



MEHER SPIRITUAL CENTER
Overview of Master Plan Draft Scenarios

- **The master plan:**

In May 2013 the board created an ad hoc Master Plan Committee, charged with creating three master plan scenarios, or options, from which the board can develop a final master plan for Meher Center. This master plan will create a framework in which key decisions can be made about the development of the Center over the next fifty years. It addresses a variety of long-term potentialities, such as new group gathering spaces, overnight accommodations, and reception/welcoming areas, to name a few.

- **The master plan engagement process:**

As part of the development of the three mentioned scenarios, the Master Plan Committee and the Board of Directors are carrying out an engagement process with the broader Meher Baba Family. This process will determine how those who frequent the Center feel about what is reflected in the three master plan scenarios to date.

- **Core values underlying all 3 scenarios:**

In 2009, the Board of Directors approved the following vision, values and mission to guide all Center work. The Master Plan Committee used them to guide the creation of all 3 master plan scenarios.

- **Meher Spiritual Center Vision, Mission, and Values**

Vision:

Meher Spiritual Center, Meher Baba's Home in the West, where all who come can experience His love.

Values and Value Statements:

These values are the foundation that keeps us focused on the vision of Avatar Meher Baba's Home in the West. For the vision to be realized, efforts of the Board, staff and volunteers are guided by the following values:

Focus on Meher Baba: Avatar Meher Baba, His teachings and His Life of Love and Service underlie all we do to uphold His wish that the Meher Spiritual Center remain a place for rest and for renewal of the spiritual life.

Welcoming: Our responsibility toward all who come to Avatar Meher Baba's Home in the West is to be genuine, loving and receptive in all our interactions.

Shared Stewardship: As stewards of Avatar Meher Baba's Home in the West, we carefully and responsibly engage in a cooperative effort to ensure that the Center flourishes for all time.

Harmony: We embrace our individual and shared responsibilities, putting ourselves aside in service to Avatar Meher Baba and His Home in the West.

Attentiveness: We remain alert and responsive to any condition, action or inaction that may enhance or detract from the unique atmosphere of the Center.

Integrity: We align our behaviors with our vision, values and mission. Our conscious intent is to be honest, sincere and loving in all our actions and interactions.

Mission Statement:

The Meher Spiritual Center, Avatar Meher Baba's Home in the West, is a place of pilgrimage for all who love and follow Him and for those who know of Him and want to know more. In a spirit of love and service and in alignment with the Center's vision and values, the Board, staff and volunteers are committed to:

- Maintaining the intimate and unique atmosphere of Meher Baba's Home: a place of retreat, rest, contemplation and renewal of the spiritual life;
- Providing a safe and welcoming experience for all;
- Offering information about the Avatar's teachings and His life of love and service without supplanting anyone's religious convictions or beliefs;
- Creating the shared stewardship opportunities that best serve the purposes of the Center;
- Ensuring the preservation and maintenance of the Center: all of its grounds, buildings, archival treasures and its natural environment;
- Developing the physical, human and fiscal resources in ways that best serve the purposes of the Center, and
- Developing or supporting programs based on Avatar Meher Baba's example of love and service to those in need.

○ **Master plan core principles**

In addition to the board's vision, values and mission, the scenarios are based on the following core principles:

1. 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 1950's and continue to this day including special celebrations, Youth Sahavas, and programs when mandali members 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 (numbers, demographics, other characteristics). However, no changes can compromise its cultural resources—specifically the three sites that Baba requested to be maintained as much as possible as they were when He was here: the Barn, the Lagoon Cabin, and Meher Abode; in the same spirit, care must be taken that changes do not compromise the natural setting 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 treated. All are welcomed and provided for as they come for the intimate connection with their Beloved.

○ **Master plan assumptions**

The MPC has also identified several core assumptions that underlie the development of these scenarios. Core assumptions are possibilities considered significant enough in the life of Meher Spiritual Center that the Master Plan should assume they would occur.

1. Over time and for a variety of reasons, there will be significantly greater numbers of people interested in visiting the Center, both as day visitors and overnight retreat guests. In time, huge numbers of people will want to have access to MSC.

2. More followers of Meher Baba will be coming to live near the Center, mainly retired people who will want to have access to the Center as visitors. They will also form a significant force of volunteer labor that will help carry out the operations of the Center.

3. The natural environment is changing and this will accelerate, creating impacts on flora, fauna, the tidal line, fire hazards, hurricane damage, etc. This will have 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 MSC's tax exemptions are likely to occur. While these have not yet 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 be turned down because it seems to be nonviable or impractical when presented.

Taken together the vision, values, mission, core principles, and key assumptions are embedded in each of the scenarios that have been developed. They form the foundation for the master plan.

☒ **The three master plan scenarios**

The following summarizes three scenarios, each forged from plausible visions for the future of the Center. All scenarios are based on a set of core principles; however, each scenario interprets these principles differently. Regardless of the differences across the scenarios, all are offered with the intention of pleasing Him and keeping the Center as His home.

These scenario proposals vary according to judgments regarding the maximum number of people that could be accommodated while still preserving the essential character or nature of the Center (see "core principles" above). For the most part, these judgments are qualitative in nature. Keep in mind that once the optimal capacity is reached for each scenario, other people could not be accommodated on the Center.

**Maps for all 3 scenarios will be viewable on the Meher Center website by the middle of October*

***Please remember that the following scenario elements are concepts and not fleshed-out designs*

SCENARIO ONE

Philosophy:

- ❖ 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 could concentrate on preserving the existing atmosphere and accommodating expanded interest through management techniques and off-site facilities.

Capacity:

85 overnight guests

160 day/evening guests

245 Total on Center at any one time (plus staff and volunteers)

Elements and Options:

ELEMENT - Cabins/locations:

- Two hermitage cabins
 - location: along Meher Baba's Gate road
- One family duplex
 - location: yet to be determined

ELEMENT - Meeting/Program facilities:

- A gathering facility: similar to Reading Room in function and feel
 - location: east of the orchard area
 - size: 1,000 square feet
 - capacity: 40
- Outside-the-Center venues: used to hold large group gatherings (e.g. renting or acquiring space)

ELEMENT - Kitchen facilities:

- White storage building/garage kitchen: repurpose building currently used as cabin crew operations; would have a stable foundation to accommodate necessary equipment for group gatherings; would be upgraded to meet safety, sanitation, and worker safety concerns
 - location: in current white storage building and garage with possible garage extension
 - size: 1,800 square feet
 - capacity: not yet determined

ELEMENT - Public information/access to archival materials

- Research library and archival facility: accessible to public; would feature archival materials, Baba treasures on display, research computers, and reading room
 - location: between old and new Gateway
 - size: 1,800 square feet
 - capacity: not yet determined

ELEMENT - Reception/administration:

- Administration offices remain in Dilruba

- Board and committee meeting facility
 - location: either near front entrance across from the Gateway, in a repurposed Dilruba garage, or as an addition to Dilruba
 - size: 700 square feet
 - capacity: not yet determined
 - description: specific building needs would depend on its location; beyond meeting room and/or offices, could contain bathroom, kitchenette and storage

ELEMENT - Meditation/reflection:

- Rejuvenate trails
 - make them more engaging e.g. establish themes assigned to different trails including quotes from Baba's visits
 - promote them
 - maintain existing gazebos and benches; add one or two strategically
 - address safety and security (e.g. alarm system in gazebos)

ELEMENT - Other buildings/grounds:

- New maintenance and storage facility: would function as storage for linens and cabin crew equipment, and as a relocated workshop
 - location: west of crossroads
 - size: not yet determined

- Move volleyball court away from cabins, to orchard area

ELEMENT - Parking/transportation:

- Expand parking lot at entrance

SCENARIO TWO

Philosophy:

- ❖ The unique atmosphere of the Center is based as much on the love that is brought by the people who come as on any particular physical characteristic of the Center.

- ❖ Further the Center has gone through 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.

Capacity:

150 overnight guests

160 day/evening guests

310 Total on Center at any one time (plus staff and volunteers)

Elements and Options:

ELEMENT - Cabins/locations:

- Number of cabins not yet determined; built in response to need
- Potential locations for new cabins:
 - Gator Lake
 - Land due east of crossroads
 - Youpon Dunes Trail
 - Meher Baba's Gate road
- Repurpose Dilruba for accommodations/as cabin if administration is relocated to Gateway area

ELEMENT - Meeting/program facilities:

- Multipurpose Building I:
 - location (options):
 - north or south of crossroads, in orchard area, or at Gator Lake
 - size: 3,500 square feet under roof (main room is size of current Meeting Place)
 - capacity: 275 total-- 130 inside (or 200 in theater seating), and 75 on porches
 - description: large space for multipurpose use-formal and informal gatherings, programs, eating; has bathrooms, storage heated/AC; includes performance space (stage); communal kitchen that could be used with "camp kitchen" (set up only for special events).

ELEMENT - Kitchen facilities:

- Communal kitchen:
 - location: in Multipurpose Building I
 - capacity: serves up to 75 for meals; 75 more on porches in good weather
 - description: kitchen located in MPB I for teas, staff meals, group meals, group retreats (combined with kitchen that can be set up only for special events) no cabins assigned to it
- OR
- Professional kitchen:
 - location: in Multipurpose Building I
 - capacity: would accommodate serving up to 130 people for meals and 75 additional on porches in warmer weather
 - description: Full professional-grade kitchen located in MPB I for group gathering meals and staff meals; could accommodate teas and other afternoon events; would provide food service for overnight guests and day visitors; would not be available for rental to outside individuals/groups

ELEMENT - Public Information/access to archival materials:

- Research library and archival facility:
 - location: between old and new gateway
 - size: 1,800 square feet
 - capacity: not yet determined
 - description: would be accessible to public; would feature archival materials, Baba treasures on display, research computers, and reading room

ELEMENT - Reception/administration:

- Welcome/Interface Center: part of expanded Gateway or new administration and reception building
 - location: at entrance; in or near current Gateway
 - size and capacity: not yet determined
 - description:
 - ✓ gathering place for tours or volunteers going on a service project
 - ✓ orientation for first-time visitors
 - ✓ quotes; facsimile archival displays
 - ✓ previous avatars or founders of major religions represented in a small, "Beads on One String" library geared to newcomers
 - ✓ tea and coffee served (perhaps)

- Administration/Reception: could be a single complex (an expanded Gateway) or a complex with separate buildings
 - location: entrance
 - size:
 - ✓ one building would be Gateway roughly twice as big;
 - ✓ separate buildings would keep Gateway for reception and add administration as big or bigger depending on number of offices
 - capacity: not yet determined
 - description: meeting space (16x20) with technology and media; office space for 7-8 administrative staff, including volunteer coordinator, program director, etc.

ELEMENT - Meditation/reflection:

- Add trail system
 - location: dunes and marsh areas on ocean side of lake; linked to screened-in gazebo(s) on lake
 - description: partly boardwalk, partly trail
- Repurpose some or all historic cabins to meditation/reading sites
- Expand Saroja library
 - use building as single space, where library and reading room are not separate
 - add additional space, perhaps on other side of current library
 - open more hours
 - add AV, screens, computers
 - display archival materials
- Repurpose Dilruba as meditative or social space if administration moves to Gateway area
 - could be used in conjunction with Baba's house:
 - ✓ as a staging area if traffic at Baba's house increases
 - ✓ as an extension of Baba's house with artifacts on display
 - ✓ for pre- and post- Baba's house meditation or gatherings if time limits are imposed
- Repurpose Sheriar Gate House as art gallery:
 - studios, exhibits, art workshops
 - would contain kitchen with tea room
- Add 1 - 3 additional boathouse(s):

- locations: at the foot of the stairs to Baba's House; on Youpon Dunes Trail; at Gator Lake
- size: smaller than or equal to existing boathouse
- description: one boat at the Baba's House and Youpon Dunes boathouses

ELEMENT - Other buildings/grounds:

- New maintenance and storage facility: would function as storage for linens and cabin crew equipment, and as a relocated workshop
 - location: west of crossroads, on road to the Barn
 - size: not yet determined
- Repurpose Meher House as the residence for the Center administrator
- Caretaker's cabin at Gator Lake, if multiple cabins are built
- Move volleyball court away from cabins, to orchard area perhaps

ELEMENT - Parking/transportation:

- Overflow parking lot at entrance; shuttle day visitors onto Center; retreat guests have interior parking
 - encourage use of bicycles and walking to main part of Center
 - negotiate with mall for extra parking for special events
- Open a new entrance at Lands End and add parking on Center with shuttle service for day visitors
- Open a new entrance at Lands End, rent or purchase RV lot for off-Center parking, and run shuttle for day visitors
- Provide "Blue Bus" pickup service for otherwise homebound residents

SCENARIO THREE

Philosophy:

- ❖ The numbers who will want to come to the Center is likely to grow, to the point that many more people will be required to stay off the Center property and come on as day and evening visitors.
- ❖ Once we establish 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 have reached capacity, the Center should make every effort to accommodate the largest numbers possible while still functioning as a retreat center.

Capacity:

200 overnight guests

300 day/evening guests

500 Total on Center at any one time (plus staff and volunteers)

Elements and Options:

ELEMENT - Cabins/locations:

- Number of cabins not yet determined; built in response to need
- Potential locations for new cabins:
 - Gator Lake
 - Land due east of crossroads
 - Youpon Dunes Trail
 - Meher Baba's Gate road
 - Land northeast of crossroads
- Repurpose Dilruba for accommodations if administration is relocated to Gateway area

ELEMENT - Meeting/program facilities:

- Multipurpose Building II:
 - location: north or south of crossroads, in orchard area, or at Gator Lake
 - size: 4,000 square feet

- capacity: 350 total---could accommodate 130 people at tables; 250 in rows for programs; side room one-40 people; side room two-60 people
- description: large multi-use building with 2 intimate inside rooms on either side of main room; incorporates inside kitchen; includes bathroom, storage, screen-in porch and heating/AC; could performance space/stage; can be closed off to provide more intimate spaces or opened up to extend the numbers of people who could be accommodated in a single large space (e.g., for a talk).

ELEMENT - Kitchen facilities:

- Professional kitchen:
 - location: in Multipurpose Building II
 - capacity: would accommodate serving up to 130 people for meals and 75 additional on porches in warmer weather
 - description: full professional-grade kitchen located in MPB II for group gathering meals and staff meals; could accommodate teas and other afternoon events; would provide food service for overnight guests and day visitors; would not be available for rental to outside individuals/groups

ELEMENT - Public Information/access to archival materials:

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