

Email sent to ECCO on August 3, 2020:

I'm writing on behalf of the of Minnesota Zen Meditation Center (MZMC) to inform you about a proposed renovation of our property, located at 3343 E Bde Maka Ska Parkway, Minneapolis, MN 55408. I am an MZMC board member and neighbor. MZMC seeks to remove a 1-story addition, consisting of a garage and unheated storage space, and replace it with a 1-story addition that will be used for a new meditation hall (zendo).

By way of background, MZMC is a Minnesota 501(c)(3) nonprofit religious corporation that was formed in 1972 as the first Zen Center in the Midwest. All of MZMC's talks, classes, and retreats are open to the public, including free meditation classes. Membership is on a pay-as-you-can basis, and many of our members and participants are low-income.

As meditation has become more popular, our zendo has become more crowded. Therefore, we propose to replace the current 230 s.f. garage/storage room addition (built by prior owners) with a 766 s.f. addition that will serve as our new zendo. This new zendo will benefit the public not only by relieving overcrowding during public talks and retreats, but also by making our building more accessible. The addition will include a handicapped-accessible building entrance, and it will enable us to convert a portion of our existing zendo into two new handicapped-accessible first-floor bathrooms. Our building currently lacks a handicapped-accessible entrance or a handicapped-accessible bathroom.

In connection with this renovation project, MZMC is seeking a variance from the Zoning Code's minimum parking requirements. The Zoning Code requires a minimum of 12 parking spaces (after a 1-space bicycle reduction), based on a calculated occupant load of 128 people (99 for the new zendo and 29 for an existing adjacent multi-purpose room). This requirement is based on an occupant load formula (1 occupant per 7 sf) that significantly overstates the actual occupant load for our zendo; Zen meditators primarily sit on floor cushions, and the new zendo will accommodate only about 45 meditation cushions, not 99.

We have been advised by the City that MZMC currently has 3 conforming off-street parking spaces: two in a front parking area, and one in the adjacent garage that we plan to remove. MZMC also has 6 spots in a rear alley, but they are nonconforming as to size, location, and paving requirements.

MZMC seeks a variance from the Code's minimum parking requirements permitting us to maintain three conforming parking spots. Those spots could be sited in our current front parking area. Without such a variance, MZMC would effectively have to convert a substantial portion of its landscaped, publicly accessible yard into a paved parking lot. The yard, located across from Bde Maka Ska, is maintained by MZMC volunteers but open to the public. It provides an urban sanctuary, with a mature tree canopy and a diversity of native plants. A public seating area provides a view of Bde Maka Ska. Weddings, charity fundraisers, and other public events are held there. A walking path is used for walking meditation during retreats and on weekday mornings. Walking meditation, along with sitting meditation, is an essential part of our practice.

Converting public landscaping to a parking lot would be harmful to the public welfare and MZMC; unnecessary to meet MZMC's reasonable parking needs; and contrary to the Minneapolis 2040 Plan's policies of discouraging automobile use, preserving public green space, and protecting public waters. Constructing a large parking lot in our yard would require removing lawn, groundcover, shrubs, and a mature tree, as well as awkwardly rerouting our walking meditation path. Parking has never been a

significant issue at MZMC, and it will continue to be a non-issue even with a larger zendo. So many of our members and guests use alternative means of transportation—biking, walking, bus, ride-sharing—that the ample nearby street-parking is more than adequate to meet our needs. Therefore, we seek a variance allowing us to complete the project while maintaining three conforming parking spots.

I hope you will support MZMC's variance application. Please feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss this.

Sincerely,
Wayne Moskowitz