Molly McGuire

From: Jill Handaly <jillhandaly@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 13, 2026 12:33 PM
To: Molly McGuire
Subject: Re: SJCC Rezone hearing

Hi-
Thank you for getting back. Any information you have would be helpful. In the meantime, here are my comments for the record.
Thank you,
Jill

Hi, my name is Jill Handaly, and I'm President of the Board of Directors of the Stroum Jewish Community Center.

I stand here tonight not as someone who lives on Mercer Island, or even as someone who grew up in Seattle. I'm a transplant from Houston—and trust me, coming from Houston, I understand what can happen to a city without thoughtful zoning restrictions.

You get parks next to high-rises and strip clubs next to elementary schools.

But we aren't trying to build a strip club. And contrary to some of what you may have heard, we aren't trying to build a 400,000-square-foot office building.

We are simply asking that our property be rezoned so that we can continue to carry out our mission: **to be the Puget Sound's most open and welcoming community-centered Jewish organization.**

And as the **only Jewish Community Center in the state of Washington**, we take that responsibility seriously.

Right now, the constraints of our building make fulfilling that mission harder than it should be.

Imagine you have mobility challenges. You've just finished a chair yoga class downstairs in our fitness center, and you want to come upstairs and buy a challah for Shabbat.

You can't just take an elevator upstairs—as you could in this building. Instead, you have to go outside, most likely in the rain, make your way down the sidewalk, back up a ramp, rescan your key fob, and reenter the building.

And under our current zoning constraints, we can't simply fix that.

How does that allow us to be the most open and welcoming community center we can be?

I was going to stand here tonight and tell you about all the other things we can't do in our current building without a rezone.

But then, this morning, I met with our oldest living past president. He is almost 98 years old, and he recounted, in remarkable detail, the history of the JCC—from its beginnings in 1949, renting rooms in a Fourth Avenue office building, to raising enough money in 1959 to purchase a permanent home in a former Elks building, to purchasing land on Mercer Island in 1966 and opening our doors here in 1969—one year before the City of Mercer Island and the Town of Mercer Island merged to become one city.

And I was struck by two things.

First, **every generation of leaders before us has had to think about what their community needs—not just today, but for the generations that follow.**

And second, **this rezone predates ALL of us.**

This isn't about one Board, one City Council, or one moment in time. It's about making sure an institution that has been part of Mercer Island for nearly 60 years can continue to serve this community for the next 60.

So while I may be a little nervous standing here tonight asking you for a rezone, it is the least I can do to honor the people who came before me—people who dedicated decades of blood, sweat, and tears to ensure that the JCC would have a permanent home for generations to come.

Tonight, I'm asking you to help us protect that legacy while allowing it to evolve.

Please grant the SJCC this rezone so that we can get back to doing what we do best: **being the Puget Sound's most open and welcoming community-centered Jewish organization.**

Thank you.

> On Oct 13, 2026, at 12:31 PM, Molly McGuire <molly.mcguire@mercerisland.gov> wrote:
>
> Hi Jill,
>
> I can check with our Hearing Examiner Staff Liaison who is keeping track of the people registered to speak at the hearing. For scheduling, public comments will take place after both the City's presentation and the Applicant's presentation.
>
> Alternatively, you can submit written public comments to me which will be entered into the record during the hearing.

Sincerely,

Molly McGuire
Interim Principal Planner
City of Mercer Island – Community Planning & Development
206-275-7712 | www.mercerisland.gov
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-----Original Message-----
From: Jill Handaly <jillhandaly@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 13, 2026 12:20 PM
To: Molly McGuire <molly.mcguire@mercerisland.gov>
Subject: SJCC Rezone hearing

Hi Molly-
I'm Jill Handaly, the SJCC Board President. I am traveling on Monday and trying to figure out how to make the hearing so that I can speak. Is there any way that I could speak first or that you could give me a time so that I can schedule appropriately?
Thank you,
Jill