



**CITY OF ZEELAND
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
CITY HALL – 21 SOUTH ELM STREET
SEPTEMBER 23RD, 2025
6:00PM**

-6:00PM – Chairman Elhart called the meeting to order and requested a roll call of Planning Commissioners.

Present: Commissioners Rebecca Perkins, Sheri Holstege, Glenn Kass, Dan Klompmaker, Kevin Klynstra, Tim Klunder, and Chairman Bill Elhart.

Absent: Commissioners Amanda Cooper, and Bob Blanton.

Also Present: City Attorney Jim Donkersloot, Zoning Administrator Timothy Maday, Planning Consultant Paul Leblanc, and Recording Secretary Nadine Hopping.

- Staff confirmed there were no additional items beyond those listed in the agenda packet. Maday noted that a bus has been secured for the 2025 Capital Improvement Project Development list.

-6:00PM Chairman Elhart opened the public hearing for Site Plan Review Application for 515, 549. And 553 E Main Ave.

Aaron Holder of Mead Johnson presented the request to rezone the parcels at 515, 549, and 553 E Main Ave from its existing zoning of PF Public Facilities / R-2 Residential to I-2 General Industrial. Holder noted that this request is in part of the broader modernization effort and is a thoughtful reconfiguration of their existing footprint to be evolving regulatory needs and operational needs. Holder added that Mead Johnsons goal is to continue serving their customers as a stable, longstanding manufacturer of high quality and in some cases – lifesaving and good formula right here in Zeeland, MI. While also, remaining a strong and committed community partner and neighbor in the City of Zeeland for many generations to come.

Holder highlighted that Mead Johnson has proudly operated in Zeeland, MI, for over 100 years. Their facility provides many jobs—450 direct employees as well as hundreds of local contractors and suppliers. He further noted that Mead Johnson makes a significant annual contribution in local property taxes, is one of the City's largest utility users, and actively supports local nonprofits, schools, and community events. Holder added that the properties at 515, 549, and 553 e Main are essential to their modernization pan. Furthermore, noting that the parcels are located on a block that is predominantly zoned I-2 General industrial.

Holder went on to say that in the development plan, they are taking proactive steps to minimize potential community impacts and enhance community benefits with their project. He noted things like re-routing truck traffic away from Main Ave. and Fairview Rd., separating logistics flows to reduce congestion, and improve safety, and relocating contractor parking off site to preserve neighborhood character. Holder mentioned that in addition to that they're investing in a variety of public amenities, one of which being a new park at E Main Ave and Carlton St, as well as an upgraded playground in partnership with Bethel Church. Holder respectfully requested the

Commissioners support in rezoning the parcels at 515, 549, and 553 E Main Ave. Holder noted that rezoning would be a practical step forward, one that would honor Zeeland's legacy and will help secure its future.

Chairman Elhart then requested staff's comments regarding the rezoning. Maday noted that staff obtained a report from the City's Planning Consultant, Paul Leblanc, addressing this application, the Master Plan, and previous actions taken by the Commission on the matter. All of this information, along with a memo prepared by Maday regarding the rezoning, was included in the Commissioners' meeting packet.

Maday noted that a piece of correspondence had been received on September 22nd from Mr. Thomas Humbert, which will be attached to the meeting record. The letter had been emailed to Commissioners earlier in the day. He then provided a brief overview of his memo and highlighted actions taken by the Commission in recent months regarding this matter. Maday stated that staff finds the proposed rezoning appropriate, viewing it as an opportunity for the City to resolve longstanding land use conflicts by rezoning the parcels to industrial. He further emphasized that staff supports the application, given the predominance of industrial zoning in the area, the inconsistency of mixing residential with industrial uses, and the alignment with the Master Plan's objectives for industrial growth.

Maday reviewed the next steps in the process if the Commission were to move forward with the recommendation to rezone 515, 549, and 553 E Main Ave. Maday noted that rezoning is a three step process, where initially the Planning Commission would take an action to direct the City Attorney to produce a resolution with findings that would come back before the Commission for final action, which would then be the recommendation to City Council at the next scheduled Planning Commission meeting, and then City Council ultimately has the final action in this matter.

Chairman Elhart invited Planning Consultant Paul LeBlanc to provide comments on the rezoning. LeBlanc gave a brief overview of his memo and recommended approval of the rezoning for each parcel. He explained that the proposal is consistent with the Master Plan, noting that both the 2011 and 2020 updates identified these parcels as inconsistent with the surrounding zoning and land uses, and in conflict with the area's existing character. He also pointed out that the 2011 and 2002 Master Plan updates similarly recognized these inconsistencies and recommended changes. LeBlanc emphasized that the rezoning aligns with actions previously taken by the Commission earlier this summer. While acknowledging residents' concerns regarding traffic, noise, and other impacts, he clarified that such issues are typically addressed during the site plan review process. He further noted that the bulk of the property has long been zoned I-2 and used for major general industrial purposes, directly across from R-1 residential properties on the opposite side of Main Avenue. As such, he concluded that rezoning these parcels would not alter the character of the neighborhood, as it has already been shaped by the surrounding industrial uses. LeBlanc closed by formally recommending approval of the rezoning for 515, 549, and 553 E. Main Avenue.

Chairman Elhart then called for public comment.

Sue Vanden Beldt of 40 S. Division spoke in opposition to the rezoning. She referenced a special Planning Commission meeting held on October 27, 2021, where citizens' concerns had been

raised regarding the new parking lot and entrance at 725 E. Main Avenue. Vanden Beldt referred to comments made by staff member Tim Maday in relation to Mead Johnson and the Master Plan, and she provided a brief overview of the timeline of events. She highlighted that a landscape waiver had been granted to eliminate parking islands in order to create additional spaces, and that a traffic study waiver had also been approved on the basis that no new jobs were being added. She further noted that while a pollution study had been completed, it was not included in the report. Vanden Beldt urged commissioners to view this as a second chance to carefully consider the rezoning and to ask the important questions. She requested that a new pollution study be completed and cited multiple reports from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) as well as records from the EPA regarding Mead Johnson's environmental impact. She also called for a traffic study, noting that multiple tandem trucks carrying 30,000–40,000 pounds of gravel had traveled down her street, despite signage indicating that trucks exceeding 10,000 GVW were prohibited.

Vanden Beldt further recalled that at the previous meeting, Andrew Smith of Mead Johnson had stated the parking lot would only be accessed from the company's existing driveway due to security requirements, and that the temporary lot would be constructed during typical business hours under controlled conditions. She questioned Mead Johnson's long-term plans and expressed distrust toward both the company and the Planning Commission's decision-making. In closing, Vanden Beldt urged the Commissioners to require additional landscaping buffers, with no further waivers, and encouraged them to take a more active role in the projects they approve.

Thomas Humbert of 532 E Main Ave read from his submitted correspondence, which is attached to this official record.

Commissioner Holstege asked LeBlanc how the Master Plan could be interpreted so differently by those opposing the rezoning compared to those in favor, and sought clarification on how each side may be applying their interpretations.

Leblanc replied that it would be usual to receive two different view points, but added that the 2011 Master Plan, including the 2002 update clearly discuss the importance of preserving the neighborhoods and providing more housing—in which he is not opposed to, but added that the Master Plan is specific in regard to this block, showing the inconsistent land uses and how they are not compatible. Furthermore, Leblanc noted how the Master Plan outlines the importances of industrial growth in the City, for tax base, economic development, and more.

Commissioner Perkins asked Mead Johnson whether, if the parcels were rezoned and developed as anticipated, the City's public facilities would be able to support the necessary infrastructure.

Aaron Holder of Mead Johnson responded that the company has held numerous discussions with public utility providers, including Zeeland BPW and SEMCO Energy. He explained that plans are already in place for the necessary utilities and added that, based on these conversations, everything appears to be feasible.

Commissioner Klunder stated that he, along with Assistant City Manager Kevin Plockmeyer, had been present for those meetings and could confirm their accuracy. Staff Liaison Tim Maday

added that the City has a Site Development Team, a group of employees representing departments such as electric, water, and wastewater, who meet with prospective and existing property owners upon request. He explained that meetings had been held with Mead Johnson regarding their site utilities and reported that staff had no concerns from their perspective.

Commissioner Perkins asked whether, following the expansion, employment and contractor traffic would be greater, less, or about the same on weekends compared to weekdays.

Holder confirmed that Commissioner Perkins was referring to conditions after construction is completed and explained that the company is still reviewing its modernization plan. He noted that current projections show employment to be similar to what it is today. He added that with some of the new assets, efficiencies could be achieved that may reduce the need for certain contracted support. Holder also mentioned that the new assets could alter shift patterns, with some operations running less and resulting in less employee traffic. He emphasized, however, that these details remain subject to asset capacity and other factors still being evaluated as part of the planning process.

Commissioner Perkins referred to the rezoning request filed by Art Pike of Mead Johnson with staff member Tim Maday, noting a statement that the rezoning would be consistent with Michigan's Zoning Enabling Act by promoting public health, safety, and welfare, while also reducing nuisance conditions. Perkins then asked, if the rezoning were approved to extend further into the residential area, how Mead Johnson planned to ensure that those health and safety measures would be achieved.

Art Pike of Mead Johnson explained that the company is required to comply with all environmental regulations. He noted that if any audit findings arise, they are given a set period of time to address the issues before a reinspection takes place. He further explained that when new assets are added, they undergo inspection, and if any gaps are identified, the company is allotted time to make the necessary corrections. Pike emphasized that Mead Johnson is fully committed to meeting the expectations of all regulatory bodies and is routinely inspected at the highest level, given their responsibility for producing formula for populations with specific needs.

Perkins then referenced Sue Vanden Beldt's earlier comment regarding code violations from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) as well as records from the EPA regarding Mead Johnson's environmental impact, and asked if the information is accurate.

Art pike of Mead Johnson replied that he was unaware of violations, and ensured commissioners that they do meet all the standards set by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) as well as standards from the EPA.

Commissioner Klunder added that he had noticed comments regarding concerns about a traffic study, landscaping, and utility usage. He explained that although no site plans have yet been submitted, the City's traffic consultant has been involved in the related meetings, giving input and working Mead Johnson to address concerns raised by residents in the community. Klunder also noted that while Mead Johnson is not located directly within the downtown area, it is considered connected to that portion of the City. Klunder noted that they have not received

or seen a full site plan, but that discussions are underway as they are a current developer in the City.

Commissioner Perkins referenced 515 E. Main Avenue and asked whether the Blue Park Tot-Lot was planned to be located on Mead Johnson's site. She also referred to renderings that had been presented at previous Planning Commission meetings and inquired about the size of the greenspace proposed for the corner of Main Avenue and Carlton Street.

Pike explained that the corner of Main Avenue and Carlton Street will include 15,000 square feet dedicated for community use. He noted that the company is currently evaluating the best location for the playground and is considering three potential sites, with the intention of keeping the Blue Park Tot-Lot within the immediate area. Pike added that they hope to finalize a location by mid to late October.

Perkins questioned if there was anything listed regarding the purchase agreement or deed restriction in relation to the Blue Park Tot-Lot.

Pike confirmed that the playground is directly tied to the purchase agreement.

Perkins expressed her concern in rezoning 515 E Main Ave due to its current use, and discussed the potential possibility a partial rezoning. She also questioned the possibility of adding deed restrictions regarding the greenspace for Blue Park. Perkins referenced Hoogland Park in relation the size of the blue Park Tot-Lot, pointing out that she would prefer a larger green space.

Commissioners and City Attorney Jim Donkersloot discussed the different options available if the Commission wished to pursue a partial rezoning or a conditional rezoning. Donkersloot provided a brief overview of how each approach functions, outlining the potential risks they could pose to the community. He further explained that in the case of a conditional rezoning, any conditions would need to be initiated by the applicant rather than by Commissioners.

Commissioner Klunder suggested the use of a development agreement that could be put in place by City Council. Klunder noted that City has utilized development agreements in past with Gentex at their N Riley campus regarding their water lines and sewer lines, and now JR Automation as they begin construction for their new facility at 800 E Riley.

Commissioner Perkins expressed her desire to keep an area of green space or a public facility in this neighborhood and furthermore expressed her concern in demolishing a church. Perkin emphasized her goal of keeping that portion of the parcel restricted to only PF Public facilities or greenspace welcome to the public for use.

Pike responded they have yet to see a development agreement from the City in relation to the Blue Park Tot Lot, but would be more than happy and willing to work through that agreement with the City.

Commissioner Klompmaker questioned if Maday's office has received any complaints regarding the ongoing work at Mead Johnson, while referencing a complaint made regarding the 24/7 trucks operations, and questioned what follow up has taken place to alleviate these concerns and complaints.

Maday responded that his office received concerns regarding the trucks that were constructing the parking lot, where he then followed up with Mead Johnson who advised that they have used that gate a number of times and it was their understanding that the parking lot was to be accessed through the interior of the site after it was constructed. Maday stated that at the time he spoke with Mead Johnson, they advised they were done running trucks up and down those streets. He further noted concerns regarding parking on the lawn and are working with their team to remedy the situation.

Commissioner Klompmaker asked whether Mead Johnson had ever opposed any of the corrections provided by staff member Tim Maday. Maday responded that Mead Johnson has been very responsive throughout the process and referenced a recent concern about evening work at the site. He explained that he had reached out to Mead Johnson regarding the issue, and the company acknowledged that the work had been loud and had already stopped evening operations before his call.

Commissioners, staff, and City Attorney Donkersloot discussed the options of partial or conditional rezoning. Donkersloot explained that conditional rezoning requires the property owner to propose conditions for negotiation. With support from Maday, he also noted that partial rezoning can create inconsistencies within the district and lead to future conflicts. The commissioners then considered the possibility of incorporating a development agreement into the site planning process.

Chairman Elhart questioned if anyone else wished to make a comment.

Sue Vanden Beldt of 40 S. Division urged commissioners to review information available through the EPA and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE). She expressed concern that Mead Johnson was not providing straightforward answers and stated that she felt a conflict already existed. Vanden Beldt asked the commissioners to take a step back and carefully review the information before making a decision on the rezoning.

Chairman Elhart requested that Sue Vanden Beldt of 40 S. Division submit the reports that were referenced in her statements during public comment tonight.

Ericka Humbert of 532 E. Main Avenue addressed Commissioner Holstege's earlier question about how the Master Plan has been interpreted differently by those opposing and supporting the rezoning. Humbert responded by asking the Commissioners when they had last read the entire Master Plan from beginning to end, stressing that residents rely on them to understand its contents. She emphasized the significance of the commission's decisions, noting their impact on residents' daily lives and property investments. She questioned the data used in previous recommendations. She added that he did not believe his neighborhood was included in the Master Plan map referenced during this process. Humbert concluded by questioning how the Master Plan could be interpreted so differently when reviewing the maps, lines, and drawings it contains.

LeBlanc referred to the map on page 27 of the Master Plan and identified areas of inconsistent zoning. He explained that no specific boundary is shown around the area, but the map indicates that most of it is industrial with some inconsistent uses within it.

Vanden Beldt questioned where the encroachments stops and cautioned Commissioners to be careful in their decision making. Vanden Beldt expressed her concern for relocating families after rezoning properties for industrial property.

Collin Ebels of 19 S. Park Street stated that he felt 15,000 square feet was too small for a green space or park and urged the Commissioners to prioritize protecting the neighborhood block by ensuring a larger green space area is provided as a buffer.

-6:58 PM moved by Commissioner Klynstra to close public hearing. Supported by Commissioner Klompaker. All voted aye.

Motion 2025.19

Moved by Klompaker to approve the rezoning of the parcels at 549, and 553 E Main Ave into the I-2 General Industrial District.

Supported by Holstege

Roll Call Vote on Motion 2025.19

Ayes: Perkins, Holstege, Kass, Klompaker, Klynstra, Klunder, and Chairman Elhart.

Nays: None.

Absent: Cooper, Blanton.

Motion Passes.

Motion 2025.20

Moved by Perkins to approve the rezoning of the parcel at 515 E Main Ave into the I-2 General Industrial District, with a provision in the development agreement to dedicate one acre of the parcel be used as green space

Motion not supported.

Roll Call Vote on Motion 2025.20

Ayes: None.

Nays: None.

Absent: Cooper, Blanton.

Motion not completed.

The Commissioners, together with Planning Consultant Paul LeBlanc and City Attorney Jim Donkersloot, discussed the possibility of tabling action on 515 E Main Ave, noting that Commissioner Perkins's comments suggested a conditional rezoning. Donkersloot explained that if the commission chose to table the rezoning, it would give Mead Johnson time to consider pursuing a conditional rezoning.

Commissioner Klunder noted that he, along with other staff members and City Council representatives, were present at the meeting and had heard Perkin's request. He assured that the development agreement would include a requirement for public green space at the corner. Commissioner Perkins responded that she would like the greenspace to be larger than 15,000 square feet and expressed her desire to table the rezoning of 515 E. Main Avenue.

Commissioners then discussed adding the provision to the development agreement in the site planning review phase.

Motion 2025.21

Moved by Perkins to table the decision to rezone the parcel at 515 E Main Ave from PF Public Facilities to I-2 General Industrial until the next scheduled Planning Commission meeting were more discussion can take place.

Supported by Klompmaker

Roll Call Vote on Motion 2025.21

Ayes: Perkins, Klompmaker.

Nays: Holstege, Kass, Klynstra, Klunder, and Chairman Elhart.

Absent: Cooper, Blanton.

Motion Fails.

Motion 2025.22

Moved by Klunder to approve the rezoning of the parcel at 515 E Main Ave into the I-2 General Industrial District

Supported by Holstege

Roll Call Vote on Motion 2025.22

Ayes: Holstege, Kass, Klompmaker, Klynstra, Klunder, and Chairman Elhart.

Nays: Perkins.

Absent: Cooper, Blanton.

Motion Passes.

Commissioner Klunder noted that staff, City Council representatives, and Mead Johnson had all heard the concerns regarding the Blue Park Tot Lot and the desire for public green space in that corridor, and he assured that these details would be addressed during the site plan review phase and through the development agreement. He expressed hesitation about adding restrictions at this stage, explaining that he was unsure how such measures might affect utility placement, stormwater management, parking, green space setbacks, and other site elements. Klunder stated with confidence that these issues would be fully considered during the site plan review process. He further emphasized that the City, the commissioners, and City Council all have the public's best interests and safety in mind and are working diligently to ensure those priorities are met.

-Moved by Commissioner Klompmaker to approve the Planning Commission meeting minutes from the September 4th, 2025 meeting. Supported by Commissioner Holstege. All Commissioners voted aye.

-7:09 PM Moved by Commissioner Klompmaker to adjourn. Supported by Commissioner Holstege. All voted aye.

Respectfully submitted,

Nadine Hopping
Recording Secretary

City of Zeeland

SEP 22 2025

Received

To whom it may concern:

My name is Thomas Humbert, I live at 532 E Main Avenue.

Each morning, I look out my window and watch the sun rise over the "Feel the Zeel" water tower. To me, that view represents Zeeland at its best: a community that has always balanced industry with the integrity of its neighborhoods. That balance is what makes Zeeland special — and it is now at a crossroad.

The request to rezone 515, 549, and 553 E Main Avenue is more than a technical change on paper. It means tearing down three well-maintained family homes. It means demolishing a church, removing its playground, wiping out community gardens, and eliminating a seasonal ice rink, one of the few off-season attractions provided to the community. In one decision, Zeeland would not only lose housing stock it says it needs more of — it would erase community institutions and amenities that make this corridor livable and connected.

This directly contradicts Zeeland's Master Plan. That plan doesn't just exist for show; it is the city's roadmap for responsible growth and neighborhood protection. It calls for preserving viable housing even in sensitive areas, protecting neighborhood facilities, and prioritizing the stability of existing neighborhoods. Those aren't suggestions — they are obligations under state law. The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act and Planning Enabling Act require rezonings to be consistent with an adopted plan. Courts have repeatedly struck down rezonings that ignore this principle.

To approve this rezoning would send the opposite message: that Zeeland's vision for its future can be rewritten any time it becomes inconvenient. That the homes families trusted would remain part of a neighborhood can be swept aside for private development. That a church can be bulldozed without a second thought. And still, it's not clear where Mead Johnson intends to relocate the playground which currently serves neighborhood children.

Traffic and safety only add to the stakes. Main Avenue already carries significant volumes of local and commuter traffic. More intensive industrial use here means more turning conflicts, more congestion, and more risk for children who walk or bike this corridor to access the soccer fields near Fairview. We cannot claim to value safe neighborhoods while funneling industrial traffic directly past homes and school bus stops.

And I have to ask plainly: is my home not part of the same neighborhood as the parsonage across the street? I have always considered that family my neighbor. When did Main Avenue become a dividing line between who counts as a "neighborhood" and who counts as an "industrial district"? Neighborhoods are not just blocks on a map. If you travel further down Main Avenue, are Public and Franks no longer neighbors? How does that make sense in front of my house? In future Master Plans, block utilization should not be the sole rationale for considering rezoning. Let's fix this definition in future planning. Neighborhoods are not solely defined by blocks. The 2020 Master Plan itself promises to "promote orderly development of Zeeland's

neighborhoods through the encouragement of adjacent compatible land uses." This rezoning does the opposite.

For these reasons, I urge you in the strongest possible terms: deny the rezoning request for 515, 549, and 553 E Main Avenue. Protect the integrity of Zeeland's Master Plan. Protect the homes and institutions that define this neighborhood. Protect the trust that residents have placed in your leadership. Even though Mead Johnson's application tries to make the claim, the parcels before you tonight were never part of a land-use conflict. According to the 2011 Master Plan, these parcels did *not* fall within the region labeled as a land use conflict on Main Avenue. The area West of Carlton and East of N Division are outside that label:



Pg. 27, CITY OF ZEELAND MASTER PLAN 2011

If, despite these facts, the rezoning is approved, then it is your duty to require every safeguard possible: no less than 150' setbacks from Main Ave not including parking lots, layered, mature landscape buffers, strict access limitations on Main Avenue only east of Sanford, and real enforcement tools with consequences.

But the better path — the right path — is simple: uphold Zeeland's Master Plan. Protect its neighborhood and refuse to cash in on our community's character.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Thomas Humbert
532 E Main Avenue