



Annual Report

June 1, 2009 - May 31, 2010

City of Auburn Hills Planning Commission

Under the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, PA 33 of 2008, the Planning Commission is required to provide an annual report to the City Council. This report is intended to coincide with the City Council's review of the City budget.

This report discusses the following topics:

- Summary of the Commission's operations during the past 12 months
- The status of any on-going planning activities
- Recommendations to the City Council related to planning/development and funding

Commission Operations

The Commission is governed by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act and the City's Zoning Ordinance. During the 12 month period starting on June 1, 2009 and ending on May 31, 2010, the Commission's membership was as follows:

Greg Ouellette, Chairperson
 Veronica Mitchell, Vice-Chairperson
 Cheryl Verbeke, Secretary
 Sam Beidoun
 Anne Doyle (served until November 3, 2009)
 Chauncey Hitchcock
 Robert Kittle (City Council liaison)
 Bob Pierce
 Lacey Salerno
 Wade Spurlin (appointed December 21, 2009)

During this time period, the Commission held 10 meetings and recommendations were made to the City Council on 18 development related items, which was down from the year before as shown below.

Measurable	Y2007-2008	Y2008-2009	Y2009-2010
Meetings	10	17	10
Site Plans	5	10	2
Special Land Use Permits	6	8	6
Tree Removal Permits	4	3	1
Planned Unit Developments	2	1	0
Rezoning	3	2	1
Text Amendments	0	4	8
Total	20	28	18

Steve Cohen, Director of Community Development provides staff support to the Commission. Mr. Cohen has served the Commission since October 4, 1999. He is both registered as a Professional Community Planner (PCP) with the State of Michigan and certified as a professional planner (AICP) with the American Planning Association. He has Bachelor and Master Degrees in Urban and Regional Planning from Michigan State University.

Notable Commission Items

1. Riverwalk Master Plan

The Commission and Tax Increment Financing Authority worked with the consulting firm Conservation Design Forum (CDF) and staff to develop this technical study. Shawn Keenan, Water Resources Coordinator served as the project coordinator. The intent of the plan is to connect the Downtown and the three City parks located along the Clinton River with multi-use trails and link citizens to parks, shops, restaurants, and other neighborhoods. The trail system will feature ecological restoration of various woodlands and wetland landscapes. Site elements will include the trail system, overlooks and plazas, shoreline restoration, and landscape improvements. It was a goal of the City Council to complete this plan in Y2009. The plan was adopted on October 13, 2009. The Riverwalk Master Plan was recently nominated by the Clinton River Watershed Council to the Michigan Chapter of the American Planning Association for the Y2010 Planning Excellence award.

2. Master Land Use Plan – Update

The State law requires the Commission to review the Master Plan at least once every five years. It was a goal of the City Council to update this plan in Y2009. The Commission decided on August 11, 2009 to keep the existing brochure format, while maintaining a focus on conducting neighborhood or subarea planning studies. The Commission determined that this flexible planning style best suited the City's needs. As a result, the Commission adopted editorial changes to the Master Plan on November 17, 2009. The new brochure was published and distributed in the Summer Issue of the Auburn Hills Review.

3. Development Applications

Notable projects reviewed by the Commission were the following:

- Crystal Palace Gas Station – 5,340 sq. ft. gas station
- Toby Keith's - I Love This Bar and Grill – outside seating
- Bar Louie – outside seating
- Verizon Wireless / Auburn Road Monopole – permit extension
- Palace of Auburn Hills – LED sign replacement
- US Farathane Corporation – 240,689 sq. ft. world headquarters
- Frankel Rezoning / Gloria Dei Lutheran Church – R-1 and O to T&R district

4. Streamlining of the Development Process

At the ground breaking of US Farathane's new world headquarters, Governor Jennifer Granholm applauded the City of Auburn Hills for having a "model planning process that should be duplicated throughout the State." It is noted that the Commission plays a large role in helping make Auburn Hills an excellent place for investment in terms of the following:

- flexibility with meeting date scheduling
- quick understanding of complex projects, issues, and schedules
- promoter of an open planning process, information dissemination, and public participation prior to scheduled meeting dates
- fair interpretation and application of the City's Zoning Ordinance and standards

Also, for the 3rd year in a row, the City was recognized by the University of Michigan-Dearborn College of Business for being an "Entrepreneurial City." The "eCities" study or "Entrepreneurial Cities Index" found that Auburn Hills was one of a select few Michigan municipalities that stand out as being successful at attracting, cultivating, building, and retaining entrepreneurial firms. The study focused on entrepreneurship because of its importance to expansion and diversification of Michigan's regional economies and the impact small businesses have on job creation. The goal of the project is to provide a method for cities, townships, and villages to benchmark their efforts. The City Council, Boards and Commissions, and staff are commended for this high achievement.

5. Text Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance

The Commission was proactive in amending and improving the text of the Zoning Ordinance. Changes were made to improve the following sections:

- I-3 District – compost facilities
- Definitions and B-2 District – medical marihuana dispensaries
- Zoning Board of Appeals – changes based on State law
- Zoning Districts and Maps – change village center to downtown
- B-2 District – outside seating
- General Provisions – planned unit development option
- General Provisions – large format wall murals
- B-2 District – regulations for shopping centers over 600,000 sq. ft. in size

Special thanks to Commissioner Pierce for his assistance to staff on several of the text amendments.

6. Rental Inspection Ordinance

On March 9, 2010, the Commission accepted the staff's recommendation and decided not to pursue a rental inspection ordinance at this time. It was recommended that the City address issues with rental housing by improving the enforcement of existing city ordinances via a collective effort to share information between City departments. One deficiency identified was addressing problems associated with rental units after hours and on the weekends. To address this concern, the Police Department stepped up and committed to help with the effort via targeted inspections, sharing their findings on unusual activity, etc. Staff has been very proactive as a team in identifying and monitoring observed rental properties.

Advantages of the Commission's decision included:

- By using existing ordinances and zoning regulations, the City does not have to create a new ordinance, fee structure, registration process, etc.
- Additional staffing would not be required to implement due to improved efficiencies.
- Targets problem properties, which we are made aware of through citizen complaints, or observations of City employees who respond to these properties in the course of their duties.
- Minimizes hostile feelings between landlords, tenants, and the City because it does not require inspection of every rental property, but only those that we have probable cause to investigate.
- Legal issues are minimized since we must have probable cause to enter a property.
- It will give us a new protocol when dealing with high occupancy concerns. All residential properties will continue to be addressed in an equal manner in terms of property maintenance ordinance enforcement regardless of ownership.

7. Tammy Hurt-Mendyka - Planning Commissioner of the Year

Former Chairperson Tammy Hurt-Mendyka was awarded the *Helen S. Willis Outstanding Commissioner Award* by the Michigan Chapter of the American Planning Association on September 30, 2009 in Mt. Pleasant. Established in 1994, the award honors an individual who advanced or promoted the cause of planning in the public arena. During her time serving Auburn Hills, Tammy was instrumental in the development of the City's neighborhood planning program and Citizen Participation Ordinance. Both innovative ideas were designed to seek input in a proactive way (early in the planning process) to create "win-win" scenarios for all involved. Her primary goal was to make sure everyone knew that the City was listening. Tammy retired from the Commission in 2008 after 17 years of dedicated service. To put this award in perspective, there are approximately 1,775 cities, villages, and townships in the State of Michigan. Most have 9 member Planning Commission boards. Thus, over 15,000 Planning Commissioners serve their municipalities throughout the State. Tammy was recognized by her peers as one of the best, which was a great honor for the City of Auburn Hills.

8. Commission Training

Training is a high priority for the Commission and City Council. Members are faced with an enormous responsibility to help guide the physical development of the community. Poor decisions could lead the City into costly litigation. The Commission has benefited greatly over the years from training; whether they are new members who want to learn about planning, or veteran members who need to keep up to date with changes in the law and planning practices.

Members Beidoun, Ouellette, Pierce, and Salerno attended the Michigan APA Conference in Mt. Pleasant in September-October 2009. Several members also attended seminars locally offered by Oakland County and Michigan State University Extension.

The Commission has 5 members (Beidoun, Hitchcock, Ouellette, Pierce, and Salerno) who are certified as "Citizen Planners" by Michigan State University Extension, 3 of which have received a Master designation. The members were required to take 7 courses related to land use planning to obtain the certification. To receive the Master Citizen Planner designation additional course work was required.

Auburn Hills has been involved with a very limited number of development-related lawsuits over the past 10 years; which is mainly attributed to a proactive Commissioner training program and excellent staff support. It is our understanding that this track record has helped the City lower its general liability insurance rates over the years, which saves taxpayers money.

On-Going Planning Activities

1. Review and update existing medical marihuana regulations per City Council direction
2. Serve as public forum for the desired design of the North Squirrel Road looking 20 years into the future and provide recommendation to the City Council
3. Review the land use around Oakland University, near Walton Boulevard and impact of the new medical school and growth of the university on this area of the City
4. Look for ways to incorporate low-impact development and green building standards into the Zoning Ordinance
5. Review the possibility of allowing "stealth" wireless communication facilities on buildings outside areas shown on the Wireless Concentration Map
6. Seek to have all Commission members obtain Michigan Citizen Planner status in Y2010
7. Celebrate National Community Planning Month in October with a small event (e.g., open house or screen a planning movie)

Commission Recommendations to City Council

The Commission respectfully recommends that the City Council ensure that the Y2011 City of Auburn Hills Budget allows for the following items:

1. Continued staff support from Mr. Cohen and the City's Administrative Development Review Team
2. Funding to complete neighborhood and subarea planning studies (e.g., citizen participation, maps, printing, technical research, etc.)
3. Funding for educational materials and technical training for Commission members