



# Annual Report

## June 1, 2008 - May 31, 2009

### **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 and development

#### **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, 2008 and ending on May 31, 2009, the Commission's membership was as follows:

- Greg Ouellette, Chairperson
- Tammy Hurt-Mendyka (former Chairperson, resigned December 15, 2008)
- Veronica Mitchell, Vice-Chairperson
- Anne Doyle, Secretary
- Sam Beidoun
- Chauncey Hitchcock
- Robert Kittle (City Council liaison)
- Bob Pierce
- Lacey Salerno (appointed December 15, 2008)
- Cheryl Verbeke

During this time period, the Commission held 17 meetings and recommendations were made to the City Council on 28 development related items. In comparison, 10 meetings were held and half the number of site plans were reviewed in Y2007-2008, as shown below.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Y2007-2008</b>	<b>Y2008-2009</b>
Site Plans	5	10
Special Land Use Permits	6	8
Tree Removal Permits	4	3
Planned Unit Developments	2	1
Rezoning	3	2
Text Amendments	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>28</b>

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. Parks and Recreation Master Plan (Y2009-Y2013)

The plan was adopted by the Commission on January 13, 2009 and City Council January 19, 2009. It was a goal of the City Council to complete the plan in Y2009. Throughout the process, City staff received input from residents by gathering data at various opportunities using questionnaires, public meetings, and a focus group. This information was shared with the Commission over the course of several meetings, where their input and direction was incorporated into the plan.

The plan serves as a working guide for the City to use that will help enhance the community's park system, recreational programs, and events over the next 5 years. The plan also enables the City to be eligible for State and Federal grants relating to potential park development and acquisition, as well as grants from the private sector including opportunities for corporate and foundation funding.

Highlights of the plan were the following:

- Emphasis placed on developing and enhancing the City's existing park system
- Develop and complete the existing pathway and trails system to connect parks with adjacent neighborhoods and business centers
- Offer programs and events that meet the needs of our increasingly diverse community
- Continue to develop new partnerships to enhance programming and events, while reducing operating expenses
- Develop more programming to reduce obesity and promote healthy choices

The City also created an "Action Plan" which outlines recommended strategies to fulfill the vision of the plan. New for the plan was the inclusion of goals related to the operational side of Parks and Recreation, such as staffing, programming, and operations – all key pieces of the overall Parks and Recreation system that the City provides. For example, the City's desire to form partnerships, utilize technology, and pursue accreditation was expressed in the plan and could prove to be beneficial in securing future resources for the City's residents and business community.

Lastly, on behalf of the Commission and City Council, staff created an informational brochure which summarized the plan with maps. The brochure was distributed to all City businesses and residents via an insert in the Auburn Hills Review. It is also displayed on the City's website.

2. 2009 Auburn Hills Downtown Economic Enhancement Strategy by HyettPalma

Commission members Ouellette, Pierce, and Salerno were actively involved in the formation of this study as liaisons to the Blue Ribbon Committee. Laurie Johnson, Economic Development Coordinator served as the project coordinator. On January 15, 2009, a town meeting was held to unveil the results of the study and present a recommended course of action. Approximately 100 people were in attendance with a good mix of citizens, business owners, developers, potential future business owners, board members, and staff. The strategy was adopted by the City Council on February 2, 2009.

The main findings in the HyettPalma report for the Downtown were as follows.

- Function. Call it “Downtown” and the area around the Downtown should be considered the Village Center
- Management. Form a DDA using a mix of City staff, business owners, citizens, developers, and chamber of commerce personnel
- Marketing. Get the word out in every way possible (e.g., News, Events, Advertisements Web, etc.)
- Business Development. Meet customer needs in terms of business types and hours of operation; encourage 1st floor retail use; utilize business recruitment efforts with business attraction incentives and promotional materials
- Traffic and Parking. Allow on-street angle parking; build a parking deck right away; waive fee-in-lieu of parking requirements; keep speed limit at 25 mph; and create college shuttle/transportation
- Real Estate Improvements. Fill existing buildings first, then work on infill construction with zero lot line setbacks; keep Fire Station No. 1 where it is; create student housing in the area; and use City-owned property wisely for development
- Public Improvements. Use a wayfinding sign system like they do in hospitals; people do feel safe in the Downtown, keep up the excellent public safety efforts; display public art; make the Downtown completely wireless internet capable (go Wi-Fi); and keep doing the great job of maintenance
- Destinations. Make Downtown a destination place; make Riverside Park visible, hold more events, build an amphitheatre, and develop the Riverwalk trail system (already underway); offer Downtown satellite library with services beyond a normal library and hours to meet the needs of the college students; hold a Farmer’s Market weekly with several different components; and create a performance space like the Purple Rose in Chelsea

3. Riverwalk Master Plan

The Commission and Tax Increment Financing Authority have been working with the consulting firm Conservation Design Forum (CDF) and staff to develop this technical study since September 2008. Shawn Keenan, Water Resources Coordinator is the project coordinator. It was a goal of the City Council to complete this plan in Y2009.

The intent of this plan is to connect the Downtown and the three City parks located along the Clinton River with multi-use trails, and thus link citizens to parks, shops, restaurants, and other neighborhoods. The trail system will feature ecological restoration of various woodlands and wetland landscapes, and incorporate new uses into the landscape.

CDF will design and illustrate potential corridor amenities and propose a theme from Riverside Park to M-59. Site elements will include the trail system, overlooks and plazas, shoreline restoration, and landscape alternatives. It will include recommendations regarding materials, and integration of interpretive program elements. Recommendations will be made for easements and/or property acquisitions, and cost estimates will be prepared. The City held visioning sessions on December 6, 2008 and January 13, 2009 to gather input from stakeholders. The plan is expected to be completed in August 2009.

4. Text Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance

The Commission was proactive in amending the text of the Zoning Ordinance. Changes were made to improve citizen participation in the development process (Sections 1833 and 1908), color LED sign standards were addressed (Section 1811), and the Downtown District was created (Article IX-A).

5. Development Applications

Notable projects reviewed by the Commission were the following:

- FEV, Inc. – 32,625 sq. ft. addition
- Golden Triangle Center – 10,411 sq. ft. retail center
- North Auburn Hills Baptist Church – 95 space parking lot expansion
- Extension of the Pitcairn Place PUD - until December 31, 2012
- 2500 Executive Hills Boulevard – 145 space parking lot expansion
- Kensington Community Church (revised) – 1,500 seat, 73,274 sq. ft. facility
- Auburn Hills Recycling and Landscape Center – compost facility
- Havenwyck Hospital – 123 new bed, 78,130 sq. ft. addition
- DWSD Water Booster Pumping Station – 25,231 sq. ft. facility
- Genisys Credit Union – color LED sign
- Cornerstone Financial Credit Union – 2-story, 11,070 sq. ft. addition
- Chrysler Corporation – outside storage permit
- Meijer, Inc. – pharmacy drive-thru and associated site improvements

6. Commission By-Laws - Updates

The Commission updated their rules for procedure 3 times over the past 12 months. On August 7, 2008 and August 20, 2008, they changed their meeting date from Thursday to Tuesday to expedite projects through the review process which allows items to be placed on an earlier City Council agenda.

On April 14, 2009, the Commission amended their By-Laws to address the following items required by the new Michigan Planning Enabling Act:

- The Board make-up should represent, insofar as it is possible, important segments of the community such as economic, governmental, educational and social development. To the extent possible, membership shall be representative of the entire geography of the City.
- Members may be removed for misfeasance, malfeasance, or nonfeasance
- Unexcused absences are strongly discouraged. To be excused from a Commission meeting, a member shall notify the Community Development Department via phone and/or writing in advance of a meeting from which he/she intends to be absent.
- A City employee is not eligible to serve on the Commission
- Created a written policy in regard to order of procedure for public hearings
- Updated standards for conflict of interest
- Election of officers would occur in January, in lieu of December
- New section on the Planning Commission's role:
  - Educate the public about local planning issues, master plan, and land use regulations
  - Prepare, adopt, and maintain a Master Plan
  - Draft/present to the City Council amendments to the Zoning Ordinance and Map
  - Review and comment on proposed public works projects
  - Exempted from preparation of Capital Improvements Program (City Council responsibility)
  - Obtain training to improve skills
  - Create an annual report of activities for City Council

7. Promotion of Green Building

The Commission, with the support of City staff, took many steps to educate and promote green building practices during this reporting year, including:

- Requested applicable petitioners to submit a LEED checklist as part of the Commission informational packet, so as to identify the green practices each project proposed to use
- Provided information and assistance to Dr. Tobola's dentist office on Auburn Road for their new "green building," which will be the 1<sup>st</sup> LEED Certified dentist office in Southeast Michigan
- The City partnered with Oakland County and the City of Troy in holding the *Oakland County Green Summit: Your Green Bottom Line* on May 19, 2009 (140+ attendees). Members Ouellette and Doyle were in attendance
  - It is noted that Auburn Hills received an award from Oakland County which recognized the City's past and present efforts in promoting green practices
- On behalf of the City, Mr. Keenan helped organize the *Greening the Heartland Conference* in Detroit by serving on the conference Planning Committee. The Conference was held May 31 – June 3, 2009 (700+ attendees)

#### 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, Mitchell, Ouellette, and Pierce attended the Michigan APA Conference in Kalamazoo in October 2008. Several members attended seminars offered by Oakland County and Michigan State University Extension with topics ranging from roundabouts to creating a 21<sup>st</sup> century master plan.

The Commission has 5 members who are certified as "Citizen Planners" by Michigan State University Extension, 4 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.

- Sam Beidoun (Master)
- Anne Doyle (Master)
- Greg Ouellette (Master)
- Bob Pierce (Master)
- Chauncey Hitchcock

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. Master Plan Update

Over the next 12 months the Commission intends to focus its efforts on updating the City's Master Plan. The plan was last comprehensively updated in November 2002. This project has been identified as a City Council goal for Y2009, but will not be completed until mid-Y2010. The Commission intends to hold a community visioning event in September 2009

to obtain public input. Mr. Cohen will serve as project coordinator. Mr. Keenan and Ms. Brennan will provide considerable staff support. It is noted that staff from the Oakland County Planning Department have also agreed to provide some assistance with the project.

An Ad-Hoc Committee has been created (Members Ouellette, Pierce, Verbeke, and Salerno) by the Commission that will work closely with City staff. The group will help guide the planning process, develop citizen participation techniques, and discuss key planning issues before bringing the ideas to the Commission as a whole. The Ad-Hoc Committee will report back to the Commission monthly at their regular meeting until the plan is completed.

Lastly, like the Parks and Recreation Plan, the City plans to create an informational brochure which summarizes the plan with maps. The brochure would be distributed to all City businesses and residents as an insert in the Auburn Hills Review in Y2010. It will also be displayed on the City's website.

2. Riverwalk Master Plan

As discussed previously, this master plan to link the City's parks along the Clinton River via a trail system is expected to be completed by August 2009.

3. Text Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance

The Commission intends to review the Planned Unit Development Option standards to make them easier to understand and allow an expedited review of certain types of projects (combination of Steps One and Two). Also, some amendments to the Zoning Ordinance may arise out of the Master Plan update.

### **Commission Recommendations to City Council**

The Commission respectfully recommends that the City Council ensure that the Y2010 City budget allows for the following items:

1. Continued staff support from Mr. Cohen

2. Continuation and completion of the Master Plan update

Citizen participation techniques, maps, printing, technical research, etc.

3. Creation of a Master Plan informational brochure for mass distribution and website

4. Unanticipated minor planning studies that may arise as directed by City Council

5. Educational materials for Commission members

Planning and Zoning News and Michigan Planner Magazine

6. Advanced training for Commission members

Michigan APA Conference, Citizen Planner Training, and Oakland County seminars