



Minnesota Zen Meditation Center

3343 East Bde Make Ska (Calhoun) Parkway Minneapolis, MN 55408

April 3, 2020

Dear City Council Member Bender,

We write on behalf of the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center (MZMC) to request a special permit, or other assistance, reducing the Zoning Code's minimum parking requirements in connection with our planned renovation of our home on East Bde Maka Ska Parkway. If enforced, § 541.40 of the Zoning Code would effectively require MZMC to replace a substantial portion of its landscaped, publically accessible yard across from Bde Maka Ska with a paved parking lot. Converting this 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. Therefore, we respectfully request a special permit notwithstanding § 541.40, or other assistance, reducing the minimum parking requirements from 12 to 9 spots.

In addition, we seek relief from being required to pave our current parking spots, because this would increase impervious surfaces near Bde Maka Ska, contrary to the Minneapolis 2040 Plan.

MZMC

MZMC was formed in 1972 as a Minnesota 501(c)(3) nonprofit religious corporation; it was the first Zen Center in the Midwest. For the last 45 years, our home has been a house constructed in 1905 on the eastern shore of what is now Bde Maka Ska.

We provide valuable services to the community-at-large. All of our talks, classes, and retreats are open to the public, including weekly meditation classes and daily meditation sessions that are free. We also provide space to recovery groups and serve people suffering from emotional distress, including many who have been referred by a doctor or therapist. We are continuing to provide most of our regular programming remotely during our temporary building closure resulting from coronavirus. Membership is on a pay-as-you-can basis, and many of our members and participants are low-income. Our annual operating budget is modest (approximately \$200,000).

An important feature of our home is the beautiful natural landscape in our yard, with a mature tree canopy and a diversity of native plants. The yard is an urban sanctuary, maintained by MZMC volunteers but open to the public. A public seating area provides a view of Bde Maka Ska. A walking path allows people to practice walking meditation during retreats. We hold weddings, charity fundraisers, and other public events there. Our community cherishes this green space.

MZMC's Renovation Project

As our offerings have become more popular, our home has become more crowded. Most activities are conducted in our main room, the zendo, which is no bigger today than when it was used as a living room in the early 1900s. For many years we debated whether to move, tear-down, or renovate. Ultimately, we decided to stay and renovate.

Our renovation project has three goals: (1) accommodating growth; (2) improving accessibility; and (3) enhancing stewardship of our building and grounds. To achieve our first goal we intend to remove a 2-story addition that was constructed before we bought the property, consisting of a garage and unheated storage space, and replace it with a new 2-story addition that will include our new zendo. To achieve our other goals we intend to, among other things, add two new handicapped accessible bathrooms, remodel our entrances to improve access, and re-stucco our building. We conducted a capital campaign that raised nearly \$600,000, and engaged an architect (Rick Okada of Chowa Studio) and builder (Flannery Construction). We believe our renovation project will benefit not just our members but also our neighbors and others who use our services. We hope to begin construction this summer.

Grounds for Assistance

If enforced, § 541.40 would require MZMC to increase its off-street parking spots from 9 to 12, effectively requiring it to replace a substantial portion of its valuable public green space –directly across from Bde Maka Ska–with unnecessary paved parking, contrary to the Minneapolis 2040 Plan.

MZMC currently has 9 off-street parking spots: 6 spots in a rear alley, and 3 on its grounds. MZMC's new zendo would be 710 square feet, resulting in a required minimum of 12 parking spots under the Zoning Code. (See attached March 10, 2020 email from Zoning Administrator.) This would require constructing 6 spots

on MZMC's landscaped grounds, because the rear alley cannot fit more spots. Section 541.40 would thus require constructing a 6-spot paved parking lot in our yard.

The attached site plan shows the zendo addition and the required large parking lot. Images of the affected site, on the east side of our home, can be viewed using Google Maps' "street view" of 3343 East Bde Maka Ska Parkway.

Constructing such a large parking lot in our yard would require removing lawn, groundcover, shrubs, and trees, and to awkwardly reroute our walking meditation path. In its place would be an unwanted and unneeded parking lot. 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. And we believe our neighbors would prefer our landscaping to a large parking lot.

In addition, § 541.40's minimum parking requirements, as applied here, would violate the Minneapolis 2040 Plan's policies that discourage automobile use, and encourage preserving public green space and protecting public waters. Requiring MZMC to build a large paved parking lot across from Bde Maka Ska would contravene these Plan policies:

Policy 6. Pedestrian-Oriented Building and Site Design: Regulate land uses, building design, and site design of new development consistent with a transportation system that **prioritizes walking first, followed by bicycling and transit use, and lastly motor vehicle use.**

Action steps:

. . . **Eliminate the requirement for off-street parking minimums throughout the city**, acknowledging that demand for parking will still result in the supply being built, and re-evaluate established parking maximums to better align with City goals.

Policy 16. Environmental Impacts of Transportation: Reduce the energy, carbon, and health impacts of transportation through

reduced single-occupancy vehicle trips and phasing out of fossil fuel vehicles.

Action steps:

. . . Increase availability and attractiveness of public transportation and non-motorized modes, and **continue to disincentivize driving** and driving alone.

Policy 13. Landscaping: Require landscaping in conjunction with new development that complements its surroundings and enhances the built environment.

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Action steps:

Encourage larger, well-placed, contiguous planting areas that create and define public and private spaces, and acknowledge the roles smaller, disconnected areas can play in supporting diverse ecologies. . . .

Promote landscaped areas that include plant and tree types that address ecological function, including the interception and filtration of stormwater, reduction of the urban heat island effect, and preservation and restoration of natural amenities. . . .

Encourage and identify opportunities to integrate green roofs, living walls, and **porous pavement into development, acknowledging that these practices are not meant to be a substitute for ground-level landscaping of sites as landscaping provides both a natural amenity and aesthetic beauty to the urban landscape.**

Policy 14. Tree Canopy and Urban Forest: Improve the tree canopy and urban forest.

Action steps:

. . . Explore . . . requirements for. . . additions to existing buildings to retain mature trees. . . .

Policy 73. Stormwater Management: Manage natural areas in and around surface waters, as well as stormwater ponds and other stormwater treatment facilities, as areas supportive of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems.

Action steps:

. . . Encourage and require reductions in amounts of impervious surfaces.

Policy 74. Integration of Water Management into Development: Integrate water resource management into public and private projects in order to benefit natural systems.

Action steps:

. . . Encourage, facilitate, or require the use of best management practices that minimize or reduce the impact of impervious cover, including . . . **minimizing the extent of paved surfaces. . . .**

Policy 97. Preserving and Enhancing Public Lakes and Waterways: Ensure ongoing preservation and improvement of the natural and built environment near the city's lakes and waterways.

Action steps:

Regulate development of land adjacent to public waters in a manner that preserves and enhances the quality of surface waters while also preserving their economic and natural environmental value.

Recognize and promote the value of the built environment and landscape as an asset that enhances community identity and a sense of place.

Increase habitat and natural areas around . . . natural water bodies while maintaining and prioritizing stormwater function. . . .

These Plan policies all support reducing the Zoning Code's minimum parking requirements from 12 to 9 spots. This relief would permit MZMC to construct a smaller parking lot in its yard that would not significantly increase the paved area across from Bde Maka Ska or substantially reduce the amount of landscaped space available for public use.

In addition, per the March 10 Zoning Administrator email, Section 541.300 requires paving the 6 spots in our rear alley for them to satisfy the minimum off-street parking requirements. Paving these spots would increase the impervious surfaces near Bda Maka Ska, because pervious paving would be prohibitively expensive for MZMC; even impervious paving would cost over \$24,000, and pervious paving would cost significantly more, according to our contractor. Increasing pervious surfaces near Bda Maka Ska so as to facilitate parking would be inconsistent with many of the 2040 Plan provisions quoted above.

Accordingly, we respectfully request a special permit or other assistance reducing the minimum parking requirements from 12 to 9 spots, including the 6 spots currently in our rear alley.

We are mindful that the current public health crisis is creating a strain on the City Council's resources, and we greatly appreciate your taking the time to consider this request.

Respectfully,



Tim Burkett, Guiding Teacher



Ted O'Toole, Guiding Teacher



Karen Davis, MZMC Board President