Molly McGuire

From: PAUL BURSTEIN <burstein62@comcast.net>
Sent: Thursday, October 15, 2026 1:40 PM
To: Molly McGuire
Subject: statement for hearing on Stroum JCC rezoning application

Hi, Molly,

Below is a statement I have written in support of the Stroum JCC's rezoning application, being addressed in a hearing on Monday morning. Please include it in the set of public comments.

I am also scheduled to speak at the hearing.

Thanks for your attention.

Paul

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I am writing to urge your support for rezoning the property of the Stroum Jewish Community Center from residential to commercial.

My name is Paul Burstein. My wife and I moved to Mercer Island 40 years ago, and we have been members of the Stroum JCC ever since. Our three children attended preschool at the J; they attended its after-school programs and its summer camp for many years. One of those “children” now has children of her own; her family belongs to the J, and our two grandchildren enjoy holidays celebrations, swimming, and other programs there. My wife and I may still be found there frequently ourselves–at the fitness center, lectures, holiday programs, the Seattle Jewish film festival, book events, and other programs. For us, the JCC has been an important part of our very happy experience of Mercer Island.

What are those of us supporting a rezone asking for? We are not asking that a well thought out policy, adopted during a process like this one, be overturned. No one seems to know why the JCC property is zoned residential. The land has never been residential, and there are no plans for it ever to be residential. The current zoning is out of touch with reality.

The process we’re involved in provides an opportunity to change that–to bring the zoning into line with the land’s past, present, and future use.
What would be the advantages of doing so? Mercer Island has changed a lot during the 40 years since my family moved to Mercer Island, and the almost 60 years since the JCC was built. The Community Center was built, the library rebuilt and updated, and the central business district transformed. The houses being built today are very different from the houses built 40 years ago, or 60. Some object to their size, but overall they are much improved–better heating and lighting, greater energy efficiency, better appliances, more pleasant to live in. Mercer Island is a 2020s community, not a 1960s community, and is the better for it.

The JCC has grown and changed along with the rest of Mercer Island; it is home to the Seattle Jewish film festival, the preschool has been updated, the fitness facility has been transformed, and it

is home to a wider and wider range of activities appealing to Mercer Island residents and those from surrounding communities.

But the JCC is stuck. Even with the modest improvements allowed under its current zoning, it is still a 1960s facility. If it remains so, its appeal with decline, and its future will be in doubt. Do the J's members, potential members and future members want a trip there to be a trip backward in time? Does Mercer Island, moving forward in so many areas, want to force the JCC to be a musty monument to the 1960s?

I hope not. I hope the JCC will be allowed to be part of Mercer Island's progress. A JCC brought forward into the 2020s will be a vital part of our community–a cultural center, a place for educating children, a sports facility, a community center that is Jewish and also a model of diversity open to everyone.

The JCC's leadership is visionary. It has plans for the JCC that will improve it beyond measure. And those plans take into account the desires of those living nearby; tremendous effort will be devoted to seeing that an improved and expanded JCC fits into the neighborhood and improves it, rather than somehow being apart from it.

By approving a rezone, you will ensure that the JCC can move successfully into the future, along with the rest of Mercer Island. I urge you to do so.

Thank you for your consideration.

Paul Burstein
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