, loss, or damage, when anyone uses the building? Who will be responsible? Quaker-hosted and Quaker-sponsored groups are accountable through the host or sponsor. Outside groups sign liability waivers as part of their rental agreement. We do not pass out key codes. People who rent the building get a key which they return when they're done.

* What are our current fees? We charge outside groups between \$15 and \$50 per hour, depending on the size of the group and the amount of space used. These fees cover cleaning and wear-and-tear, and are lower than most other churches. Some churches ask for a damage deposit; do we?

* What are some examples (positive and negative) of past building usage?

The Silver Lake Ditch company (which has a much wider community than our immediate neighborhood) had a meeting here. Water rights issues are very contentious. When voices were raised, a Friend interjected, "This is my house of worship. Stop yelling here." And so the fact they had their meeting here helped to diffuse tensions. Also, we have had a memorial service for a non-Quaker, because it was a welcoming space for that family.

On the other hand, problems with use by the Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center, such as sharing key codes and others, led to our Meeting changing past building use policies. Also, there were cleanup problems when past usage was higher than at present.

One Friend, whose non-profit volunteer group uses both the building and the grounds outside, is grateful to be able to use them. She cleans up after her own group and sometimes cleans up other people's messes when she comes in.

* Every organization has resources (physical, financial, and human). Nominating Committee has a concern about the aging of our congregation, affecting our abilities to do physical labor. If we change our building use policy, we may have to change how the B&G committee operates.

* Are there other ways to regulate building usage? Could there be a waiting list of some kind for use of the building? Or could we set a budget for building use, based on what we charge outside groups, and set aside funds for committees to use for use by sponsored groups, as a way to limit usage? Could we ask for donations in lieu of fees, for groups we don't charge? Or have a "pay as led" system?

* Are Friends being friends to our community? As a ministry to members of our community, we should try to support similar outside groups, sharing our home in a good way for the benefit of all. It is good to be sharing and charitable, staying aligned with our own testimonies.

* This is hard, because it is connected to our deepest spiritual feelings. This is our spiritual home, and we treat it as our home. But it is God's home, and we should use it for God's work. One time we had homeless people in this building, which was risky. But we have to balance the risks and costs with our desire for outreach and service. The big disagreement seems to be about how we use this part of our treasure. And we're getting old and can't give more than we have. We need to have realistic expectations of what we can do to support our spiritual work.

* Our aging congregation is a reason for outreach, to raise awareness that we exist and who we are.

* Trying to summarize what had been said so far, one Friend found several items of common ground: First, our Quaker family has priority. Second, we seem to want to go beyond status quo. We have a valuable resource we can share. And we can use it for outreach. Third, assure accountability. Quakers assume responsibility when we host meetings. Committees which sponsor groups should know those

groups. Fourth, consistency of payments. Our charges are much less than other churches. If we give money to a group, then don't ask for payment to use the building. Fees can be adjusted to cover our costs, if they change. Have limits to avoid overloading our members as hosts or sponsors.

* Stewart suggested explicitly adding to our policy, that if a group can't find a Quaker host or sponsor, that the question goes to B&G for approval. If there is time and it is practical, B&G could ask for input from other committees.

* One Friend was concerned that members of the Building and Grounds/Finance Committee should not be the only Meeting members consulted if an outside group cannot find a Quaker host or sponsor. Another concern is that stewardship of property and financial matters should not be given higher priority than supporting an important social concern or a spiritual leading. Other participants believe that stewardship of what we own is important too. Another Friend acknowledged the hurt others felt by a comment made in the session and asked Friends to hold each other in the Light.

Next Steps (Part IV from the Handout):

We will collect comments from the Program Hour and Threshing Session and directly from Friends (please email your comments to Sara Williams-Mann, sara.williamsmann@gmail.com or Stewart Walker, stewartbackintheusa@gmail.com). B&G will get together soon to see how much work there is to do, then draft updates to the building use policy, rental agreement, and building use coordinator job description. They would like to distribute these for seasoning at the November or December business meeting, and then present it for approval at the next business meeting.

The Clerk closed the meeting with a short period of silent worship.

Submitted by, Stan Grotegut, Clerk, and Greg Shubert, Recording Clerk