

11/03/22

Mercer Island Country Club

8700 SE 71st St

Mercer Island, WA 98040

Project Narrative

Introduction

The Mercer Island Country Club is a member-owned non-profit organization that operates a tennis, swim, and fitness facility at 8700 SE 71st Street on Mercer Island. There are 2,400 member-owners being served by the Club. The Club has an approximately 67,000 square foot facility, housing 7 indoor tennis courts, a 6,000 square foot fitness facility, accompanying locker rooms, and social spaces. The Club is zoned residential R9.6.

The Mercer Island Country Club proposes to replace the previously existing seasonal air-supported structure that covers the northern four (4) existing outdoor tennis courts. This will add an additional four USTA conforming courts to the community during the rainy season. The seasonal structure will house the Club's junior tennis training program, which makes available exercise and sporting opportunities to Mercer Island youth, almost equally split between girls and boys. The Club's youth program has served approximately 2000 youth over the last decade and, if allowed the covered court space in question, is poised to serve even more in the coming decade.

The nationwide increased interest in tennis and pickleball has created more demand for court space, which cannot currently be accommodated by the 7 indoor courts at the Club. This project will expand the number of indoor courts at the Club and on Mercer Island from the current 7 to 11, an important 36.4% increase in opportunities for Mercer Island residents to exercise and train during the winter. Expanding winter court availability is an imperative for meeting the needs of the Mercer Island racquet sports community, particularly the youth.

The proposed replacement seasonal enclosure structure is planned to be erected at the start of the rainy season (approximately November 1) and removed and stored during the summer months (approximately April 30 - November 1) returning the courts to their current condition. As the air-supported structure is covering existing courts, this project has no impact on the amount or location of impervious surfaces at the Mercer Island Country Club.

The project will not alter the existing usage except to increase the availability of courts for Mercer Island residents during the winter months. There is no other way to expand accessibility to meet the demand on the Club's property without increasing the impervious surface coverage. Seasonally covering four (4) of the existing outdoor courts is the least impactful - to the environment and neighboring properties - way to meet the need for racquet sports opportunities for Mercer Island youth during the winter months.

The design of the replacement seasonal structure minimizes impact on the environment and on neighboring properties. The shape of the structure, with rounded edges and corners, and its placement in a wooded area means the structure will have virtually no impact on sunlight for neighboring spaces.

Variance for Height

The proposed structure will be 39' tall at the peak, providing the recommended ceiling clearance for USTA-sanctioned tournament play. There are no immediate neighbors to the east, west or south of the structure. It is near the rear of the club's property, distant from both Island Crest Way and SE 71st St. There is sufficient coniferous tree coverage along both of those elevations that when the court cover is up, views will be minimized and dappled. Along the northern or rear property line the seasonal structure butts against the Pioneer Park Youth Club, which houses the Mercer Island Saddle Club and Sunnybeam School. It is important to note that this property is also zoned residential but has been in a non-residential use for many decades.

The grade to the north of the Club's property slopes up sharply from the existing tennis courts such that the elevation of the PPYC property is approximately ten feet above the Club's court height, mitigating the perceived height of the replacement seasonal structure. Granting the height variance will not impact residential views or neighborhood character which the height limitation was established to protect.

Residential properties further from the proposed site, across SE 71st Street from the Club and over the north fence on SE 69th Place, will view just a small portion of the top of the seasonal structure because the fencing around the existing courts blocks the view of most of the structure. Additionally, the height of the seasonal, air-inflated cover is well below surrounding trees such that views to the sky are unchanged from these neighboring properties.

Variance for Floor Area Ratio

The Mercer Island Country Club property is zoned residential (R-9.6) under Mercer Island zoning designations. The floor area ratio restrictions defined for this zoning designation were written with single-family residences in mind. The Club is a shared facility serving approximately 861 Mercer Island families. To effectively meet the recreational needs of this community, the Club has been allowed to exceed the 8,000 square foot limit for gross floor area almost since its inception in 1967. The proposed seasonal court cover follows the same structure as these previous allowances, creating a greater good for the community without being materially detrimental to the public welfare or detrimental to the property or those around it.

Variance for Side Yard Set Back

The Mercer Island Country Club property is zoned residential (R-9.6) under Mercer Island zoning designations, which is designed for single-family lots ranging from 9,600 to 12,000 square feet. For reference, the Mercer Island Country Club property is 242,480 square feet. The side yard set back under R9.6 is 17% of lot width, as the property is over 90' wide. The result of such a large property in a zone designed for residential parcels that are orders of magnitude smaller is an aggregate side

yard setback of 213' and a minimum side yard setback of 70.3'. This set back was meant to restrict the placement of single family homes to ensure that light and air are not restricted from neighboring homes and provide a fire break between houses. Having a 70.3' and a 142.7' setback are not only unnecessary to achieve these goals, they severely limit the Club's ability to functionally serve its members.

The City has accepted a 20' side yard setback on this property as recently as 2006 during the club's addition and modernization project as shown on the accepted permit drawings dated 1/13/2006. We would propose the same 20' side yard setback in this variance, ending at the edge of the existing tennis court to accommodate the seasonal coverage of the tennis courts.

Variance for Rear Yard Set Back

The proposed seasonal court cover is 5' from the rear property line. The club was previously granted a variance from the City allowing a similar seasonal structure to be put up, in the same space as the current proposed replacement seasonal structure. The previous setback variance was approved by the mayor and the city council in Resolution No. 444.

The neighboring property to the north, owned by Pioneer Park Youth Club (PPYC) and partially leased to the Mercer Island Saddle Club is currently and permanently encumbered by a development-restrictive easement that prevents the removal of trees to build new structures. The easement is recorded and publicly available and can be provided if required. The approximately 70' distance between the proposed location of the Club's seasonal air-inflated tennis structure and the nearest existing structure on the PPYC parcel, is completely wooded which prevents any building in the area. This in effect provides a legally designated 70' buffer or "setback" between the proposed court cover structure and the closest neighboring structure in that direction. This is far and above the city's required 25' setback and achieves the desired fire stop, density limits within the zone, buffer for sound and artificial light, and access to natural light; all of the intended benefits of the required setbacks.

Conclusion

The variances requested here, adjusting the restrictions designed for residential properties regarding building height, floor area ratio, and setbacks are required to enable the Club to meet the recreational and fitness needs of our community and materially increase winter racquet sports access during our winter months for youth, which has been central to the mission of Mercer Island Country Club since its inception in 1967. The current restrictions create an unnecessary hardship on the Club and fundamentally cripple its mission by limiting access to racquet sports in the winter months, reducing the welfare of the tennis and pickleball community on Mercer Island. The Mercer Island Country Club Juniors Tennis Program is a model throughout the Pacific Northwest and it has produced high school and college tennis champions and, more importantly, lifelong tennis and pickleball players. For this facility to continue to meet the growing needs, it must be granted the ability to once again be permitted to seasonally cover four of its outdoor tennis courts.