

MUNSTER BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
Meeting Date: December 9, 2025

The Board of Zoning Appeals held a meeting on December 9, 2025, at Munster Town Hall, 1005 Ridge Road, in the Main meeting room and could be accessed remotely via Zoom Webinar, a video conference application.

Call to Order: Member Raffin called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

Moment of Silence and Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call:

Roland R. Raffin, Member, Appointed by: Plan Commission, Initial Appointment: 08/20/2018-Term Expiration: 12/31/2025

Sharon A. Mayer, Member, Appointed by: Town Council, Initial Appointment: 10/23/2000-Term Expiration: 12/31/2026

Jennifer Johns, Member, Appointed by: Town Council, Initial Appointment: 06/01/2018-Term Expiration: 12/31/2027

Brad Hemingway, Member, Appointed by: Town Council, Initial Appointment: 3/7/2022-Term Expiration: 12/31/2025

Dan Sharpe, Member, Appointed by: Town Council, Initial Appointment: 07/07/25 Term Expiration: 12/31/27

Members in Attendance:

Jennifer Johns
Roland Raffin
Sharon Mayer
Dan Sharpe

Members Absent:

Brad Hemingway

Staff Present:

Sergio Mendoza, Planning Director
Nicole Bennett, Town Attorney
Denise Core, Administrative Assistant

Approval of Minutes: November 18, 2025, BZA Minutes

Motion: Member Johns moved to approve the minutes of November 18, 2025, as submitted.

Second: Member Sharpe

Vote: Yes –4 No – 0 Abstain – 0. Motion carried

Preliminary Hearings: None

Public Hearings:

BZA25-009 DEVELOPMENTAL STANDARDS VARIANCE: Sean Begley representing the School Town of Munster requests variances from SECTION 26-6.405 Q. **PRIVATE LIGHTING STANDARDS:** Height, Head Type, and Color Temperature; for the replacement of parking lot lighting at Eads Elementary located at 8000 Jackson Avenue and 8001 Harrison Avenue.

Director Mendoza reported that Eads Elementary is looking to replace all the parking lot lights. They are not relocating anything that does not already exist, they're just replacing them in the same locations. They're proposing to replace 14 lights, one near a residential zone area, four along Jackson Avenue, with

the others are on what is called Harrison Avenue, but they are within the interior drive along both Jackson and Harrison. The request is to vary from the standards with regards to the light head type; they're proposing an off-road type of head. He referenced the staff report images that compare the proposed lighting to what is there now. The proposed head type is boxier, a more streamlined off-road overhead type, for a more modern look. They are also proposing to increase the height of the pole to 25 feet and the color temperature. They are proposing a 5,000K color temperature, the code requirement is a 3,000K color temperature. The difference is the higher the number, the whiter it appears; the lower the number, the more yellow tinge it has. He said they are asking for variances from those three standards. Member Raffin asked if the board members had any questions. When there were no questions, he asked if anyone was present to speak on behalf of the petitioner.

Mr. Sean Begley, Director of Operations for the School Town of Munster, said they would like to replace the original lights; they are over 20 years old. The height right now from the base of the concrete up to the base of the fixture is 23 feet, 9 inches and continues up from there to an overall height of approximately 25 feet; they don't want to change the height. He said the color is 5,000K now but they can certainly make adjustments, they want to be good neighbors. He said they currently have a photocell, so we just turn them on; the light goes on when the sun goes down. At Elliott, they only light every third light to keep the brightness down when the school is not in use, they can also adjust the wattage to lower the brightness of them. He said there are times when they do need to light up the entire facility; the Adventure Club is a perfect example. He went by there today and it was completely dark; noting that it is pretty dark in that back area of the school as the kids are loading at Eads and Elliott. He said they do have evening programs and evening events where people are utilizing the facility. He said they have had neighbors complain about some of the lights and they have disabled some of them in order to be good neighbors and work with people. They would like to move forward with this project.

Member Johns asked if this petition and the next can be discussed at the same time since there are similarities. Member Raffin said these are both public hearing so we should keep them separate and asked the opinion of Attorney Bennett. She answered that it is probably better to keep the focus on each one for the purposes of the public hearing, but for the discussion, it is up to the board on how they manage that as long as the public hearings and the voter actions are separate. Member Raffin asked if there were any questions for Mr. Begley.

Member Johns said Mr. Begley was agreeable to reducing the height to 20 feet in the last meeting. Mr. Begley said there are a few other options and they're amenable to work with everybody. Director Mendoza asked if the overall height is 23 with the head height. Mr. Begley said that is the (measurement) from the base of the concrete, which is about 2 feet, so it's over 25 feet. His estimation would be 26 or 27 feet from the ground to the top; the pole alone is about 25 feet, and the fixture would sit flush on top of it. Member Mayer asked if the poles they are proposing would they be taller to the absolute top than what is there now. Mr. Begley said no, it would be about the same height.

Member Mayer asked if they did the photometrics with a 20-foot-high pole for an alternate plan. Mr. Begley said he did not; he did it with 25 feet so, with 20 feet, it would be less. He said you want to have about 2-foot candles to appropriately light the parking lot. He said he could have the lighting engineer run (the photometrics) again. Member Mayer noted that in his introduction, he said that he turns off every third pole. Mr. Begley said at the back of Elliott, every third light is out. He said they could turn them all on, but they want to save energy, and they don't want light bleeding over to the neighbors. When they have an evening event, they have to light it up, because people are coming in and out of the

school. Member Mayer said they were talking about Eads. Mr. Begley said, at Eads, they have all the lights on, there's distance between the back of the school and the outside properties there. Member Mayer said she was looking at the Ead's photometric plan and there they do have some houses that back up to the road and they don't turn off any of those lights on a daily basis. Mr. Begley said they don't; they haven't had any complaints that he was aware of. Member Mayer said the current code is 3,000K lumens and they are proposing 5,000K lumens. Mr. Begley said that is what they have now.

Member Raffin opened the public hearing and asked if anyone was here to speak publicly on BZA25-009, Eads Elementary at Jackson and Harrison. There was no public response, he closed the public hearing and brought the matter back to the BZA.

Member Mayer said her understanding from the staff is that they prefer the 20-foot-high pole, she asked Member Raffin if they need to request that the petitioner revise his request and prepare a photometric plan using the 20-foot-high pole. Member Raffin said his opinion was no, the 20-foot pole would be less lumens than the 25-foot pole so the total photometrics would go down. He thought it would delay the School Town of Munster another month. He said based on his technical experience and looking at the photometric plan, the numbers at the property line compared to where the houses are, it looked like they meet codes at bleed lines and stuff like that onto other properties, so the lighting doesn't look like an issue at this location. Member Mayer asked if, rather than denying the request, it would make more sense to table it and allow the petitioner to review going with 20-foot-high poles and if that will work for the School Town of Munster. Member Raffin said he believed Mr. Begley had already talked about going with a 20-foot pole at this location. Mr. Begley said if it would please the Board for him to get a study on that, he could do that and bring it back to the Commission. He said if the 20-foot pole is requested, he would prefer to get a study on it. He said it is in their best interest to make sure they have suitable, minimal lighting and that it illuminates the areas where people are coming in and going out. Member Raffin said they want to make sure their site is safe and secure. Mr. Begley said he didn't want to go and say yes and put it in and it's not right. Member Mayer asked if this would be across the board or are there some locations at one of these schools, where it absolutely needs to be 25 feet high. Mr. Begley said the study will tell them that. Member Mayer said then maybe we'll table this and he can go back and get with their engineer. Mr. Begley said they can have it back in a couple days. Member Raffin asked if they had a target date for installing the lights. Mr. Begley said they have to be back up by September. Member Johns asked Attorney Bennett if she could suggest terms of approval the Board could do so Mr. Begley would not have to come back. Attorney Bennett said they could use a form of the motion as was proposed by Mr. Mendoza to approve the request for the proposed cobra light fixture in 5,000K temperature, contingent upon the photometric plan meeting the Town code requirement for foot candles at the height of 20 feet on the light pole. Mr. Begley said it wasn't hard for him, there is not a lot of outside work going on anyway with the weather, so it would be fine to start in February. Member Mayer said it will take them a while to get the poles in. Mr. Begley said there is a wait time for them. Member Raffin asked if they would look at areas that, if you're low on light and the foot candles are too low, would you in some areas, in other areas that are low light and have 20-foot poles in some areas and 25-foot pole in others. Mr. Begley said if you look at the front of Eads, there are some areas that have zero at the entrance and the exit, and they have some lighting from the street.

Member Mayer made a motion to table this to next month's meeting. Member Raffin asked Attorney Bennett, since he had opened and closed the public hearing, if he would be able to reopen it if there were any residents who would like to speak. Attorney Bennet said it can be reopened at the Chair's discretion.

Motion: Member Mayer moved to table BZA Docket No. 25-009 until next month's meeting.

Second: Member Johns

Vote: Yes –4 No – 0 Abstain – 0. Motion carried

BZA25-010 DEVELOPMENTAL STANDARDS VARIANCE: Sean Begley representing the School Town of Munster requests variances from SECTION 26-6.405 Q. PRIVATE LIGHTING STANDARDS: Height, Head Type, and Color Temperature; for the replacement of parking lot lighting at Elliott Elementary located at 8718 White Oak Avenue.

Director Mendoza reported that this is the same request for Elliott School. They are looking to replace 19 existing pole lights for parking and drive aisles. They are proposing to replace 6 pole lights fronting 35th Street within the current drive aisle and parking area, 6 poles in the rear of the property of the school along the drive aisle exiting onto White Oak, and 7 additional poles would be adjacent or abutting residential districts, potentially impacting some residential homes. They are, again, proposing their head type to be a more modern, slick, off-road or cobra head type. They're proposing 25-foot-high poles as well as 5,000K color temperature. The code requires 3,000K color temperature, and 20-foot pole height. He said this is the request that will bring up the photometrics as part of the discussion. Member Raffin asked if anyone from the BZA had questions for staff. When there were no questions, he asked the petitioner to speak.

Mr. Sean Begley, School Town of Munster, said this much the same as Eads as they have the same exact design although there is a smaller footprint here, so we are closer to the neighbors. The age of the lights is over 20 years old. They want to do a replacement in kind, keeping the height and the color type the same. They are willing to adjust with sensors to include motion and photocell. They had worked with their neighbors with every third light and adjusted wattage and shielding to prevent light bleeding over. He referenced the study, which shows that there is minimal light over to those sides, and those lights all point back towards the school. He said they do have times where they have after-school activities, at this time of year when the light comes on around 4:00 in the afternoon. The Adventure Club gets dropped off at 6:00 or 6:30 in the morning and get picked up at 4:00 or 4:30 in the afternoon. They would like to have those areas lit for those kids when they're coming out and going to the cars. He said what they have done back there is light every third light when they're not having a major event. They keep the lighting down, saving energy. He said in response to the remonstrance, they have disabled the light at the end of the drive to prevent that light from shining in the neighbor's yard.

Member Mayer this is very similar but the numbers on this photometric plan are much higher than they were on Eads; they have some 7's on here. Mr. Begley said they are closer to the property. Member Mayer said, in this instance, shortening up the pole lights is going to help drop those numbers, but asked if that would be enough to get them in the reasonable range. Mr. Begley said he can bring that study back and can see where it is. Member Mayer asked if, besides the pole height, would the lumens have a (affect) on the numbers. She asked if they were absolute on the 5,000K. Mr. Begley said they can make an adjustment to that, but it does get much more yellow, and it's a little bit harder to see. They could make an adjustment to 4,000K. Member Meyer asked Director Mendoza if there photometric plan showing what the maximum is. Director Mendoza said there is no maximum, it's minimum, typically at the property line it's zero. He clarified that zero does not mean no light, it means you still will have light, but the meter reads zero. Member Mater said P7, P8, P12 and P13 have 7's and a 6. Mr. Begley said that is a tight property line there and that is also where the Adventure Club kids come out, walk down and get in the cars. Member Raffin said he was sure the Board of Safety and the police had looked at this. He asked if there was any opinion on the lighting and safety for schools. Director Mendoza said there was

no response from the police or fire departments at the time this was submitted for site review. Member Raffin said he would assume there's no negative or positive. He asked if there were any questions for Mr. Begley.

Member Mayer said she'd like to give him some kind of direction on what we're what we're looking for. Mr. Begley said he can ask for a study at a 20-foot height, and 3,000K a 4,000K.

Member Raffin opened the public hearing and asked if anyone wanted to come up and speak on behalf of the public.

Mr. Peter Frankos, 1432 35th Street, said they are right along the western edge of the school property which is right along the western fence line. He said there are 2 lights that are absolutely intolerable to them. They shine light, they penetrate every single window of their house, and they cannot sleep. He said the folks at Elliott School have been good enough for the past 5-6 years to not even use those. He said quite frankly, all they light up is the exit, an area where there's nothing anyway. They are far from the playground. He said there are also streetlights within 15 yards that light this area up where there's nothing but a gate. He said he doesn't know what they want to do here, but those two lights, or any lights there, are absolutely intolerable to them and they have nothing to do with anything going on at the school, or the playground, or anywhere else. He said they need to sleep; his wife works in the emergency room and gets up at 5:00 in the morning. He said they've tolerated everybody lining up there; they get off work at 3:00 and they have to wait until all the traffic goes before they can get into their driveway. He said they can handle that, but not those lights. He asked everyone to work with them.

Roseanne Larson, 1432 35th Street said if there's a special event, she's all for having lights on; that's not a big deal, but not every day since they light their entire house up.

Attorney Bennett said Mr. Franco sent in a written response to this petition, we'll make that part of the record.

Mr. Terry Murphy, 1531 Janice Lane, said he is adjacent to the bus lane. He said the engineer mentioned changing the wattage. He asked how they propose changing the wattage when lamp fixtures usually have a set wattage. He said they would have to get something that was switch selectable, or something like that and that is not very common. Member Raffin said it would be a totally different head type, a different fixture for that wattage. Mr. Murphy said on the opposite side of the school from their house on the 35th side, the poles are actually over the school, and they shine into their back family room windows, which makes it difficult to function in their house, so he would prefer 20-foot poles.

Member Raffin asked if anyone else wanted to come up and speak on behalf of this petition. He said when the School Town of Munster presents their study based on the 20-foot poles and the change in the fixture, this will come again in front of the BZA. At that time, the Chairman will have the right to open it back up for a public hearing. There were no more public comments, he closed the public hearing.

Member Raffin said he was looking for a motion similar to the last motion asking the School of Town of Munster to present the 20-foot pole, as well as the change in the fixture wattage.

Member Mayer said the photos of the existing pole lights show showed 3 heads, and the proposed all showed a single. She asked if that was true. Mr. Begley said in some cases, there may be 2 heads on the same pole. She asked if P7 and P8 would be single or dual heads. Mr. Begley said he would have to look

at that a little more. Member Mayer asked what is there now. Mr. Begley said they have two but if one would work, they could put in one. He said it really should be based upon lighting the facility, so if it needs 2, then it would be 2. He said it is not hard for them to switch from every third, and then when we have an event, we can put them all on. When the event's over, we go back to every third. Member Mayer said she knows they have been operating that way, but that doesn't mean that they're always going to operate that way. She said years from now, and he's retired, somebody else might say they're not going to operate that way. Member Raffin said there are a lot of what ifs. Member Mayer said that by having those light fixtures there, there is the potential for them all to be lit all the time. She said they are not going to write a motion that says you can only light every other one. Mr. Begley said they do want to be good neighbors, and they want to have safe schools, so they want to balance that out. He can't speak to the future, but he could promise that, as long as he's here, he would listen to any concerns of the public, and if it's an easy fix of turning the light off when they don't need it, they'll turn it off. They also want to save energy so if they don't need to light it, they try to turn it off. He said they have a gentleman whose specific job for the district is to maximize energy savings so they're trying to turn everything off as much as possible. He said they are willing to work on this, it is very easy for the lightning folks to give him multiple options, from 20 feet, at 3,000K and 4,000K, and at a lower wattage. He could present that at next month's meeting and the BZA can tell him what they can do. He said they'd be happy to move forward; the lights are old, they are aging and starting to fail so they do need to get them replaced. He added that they are starting to strobe, which will certainly cause some complaints. He said they are willing to work with their neighbors but, at the same time, they have to function as a school; when they have people coming in and out and the place has to be lit.

Motion: Member Mayer moved to table BZA Docket No. 25-010 until the next meeting.

Second: Member Johns

Vote: Yes –4 No – 0 Abstain – 0. Motion carried

BZA25-011 DEVELOPMENTAL STANDARDS VARIANCE: Peter Alemis from Family Dental Care received approval requests variances from SECTION 26-6.701.B.5.t GENERAL SIGN PROVISIONS and TABLE 26-6.701.B MONUMENT SIGN SPECIFIC STANDARDS: Dimensions, Area, and Description; to permit modifications to an existing monument sign located at 131 Ridge Road.

Director Mendoza reported that the applicant was here last month, the proposed sign is the rendering on the left side, (Proposed Sign) on page 3 of the staff report. They propose to maintain the existing structure and install a cabinet sign with four tenant spaces. The rendering on the right side is the existing. He said this request would trigger a couple variances. The variances required for this sign include the use of a cabinet sign, a cap, the monument sign is not on a solid base, and the square footage. They are proposing an increase in the existing square footage over what's permitted by code by 3 additional square feet. He displayed a new sign rendering in the staff report that represented communication that occurred at the last meeting. He said the BZA had asked the applicant to consider reducing the number of variances requested and the new sign rendering identifies the potential ways of reducing the number of variances by installing a metal cap or a finish to the proposed sign and then raising the brick to meet the base of the proposed sign so that would come into compliance. Then the only variance request would be for 3 square foot additional signage. He said they've identified the proportions of the existing system structure.

Member Raffin asked if the members had any questions for staff. He said the revised is a nice rendering, but he'd like to see how they are going to match a 1970 brick with pollution with the same running color and all that kind of stuff; it would be a very, very hard task.

Member Johns said she had thought the same thing. They want to see it maintained, they could paint it out to match the trim of the building or do something that could make it all cohesive. That would save them the cost of having to buy all new brick; they would just have to maintain that paint.

Mr. Alex Alemis, building owner at 131 Ridge Road, said that's correct. The building is dated and that's the reason they're putting money into upgrading it. They're going to change all the windows come spring when they sign a contract. He said they had lost some tenants because they wanted a more updated building. He said they just want to be seen, and you can't see anything on the previous building sign. They're trying to get it within the framework without needing too many variances. He said they worked with the city, as they have in the past; the new rendering is what they're proposing.

Member Johns asked Mr. Alemis to confirm that the rendering on page 5 of the staff report, with the additional brick and the aluminum capping across the top, is the sign they are now proposing for consideration by the Board this evening. Mr. Alemis said it is, they had wanted to keep the space underneath, but the city said it would be better if they just put in the brick so there would be less variances to deal with. He said that is acceptable to them, it still looks good, people will see their tenants there, and their tenants will be happy to have a sign.

Member Johns said this does not meet the square footage (requirement). It meets everything else, but they still need a variance for the square footage. She asked if this was due to the amount of lettering. Director Mendoza said the proposed cabinet sign is to be 21 square feet; our sign code requires 18 square feet. He clarified that it is metal face with routed panels so that complies with our sign code.

Member Raffin asked if there were any more questions for the petitioner. When there were none, he opened the public hearing and asked if anyone wanted to speak on BZA25-011. There were no public comments; he closed the public hearing.

Member Raffin asked Mr. Alemis to return to the podium to answer an additional question from Member Johns. She said her question was about aesthetics. She asked him if the Board can be assured that they will either effectively match that brick or it will be painted in a tasteful manner, to her personal liking, to make it go well architecturally with the building. Mr. Alemis said it's for all their benefit to make it look the same as the building.

Motion: Member Johns made a motion to approve BZA Docket No. 25-011, a developmental standards variance to request for a 21-square-foot double-sided sign face, internally illuminated with the condition that the monument sign complies with all zoning codes except for the square footage requirement including all discussions and findings.

Second: Member Sharpe seconded the motion.

Vote: Yes –4 No – 0 Abstain 1. Motion carried.

Findings of Fact:

BZA25-007 DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS VARIANCE: Emma O'Brien of Legacy Sign received approval for variances from TABLE 26-6.701.B WALL SIGN SPECIFIC STANDARDS: Dimensions, Additional Standards; to increase the permitted height and obscure an architectural element for a proposed new auditorium entrance sign at Munster High School located at 8808 Columbia Avenue.

Motion: Member Mayer moved to approve the Findings of Facts for BZA Docket No. 25-007.
Second: Member Sharpe seconded the motion.
Vote: Yes –4 No – 0 Abstain 1. Motion carried.

BZA25-008 DEVELOPMENTAL STANDARDS VARIANCE: Jim Glascott on behalf of the School Town of Munster received approval for a variance from TABLE 26-6.405.B CIVIC ZONE STANDARDS: Lighting, Screening, Private Landscaping and Fencing; to increase the permitted height and standards for proposed tennis courts located at 8839 Calumet Avenue.

Motion: Member Mayer moved to approve the Findings of Facts for BZA Docket No. 25-008.
Second: Member Sharpe seconded the motion.
Vote: Yes –4 No – 0 Abstain 1. Motion carried.

Other Business: None

Continued Discussion Items: None

Member Raffin announced the next regular meeting will be held on January 13, 2026.

Adjournment:

Motion: Member Johns moved to adjourn.
Second: Member Sharpe seconded the motion.
Vote: Yes –4 No – 0 Abstain – 0. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 6:47 pm

Member Roland Raffin
Board of Zoning Appeals

Date of Approval

Executive Secretary Sergio Mendoza
Board of Zoning Appeals

Date of Approval