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From: denisejoffe@mac.com
Sent: Tuesday, July 21, 2026 8:00 PM
To: Planning Commission; Alison Van Gorp; Deb Estrada; Council
Subject: JCC rezone request

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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July 31, 2026

To the MI city council:

I'm writing to urge your support for amending the Comprehensive Plan to change the designation of the SJCC property from single-family residential to commercial, allowing the Jewish Community Center to move forward with plans to replace its aging facility.

I'm here as a passionate member of the Mercer Island community and as someone who regularly uses the JCC. I visit several times a week for fitness and classes, and I have come to appreciate the J as much more than a Jewish institution. It is a community resource that welcomes people of all backgrounds and serves Islanders at every stage of life—from preschoolers and families to adults and seniors.

The JCC is an important part of the fabric of Mercer Island. It provides opportunities for fitness, education, recreation, childcare, and community connection. It also makes an effort to ensure that cost is not a barrier for those who cannot afford membership. In that sense, the J's mission extends well beyond its membership. It contributes to the health, well-being, and vitality of our entire island community.

But the current facility is aging, outdated, and no longer able to meet the needs of the community it serves. It is not simply a matter of wanting a newer or larger building. The existing structure presents significant challenges related to safety, accessibility, infrastructure, and security. At a time when antisemitism is on the rise and security concerns are very real, the limitations of the current facility are particularly troubling. It is difficult to accept that armed officers must stand outside in the rain and cold to protect the building and the people inside it. A modern facility would provide the opportunity to address these concerns in a way that the existing building simply cannot.

I understand that some Islanders have concerns about the proposed project, including traffic, membership growth, the scale of the new building, and whether rezoning would provide the JCC with an unfair advantage. These concerns deserve to be considered carefully, but I also believe they need to be evaluated in the context of what this project means for Mercer Island as a whole.

The proposed redevelopment is not an effort to fundamentally change the character of the East Mercer Way community. It is an opportunity to replace an aging facility with a modern, safe, and functional community resource.

I also believe the proposed rezoning should be viewed in the context of the property's history and existing use. The JCC has long served as a community institution, and the current zoning designation does not fully reflect the property's established role or the services it provides. Changing the designation would allow the land use designation to better align with the reality of how this property has functioned for years.

This decision is ultimately about more than one building or one organization. It is about what kind of community we want Mercer Island to be. Do we want to preserve an aging facility that is increasingly difficult to secure, maintain, and adapt? Or do we want to support the creation of a modern community center that can safely and effectively serve Islanders for decades to come?

I believe Mercer Island is stronger when we invest in institutions that bring people together, support families, promote health and wellness, care for children and seniors, and provide a place where people from different backgrounds can connect. The JCC is one of those institutions.

I urge you to support the requested Comprehensive Plan amendment and rezoning. The JCC cannot simply remodel its way out of the limitations of the existing building. It is time for a thoughtful tear-down and rebuild.

The JCC is asking for the opportunity to build a modern facility that can continue serving Mercer Island—safely, inclusively, and for generations to come. I believe that is an investment that benefits the entire island.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Denise Joffe

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