

November 13, 2006

Commissioner Sue Ann Douglas, Chairperson
Oakland County Coordinating Zoning Committee
1200 North Telegraph Road
Pontiac, MI 48341

SUBJECT: County Code No. MP 06-10, Planning and Economic Development Services' review of an amendment to the City of Auburn Hills Master Land Use Plan

Dear Chairperson Douglas and Committee Members:

The City of Auburn Hills Planning Commission proposes to amend its 2002 Master Plan by adding a Future Land Use Plan map reflecting the Opdyke Road Corridor Study. The following is a review and analysis of the plan amendment, which consists of a two-page annotated map.

Under the amendments to the Municipal Planning Act, which took effect January 9, 2003, the City of Auburn Hills is required to send a copy of the draft amendment to Oakland County and neighboring communities for comment prior to adoption. Oakland County has between 55 and 75 days to submit comments on amendments. The December 5, 2006 Oakland County Coordinating Zoning Committee (CZC) meeting falls within our 75-day comment period. Neighboring communities have 40 days to submit comments directly to Auburn Hills and are required to send a copy of any comments to the County as well. Once the County's 75-day comment period has expired, the Planning Commission can hold a public hearing on the amendment and take final action to amend the plan.

According to the City's Planning Department, the Cities of Pontiac, Lake Angelus, and Rochester Hills; Bloomfield, Orion, and Waterford Townships; Orion, Rochester, Pontiac, and Avondale School Districts; Auburn Hills Chamber of Commerce; Oakland County Drain Commissioner; Road Commission for Oakland County; Michigan Department of Transportation; Michigan Department of Environmental Quality; SEMCOG; DTE Energy; Consumers Energy; SBC Ameritech; Comcast Cable; and Canadian National Railway were sent a copy of the amendment. All of these communities and agencies have received notice of the CZC meeting. Comments have been received from Rochester Hills, Pontiac, and the Oakland County Drain Commission, and are attached.

Background Information

The City of Auburn Hills takes a unique approach to their master planning process. The Auburn Hills' master land use map only has the following three categories: Residential, Non-Residential, and Public. Residential densities are shown on the map. However, the Auburn Hills Planning Commission provides further definition to this map through the preparation of sub-area plans that give more detail for smaller areas of the City. According to the City's Planning Director, nine sub-area plans have been prepared within the last seven years, and each plan has been prepared with citizen involvement. The City uses this "Neighborhood Planning" approach to involve residents and businesses in planning for potential change and redevelopment in their particular part of the City.

Public Participation Process

The Opdyke Road Corridor Study is an example of the Neighborhood Planning approach used in the City of Auburn Hills. Approximately 800 property owners were notified of the study and invited to participate. The corridor was divided into three study areas, and property owners were invited to attend one of three meetings addressing their respective portion of the corridor. The Planning Commission used this input as they developed the Opdyke Road Future Land Use Plan. In July, a public hearing was held to solicit more input. In addition to notices in the newspaper regarding the hearing, all those previously notified about the study were invited to attend the public hearing. Another public hearing will be held after the Coordinating Zoning Committee has submitted its comments to the City.

Study Area

The study area extends from Walton Boulevard in the north to South Boulevard in the south. I-75 is the eastern boundary of the study area, and the municipal boundary with the City of Pontiac is the western boundary. The Opdyke Road Corridor Study, Future Land Use Plan map is attached. For citizen participation and discussion purposes, the area was further divided into three study areas: north, central, and south.

The northern study area consists of the Walton Triangle District and the Showcase District, and extends to Pontiac Road. This portion of the study area has a variety of land uses (residential, retail, business, and vacant land and buildings), with the west side of Opdyke Road having a greater mixture of these uses than the east side. Within this area, there are several potential sites for redevelopment, and therefore the northern portion of the study area has the most recommended changes. The following are the three key recommendations for the northern area:

1. Office use is proposed for the western triangle bounded by Lapeer, Opdyke, and Walton Boulevard. This area, made up of 33 parcels, is currently a mixture of older single family homes, businesses, and vacant land. The preference is to have this area redeveloped comprehensively by a single developer for a mixed use project that could contain professional offices, a business park, residential condominiums, health club, or senior housing. An alternative is to assemble 2 to 4 parcels at a time and develop small office buildings.
2. Redevelop the vacant Showcase Cinema site on the east side of Opdyke Road as a high tech/business park. Building heights should not exceed five stories.
3. Redevelop the area between Commonwealth Avenue and Opdyke Road as mixed use using the Planned Unit Development process. The orientation of this mixed use could either be residential (condominiums, senior housing, or congregate care) or business depending on the demand generated by the redevelopment of the Showcase Cinema site across the street.

The central study area consists of the north and south Opdyke Parkway Districts. This is the largest portion of the study area and extends from Pontiac Road to the M-59 Expressway. No major changes are proposed in this portion of the study area. High tech businesses are currently concentrated in this area, along with several hotels and restaurants. The Special Purpose uses shown along University Road include Havenwyck Hospital and Baker College. The business park between Featherstone Avenue and M-59 in the south Opdyke Parkway District is adjacent to the Pontiac Silverdome.

The southern study area is made up of the Clinton River District. Two main recommendations are made for this area:

1. Redevelop the Wal-Mart property at the corner of M-59 and Opdyke Road as a business park. The homes along Hillfield Road are intended to remain; however an alternative could be considered for a large mixed use project (business park or condominiums) if the entire Hillfield neighborhood were purchased for redevelopment.
2. If the golf dome site at Auburn and Opdyke Roads is redeveloped, the City's preference is to see this as high density condominiums.

No changes are proposed from south of the golf dome to South Boulevard.

Comparison of Master Plan Amendment to the 2002 Master Land Use Plan Map

As noted, the Opdyke Road Corridor Study map provides added definition to the more generic classifications of Residential, Non-residential, and Public found on the 2002 Master Land Use Plan Map. Non-residential uses include Business Park, Office, Retail, and Special Purpose. Residential uses include Single Family Residential and Residential Condominiums. Planned Unit Use Mix could be either residential, non-residential, or some combination of both, depending on the preferred uses given. Based on this, the only changes between the two maps are in the southern study area in the Clinton River District. In this location, three areas shown as Non-residential on the 2002 map are now shown for Residential uses. They are the Hillfield neighborhood east of the Wal-Mart property, now shown as Single Family Residential, the Residential Condominiums located just south of the Wal-Mart site, and the Residential Condominium designation for the golf dome site, south of Auburn Road.

In addition, the future land use map for the Opdyke Road Corridor reinforces the City's desire to keep the Galloway neighborhood in the Showcase District, and the Kircher-Joy-Willot neighborhood in the northern Opdyke Parkway District residential.

Coordination with Adjacent Community Boundary:

Under state law, the county's review is required to include a statement indicating whether the proposed plan is "inconsistent with the plan of any city, village, or township" that received notice of the draft plan. The proposed amendment is only adjacent to the City of Pontiac.

West Boundary – City of Pontiac: The Pontiac 2010 A New Reality Comprehensive Plan was adopted in December 1991 and has been amended several times since. For the purposes of this review, the boundary between Pontiac and Auburn Hills extends from Walton Boulevard in the north to just south of Auburn Road, as no changes were made south of this point.

Starting in the north, between Walton and Pontiac Road, along Commonwealth Avenue both communities have planned for residential uses. The City of Pontiac has this area planned for Medium Density Residential (1 to 20 dwelling units per acre) and Auburn Hills has Single Family and Planned Unit Use Mix with their Preference #1 being for residential uses of condominiums, senior housing, or congregate care. Preference #2 for this mixed use development is a business park. The City of Pontiac has sent comments objecting to Preference #2 as it would abut future residential development. In their letter, the City of Pontiac prefers the residential orientation of Preference #1.

Between Pontiac Road and University, the City of Pontiac has the northern portion planned for Low-Medium Density Residential (1 to 7 dwelling units per acre). This is adjacent to Single Family Residential in Auburn Hills. The City of Pontiac amended their master plan for the southern portion of this boundary to University, and this area is now shown for Office. This is adjacent to Business Park, Office, Retail, and Special Purpose in Auburn Hills. The City's change in 2002 from planned residential use to office makes this portion of the border more compatible with what is planned in Auburn Hills.

From University south to Featherstone Avenue, the City of Pontiac has Office and Low-Medium Density Residential. This is adjacent to Special Purpose, Business Park, and Retail in Auburn Hills. In this location, the back yards of existing buildings in the Business Park are adjacent to the residential in Pontiac. From viewing aerials of this area, it appears that setbacks, screening, and buffering have been taken into consideration to minimize the impact on adjacent residential that is starting to be developed in this area. The City of Pontiac makes reference to this area in their letter, and suggests *“strict design guidelines be developed for buffering the residential development in Pontiac from noise and visually from the business/industrial operations for the protection and enjoyment of the residents.”* County staff agrees that continued efforts should be made to ensure that the business and industrial uses do not disrupt the newly developing homes.

The Business Park between Featherstone Avenue and M-59 in Auburn Hills is adjacent to Public Service in the City of Pontiac. This is the Silverdome site, and its future redevelopment may provide additional development opportunities in the City of Auburn Hills as well.

Finally, south of M-59 to Auburn Road, the City of Pontiac has Heavy Commercial/Distribution at the interchange, then more Public Service (waste water treatment plant), and Medium Density Residential. Industrial is planned just south of Auburn. In Auburn Hills, this area is planned for Business Park (redeveloped Wal-Mart store), Residential Condominiums, and Clinton River. Just south of Auburn is more Business Park and Residential Condominiums. This border area is compatible.

Analysis

This stretch of Opdyke Road goes through a variety of land uses, including some of the newer high technology uses and some of the older mixed use areas that are going through a transition from residential to non-residential. Therefore, it is appropriate that the City of Auburn Hills review this area to determine what redevelopment opportunities exist and gauge residents' desire for change. The Neighborhood Planning approach is an excellent way to involve residents and businesses in planning for their own future. Since this is a very time intensive approach for city

staff and the planning commission, they should be commended for the effort and dedication invested in each of these small area studies.

The final report from this planning effort is reader friendly. All the recommended changes are summarized on the two-page map amendment. Additional documentation for the findings shown on the map is found in the planning commission minutes, which are extensive. By keeping the end product simple and easy to understand, the City is further demonstrating its commitment to make planning accessible to its residents.

In 2007, the City of Auburn Hills will be making a \$2 million investment in streetscape improvements along Opdyke Road from Walton to M-59. Signage and landscaping will be part of the design work done on this portion of the corridor. These City investments should prompt corresponding private investment on this key corridor.

Conclusion

Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services staff commends the City of Auburn Hills for preparing this master plan amendment.

Based on the review of the surrounding communities' master plans, the Opdyke Road Corridor Study amendment is **not** inconsistent with the plan of any city, village, or township that received notice of the draft plan. Comments were received from Rochester Hills, Pontiac, and the Oakland County Drain Commissioner, and are attached.

Oakland County has not prepared a countywide development plan, so there is no countywide plan to which to compare the City of Auburn Hills Draft Master Plan amendment.

Sincerely,

Charlotte P. Burckhardt, AICP, PCP
Principal Planner

Enclosures