

Variance Request for New Construction Garage at 3900 Natchez Avenue S, Saint Louis Park, Minnesota

No. of variances requested: (1)

To: The Board of Zoning Appeals, City of Saint Louis Park

Dear Board Members,

I am writing to formally request a single variance for the construction of a new garage on the property located at 3900 Natchez Avenue S, Saint Louis Park, Minnesota. The proposed construction partially overlaps with a no-build zone as defined by the city's zoning ordinance. Below is a detailed explanation of how the proposed variance complies with the necessary criteria for granting such a request, as outlined by the city's zoning ordinance.

1. The effect of the proposed variance upon the health, safety, and welfare of the community:

The proposed garage offers significant improvements to both child safety and the overall welfare of the neighborhood. By positioning the garage in the far southwest corner, the area between the house and proposed garage will serve as the primary yard and a designated play space, allowing a clear line of sight from the home to the yard. This design provides the opportunity to create an enclosed, secure environment where children can play safely under parental supervision, away from busy streets and intersections. This improvement minimizes the risk of children inadvertently wandering near traffic on Natchez or Vallacher. The property's location at the intersection of Natchez and Vallacher means a fully fenced in front-yard would inhibit visibility for traffic, reduce road safety and not offer a clear line of sight for child safety from the home's main living spaces (living room & kitchen).

The garage's design and increased parking space will also reduce traffic-related hazards by decreasing the need for street parking. The residents will no longer have to park additional vehicles on the street (within permit parking zones), reducing congestion and improving the safety of pedestrians and drivers on an active school route and near stops. This is particularly beneficial for a neighborhood with many families and young children, ensuring that sightlines are clear for both drivers and pedestrians, thus preventing accidents. These improvements directly contribute to the community's overall safety and align with the city's commitment to health and welfare.

2. The request is in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the zoning ordinance:

The garage placement aligns with the zoning ordinance's intent to maintain the safety and character of the neighborhood. The location along the south and west property lines ensures that the neighboring property to the south retains full visibility, enhancing both neighbor and traffic safety. Additionally, the existing dense foliage and greenery along the entirety of the south property line will remain in place, ensuring privacy while maintaining aesthetic appeal. An added benefit is that the property line on the South is angled away from the neighbor's driveway, further enhancing the line of sight.

The proposed garage integrates seamlessly into the neighborhood, preserving its charm and enhancing homeowner satisfaction and long-term retention. By creating a more functional, secure yard space for children, the project encourages families to remain in the neighborhood as the property meets the needs of growing families, which contributes to the community's stability and continuity. These safety and livability improvements align with the 2040 Comprehensive Plan's goals for preserving neighborhood character and improving resident well-being.

3. The request is consistent with the comprehensive plan:

The St. Louis Park 2040 Comprehensive Plan emphasizes the importance of creating safe, livable neighborhoods that cater to families and community well-being. The proposed garage construction will contribute to this vision by enhancing both child safety and neighborhood security, ensuring that residents can enjoy their homes while protecting their families.

The expanded garage from a single-car to a 2.5-car space reduces the need for on-street parking, further minimizing traffic congestion and improving safety for pedestrians, drivers, and cyclists, especially in a neighborhood with many children. This project contributes to the comprehensive plan's vision of creating safer, more functional spaces for residents while enhancing the property's usability.

Additionally, the improved yard space for children to play safely supports the plan's focus on creating healthy and active neighborhoods by encouraging outdoor activity and fostering stronger family ties within the community.

4. Practical difficulties in complying with the zoning ordinance:

- **a. Permitted use in the zoning district:**

The proposed garage is consistent with the residential zoning of the property. The variance relates only to the garage's location partially within a no-build zone, which is a dimensional request, not a use variance.
- **b. Unique circumstances of the property:**

The property's unique configuration presents significant challenges in complying with the zoning ordinance. The irregular shape of the lot along, with the front and back yard situated to the left and right of the primary home, and with its location near a busy intersection, creates difficulties in safe use of outdoor space along vehicle and pedestrian traffic. These factors, coupled with the existing garage's limitations, make it difficult to provide adequate yard space for children without infringing on the no-build zone. The proposed garage location provides a solution to these challenges by enhancing both child safety and neighborhood security, without compromising the zoning ordinance's broader intent.
- **c. No alteration of essential character:**

The proposed garage will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood. It will be designed to match the architectural style of the house, while maintaining and enhancing the charm and safety of the surrounding area. By reducing on-street parking and creating a more secure play area for children, the garage enhances both safety and livability for all residents, aligning with the neighborhood's existing character.
- **d. Economic considerations alone are not the basis for this request:**

While the garage's construction has economic benefits such as increased utility and value, the variance request is primarily driven by safety and usability concerns. The primary goal is to enhance child safety, public traffic safety, and the overall functionality of the property rather than to address financial considerations.
- **e. Solar access:**

The proposed garage will not obstruct access to sunlight for any current or future solar energy systems on this or adjacent properties. The placement has been carefully considered to avoid any negative impacts on solar energy potential.

5. Unique circumstances of the property (shape, topography, or other conditions):

The property's unique configuration, including its irregular shape, non-traditional front and back yard placement and proximity to a busy intersection, creates a practical difficulty in adhering to the no-build zone restrictions. The proposed garage provides a safe and functional solution by creating a secure space for children to play without visual obstructions from the home and improving neighborhood traffic flow. These circumstances are uncommon among surrounding lots, necessitating the requested variance.

6. Granting the variance is necessary for the preservation and enjoyment of a substantial property right:

Granting the variance is necessary to ensure the homeowners enjoy the same safety and utility as neighboring properties. Expanding the garage from a single-car to a 2.5-car space will reduce the need for off-street parking, thereby improving traffic safety and reducing congestion on Natchez Avenue. Additionally, this improvement ensures that the property remains functional for families as they grow by creating a safe yard space for children, contributing to the neighborhood's family-friendly atmosphere and economic stability.

7. The granting of the variance will not impair light and air to surrounding properties, increase congestion, or endanger public safety:

The garage's placement will not impair access to light or air for adjacent properties. It has been designed with sufficient setbacks to minimize impact on neighbors and will provide more light and air for the property on the West as it groups the garages more closely together. Moreover, by reducing the need for street parking, the project will improve traffic flow on a school bus route and enhance safety for pedestrians and cyclists. The garage will comply with all fire and safety codes, ensuring public safety throughout the construction process and beyond.

8. The granting of the variance will not merely serve as a convenience but is necessary to alleviate a practical difficulty:

This variance is essential to address the practical difficulties posed by the property's unique configuration and proximity to a busy intersection. Without the variance, it would be impossible to construct a garage that meets the property's and resident's needs while also ensuring child safety and neighborhood security. The new garage location will improve both traffic safety and the overall enjoyment of the home, while maintaining the neighborhood's charm and character, in alignment with the 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

In conclusion, I respectfully request that the Board of Zoning Appeals approve this variance for the construction of a garage with overlap into a no-build zone. This variance is critical to improving child safety, neighborhood security, and property functionality, while preserving the neighborhoods' charm and appeal, in alignment with the long-term goals of the St. Louis Park 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Danny and Aubrey van der Steeg
3900 Natchez Avenue S
Saint Louis Park, Minnesota