Molly McGuire

From: Orly Steinberg <opsteinberg@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, October 5, 2026 7:23 PM
To: Molly McGuire
Subject: Support Proposed Zoning Change for the SJCC

Dear Mercer Island City Council,
I am writing to urge your support of the SJCC property rezone to Commercial Office.

I want to share my perspective not as a land-use expert, but as a community member who has experienced firsthand what the Stroum Jewish Community Center contributes to Mercer Island and the greater Seattle community.

Many people think of the JCC as a place primarily for the Jewish community, but in reality it serves a much broader population offering childcare, preschool, summer camps, fitness facilities, educational programs, cultural events, lectures, cooking classes, and activities for people of all ages. These programs are open to the broader community, and many participants are not members, like myself, or not Jewish.

My own family has benefited with my three children attending summer camp there for several years. Later, my son and his girlfriend worked there as a summer camp counselors, gaining valuable work experience while serving local families, riding the J's bus down from North Seattle with a busful of campers. During COVID, when so many parents struggled to balance work and childcare, the SJCC created supervised learning spaces where children could safely complete their remote schooling while still interacting with other children and enjoying outdoor play. That program allowed me, as a physician, to continue caring for patients because I knew my daughter had a safe and supportive place to spend the day while attending school online.

I understand the importance of protecting residential neighborhoods. This zoning change would better reflect a community use that has existed on this site for decades, ANY future redevelopment will STILL be subject to additional city review and public input.

BUT Every dollar and every hour spent by SJCC navigating a zoning framework that no longer reflects the property's longstanding community use is a dollar and an hour that cannot be invested in preschool programs, services for seniors, summer camps, cultural events, or other programs that benefit the community. At a time of rising antisemitism, more of the J’s funding must go to security and other programming countering that hate, not to rezoning issues or to managing with a zoning status that does not allow the building to remodel properly.

As you consider your recommendation, I encourage you to think not only about the property itself, but also about the thousands of people whose lives are enriched by the programs and services offered there. Please weigh the extraordinary public benefit the SJCC provides to families in Mercer Island and throughout our region. I hope you will support a recommendation that allows this longstanding community institution to have a zoning designation that reflects its use.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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