



Administrator's Office  
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## Memorandum

To: Kent County Board of Commissioners  
Re: John Ball Zoo Parking Expansion Approval  
From: Al Vanderberg, Administrator/Controller  
Date: August 28, 2024

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On August 26, 2024, the John Ball Zoo (JBZ) formally requested permission, as required under Article 5 of the operating agreement, to implement their parking lot expansion project. This expansion was part of an amendment to the JBZ Master Plan which was approved by the Board of Commissioners in January 2024. The project includes the following:

- 463 new parking spaces, 14 of which are barrier free
- A new access road extending through the site to a new entrance and exit off of Butterworth Drive
- Removal of the exit and entrance at the intersection of Park Street and John Ball Park Drive
- A new bus drop off location for school and community groups that will feature three tree sculptures titled, "The Memory of Trees" – These sculptures will provide shade, filter light, and create solar energy with each of their 20' disc-shaped, translucent leaf-like attachments
- New access gates allowing the JBZ to control traffic into and out of the site, and allow the organization to charge for parking (the JBZ's current millage promise is that parking fees will be waived for Kent County residents visiting the zoo)
- New pedestrian walkways that provide connectivity to the JBZ entrance and through the site connecting into Kent Trails
- Underground stormwater detention system
- Relocated basketball court
- Over 600 new native shrub and tree plantings

A rendering of the project has been attached.

**I have reviewed the request against the consent criteria listed in section 5.3 of the agreement and have determined that the zoo has satisfied each criterion.**

**Therefore, I have sent formal approval to the John Ball Zoo.** This approval comes with the condition that the organization obtain necessary permits as required under section 5.6 of the agreement as well as the necessary payment and performance bonds before any construction or site work begins. In addition to necessary permits, my approval is also conditional upon the City providing approval for the new basketball court which would be located within the 150' buffer. This approval is necessary because athletic courts are not explicitly listed in the County's deed as an allowed use within the buffer zone. This location for the basketball court is the location preferred by the neighbors.

For your reference, I have provided my justification below under each consent criterion listed in Section 5.3 of the Operating Agreement.

***5.3.1 All proposed improvements shall be consistent with the then current Master Plan.***

I have attached the map of the 2024 Master Plan amendment that was approved by the Commission on January 25, 2024. I reviewed and compared the map included in the Master Plan with the plan submitted on August 26, 2024 and concluded that the proposed parking expansion is consistent with the Commission-approved Master Plan.

***5.3.2 All improvements shall be constructed to meet standards for safety and quality of construction as established under Applicable Laws or by AZA or a similar organization with jurisdiction. All such submissions shall be sufficient in detail to enable County to make an informed judgment concerning the quality of the contemplated improvements and renovations in the determination of the County.***

The County's Facilities Management Director, Tim Bradshaw, reviewed the construction documents and determined that the plan will ensure quality of construction. The JBZ team and Progressive AE were excellent to work with through this process.

***5.3.3 Zoo's AZA accreditation must be in good standing or Corporation is actively pursuing the reinstatement of its accreditation by seeking to construct improvements required by AZA to restore accreditation or otherwise respond to the noted deficiencies.***

I confirmed that the John Ball Zoo's accreditation is in good standing with the AZA.

***5.3.4 Corporation shall provide documentation demonstrating that it has all funds necessary for construction of the proposed Capital Project or has other financing commitments sufficient to fund the proposed Capital Project, and that it has/will have sufficient resources for operation and maintenance of the Capital Project.***

The total project budget for the parking expansion is \$10 million. The JBZ has provided a signed agreement with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation allowing for \$5 million in construction activities. Additionally, the JBZ provided the 2023 financial audit which shows that the organization has \$19,250,118 in unrestricted assets available to fund the project, if necessary. The organization's leadership told me that they hope to raise additional funds over the next few months to reduce the amount of current assets that would be used for the project.

***5.3.5 Corporation has submitted to County a construction plan, drawings and renderings demonstrating conformity to the Master Plan and the Consent Criteria.***

Construction plans and renderings have been received and reviewed by my team and the Facilities Management Director.

***5.3.6 Corporation has committed to provide certificates or other acceptable proof of insurance and payment and performance bonds required by the County regarding the proposed construction or improvement after construction contracts have been entered into following County approval. Proof of insurance and payment and performance bonds must be submitted to the County before any construction or site work is started.***

The John Ball Zoo has submitted proof of insurance which has been reviewed by our purchasing staff. The insurance policy meets the County's requirements. My approval is conditional upon obtaining payment and performance bonds and submitting proof to me before any construction or site work is started.



