

Molly McGuire

From: Jeffery Weisman <jeffery.weisman@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, August 5, 2026 5:47 PM
To: Planning Commission
Cc: Alison Van Gorp; Deb Estrada; Council
Subject: SJCC Rezone - Oppose - Will Set Damaging Island-Wide Precedent

Dear Planning Commission:

I support the JCC as an organization and recognize its importance to the community. However, I strongly oppose the proposed rezone. Supporting the JCC should not require the City to disregard the potential consequences for neighboring residents, users of East Mercer Way and SE 36th Street, or the broader Mercer Island community.

The proposed rezone should be rejected because it: (1) establishes a damaging precedent; (2) fails to satisfy key requirements applicable to a spot-specific rezone; (3) is not justified by the arguments and statements offered in support of it; and (4) is not tied to any specific project design, development features, or even a commitment that the property will not be sold.

1. The rezone would establish a damaging island-wide precedent.

The property currently operates in a residential zone under a conditional use permit. If the City allows this property to be rezoned to C-O, it will create a precedent for other clubs, community centers, facilities with community gyms or pools, and churches to seek similar rezones.

Northwest Yeshiva High School is located in an R-8.4 zone. Mercer Island Presbyterian Church is zoned R-9.6. The Church of Jesus Christ LDS is zoned R-9.6. St. Monica's Church, together with its school and gym, is zoned R-9.6. Emmanuel Episcopal Church, Mercer Island United Congregational Church, and Shevet Achim Congregation are also located in R-9.6 zones.

These institutions, like the SJCC in its current bulk and scale, are compatible with the overall residential character of the community. Rezoning the SJCC parcels would create a precedent for rezoning these other religious and community institutions. The Mercer Island Community and Events Center, Mercer Island Beach Club, Mercer Island Country Club, and Mercerwood Shore Club are likewise located in residential zones.

Separately, Mayor Salim Nice personally initiated the procedural linking of the SJCC rezone docket proposal with the Mercer Island Country Club's docket proposal, yet that history does not appear to be addressed in the current materials.

At the December 5, 2023 City Council meeting, the Council considered whether to place the SJCC's Proposed Amendment No. 18 on the 2024 docket. Mayor Nice moved to amend the proposal under MICC 19.15.230(H) by adding the properties generally known as the Mercer Island Country Club and finding that those properties were sufficiently similarly situated to expand the amendment's geographic scope.

The amendment passed 5–1, with Councilmember Reynolds opposed and Councilmember Weinberg recused. The meeting minutes are available here:

<https://mccmeetings.blob.core.usgovcloudapi.net/mercerwa-pubu/MEET-Minutes-682d59f17cfb46c5bc35a0c2fed5b25c.pdf>

Is the Country Club’s docket proposal still attached to the SJCC proposal? If it is not, what happened to that portion of the docket amendment?

2. The rezone would confer a significant private financial benefit.

Rezoning the property from Residential to C-O would permit many additional uses and significantly increase the value of the land. That increase would convey a financial benefit to the SJCC and therefore does not satisfy the criterion that a spot-specific rezone not provide a benefit to a person or group of property owners.

The intensity of development could also increase to as much as four times the size of the current SJCC facility, according to the SJCC’s own transportation consultant.

3. The arguments offered in support of the rezone are not persuasive.

The argument that the property should be rezoned because of how it has historically been used carries little weight. The SJCC has operated beyond the capacity authorized by its CUP, including maintaining a larger membership than originally agreed upon.

A use conducted in violation of existing zoning does not justify changing the zoning. I could operate a car dealership in my yard in complete violation of residential zoning, but that would not justify rezoning my property.

The JCC also cites its future planned use as a reason to approve the rezone. By that reasoning, if I planned to construct a 50-story apartment building on my property, that plan alone would justify rezoning my residential lot.

The proposal also includes a parcel that is currently used as a single-family residence. The outline of that residence continues to appear on the JCC’s proposed plans from 2023. Why, then, is that parcel included in the requested rezone?

The current-use argument cannot apply to that parcel. The justification must therefore be based on a planned future use. A reasonable conclusion is that the published proposal does not reflect what will ultimately move forward. The JCC suggests that the use will remain generally similar and has presented a proposal to the community, but it is asking the City to approve a rezone without legally tying that rezone to the proposal that has been shown.

4. The appropriate process is a CUP, not a rezone.

The materials previously presented by the JCC imply that the organization intends to pursue a modest and attractive design if the rezone is approved. That proposal appears to involve seeking relief from certain zoning design constraints in exchange for presenting a detailed building proposal.

That is essentially the purpose of a conditional use permit.

The project should proceed through the CUP process, and the City should support redevelopment through a CUP, plain and simple. Redevelopment through a rezone: (1) creates a dangerous precedent; (2) provides substantial value to a private organization; (3) is not justified merely by reference to the current or planned use; and (4) is not tied to a specific development proposal, even though a proposal has been shown to the community that does not appear to require rezoning all of the identified parcels.

A reasonable person could therefore conclude that the development ultimately constructed may be substantially larger than what has been publicly rendered.

We can support the JCC while also protecting the interests of the entire Mercer Island community. The City should help the JCC update and revitalize its facilities in accordance with existing City laws, without creating a harmful island-wide precedent.

The Planning Commission should reject the rezone proposal and remand the JCC to work with the City on a CUP-able design that includes reasonable updates and can serve Mercer Islanders for the next 55 years.

-JW