



**CITY OF ZEELAND  
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS MEETING MINUTES  
COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
21 SOUTH ELM STREET  
APRIL 21<sup>ST</sup> 2026  
6:00 PM**

The meeting was called to order at 6:00PM

Present: Board Members Linda Mergener, Dave Stegink, Paul DeBoer, Lara Kovacs, and Scott Bartolomei.

Absent: Board Members Kevin Streeter, and Rebecca Perkins.

Also Present: Zoning Administrator Timothy Maday, City Attorney Jim Donkersloot, and Recording Secretary Nadine Garza

Board members recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

No absences were verbally excused, as both members had previously provided notice of their planned absence from this meeting.

Public Hearing for Dimensional Variance Request at 113 S Centennial St. – Blair Dewitt

Maday reviewed the application for a dimensional/non-use variance for 113 S. Centennial Avenue, Zeeland, MI. He explained that the subject parcel is an R-1 zoned interior lot measuring approximately 56.6 feet in width and 106 feet in depth, totaling 6,012 square feet, which is below the minimum lot width and area required in the R-1 district. The property currently contains a single-family dwelling, a 216-square-foot detached garage, and a 96-square-foot detached accessory building. Both accessory structures are considered nonconforming due to insufficient setbacks.

He noted that the applicant is proposing to demolish the existing nonconforming accessory structures and construct a new attached breezeway and single-stall garage on the rear (east) side of the dwelling.

Maday further explained that the City's R-1 district regulations require that when a garage or other structure is attached to the principal dwelling, it must meet the required setbacks for the principal building, including a minimum side yard setback of 10 feet and a rear yard setback of 25 feet. As proposed, the attached garage and breezeway would not meet these requirements, and the applicant is therefore requesting dimensional variances.

He also reviewed Section 3.201(8) of Volume II of the Zeeland City Code, which provides a narrow lot provision for parcels less than 70 feet in width. As the subject parcel is approximately 56.6 feet wide, this provision applies and allows for the construction of a connector structure and garage under reduced setback conditions, provided specific criteria are met. He noted that the proposed breezeway/connector structure meets the minimum required 7-foot side yard setback under this provision. However, the proposed attached garage would be set back 2 feet from the side property line, where a minimum of 3 feet is required, resulting in a 1-foot side yard variance request. Additionally, the proposed rear yard setback does not meet the required standard, necessitating further variance consideration.

Maday outlined the criteria for consideration of a dimensional/non-use variance, including the requirement to demonstrate practical difficulty. He reviewed relevant staff comments, including

the parcel's substandard size, limitations in constructing an attached garage in compliance with current setback requirements, and submitted support from adjacent property owners. He also advised that the Board must determine whether the request meets the required standards and take action in the form of a motion to approve or deny the application, with three affirmative votes required for approval.

Kovacs questioned whether the existing structure on the property qualifies as a single-stall garage. Maday explained that it is slightly larger than a typical single-stall garage, but not large enough to be considered a double-stall garage.

Jim DeWitt of Hamilton, MI, explained that his daughter was unable to attend the meeting due to illness and that he would be representing her and her application for a dimensional/non-use variance for 113 S. Centennial Street.

Moved by Mergener, supported by Stegink, to enter the application into the meeting minutes as part of the official record. All voted aye. Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

DeWitt explained that his daughter is proposing to construct a garage with an attached breezeway to the home at 113 S. Centennial Street. He noted that the current placement of the house on the lot presents challenges when considering additions or modifications. DeWitt stated that they explored the option of constructing on the north side of the lot; however, this was not a feasible solution.

DeWitt further explained that the enclosed breezeway connecting the garage to the dwelling would provide convenient access from the vehicle to the home, particularly when carrying children or groceries. He also noted that the existing garage is not large enough to accommodate their sedan and has instead been used for storage since purchasing the property a few years ago.

Bartolomei questioned why the north side of the home was not considered a feasible option. DeWitt responded that relocating the driveway to the north side would require new concrete and the relocation of the air conditioning unit currently located on that side of the home, making the project not financially practical. He added that he believes his daughter would be unlikely to recoup the cost of the garage if the home were sold in the future.

Members discussed alternative approaches with DeWitt. Kovacs suggested that reorienting the garage so the doors face south could allow the applicant to meet setback requirements while still achieving their goal. However, DeWitt noted that a covered porch currently occupies that area, and that a large tree would need to be removed for this option to be feasible.

Mergener commented that if the proposed garage were shifted slightly to the north, it could provide additional room to reorient the garage so the doors face south. DeWitt responded that this option would significantly reduce the property's green space and eliminate an area currently used for outdoor seating, which the family considers a valuable and usable outdoor space.

6:25 PM Motion to close public hearing made by Mergener. Supported by Stegink. All voted aye. Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

Members then reviewed the following submitted application:

"1. Provide sufficient evidence that the building, structure or land cannot reasonably be used for a use allowed in the zone district in which it is located (Sec. 2.205C 1)."

DeBoer noted that the property is a nonconforming lot, meaning it does not meet current zoning standards for new construction due to its dimensions. He explained that the lot is relatively shallow; At approximately 15–16% shorter than other standard lots on the block, and stated that these conditions contribute to a hardship for the applicant.

"2. List all unique or extraordinary conditions and facts of this property, including, but not necessarily limited to, exceptional narrowness, shallowness, shape and topographic conditions which necessitate this variance request (Sec. 2.205C 2)."

Kovacs noted that the lot provides very limited options due to its smaller size and existing conditions, describing it as a unique and restrictive property given its narrow width and shallow depth; factors that cannot be changed.

DeBoer added that the proposal appears to be a practical improvement to the site rather than something excessive. He noted that the existing garage is not currently usable for vehicle storage and is instead being used for general storage.

Stegink commented that if the applicant were to consider a detached garage, it would comply with setbacks and all requirements. However, he understands the reasoning behind wanting to enclose a passageway between the home and proposed garage.

Bartolomei confirmed that it does not meet the current standards and requirements due to it be an attached structure.

"3. Give evidence that the granting of this variance will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood (Sec. 2.205C 3)."

Maday noted that the applicant appeared to have submitted a use variance application and asked the members to review the request in accordance with the criteria outlined in the memo, as the applicable standards differ slightly. He added that, at this time, only the first question had been addressed. Bartolomei confirmed that the Board would return to Question 2 and proceed from that point.

"2. That if a variance is not granted, the applicant will be unable to enjoy substantial property rights and privileges similar to those possessed by others in the same zoning district and vicinity."

Maday noted that from a staff standpoint that based on a review of the survey and the location of the existing dwelling on the parcel, staff have not identified a location where an attached garage could be constructed in full compliance with applicable setback requirements. As a result, the ability to construct an attached garage on the property may be limited in comparison to other properties in the same zoning district that are able to accommodate attached garages in compliance with ordinance standards

Mergener advised that the Board would be granting a larger variance for the attached garage, noting that many properties throughout the City do not have attached garages. She added that the applicant could still meet the basic requirements by constructing a detached garage rather than an attached one.

Bartolomei confirmed that the property could be used in accordance with the ordinance with only a one-foot adjustment, provided the garage is constructed as a detached structure. All members agreed.

"3. Is there evidence that the reason(s) for this variance request goes beyond the possibility of increased financial return for the applicant?"

All members collectively agreed that there would be no financial gain to the applicant if the variance were granted.

"4. Will granting this variance be significantly detrimental to your adjacent neighbors and surrounding neighborhood?"

Kovacs commented that the neighborhood reflects an eclectic mix of bungalow-style homes and that the proposed project, if approved, would not negatively impact the overall character of the area. She noted that the proposal is modest in scale and appropriately reflects the limitations of the lot. She also observed that, given the narrow driveways and the addition of an attached garage, green space can be reduced quickly, which could otherwise lead to the need for additional variances. Overall, she expressed that the proposal, as presented, would not negatively impact the neighborhood.

"5. Will granting this variance harm the intent and purpose of this Ordinance?"

Mergener stated that the ordinance requirements could be met if the applicant chooses not to attach the garage. She noted that the intent of the ordinance is to provide clear standards for development, and that those standards could be satisfied with this application if a one-foot adjustment is granted and the garage is constructed as a detached structure.

Being that the application proposes an attached garage, Mergener expressed concern that the Board would be overlooking a viable option to comply with the ordinance.

DeBoer commented in disagreement, stating that while he understands the purpose and intent of the ordinance and its guidelines, this is a modest and straightforward request. He noted that the proposal does not appear to harm the intent of the ordinance or negatively impact surrounding property owners. He further explained that ordinances are generally written with standard-sized lots in mind, and because this parcel is nonconforming, strict application of those standards does not necessarily align with the intent of the ordinance. Therefore, there would be no harm.

DeWitt noted that constructing a detached garage would consume a significant portion of the available green space and would create challenges when accessing and exiting the garage and driveway.

Maday added that, when considering the intent of the ordinance, factors such as light, ventilation, and spacing are often central to setback requirements. He explained that these standards are intended to ensure adequate light and airflow between structures, which are key considerations when evaluating setback-related variances.

Bartolomei advised that due to the split opinions between members, they will move onto the next question.

"6. Has the immediate practical difficulty been caused by anything the applicant him- or herself has done?"

DeBoer questioned whether the home had been purchased within the past two years and if no alterations had been made since that time. DeWitt confirmed.

Bartolomei commented that the Board is not responsible for solving the applicant's problem or providing alternative solutions. He noted that their role is to determine whether the application meets the criteria outlined in the ordinance.

Maday noted for the members that two trees are not shown on the current drawing submitted with the application, which are located directly in the area where the Board had hypothetically discussed reorienting the garage to reduce the need for a variance.

Donkersloot noted that staff had sent notice to surrounding property owners within 305 feet of 113 S. Centennial Street, informing them of that evening's public hearing. He stated that no members of the public appeared in opposition to the application. Maday also referenced a petition of support submitted by neighboring property owners, indicating support for the application and proposed project.

Stegink referenced the recently constructed garage at 15 S. Wall Street, noting that a large two-stall detached garage was built at that location along the rear property line. He stated that a detached garage may be the best option for the applicant in order to remain in compliance with the ordinance.

DeWitt responded that shifting the proposed garage further north and to the rear would result in the removal of trees that are valued and used by both his daughter and neighboring property owners. He added that while it is generally easier to meet ordinance requirements on a conforming lot, the smaller size of this nonconforming parcel makes compliance more challenging, which is the basis for the variance request.

Moved by DeBoer to approve the application, citing the following findings in support of the variance:

1. The property has an unusual shape and physical characteristics that create a practical difficulty, specifically due to the smaller, nonconforming lot size.
  - a. There is an extraordinary situation related to the land, building, or structure, again tied to the limited dimensions of the parcel.
  - b. There is unusual use or development of immediately adjoining properties that contributes to the uniqueness of the situation.
2. The applicant would be unable to enjoy substantial property rights and privileges similar to those of other properties in the same zoning district and vicinity, given the smaller-than-standard lot size.
3. The request is not driven by the possibility of increased financial return.
4. The variance would not be significantly detrimental to adjacent properties or the surrounding neighborhood.
5. The variance would not harm the intent and purpose of the ordinance, despite differing opinions among Board members.
6. The practical difficulty has not been caused by any action of the applicant.

#### **Motion 2026.02**

Moved by DeBoer to approve the application, citing the following findings in support of the variance:

1. **The property has an unusual shape and physical characteristics that create a practical difficulty, specifically due to the smaller, nonconforming lot size.**
  - a. **There is an extraordinary situation related to the land, building, or structure, again tied to the limited dimensions of the parcel.**
  - b. **There is unusual use or development of immediately adjoining properties that contributes to the uniqueness of the situation.**
2. **The applicant would be unable to enjoy substantial property rights and privileges similar to those of other properties in the same zoning district and vicinity, given the smaller-than-standard lot size.**
3. **The request is not driven by the possibility of increased financial return.**

4. **The variance would not be significantly detrimental to adjacent properties or the surrounding neighborhood.**
5. **The variance would not harm the intent and purpose of the ordinance, despite differing opinions among Board members.**
6. **The practical difficulty has not been caused by any action of the applicant.**

**Chair: Bartolomei**  
**Vice Chair: Stegink**  
**Secretary: Mergener**

**Supported by Stegink**

**Ayes: DeBoer**  
**Nays: Mergener, Stegink, Bartolomei, Kovacs**  
**Absent: Kevin Streeter, and Rebecca Perkins.**  
**Motion not passed.**

Bartolomei addressed DeWitt, stating that while the Board would like to grant the variance, they are obligated to apply the criteria outlined in the ordinance. He noted that the option to construct a detached garage remains available without the need for a variance. Bartolomei also shared that he resides in the same neighborhood on a differently sized lot and faces a similar limitation in not being able to have an attached garage.

Steggink recommended that the proposed garage be moved straight back and constructed three feet from the lot line as a detached structure.

DeWitt acknowledged the Board's decision, noting that exceptions have been made in the past. He concluded by stating that he understood the position the Board must take and expressed appreciation for their time and consideration of the application.

Kovacs stated that, due to the limitations of the lot, the Board is unable to grant the requested variance. She referenced the criterion regarding whether the applicant is afforded the same privileges as others in the neighborhood, noting that existing conditions on the property cannot be changed. Based on this, she concluded that the variance could not be supported.

-Moved by Stegink, supported by Mergener to approve the minutes of the February 17th, 2026 Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting. All voted aye. Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

#### Additional Items

Maday noted that the City has received a site plan for the proposed modernization project at Mead Johnson, located at 725 E. Main Avenue, and indicated that the Board will likely see a variance application related to this project in the near future. He added that the project must still undergo site plan review.

Maday explained that, while the Zoning Board of Appeals would typically review such an application first, staff; After consulting with Paul LeBlanc of PLB Planning, staff decided to reverse the order of review due to the scale of the project and anticipated public interest. This approach is intended to allow for a more comprehensive site plan review and provide an opportunity for public input.

He further noted that the May 11 Planning Commission meeting is expected to initiate that process, as many aspects of the site plan fall outside the jurisdiction of the ZBA, including landscaping, screening, and access points. Staff determined it would be most appropriate for

the Planning Commission to address those items first so that, if and when the application comes before the Board, members will have the benefit of a more complete review and information.

-7:12 Moved by Stegink, supported by Mergener to adjourn. All voted aye. Motion carried unanimously by voice vote

Submitted by,

Nadine Garza  
Recording Secretary

DRAFT