

STRANG, INC.

811 East Washington Avenue, Suite 200
Madison, Wisconsin 53703

March 31, 2026

City of Madison
Landmarks Commission and Plan Commission
Planning Division
215 Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard
Madison, Wisconsin 53703

RE: Letter of Intent — Demolition Permit and Conditional Use Application

MTZ Charitable Organization — Family Life Center
2019 and 2025 Fisher Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53713
Strang Project No. 2026017

Dear Members of the Landmarks Commission and Plan Commission:

On behalf of our client, MTZ Charitable Organization Inc. (MTZCO), Strang, Inc. respectfully submits this Letter of Intent in support of applications for Demolition Permit approval and Conditional Use approval for the property located at 2019 and 2025 Fisher Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53713. The applicant and property Owner representative is Dwight McDonald, Chair of the MTZ Building Committee, MTZ Charitable Org Board.

This letter addresses the proposed partial demolition of the existing principal structure at 2019 Fisher Street and the complete demolition of the structure at 2025 Fisher Street, as well as the Conditional Use request for the construction of a new Family Life Center addition on the consolidated site. Both applications are being submitted concurrently and are intended to be reviewed together by the Plan Commission.

1. Property History

Mount Zion Baptist Church was founded in May 1911 above a harness shop at 118 East Washington Avenue in Madison, Wisconsin, making it one of the oldest African American institutions in the city. The church was incorporated under the Wisconsin Secretary of State on May 27, 1914. After relocating to 548 West Johnson Street in 1925, the congregation grew under the leadership of Reverend Joseph Washington (1927–1955), who established the Mother's Watch program, helped found the Madison chapter of the NAACP, and co-founded the South Madison Neighborhood Center — the first social service agency on Madison's south side. Reverend Washington was the first recipient of the City of Madison's Martin Luther King Jr. Humanitarian Award in 1974.

In 1960, the University of Wisconsin purchased and demolished the church's West Johnson Street building. Reverend Joe E. Dawson (1955–1985) led the congregation through this displacement, negotiating parcels on Fisher and Baird Streets in the Bram's Addition neighborhood on Madison's south side. Reverend Dawson personally constructed a parsonage at 2025 Fisher Street in 1960. That same year, church members broke ground on a new contemporary-style building at 2019 Fisher Street, using salvaged materials from the demolished Johnson Street church. The first service was held Easter Sunday, April 2, 1961, and the mortgage was burned on November 25, 1962. A major addition was completed in 1981. In September 1982, the church established a food pantry and constructed a small ranch-style community center building adjacent to the parsonage at 2025 Fisher Street. In 2003–2004, a significant new addition was constructed facing Baird Street; it was dedicated on August 29, 2004. This newer portion of the building is proposed to be retained.

Throughout its 115-year history, the congregation has demonstrated a pattern of community leadership and resilience. In 2017, a Mt. Zion choir robe was placed in the collection of the Wisconsin Historical Museum. In 2020, the church opened a drop-in mental health clinic in partnership with Anesis Mental Health, and in April 2021, Mount Zion became the first African American church in Madison to host a COVID-19 vaccine clinic. Under the current leadership of Reverend Dr. Marcus Allen Sr. (2017–present), the church's charitable arm, MTZ Charitable Organization Inc., continues to expand the same tradition of community service that has defined this site since 1960.

Underrepresented Communities Historic Resources Survey

Both properties on the project site are identified in the City of Madison Underrepresented Communities Intensive Survey Report, prepared by Legacy Architecture, Inc. (Jennifer L. Lehrke, Rowan Davidson, Robert Short) and Jason Tish of Archetype Historic Property Consultants, sponsored by the City of Madison Department of Planning and Community and Economic Development (2017–2020). The applicant acknowledges these findings and the significance they carry.

The survey's Chapter 14 (Religion) states: "Mount Zion Baptist Church was established in 1911 as a Baptist mission... In 1960, the University of Wisconsin purchased the church and demolished it. That same year, Mount Zion moved to Bram's Addition neighborhood... A new contemporary style building was constructed for the church at 2019 Fisher Street. An adjacent minimal traditional style parsonage house was also constructed that year at 2025–2029 Fisher Street." The survey further notes: "In 1982, the church established a food pantry and constructed a small ranch style building at 2025 Fisher Street, adjacent to the parsonage and church, to serve as a community center." The survey concludes that "Mount Zion Baptist Church is locally significant to the African American community in the area of Religion from 1911 to the present" and that "this church is potentially eligible for designation as a City of Madison Landmark."

The survey identifies both properties as resources eligible for designation as City of Madison Landmarks, as summarized below:

Address	Resource Name	Community	Period	AHI #
2019 Fisher St.	Mount Zion Baptist Church	African American	1960–present	108156
2025–2029 Fisher St.	Mt. Zion Baptist Church Parsonage and Community Center	African American	1960–present	241083

Both properties are classified as “CoM Eligible Landmark” in the survey’s results table (Chapter 21). The architectural style of the church at 2019 Fisher Street is identified as Contemporary (1960); the parsonage and community center at 2025–2029 Fisher Street is identified as Ranch (1960). The applicant fully acknowledges the landmark-eligible status of both properties and the significance of this site to the African American community in Madison.

The structure at 2025–2029 Fisher Street was originally constructed in 1960 as a parsonage by Reverend Joe E. Dawson. In 1982, the church established a food pantry program and constructed an additional small ranch-style building on the same parcel to serve as a community center. The combined parcel currently houses the MTZCO Food Pantry, which assists 50 to 60 households per month across Dane County, with demand steadily growing. The property at 2025 Fisher Street will be consolidated into the project site through a Certified Survey Map, and the food pantry program will continue in expanded, purpose-built space within the new Family Life Center.

2. Description of Proposed Demolition

2019 Fisher Street — Partial Demolition

The existing building at 2019 Fisher Street consists of two distinct portions: the original contemporary-style church constructed in 1960–1961 by the congregation using salvaged materials from their demolished West Johnson Street building, with a major addition completed in 1981; and a newer section constructed in 2003–2004 and dedicated on August 29, 2004. The applicant proposes to demolish the older portion of the building (1960/1981) while retaining the 2004 section, which houses the current sanctuary and administrative suite. The retained section (2004) will be integrated into the new Family Life Center addition as a single, unified structure. The entire property will be treated as a single parcel, and the Certified Survey Map (CSM) will be updated to consolidate ownership and eliminate underlying parcel lines.

2025 Fisher Street — Complete Demolition

The property at 2025–2029 Fisher Street included a parsonage constructed in 1960 by Reverend Joe E. Dawson (since demolished in 2019), and a small ranch-style community center building constructed in 1982 when the church established its food pantry program. The combined property currently houses the MTZCO Food Pantry. The applicant proposes to fully demolish the remaining small ranch style community center building and its adjacent garage structure to accommodate the consolidated site plan for the Family Life Center. The food pantry program and community center functions will be relocated into the new building with expanded capacity, including dedicated loading access, walk-in refrigeration, a welcome desk and intake area, and a grocery-store-model layout designed to serve clients with dignity and hospitality.

3. Continuation of the Site's Heritage Through the New Development

The applicant wishes to emphasize that the proposed demolition is not an erasure of history. It is a reinvestment in the same community, by the same community, on the same site. The story of 2019 Fisher Street is not ending — it is expanding and evolving.

MTZ Charitable Organization Inc. has operated from this site since 1960 and will continue to do so. The organization currently runs eight (8) vital community programs serving diverse populations across Madison and Dane County, with a focus on youth, older adults, and underserved populations. Its mission — to transform the community by delivering essential services, uplifting those in need, and cultivating an empowered future for all — is a direct continuation of the values that have defined this site for over 65 years and the congregation's broader mission since its founding in 1911.

Addressing the 2019 Fisher Street Structure (1960/1981)

The original 1960/1981 portion of the building at 2019 Fisher Street — built by the congregation itself using salvaged materials after their displacement from West Johnson Street — has been a place of worship, community gathering, education, and mutual support for the African American community for over 65 years. While the physical structure has reached the end of its functional life, the heritage it represents will be carried forward in the following ways:

- **Same community, same mission, same site.** MTZCO is not a new owner or outside developer. The organization and its leadership are deeply rooted in the African American community that built and sustained this site. When the congregation was displaced from West Johnson Street in 1960, its members built this place with their own hands. The decision to demolish and rebuild is once again being made by the community that this building has served — continuing a pattern of resilience and self-determination that has defined Mount Zion for 115 years.

- **Expanded programming that honors the building's legacy.** The new Family Life Center will house all of the programs currently operating from this site — and significantly expand their capacity. The Academic Learning Center, which has served local youth for nearly 20 years under the leadership of founder Ms. Chris Hodge, will continue in dedicated, purpose-built classrooms designed for K–6 tutoring, STEM education, and digital literacy. The Behavioral Health Clinic, operated in partnership with Anesis Therapy, will have its own suite with a separate exterior entrance and dedicated toilet room — designed to normalize mental health care and reduce stigma. The Older Adults Program, which has supported nearly 300 Black older adults across 16 zip codes, will have flexible gathering spaces with taller ceilings, natural light, and acoustic treatment for the classes and events that combat isolation and loneliness among its participants.
- **A multi-purpose hall as a new community anchor.** The new building includes a multi-purpose room designed to serve the same function the site has always served: supporting the community and bringing people together. Planned uses include older adult fitness, youth sports, banquets, repasses, town halls, voting events, vaccine clinics, summer camps, rental events, and small musical performances or plays. The multi-purpose room will also serve as overflow and staging space for food pantry operations. This space directly continues the tradition of the site as the center of community life.
- **Legacy recognized in the built environment.** The MTZCO Building Committee has expressed a strong commitment to ensuring that the legacy of the older adults who built this organization is visible and felt in the new building — not merely stated. The design program includes a legacy corridor or wall feature that will incorporate the history, ministries, and services of the organization. The building committee and design team together are envisioning the atmosphere they intend to create: warm, welcoming, at-home, inspired, safe, valued, connected, supported, and part of something larger.
- **Continuity of spiritual and cultural life.** The 2004 portion of the existing building, which houses the current sanctuary and administrative suite, will be retained and integrated into the new addition. Worship services and the spiritual life of the community will continue without interruption on this site — as they have since Easter Sunday 1961.

Addressing the 2025–2029 Fisher Street Property (1960 Parsonage / 1982 Community Center)

The property at 2025–2029 Fisher Street includes both the 1960 parsonage built by Reverend Dawson and the 1982 ranch-style community center building. Both structures are identified in the Underrepresented Communities Historic Resources Survey as part of the Mount Zion Baptist Church Parsonage and Community Center (AHI# 241083),

classified as CoM Eligible Landmark. While the buildings are modest in scale, they have served a vital community function as the MTZCO Food Pantry. The heritage of this property — its role in addressing food insecurity with compassion and dignity — will be directly continued and enhanced in the new development:

- **The food pantry program continues and expands.** The MTZCO Food Pantry currently serves 50–60 households per month across Dane County, with demand growing steadily. The new Family Life Center will relocate the food pantry into a purpose-built space designed around a grocery store concept where clients shop with a cart and select from aisles — a model grounded in the dignity of each person served. Dedicated drive-up loading access will allow volunteers to receive deliveries from Second Harvest without carrying food through the full building. Walk-in refrigeration, a welcome desk, and an intake area will support the pantry’s growing operations.
- **A full commercial kitchen expands the food mission.** The new building includes a full kitchen directly adjacent to the multi-purpose room, designed for community dinners, cooking classes, catering by small businesses, partnership programming with area colleges, and support for a potential homeless meal program. This represents a significant expansion of the food-related community service that the 2025 Fisher Street building has provided.
- **Consolidated site improves accessibility and service delivery.** By consolidating the food pantry into the main Family Life Center building, MTZCO can provide a more accessible, welcoming, and efficient experience for clients. The new design prioritizes access from parking and provides a fully accessible path from the parking area to the pantry entrance.

4. Conditional Use Request

In addition to the demolition requests described above, the applicant will be seeking a Conditional Use approval for the construction of the MTZ Family Life Center addition at 2019 Fisher Street. The property is located in the TR-C4 zoning district within the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) overlay, due to its proximity to Park Street, a designated transit corridor.

The proposed Family Life Center is a single-story addition that will be connected to the retained portion of the existing building, creating a single unified structure. The building program includes the following community-serving uses:

- Multi-purpose Hall (sports, fitness, banquets, community events, voting, health clinics)

- Classrooms for K–6 tutoring, STEM education, digital literacy, financial literacy, and adult education
- Full kitchen for community meals, cooking classes, and catering partnerships
- Food pantry with grocery-store-model layout, walk-in refrigeration, and dedicated loading access
- Behavioral Health Clinic with separate exterior entrance (operated in partnership with Anesis Therapy)
- Church administrative suite (retained in existing building portion)
- Landscape and equipment storage

The site layout has been developed in coordination with City of Madison Zoning, Planning, Landmarks, and Engineering staff through a series of pre-application meetings, including a Design Assistance Team (DAT) meeting on February 26, 2026, and a pre-application meeting with Zoning and Landmarks on March 12, 2026. The proposed layout addresses the following zoning requirements:

- Fisher Street setback of 20 feet, functioning as both the minimum (TR-C4 base) and maximum (TOD overlay), with at least 30% of building frontage aligned to the setback line.
- Primary entrance located at the Fisher Street / Dane Street corner, treated as an architectural feature per TOD requirements, with vestibule, bike parking, landscape patio, and potential monument signage.
- Dane Street treated as front yard (20-foot setback), east side as side yard (5-foot setback), and north side as rear yard (30-foot setback).
- No parking between the building and either street frontage.
- Storm line relocation

5. Community Impact and Organizational Capacity

MTZ Charitable Organization Inc. operates eight community programs that collectively serve thousands of residents across Madison and Dane County each year. The organization's programs address critical needs in education, mental health, mentorship, wellness, nutrition, security, and community support, with a particular focus on youth, older adults, and underserved populations. Key programs and their impact include:

- **Academic Learning Center (ALC):** Serves 35 registered students in free after-school tutoring with a focus on STEM and individualized learning. Founded nearly 20 years ago by Ms. Chris Hodge, who continues to volunteer.
- **Behavioral Health Clinic:** Served 207 individuals in 2024 through drop-in mental health services provided by Anesis Therapy, offering culturally competent, immediate support without long waiting periods.

- **Food Pantry:** Assists 50–60 households monthly across Dane County with comprehensive nutrition support, using a dignity-centered grocery-store model.
- **Older Adults Program:** Supports nearly 300 Black older adults across 16 zip codes with culturally responsive programming focused on healthy aging, education, and social engagement — the only program of its kind serving south Madison.
- **Health and Wellness Program:** Reached 400 individuals through health education, COVID-19 testing and vaccination, and partnerships with UW Health, UnityPoint Meriter, and Public Health of Dane County.
- **T.R.Y. (Transforming and Reaching Our Youth):** Provides mentorship to 8–10 at-risk youth bi-weekly at the Dane County Juvenile Detention Center.
- **Youth Mentorship Program:** Connects Dane County youth with mentors and resources for job placement, financial literacy, and independent living skills.
- **Emergency Assistance Program:** Provides direct support to individuals and families in crisis.

The proposed Family Life Center is the physical infrastructure required to sustain and grow these programs. The existing facilities have reached their functional limits, and the organization's continued growth depends on purpose-built spaces that can accommodate the range of services described above.

6. Conclusion

The proposed demolition of the 1960/1981 portion of the building at 2019 Fisher Street and the complete demolition of the structures at 2025–2029 Fisher Street are necessary steps in a larger project that directly continues and expands the historic mission of this site. The same community that built this place — with salvaged materials and their own labor after being displaced in 1960 — is reinvesting in it. The same programs that have served thousands of residents will continue in better, more accessible, more dignified spaces. The heritage of the site is not being lost; it is being given the physical environment it deserves.

MTZCO and the project team are committed to working cooperatively with the Landmarks Commission, Plan Commission, and City staff throughout the review process. We welcome the opportunity to present the project and address any questions.

Accompanying this Letter of Intent are the required application materials, including site plans, the Certified Survey Map application, and supplemental documentation as outlined in the City of Madison Land Use Application form.

Respectfully submitted,

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