

THE MEHER CENTER  
Master Plan Project Video 2

MASTER PLAN SCENARIOS with Daniel Stone

Hello. My name is Daniel Stone and I'm the chairperson of the Master Plan Committee. The Master Plan aims to create an overall framework within which decisions will be made about the development of the Center. It is intended to guide the Center over the next 50 years or more, so while certain aspects of the plan may be implemented in the near term, it may well be a decade or even much longer before the entire plan comes to fruition. Nevertheless, the plan will ensure that decisions that are made in the near-term are always done in the context of the long-term vision of the Center.

We don't always take the opportunity to think long-term. There are always more pressing kinds of issues and problems that tend to consume our focus. But this master planning process is a great opportunity to step back and think intuitively and creatively about the future - together - so we can envision the best possible long-term future for the Center. And by doing so, we will be helping to create an important context within which all of the other, more immediate issues, can be addressed.

Of course, we, as Baba lovers, know that Baba will have His own way. It is, after all, His Center. But it remains the responsibility that he has given to us to do our part. And in this effort, our part is to create that long-term vision that will guide the Center through the many changes we presume will be coming over these next many years.

At this stage there are three draft scenarios that have been created as possible visions for the future of the Center. Each of these scenarios is based on the vision, mission and values that were reviewed in the first video. They're also based on a set of principles that would guide any future vision. Finally, they're based on a set of assumptions that have been made about the future.

This video will introduce you to those principles and assumptions and then walk you through all three scenarios. You may find it helpful to download the overview of the scenarios and the maps to help you follow this presentation. These scenarios are being widely shared throughout the Meher Baba community to get feedback. Once the feedback has been digested, the scenarios will be finalized and the Board will determine which scenario will become the basis for the Center's final Master Plan.

There are six core principles that each of the scenarios attempts to incorporate. These are covered in the download [OVERVIEW OF MASTER PLAN SCENARIOS](#).

(#1) The first principle is that: The Center is sanctified by Meher Baba's presence. Therefore it must be maintained, preserved and used in a way that is in keeping with this sanctity.

(#2) A balance must be maintained between opportunities for quietude and opportunities for groups to gather. The Center has historically accommodated both types of experience. Group gatherings began with Meher Baba's visits in the 1950s and continue to this day including special celebrations, the Youth Sahavas and programs when mandali members and others have visited. His lovers also find opportunities for refuge and quietude within the Center since its founding.

(#3) Some aspects of the Center, such as programming and management will evolve as the community of pilgrims changes in numbers, demographics and other characteristics. However no changes can be allowed to compromise its cultural resources, specifically the three sites that Baba requested be maintained, as much as possible, as they were when He was here: the Barn, the Lagoon Cabin and His home, Meher Abode. In the same spirit, care must be taken that changes do not compromise the natural setting and the beauty that frames the Center.

(#4) A balance must be maintained through the use of appropriate management techniques between ensuring preservation and providing access to the various places and historical articles within the Center. That said, the Center must never become a museum; it must instead do its best to keep Meher Baba's presence a living experience so those who come might share in the love which He alone provides.

(#5) A balance must be maintained between providing for the needs of both retreat guests and day visitors. One must not be privileged over the other. Though their needs differ, both must be accommodated as guests of Meher Baba.

(#6) Upholding the Center's relationship with people through love is of utmost importance. The primary focus of the Center must always be on the people who come here and on the effort to ensure that they are treated as Baba would want them to be treated. All are welcomed and provided for as they come for the intimate connection with their Beloved.

In order to be coherent, a Master Plan is always based on a set of principles. However, it is also always based on a set of assumptions that the plan makes about the future. Assumptions are those events or trends that we believe are sufficiently likely to occur that the plan must be designed around them. Again, these are included for you in the download OVERVIEW OF MASTER PLAN SCENARIOS.

(#1) The first assumption is that, over time and for a variety of reasons, there will be significantly greater numbers of people interested in visiting the Center, both as visitors and as overnight retreat guests. In time, there could be huge numbers of

people who will want to have access to the Center as might be inferred from Baba's own statements.

(#2) Also, more followers of Meher Baba will be coming to live near the Center - many of them retired people who will want to have access to the Center as day visitors. These people will also form a significant source of volunteers who will help carry out the operations of the Center.

(#3) We know that the natural environment is changing and this will accelerate, creating impacts on flora, fauna, the tidal line, fire hazards, hurricane damage and other factors. This will have a significant impact on the management policies that must be implemented to protect the Center property and buildings.

(#4) Legal challenges of great importance regarding land use, eminent domain, and other tax law changes that affect Meher Spiritual Center's tax exemptions are likely to occur. While these have not recently come to pass, there is enough basis for concern - based on precedents in other locales, along with increasing pressure within Myrtle Beach to generate tax revenues - that it is only prudent for the Center to operate as if these challenges will come to pass.

(#5) Any development on the Center property will be undertaken *only* in response to demand and *only* when there are both sufficient financial resources and physical and managerial infrastructure. These preconditions ensure that no proposal should be turned down because it seems to be unviable or impractical when presented.

Taken together, the vision, values, mission, core principles and key assumptions are embedded in each of the three draft scenarios that have been developed and will ultimately form the foundation for the Master Plan.

I will give you an overview of the three scenarios. Each of these scenarios depicts a different view of the Center based largely on a difference in the number of people who can be accommodated on the Center at any one time, both as retreat guests as well as day and evening visitors. This is what is termed the "carrying capacity" of the Center. The scenarios also differ, secondarily, based on the kind of programming that would be available on the Center.

You will see, however, that there are commonalities across the scenarios, so they are not completely different. However, they all rely on a different application of the principles and a different approach to addressing the assumptions.

It also needs to be understood that these scenarios are not simply phases of a single plan. Each one is intended to stand on its own as the ultimate vision. Naturally, whichever scenario is selected, there will be a phase-in process that will happen, again, as needs demand and as finances allow. As you watch this video, you may

want to follow along in the download entitled OVERVIEW OF MASTER PLAN SCENARIOS as well as the maps.

We will review the scenarios one by one. For each scenario you will hear what is the underlying philosophy of the scenario, what is the carrying capacity of overnight guests and day/evening visitors, and a description of each of the major elements such as accommodations, meeting facilities and so on.

You will see that, for some of these elements, there may be more than one option that is offered within that particular scenario, so by the time you have heard the philosophy, the carrying capacity, and a description of the elements, it will give you an idea of what the Center would look like when it has reached the associated carrying capacity.

Let's start with **SCENARIO ONE**. (Key words are in bold type.)

Scenario One is based on the **philosophy** that the unique, sacred atmosphere of the Center is best preserved through its simplicity and spaciousness, which could be compromised if buildings and people are added. While more buildings and capacity could be added, the Center might never be able to fully accommodate the level of guest and visitor interest, according to what Meher Baba has indicated will eventually occur. Therefore, rather than detract from its unique atmosphere through further development, we should concentrate on preserving the existing atmosphere and preparing ourselves to accommodate expanded interest through management techniques and off-site facilities.

The **carrying capacity** of Scenario One is for there to be no more than 85 overnight guests at any one time, no more than 160 day and evening guests at any one time which means a total of no more than 245 people on the Center at any one time plus staff and volunteers.

Now to the **elements** and some of the options within the elements.

Let's start with **cabins**. Under Scenario One there would be the addition of two Hermitage-like cabins that would be located along Meher Baba's Gate road, which you can find on the map. There would also be one family duplex to be added at a location that is yet to be determined.

In terms of **meeting and program facilities** in Scenario One, there would be an additional gathering facility that's similar to the Reading Room in both function and feel. It would be located east of the orchard area on the map. It would be about 1,000 square feet in size and would hold about 40 people. We would also use outside-the-Center venues to hold large group gatherings, for example renting or acquiring space such as the Shriner's Club.

We would repurpose the white storage building that is currently used as cabin crew operations, to be a **kitchen**. It would be given a stable foundation to accommodate the necessary equipment for group gatherings and it would be upgraded to meet the necessary safety, sanitation and worker safety requirements. It would be located in the current white storage building and garage with a possible extension beyond the garage. The total size would be about 1,800 square feet and the capacity has not yet been determined.

In terms of **public information and access to archival materials** there would be the creation of a research library and archival facility that would be accessible to the public. It would feature archival materials, Baba treasures on display, research computers and a reading room. It would be located between the old and new Gateway. It would be about 1,800 square feet.

In terms of **guest reception and administration**, the administrative offices would remain at Dilruba. However there would be an addition of a facility to accommodate Board and committee meetings. This additional facility would either be located near the front entrance across from the Gateway, or in a repurposed garage in the Dilruba parking lot or possibly as an addition to Dilruba itself. It would be about 700 square feet and the capacity is not yet determined.

In terms of **meditation and reflection space**, we would rejuvenate the trails, make them more engaging and interesting, for example establish themes assigned to different trails. We would promote them and we would maintain the existing gazebos and benches and add one or two strategically, while addressing safety and security concerns such as establishing an alarm system at the gazebos.

In terms of **other buildings and grounds** changes, we would establish a new maintenance and storage facility that would function as storage for linens and cabin crew equipment and (we would) relocate the workshop there. This would be located southeast of the crossroads. Also, we would move the volleyball court away from the cabins, probably to the orchard area.

**Parking and transportation** is also an important consideration so we would expand the parking lot at the entrance for visitors to the new library/information building.

On to **SCENARIO TWO**.

The **philosophy** of Scenario Two is that the unique atmosphere of the Center is based as much or more on the love that is brought by the people who come as on any particular physical characteristic of the Center. Further, the Center has undergone periods of expansion over the years without any evident diminution of Baba's presence. Therefore, moderate addition of facilities to welcome overnight

guests and visitors would not undermine or detract from the unique atmosphere and would make the Center accessible to more people.

The **capacity** of the Center under Scenario Two would be no more than 150 overnight guests and no more than 150 day and evening guests for a total of no more than 250 people on Center at any one time, plus staff and volunteers.

Now the **elements**:

The first element concerns **cabins and locations**. The exact number of cabins has not yet been determined. As in all scenarios, these will be built in response to need but potential locations for the new cabins would include Gator Lake area, the land due east of the crossroads, the Youpon Dunes Trail, and Meher Baba's Gate road. Another option would be to repurpose Dilruba for accommodations. However this would require relocating administrative functions to the Gateway area.

In terms of **meeting and program facilities**, Scenario Two anticipates building what is termed Multipurpose Building 1, located north or south of the crossroads or in the orchard area or even possibly at Gator Lake. It would be about 3,500 square feet under the roof and the main room of the building would be the size of the current Meeting Place. It would hold up to 225 people at a time, 75 inside either at tables or 150 in theater seating and 75 additional people on the porches.

This building would have a communal kitchen that could be used along with a temporary kitchen (which is known as a camp kitchen). It would have bathrooms, storage for tables and chairs and would be heated and air-conditioned. Also, it would include performance space including a stage.

In terms of **kitchen facilities**, Multipurpose Building 1 would have a communal kitchen for teas, staff meals, group meals and, in combination with the camp kitchen, would service group retreats. It would serve up to 75 for meals inside with another 75 on the porches in good weather. There would be no cabins assigned to Multipurpose Building 1 for meals.

**Public information and access to archival materials** would be handled the same as they are in Scenario 1 with a new research library and archival facility accessible to the public. It would feature archival materials, Baba treasures on display, research computers and a reading room. It would be located between the old and new Gateway.

Now on to **guest reception and administration**.

A Welcome/Interface Center would be created as part of an expanded Gateway or a new administration and reception building located in or near the current Gateway. It would be used as a gathering place for tours or for volunteers going on a service project and for orienting new, first-time visitors. There would be quotes, archival

displays, and previous avatars or founders of major religions would be represented in a small, "Beads on One String" library geared to newcomers. Tea and coffee would perhaps be served there.

Administration and reception could be combined as a single complex or as a complex with separate buildings. Separate buildings would keep the Gateway for reception and add administration. There would be meeting space with technology and media, office space for seven or eight administrative staff, including a volunteer coordinator, program director and so forth.

Scenario Two provides for **meditation and reflection space** by adding a trail system in the dunes and marsh areas on the ocean side of the lake linked to screened-in gazebos on the lake. This trail would be partly boardwalk and partly natural trail.

We would also repurpose some or all of the historic cabins in the main part of the Center to become meditation and reading sites. Saroja Library would be expanded so the building could be used as a single space where library and reading room are not separate. Additional space would be added, perhaps on either side of the current library. The library would be open more hours and it would add AV, screens, and computers and it would display of archival materials.

If administrative offices are moved to the Gateway, Dilruba would be repurposed as meditative or social space. It could be used in conjunction with Baba's house as a staging area if traffic at Baba's house increases, or as an extension of Baba's house with artifacts on display. For pre- and post- time at Baba's house there could be meditation or gatherings at Dilruba.

Scenario Two also repurposes Sheriar Gatehouse as an art gallery with studios, exhibits, art workshops, even containing a kitchen with tea room.

Also, one to three boathouses would be added at the foot of the stairs to Baba's house, on Youpon Dunes Trail and at Gator Lake. The size of these would either be small than or equal to the existing boathouse.

**Other** changes to **buildings and grounds** include repurposing Meher House as the residence for the Center administrator. A caretaker's cabin would be built at Gator Lake if multiple cabins are built there, and, as in Scenario One, there would be a new maintenance and storage facility for linens and cabin crew equipment as well as a relocated workshop. And the volleyball court would be moved away from the cabins to the orchard area.

Finally, changes to the parking and transportation would be essential with a greater carrying capacity. The overflow parking lot at the entrance would be established with a shuttle to bring day visitors onto the Center while retreat guests would still have parking inside the Center. People would be encouraged to use bicycles and

walking to get from the entrance to the main part of the Center. For special events, we would negotiate with the mall for extra parking.

If there is significant building in the Gator Lake area, a new entrance could be opened and Land's End and, again, shuttle service for day visitors provided to get them onto the Center. Another possibility under consideration is providing pick-up service for otherwise homebound residents in the Myrtle Beach area.

**SCENARIO THREE** has a **philosophy** that's similar to Scenario Two whereby the numbers who will want to come to the Center will likely grow to an enormous magnitude as awareness of Meher Baba grows significantly - to the point that many more people will be required to stay off the Center property and only come on as day or evening visitors. Once we establish the maximum numbers for overnight and day visitors, the Center will need to turn people away whose hearts' desire is to experience Baba's presence on the Center. Therefore, rather than close the gates because we've reached capacity, the Center should make every effort possible to accommodate the largest numbers of people while still functioning as a retreat center.

Therefore, the **carrying capacity** of the Center under Scenario Three would be no more than 200 overnight guests at a time and no more than 300 day or evening guests at a time for a total of no more than 500 on the Center at any one time plus staff and volunteers.

Now, most of the **elements** and the options are identical to what you saw in Scenario Two with the following exceptions.

First, there would need to be a larger number of **cabins** built, not yet determined, but built in response to need to accommodate the larger carrying capacity.

And, for **meeting and program facilities**, there would be the establishment of what is termed Multipurpose Building 2, located southeast of the crossroads, in the orchard area, or perhaps at Gator Lake. This would be larger than Multipurpose Building 1. It would accommodate 125 people at tables inside and 250 people inside in rows for programs. It would also incorporate an inside kitchen and the building would be flexible enough to provide more intimate spaces or be opened up to extend the number of people who could be accommodated in a single large space, for example, for a talk or performance. It would also include a stage and bathrooms.

For **kitchen facilities**, the Multipurpose Building 2 would have both a communal and a professional kitchen. This would accommodate serving up to 150 people at a time for meals with 75 additional people on the porches in warmer weather. This would allow the building to host group gathering meals and staff meals. It could accommodate teas and other afternoon events and would be able to provide food



service for overnight guests and day visitors. It's important to note that this building would not be available for rental to outside individuals or groups.

So now you have an overview of the three draft scenarios. It's a lot of information to digest so you may want to take some time to study the overview document and maps or view the video again. However, as you feel ready, please complete the survey that can be found on the site.

In taking the survey, you will be asked several important questions about these scenarios. We are interested in hearing your feelings and thoughts and anything you provide will be treated anonymously. While we will not be able to incorporate every single idea or suggestion, you can be confident that we will read and consider all comments as we go about finalizing the scenarios.

So thank you for taking the time to reflect on the future of this most precious gift that Meher Baba has entrusted to us - His Center in the West - the Meher Center where He has assured us He never leaves - which is an invitation to each one of us to come and receive the treasure of His presence and love that He has left for each one of us and the countless ones in the future who will come to know of His having come again to give a spiritual push to all those in His creation.