



**CITY OF ZEELAND  
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES  
HOWARD MILLER COMMUNITY CENTER  
ZEELAND, MI  
MAY 11<sup>TH</sup>, 2026  
6:00 PM**

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

Present: Commissioners CJ Otteman, Rebecca Perkins, Sheri Holstege, Daniel Klompmaker, Rick VanDorp, Tim Klunder and Chairman Bill Elhart.

Absent: Commissioners Bob Blanton.

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

-Moved by Klompmaker, Supported by Holstege to excuse absent members. Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

Maday noted that there were no additional agenda items. He also referenced a communication received from resident Ryan Baas, regarding the Site Plan Review / Special Land Use Application for Mead Johnson and stated that it would be included as part of the official record in the minutes for tonight's meeting.

6:01 PM – Chairman Elhart opened the Public Hearing to hear the Site plan Review & Special Land Use Application for Mead Johnson & Company located at 725 E Main Ave.

Art Pike of Mead Johnson expressed his appreciation to the commissioners, staff, and members of the public for attending the meeting to discuss the next phase of the Mead Johnson Modernization Project. He stated that his team would be presenting a site master plan that outlines project progress while also addressing concerns previously raised, including traffic on Main Avenue, noise, odor, and landscaping.

Pike further explained that the proposed building footprint would be smaller than what had been discussed during the initial presentation last year. He also reported that Mead Johnson's commitment with Bethel Church to relocate the playground has been progressing well, while also noting continued collaboration with the Zeeland Fire and Police Departments to utilize recently purchased properties for training purposes. Additionally, Pike noted that the City and Mead Johnson have maintained a partnership for more than 100 years in support of feeding infants around the world, and he expressed his hope that the partnership would continue for the next 100 years.

Pike then introduced Allan Barron to present the site plan details.

Allan Barron of Mead Johnson provided a high-level overview of the items included in the proposed site design. He presented an overview of the entire site, identifying surrounding

properties as well as properties recently purchased by Mead Johnson that have since been rezoned for industrial use.

Barron also reviewed the proposed utilization of the site, highlighting the two existing buildings, ZSP and ZIPP. He noted that the existing building shown on E Washington Ave, formerly known as the Highpoint Finishing Building is planned to house cleaning, engineering, and maintenance contractors, who are currently operating out of trailers and Conex boxes located throughout the existing site. Barron added that approximately 100 contractors would enter the parking lot from Washington Avenue to access the site through the former Highpoint Building, which would help alleviate a portion of the traffic currently using Main Street.

Barron noted that their site plan shows buildings with increased setbacks from Calton St and Main Ave. The increased setbacks are intended to help alleviate potential noise impacts on neighboring properties. He further explained that two of the site's largest noise generators have been relocated to the center of the property so that the additional distance from surrounding streets will help disperse noise.

He noted that, in an effort to reduce traffic on Main Avenue, all entrances to the property from Main Avenue have been removed, with the exception of the 14-space visitor parking lot. All other access points have been relocated to Fairview Street or Carlton Street. This redesign allows for the addition of a continuous sidewalk, curb, and landscaping along Main Ave.

He further explained that, as a food processing facility, the FDA has specific pest control requirements, while the City requires canopy trees within parking lot islands. Due to FDA regulations and guidelines, they are unable to meet the City's required number of canopy trees. Barron stated that they are therefore requesting a variance to waive this requirement because of the property's unique circumstances.

Additionally, Barron noted that additional trees have been added along both Main Avenue and Carlton Street. He explained that trees and shrubs will be installed to help screen the property from Main Avenue and Carlton Street, while also highlighting greenbelt setback, which will include canopy trees extending from the visitor parking lot on Main Avenue to Carlton Street. Barron further noted that the pocket park concept is still in progress and is expected to be incorporated into the development agreement. He stated that Mead Johnson is currently working with the City to ensure the park aligns with the City's vision.

He then presented a cross-section view of Main Avenue, noting that they are also requesting a zoning variance for fencing. City code limits fence height to 4 feet; however, they are requesting approval for an 8-foot fence with an 18-foot setback. Barron presented a fence design he described as architecturally pleasing and explained that the fence is intended solely for security purposes, as the FDA also imposes security requirements for food processing facilities.

Barron continued his review of the site plan, noting that all towers, including the proposed new towers, will remain at the same height as previously shown. Barron also stated that the setbacks for the manufacturing building along Main Avenue are approximately four-and-a-half times greater than the required 50-foot setback. Additionally, he noted that several portions of the proposed buildings exceed the maximum permitted building height of 40 feet, requiring a height variance request.

Barron explained that another variance request involves front yard loading, as City Code does not permit loading areas within the front yard setback. He stated that Mead Johnson has worked to minimize the visual and operational impact by locating the loading docks on the west side of the building, adjacent to primarily industrial properties. He further noted that the loading area is situated approximately 400 feet from the Carlton Street right-of-way and will be fully screened with landscaping along Carlton Street.

Barron also acknowledged public concerns regarding odor and stated that Mead Johnson currently operates under valid air permits and has not received any violation notices from the County. He recognized that odor concerns have been raised by a nearby resident and referenced previous concerns related to the facility's wastewater treatment plant. Barron explained that a major component of the treatment system was replaced previously, which substantially reduced odors and related concerns. He added that Mead Johnson continues to monitor the issue and is exploring new technologies as part of the proposed project to further reduce any potential odors. Barron further noted that Mead Johnson is also working with the City's Clean Water Plant to evaluate how much wastewater treatment capacity the City may be able to provide for the facility.

Barron concluded by stating that he and his team have made a significant effort to address concerns raised by both the public and the City and have worked to incorporate that feedback into the proposed design changes. He expressed hope that the revisions demonstrate Mead Johnson's willingness to listen and respond to concerns, while also reflecting the company's commitment to remaining a good neighbor and responsible member of the Zeeland community.

Maday then provided a brief overview of the applicable City ordinances following Mead Johnson's presentation. He reminded the Commission that action had previously been taken at an earlier meeting to rezone several parcels included in the proposal to industrial zoning, making the proposed use permitted by right on those properties.

Maday explained that the current application was advertised as a Special Land Use request due to the proposed sign on one of the new buildings, which is approximately 150 square feet, exceeding the ordinance maximum of 100 square feet. He noted, however, that under the Special Land Use process, the Planning Commission may consider approval of up to an additional 50 percent in sign area.

Maday further reviewed the application materials and stated that staff finds the site plan to be complete, while noting that several waivers and variances have been requested, along with a number of outstanding utility-related items. He also stated that staff finds the proposed greenbelt along Main Avenue meets City code requirements and includes an adequate amount of trees.

Maday added that staff would like to note that the City does have Washington Ave beautification plans that were endorsed recently and staff would appreciate the opportunity to incorporate the Washington Ave beautification plans into site design, should improvements to the Washington Ave frontage be proposed. He further discussed that Commissioners have the ability to grant landscaping waivers such as the proposed relocation of the parking lot trees to Main Ave frontage, due to operational constraints cited by the property owner.

Maday further noted that staff continues to work closely with Mead Johnson regarding utility capacities, infrastructure sizing, and overall utility arrangements associated with the project. He added that staff appreciates the efforts of Mead Johnson and its contractors as the City works through a number of design-related items due to the scale and complexity of the project and the interconnected nature of the infrastructure improvements.

Maday stated that staff recommends any motion for project approval include a condition requiring final approval from the City's utility team. He explained that this is common for industrial developments, as there are often utility and infrastructure-related matters that are not directly tied to zoning ordinance requirements but must still be resolved prior to final project approval.

Additionally, Maday stated that the stormwater plans are currently under review by the Ottawa County Water Resources Office rather than City staff due to existing site conditions and the project's proximity to a county drain located adjacent to the building. He also noted that the City has consulted with a traffic engineer who has reviewed the traffic study and continues to coordinate with Mead Johnson to finalize projections and ensure the modeled traffic conditions accurately reflect anticipated field conditions. Maday stated that staff would recommend including a condition related to final traffic study approval as part of any motion. Maday then highlighted several variances being requested as part of the project, including a building height variance, as portions of several proposed buildings exceed the maximum permitted height of 40 feet. He also noted the request for a variance related to front yard fencing, as the proposed 8-foot fence exceeds the allowable fence height permitted by ordinance. Maday explained that these variance requests would require approval from the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Furthermore, Maday stated that the Mead Johnson facility has multiple front yards as it encompasses nearly an entire block, and while front yard loading is not permitted under the ordinance, the proposed loading areas are located more than 300 feet from the roadway and outside the required front yard setback. He noted that this request would also require approval from the Zoning Board of Appeals.

In conclusion, Maday stated that Mead Johnson is requesting landscape and screening waivers related to the Carlton Street trees, as well as approval for the relocation of parking lot trees. He noted that staff continues to work toward finalizing the traffic study and is awaiting comments from Ottawa County regarding stormwater review, while utility design and capacity determinations remain ongoing with staff.

Maday also noted that Mead Johnson had previously requested the vacation of North Division Street, for which the Planning Commission had already taken action recommending approval to City Council. He explained that City Council will ultimately consider the request at a future public hearing. Finally, Maday stated that staff intends to pursue a development agreement due to the scale and complexity of the project. He explained that the agreement would address a number of items, including utility coordination, infrastructure improvements and cost allocations, implementation and design of the proposed greenspace in the southwest corner of the site, and final design elements associated with the Bethel Church playground area. Maday added that staff continues to work with Zeeland Public Schools and Bethel Church to determine an appropriate arrangement for the proposed park space.

Maday clarified that, given the scale of the project and the significant level of public interest, staff is neither requesting nor expecting the Planning Commission to take action on the application at tonight's meeting. He noted, however, that the Commission may take action if members feel they have received sufficient information from all parties involved. Maday further explained that if no action is taken, the application will return for further consideration at the next regular Planning Commission meeting scheduled for June 4, 2026. Maday also referenced Planning Consultant Paul LeBlanc, noting that he was present to assist the Commission in its review and consideration of the application.

Paul LeBlanc, City Planning Consultant with PLB Planning Group, stated that Maday provided a thorough overview of the application materials. He also commented that the site plan submitted by Mead Johnson was among the most complete application packages he had reviewed, particularly for a project of this scale and complexity.

Maday added that, as Commissioners review the submitted public correspondence, it should be noted that one resident referenced the proposed tower as being 234 feet tall. He clarified that the proposed building height is actually 134 feet and stated that the discrepancy appears to stem from a misunderstanding of the elevation drawings, where the building elevation begins at 100 feet and the structure itself measures 134 feet in height.

Chairman Elhart then opened public comment.

Jeff Zylstra of 40 S. Sanford Street stated that he did not attend the meeting with an open mind and noted that he had previously been dissatisfied with the rezonings associated with the project. He explained that his purpose in attending the meeting was to remind Commissioners of their responsibility to ensure that residents living in the surrounding neighborhood continue to have a pleasant place to call home.

Zylstra stated that he was pleasantly surprised by portions of Mead Johnson's presentation, particularly the relocation of entrances from Main Avenue to Carlton Street, although he noted that he still has concerns regarding traffic impacts. He further explained that his primary concern remains odor, noting that he has lived on Sanford Street for approximately 30 years. Zylstra stated that he expected Mead Johnson to provide more definitive answers regarding odor mitigation, expressing that statements indicating the company is "trying" or "exploring options" are insufficient. He requested that the Planning Commission encourage Mead Johnson to conduct additional research and return with more concrete solutions and information regarding odor reduction efforts.

Sue Vanden Beldt of 40 S. Division Street asked the Planning Commission to carefully consider the requested variances as part of the project review process. She stated that while she understands the FDA regulations related to pest control, she does not understand the proposed parking lot landscaping plan. Vanden Beldt expressed concern regarding the reduced number of trees within the parking lot greenbelt areas and questioned how many trees would be relocated to Main Avenue if the requested variance is approved.

Maday noted that he will reference back to his City ordinance review to provide an answer.

Vanden Beldt added that the trees should be mature canopy trees, rather than saplings.

Ryan Baas of 28 S. Division Street stated that he was not present to oppose Mead Johnson's modernization efforts and acknowledged that the proposed investment represents a significant benefit to Zeeland's economy. However, he asked the Planning Commission to also consider the impacts the project may have on families living directly across the street from the facility. Baas expressed concerns that the proposed 134-foot tower would permanently alter the neighborhood skyline and that the addition of hundreds of vehicles along Main Avenue and Fairview Avenue would negatively impact the surrounding residential area. He also raised concerns regarding construction activities proposed near his residence and questioned why the project footprint could not be shifted farther north into the existing industrial area. Baas stated that relocating the development farther north would better preserve the residential character of the Main and Fairview Avenue area while also reducing potential noise and odor impacts on nearby families.

Baas also referenced the uncertain future of the Bethel Church Veldhof Playground, noting that the current site plan does not clearly commit to replacing the neighborhood amenity. He stated that failing to replace the playground with a more modern and improved facility would be a significant loss to the community. Furthermore, Baas stated that because Mead Johnson is requesting a substantial height variance in order to construct what he described as a world-class facility, he believes the City should require a comparable community benefit in return. He requested that the Planning Commission consider conditioning approval of the project on shifting the construction footprint farther north toward Washington Avenue, constructing a legacy playground that exceeds what currently exists, and establishing a neighborhood career scholarship program through Mead Johnson.

Baas explained that he envisions the proposed scholarship program as an opportunity to connect neighborhood youth with career pathways through mentorship and training opportunities coordinated with Mead Johnson's Human Resources Department. He added that he hopes his own children and other local youth will have opportunities to pursue stable, local careers within the community, which he stated is why the issue is personally important to him. Baas also referenced the written communication he submitted to the Planning Commission for further review of his ideas regarding the proposed playground improvements and scholarship program.

Maday noted that City ordinance requires 18 canopy trees along the Main Avenue frontage of the property. He explained that Mead Johnson's proposed site plan includes 48 canopy trees along Main Avenue, in addition to the proposed screening and hedgerow landscaping, exceeding the ordinance requirement by 30 trees, which are the proposed relocated parking lot trees.

Joel Geerlings of 38 Sanford Street stated that he appreciates the time and effort that has gone into Mead Johnson's proposed plans. However, he encouraged the Planning Commission to continue pushing for additional mitigation measures, noting that technologies and research exist to help better manage and reduce noise and odor impacts associated with the facility.

Geerlings stated that he is supportive of Mead Johnson and the proposed project overall, but emphasized the importance of ensuring the development remains a partnership that benefits

the community for many years to come. He added that maintaining a high quality of life within the surrounding neighborhoods is important in attracting and retaining homeowners in Zeeland.

Bruce Vanden Beldt of 40 S. Division Street expressed concerns regarding the proposed fencing along Main Avenue associated with the rezoned properties included in the project. He stated that he finds the fencing visually unappealing and commented that it resembles a prison compound. Vanden Beldt then questioned how frequently Commissioners visit the area surrounding the proposed development site, stating that he believes the project impacts are experienced differently by nearby residents than by members of the Planning Commission. He commented that the character of his neighborhood has changed significantly and expressed concern that previous approvals related to the project had been granted without a full understanding of the overall outcome.

Vanden Beldt further stated that renderings presented by Mead Johnson at previous meetings did not accurately reflect the current proposal and expressed his belief that the renderings were used to help gain support for the modernization project. He concluded by asking Commissioners to place themselves in the position of nearby residents when considering action on the application.

Colin Ebels of 19 S. Park Street referenced the proposed underground detention pond located on the west side of the site near the loading dock area and questioned whether that portion of the project could be shifted farther north or away from the residential area. He noted that vegetation cannot be established within a detention pond and expressed concern that the view from his home on Park Street would primarily consist of Mead Johnson's loading dock operations. Additionally, he commented that the proposed 15,000-square-foot park space appeared undersized and encouraged the Planning Commission to advocate for a larger public greenspace area as part of the project.

Klunder noted that it is typical for site plans to include references related to departmental reviews and clarified that each relevant department had the opportunity to review the proposed plan and provide comments. He further noted communication was submitted on May 4, 2026 regarding staff comments.

Perkins questioned whether a barrier would be installed between the visitor parking area and employee parking lot, expressing concern that employees may continue entering the site from Main Avenue through the visitor parking entrance and then cut through to access the employee parking area.

Barron confirmed that the visitor parking area will be separated by fencing and secured with a gate that would only be opened for emergency access if necessary, and not for standard day-to-day use.

Perkins questioned whether additional shrubs would be installed along the iron fencing on Main Avenue in conjunction with the proposed canopy trees. Barron confirmed that Mead Johnson is prepared to install 57 shrubs along Main Avenue, along with a similar number along Carlton Street, and stated that shrubbery will be installed continuously along the fence line. He further noted that in areas where overhead power lines are present, full screening with 6-foot arborvitae trees is proposed.

Perkins requested clarification regarding the size of the proposed pocket park. Barron explained that the original estimated size of the park was approximately 15,000 square feet and noted that the concept presented was preliminary in nature.

Perkins asked if the curb cut to the entrance of the employee lot would be placed in the same spot as the existing curb cut for (formerly) Bethel Church. Barron advised that it would be moved slightly north of the current location due to residential properties that sit across the street.

Perkins then questioned if the loading dock could be moved to ensure the drive does not sit entirely in front of a residence. Barron noted that reconfiguring that area would cause a complicated intersection in turn possibly creating more traffic congestion. He noted that they will review more options in regard.

Perkins questioned the proposed relocation of the playground. Klunder explained that Mead Johnson, the City, Zeeland Public Schools, and representatives from Bethel Church have been working together to obtain a lease agreement for property owned by the school district. He suggested that the playground be incorporated into the future development agreement, noting that the playground itself is not formally included as part of the current site plan review.

Perkins then confirmed whether the development agreement would ultimately be reviewed and approved by both the Planning Commission and City staff. Klunder advised that there would likely be two separate development agreements: one related to the playground area and another addressing utilities and related infrastructure matters, noting that the utility agreement would likely be more comprehensive in scope. He explained that the City continues to discuss what utility services and capacities it can provide as part of the project. Klunder further noted that both agreements would ultimately be reviewed by City Council, and stated that the south west greenspace design could potentially come before the Planning Commission.

Perkins questioned whether Mead Johnson plans to install mature trees as part of the landscaping plan. Barron responded that the proposed landscaping is intended to meet City Code requirements, including the installation of 10-foot-tall trees with a 2.5-inch caliper. He added that Mead Johnson intends to comply with all applicable landscaping and screening requirements, noting that trees above a certain size cannot realistically be transplanted. Barron stated that the company is making its best effort to meet ordinance standards while also addressing community concerns related to screening.

Klompaker asked whether Mead Johnson would be willing to add two additional trees along Carlton Avenue, rather than the 16 trees currently shown on the site plan. Barron responded that they are unable to add the additional trees due to the need to avoid overhead power lines located above and within the tree line area.

Holstege confirmed that neither the proposed pocket park nor the Washington Avenue Beautification Plan are formally included within the application presented by Mead Johnson at tonight's meeting, and noted that those items would need to be incorporated into any final motion by the Planning Commission in order to ensure they are included as part of the project.

Maday confirmed this understanding and stated that, if desired by the Planning Commission, a condition could be added requiring Planning Commission review and approval of the proposed greenspace located at the southwest corner of the site prior to commencement of related work. Maday further noted that, with regard to the proposed park area, staff would need to conduct additional research because the school district maintains jurisdictional authority over that portion of the property. Maday also referenced previous development agreements associated with other recently constructed developments, noting that such agreements often include language requiring Planning Commission review and approval of final building designs or site plans. He explained that this type of process allows additional time for planning and review while also creating opportunities for continued collaboration between the City and the developer.

Perkins asked whether Mead Johnson had any additional information or comments they wished to provide regarding the concerns raised during the meeting related to noise and odor impacts. Barron responded that Mead Johnson has been working with an outside consulting firm specifically focused on the design of the facility's wastewater treatment system and is currently evaluating potential improvements and mitigation measures. He noted, however, that no final decisions have been made at this time regarding those potential improvements. Additionally, Barron reiterated that Mead Johnson continues to work with the City's Clean Water Plant to explore additional solutions, expressing hope that the City may ultimately be able to fully handle the facility's wastewater treatment needs.

Barron also noted that the sound estimates referenced earlier in his presentation were based on standard sound reduction principles involving distance and decibel calculations. He explained that these calculations were developed in coordination with Mead Johnson's engineering team.

Klomp maker questioned whether truck traffic on Carlton Street would be directed toward Washington Avenue or Main Avenue. Barron responded that all truck traffic has been directed to avoid Main Avenue and instead utilize Carlton Street through Washington Avenue. He also noted that Mead Johnson's off-site warehouse is located on Fairview Avenue. Perkins then questioned whether signage would be installed to direct contractors and truck traffic appropriately. Barron stated that such signage had not yet been incorporated into the plan but noted that Mead Johnson would not be opposed to adding it. Barron further highlighted that approximately 100 vehicles currently entering and parking from Main Avenue will instead be redirected to the employee parking lot accessed from Washington Avenue under the proposed site plan.

Klomp maker asked whether Mead Johnson could provide additional clarification regarding FDA-related concerns associated with interior parking lot trees and potential pest issues. Barron explained that the FDA does not specifically regulate trees or landscaping; however, the agency does maintain rigorous standards related to pest control. He stated that Mead Johnson internally establishes standards for tree placement and landscaping design, noting that trees are positioned strategically and methodically to help minimize the risk of pest infestation, particularly given the proximity of the shipping dock to the parking areas.

Holstege questioned if the applicant planned to do anything different cosmetically with the current buildings. Barron noted they do not, and that all the buildings will match. Barron noted

that no buildings on the site would be abandoned, as all existing buildings remain necessary for operations.

Perkins questioned the anticipated construction timeline and asked whether Mead Johnson could provide an estimate as to when the project would be completed. Barron responded that his team has additional meetings scheduled in the coming weeks to further discuss the project timeline. He noted that the first phase of site work is anticipated to include construction of the parking lot off Main Avenue, followed by the possibility of installing the proposed fencing and landscaping as part of an early construction package. Barron also noted that temporary construction fencing would remain in place in addition to the decorative iron fencing presented in the proposal. He concluded by stating that the overall project timeline is still being finalized and that Mead Johnson would be happy to provide additional details to the Planning Commission once those timelines are determined.

Ottoman asked Mead Johnson to identify the source of the odor concerns referenced during the meeting. Barron explained that the odor is currently associated with the facility's wastewater treatment area and confirmed that the proposed modernization project does not include expansions to the wastewater treatment operations and therefore would not contribute additional odor impacts.

Ottoman then asked why the proposed site plan could not be shifted farther north toward Washington Avenue. Barron explained that a county drain runs directly through one of the northern properties, creating site constraints that prevent the development from fitting within that area. He further noted that Mead Johnson had attempted to acquire additional surrounding properties in an effort to create more site planning options; however, those acquisition efforts were ultimately unsuccessful.

Ryan Baas of 28 Sanford Street stated that he appreciated the technical explanation regarding why the site plan could not be shifted farther north. However, he commented that he views the project impacts as a sacrifice being made by the surrounding neighborhood and expressed that he would appreciate seeing substantial mitigation measures provided in return for that sacrifice.

Colin Ebels of 19 S. Park Street questioned how the proposed loading dock operations would function, specifically asking about the anticipated truck schedule. He noted that his residence directly faces the loading dock area and expressed concerns regarding trucks traveling along Park Street and potentially waiting in queue near his home. Barron responded that the proposed shipping dock design includes a double-lane entrance capable of accommodating up to four trucks at a time. He further noted that additional trailer parking may be located at the far south end of the Highpoint building and stated that the trailer parking area would not be directly adjacent to the street.

Hugh Bartels, representing Bethel Church, provided an update from the church's perspective regarding the proposed park and playground plans. He noted that representatives have participated in at least five meetings related to reviewing concepts and plans for the proposed improvements. Bartels stated that trust was something he initially struggled with at the beginning of the process; however, he added that he has since verified the information being presented and has been very pleased with both the demeanor of those involved and the efforts being made as part of the modernization project.

-7:07 PM Motion by Klompmaker to close the public hearing. Supported by VanDorp. Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

**Motion 2026.06**

**Moved by Klompmaker to approve the Site Plan Review & Special Land Use Application for Mead Johnson & Company LLC at 725 E Main Ave with the following requirements:**

- (1) Approval of required variances by the Zoning Board of Appeals**
- (2) Approval of requested waivers by the Planning Commission**
  - a. Approval substituting three evergreen trees for the required two additional canopy trees in the Carlton St greenbelt**
  - b. Approval of waiving landscaping installation on Washington Ave**
  - c. Approval of the relocation of parking lot trees to the Main Ave frontage of the site**
- (3) Final traffic study review and approval by the City's consulting traffic engineer**
- (4) Approval of stormwater management plans by the Ottawa County Water Resources Commissioner's Office prior to issuance of building permits**
- (5) Final review and approval of utility design and system capacity by City staff and consultants**
- (6) Execution of a development agreement addressing project-related improvements and coordination items (including the offsite playground).**

**Supported by VanDorp**

Perkins stated that she would like to see additional items completed and further reviewed prior to the Planning Commission taking action on the application. She explained that City staff has had more time and opportunity to review and discuss the plans, whereas tonight's meeting represented the Commission's first opportunity to fully review the proposal.

Maday added that scheduling for the Zoning Board of Appeals meeting would not occur unless site plan approval was granted. He explained that the City would not want the Zoning Board of Appeals to consider variances for a plan that has not yet been fully reviewed and vetted by the Planning Commission, noting that the Zoning Board of Appeals should ultimately be reviewing the finalized site design. Maday also noted that Mead Johnson would not be able to proceed with construction of the project as currently proposed without first obtaining the required variances.

Additionally, Maday stated that stormwater management review and the traffic study are technical matters handled primarily by engineers and consultants, which can require additional time to complete. He explained that staff is comfortable delegating those reviews because they are matters staff routinely evaluates and because the applicable standards are established by Ottawa County and must be met regardless of whether action on the application occurs tonight or at a future meeting.

Perkins questioned how long it would take to get those reports. Maday replied that it can sometimes take months to receive those reports. Maday noted that there are several months in planning around building codes and plan reviewing when thinking about timelines.

Klompmaker questioned whether Perkins was comfortable with the three requested waivers, to which Perkins responded that she was. He then asked whether she wished to wait for the final results of the traffic study and wastewater review before taking action on the application. Perkins responded by asking whether it would be possible for the Planning Commission to review the proposed development agreement, given the number of moving parts associated with the project.

VanDorp clarified that the development agreement would ultimately be reviewed by City Council. Commissioners then discussed the possibility of requesting that a formal written motion be prepared in advance so that outstanding items and conditions could be more thoroughly reviewed and refined prior to the next regular Planning Commission meeting scheduled for June 4, 2026.

**Motion 2026.07**

**Moved by Klompmaker to direct staff to draft a resolution approving the site plan, including the conditions referenced in the previous motion, to be presented to the Planning Commission for consideration at its next regular meeting.**

**Supported by VanDorp**

**Roll Call Vote on Motion 2026.07**

**Ayes: Otteman, Perkins, Holstege, Klompmaker, VanDorp, Klunder, and Chairman Bill Elhart.**

**Nays: None.**

**Absent: Blanton.**

**Motion Passes.**

Maday stated that he had no additional matters for the Planning Commissioners at the meeting.

-7:19 PM – Moved by Klompmaker, supported by Holstege, to adjourn. Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

Nadine Garza  
Recording Secretary

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Community Benefit & Mitigation Proposal

**RE: Mead Johnson Nutrition – Zeeland Modernization Masterplan (725 E. Main Ave) Submitted by: Ryan Baas, 28 Sanford St. | May 11, 2026**

## Overview

As a direct neighbor to the proposed expansion, I support Mead Johnson's continued investment in the Zeeland economy. However, the requested height variances (234' towers) and the relocation of industrial operations closer to the Main Avenue residential corridor impose a permanent "cost" on local families. This proposal outlines three specific conditions for site plan approval intended to mitigate these impacts and foster a long-term strategic partnership between the company and its neighbors.

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## The Three Primary Conditions for Approval

### 1. Footprint Optimization (The North-Shift)

- **The Request:** Re-evaluate the site layout to shift the high-density construction and the 234-foot tower further North toward the Washington Avenue industrial zone.
- **The Goal:** To preserve the residential skyline along Main Avenue and reduce the immediate noise and vibration impact on Sanford, Division, and Park Street residents.

### 2. The Veldhof Legacy Playground

- **The Request:** Mead Johnson to fund and construct a modern, "destination-grade" playground to replace the loss of the Bethel Church Veldhof Playground.
- **Key Features:**
  - Inclusive, ADA-accessible surfacing (no woodchips).
  - Modern climbing structures, sensory play areas, and a community splash pad.

### 3. Neighborhood-to-Career Scholarship Fund

- **The Request:** Establishment of a sustainable scholarship program for neighborhood youth, focusing on both traditional and non-traditional career paths.
  - **The "Talent Pipeline":** This initiative includes annual HR mentorship and a direct interview process for recipients, turning neighborhood children into Mead Johnson's future skilled workforce.
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### Why These Conditions?

- **Fair Mitigation:** The 234-foot tower height is a massive deviation from standard city code. These benefits serve as a fair trade for the permanent alteration of the neighborhood's character.
  - **Strategic Partnership:** By investing in a scholarship pipeline, Mead Johnson secures a reliable, local labor force while providing stability for neighborhood families.
  - **Community Continuity:** Replacing the lost playground ensures that this Zeeland neighborhood remains a premier location for young families to stay and grow.
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*"Let's ensure this project creates a lasting legacy for the families who will live in the shadow of these towers for the next fifty years."*

Ryan Baas

28 Sanford St  
Zeeland, MI 49464

ryanebaas@gmail.com

708-846-8744

June 12th, 2025

To: Art Pike – Mead Johnson/Reckitt

**Subject: Enhancing Community Partnership: A Sustainable Scholarship Fund for Local Youth**

Dear Mr. Pike,

On behalf of the residents of the neighborhood affected by Mead Johnson's expansion, I am writing to you today with a proposal to deepen Reckitt's already valued presence in our community. As you expand your operations in Zeeland, we recognize the significant impact this growth will have, and we are eager to explore opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships.

Following up on our discussions regarding a scholarship fund for students from families in the affected neighborhood, I've developed an idea that I believe could transform this initiative into a truly sustainable and strategic investment for Reckitt.

Our proposal is for a **higher education scholarship program** that not only provides essential financial support but also creates a direct talent pipeline for your company. Here's how it would work:

- **Application Interview:** When students apply for the scholarship during their senior year of high school, they would engage in an interview with Mead Johnson's Human Resources department. This provides an early opportunity for both the students and Reckitt to connect and assess potential alignment.
- **Annual HR Engagement:** To maintain their scholarship in subsequent years, recipients would have an annual contact or meeting with an HR representative. This ongoing engagement allows Mead Johnson to monitor their academic progress, offer mentorship, and provide career guidance relevant to your industry.
- **Strategic Workforce Development:** By consistently engaging with these students throughout their schooling, Mead Johnson's HR team would gain valuable insight into their skills, interests, and development. This sustained relationship could culminate in a tailored job offer for each student upon their graduation, ensuring a ready pool of qualified and familiar local talent.

I believe this model offers a significant "**win-win**" for both our community and Reckitt. For the students, it provides not just financial assistance but also invaluable mentorship, career direction, and a clear path to employment. For Mead Johnson, it represents a proactive and cost-effective strategy for **recruiting and retaining skilled local employees**, fostering strong community ties, and enhancing your reputation as a committed corporate citizen. This integrated approach turns philanthropy into a strategic investment in your future workforce.

I am confident that by linking the scholarship fund to such a robust talent development initiative, Mead Johnson would see a significant return on its investment, justifying a more substantial contribution to the fund.

I would be grateful for the opportunity to discuss this proposal further with you at your convenience. Thank you for considering this innovative approach to community partnership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ryan Baas".

Ryan Baas

# VELDHOF LEGACY PARK PROPOSAL

Community Benefit & Mitigation | Zeeland City Planning Commission | May 11, 2026

## Vision Statement

To replace the loss of the Veldhof Playground with a world-class, multi-generational discovery park. This destination-grade asset serves as a fair-trade mitigation for the permanent visual and industrial impact of the 234-foot tower expansion on the surrounding residential neighborhood.

## Key Playground Zones

<b>1. The "Sky-High" Discovery Tower</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 20-foot vertical climbing mesh tower.</li><li>• Landmark architecture echoing local modernization.</li><li>• Integrated transparent spiral tube-slides.</li></ul>	<b>2. Kinetic Hydro-Lab (Splash Pad)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Zero-depth entry for 100% accessibility.</li><li>• Interactive dams, waterwheels, and "Formula" pumps.</li><li>• Recirculating, filtered water system for sustainability.</li></ul>
<b>3. All-Abilities Sensory Sanctuary</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acoustic "cocoon" for sensory regulation.</li><li>• Tactile exploration walls and musical lithophones.</li><li>• Inclusive "We-Go-Round" and adaptive swings.</li></ul>	<b>4. High-Rebound Terrain</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Seamless, pour-in-place rubber topography.</li><li>• Integrated in-ground trampoline mats.</li><li>• Safe "parkour" mounds for physical development.</li></ul>

## Modern Amenities & Safety

- **Digital Integration:** Augmented Reality (AR) markers for gamified physical play.
- **Year-Round Use:** Heated pathways for snow-melt and solar-powered charging benches.
- **Natural Buffer:** Nature playscape transition with reclaimed wood and butterfly waystations.
- **Location:** Open field East of the Zeeland Bus Garage—centralized for residential access.

