

March 15, 2007

Commissioner David Potts, Chairperson  
Oakland County Coordinating Zoning Committee  
1200 North Telegraph Road  
Pontiac, MI 48341

SUBJECT: County Code No. MP 06-13, Planning & Economic Development Services' review of the draft City of Sylvan Lake Community Master Plan dated December 2006

Dear Chairperson Potts and Committee Members:

The Sylvan Lake Planning Commission is proposing to replace its 1997 plan with a newly prepared master plan. The following is a review and analysis of the draft plan. The plan includes text, charts, and maps that describe the existing and desired future development of the community.

Under the Municipal Planning Act, Sylvan Lake is required to send a copy of the draft plan to Oakland County and neighboring communities for comment prior to adoption. Recent amendments to the act, effective December 20, 2006, reduced the number of days counties and neighboring communities have to provide comments to 63 days. However, since the amendments were so recent, Sylvan Lake still provided Oakland County with 95 days to submit comments on the draft plan, as was the case before the Municipal Planning Act was amended. The March 27, 2007 Oakland County Coordinating Zoning Committee (CZC) meeting falls within the 95-day comment period. Once the County's comment period has expired, the Planning Commission can hold a public hearing on the plan and take final action to adopt the plan.

According to the Sylvan Lake Clerk, Bloomfield, West Bloomfield, and Waterford Townships; the Cities of Pontiac and Keego Harbor; and SEMCOG were sent a copy of the draft plan. All of these communities and agencies have received notice of the CZC meeting. Comments have been received from Keego Harbor and Bloomfield Township, and are attached.

### **Public Participation Process**

The City of Sylvan Lake used both a community survey and a visioning session to seek input from residents. *"In October 2005, residents of Sylvan Lake were mailed a survey soliciting their opinions and ideas for the future development and community image of the City. Questions were asked on recreation and other community services, shopping and dining habits, housing types, potential expenditures funded by property tax revenues, and activities for seniors and youth."* (Page 43) Three hundred eighty-three (383) survey responses were received.

Then, in January 2006, the public was invited to a visioning workshop. The 30 participants were asked their opinions on what should be preserved and what should be changed in the City. Input from this session and the survey helped in the development of the goals and objectives included in the plan.

## **Plan Contents**

The Plan is divided into the following nine chapters: History; Existing Land Use; Resources and Concerns; Demographics; Transportation and Circulation; Community Facilities; Goals and Objectives; Comprehensive Development Plan; and Implementation. Survey results are included in the Appendix.

Sylvan Lake is a small city, centrally located in Oakland County. The plan recounts the City's history, starting with its origins as part of West Bloomfield Township in the early 1800s. Sylvan Lake incorporated first as a village in 1921 and then became a city in 1947. The City had its greatest growth during the decades of the 1950s and 1960s. Its 1970 population of 2,219 was its highest level. Since 1970, the population of Sylvan Lake has steadily declined. According to the Census Bureau, the City had a 2000 population of 1,705; this is a 23% decrease since 1970.

When reviewing the demographic characteristics of the City, changes in certain population age groups stand out. The population groups of under 10 years of age, 20-34 years of age, and 55+ have decreased by 23%, 32%, and 8.5% respectively. *“Over the decade from 1990 to 2000, there has been a decline in the presence of young children, young adults, and the elderly, while the 10-19 and 35-54 age groups have increased. These changes indicate a population that is relatively static, with few new residents.”* (Page 17)

In terms of land use, approximately 71% of the City (excluding water) is in a single family residential use. Due to the small size of the City, the residential almost functions as one large neighborhood with a lake focus. Almost 83% of the housing stock is owner occupied, which is a higher percentage than either Oakland County (71.6%) or Southeast Michigan (67.9%). Over 70% of this housing was built prior to 1960; therefore property maintenance is stressed for these 45+ year old homes. The residential in both the extreme northeast and southwest corners is physically separated from the rest of the City's residential due to the lake itself or Orchard Lake Road respectively. The residential area along Greer Boulevard in the southwest corner is given special attention in the plan due to its isolated nature.

Public and semi public uses make up the next highest land use category at 11%. This classification includes schools, public and private recreation, and municipal facilities. Much of the parkland is located along the shores of Sylvan Lake. Community Center Park is the largest public park in Sylvan Lake, and the Community Center is located here. The Center is currently closed due to deterioration, though in November 2006, residents approved a millage to renovate it.

The neighborhood feel of the City and the lake focus foster pedestrian traffic, especially in the summertime. Few sidewalks exist within Sylvan Lake but a small number of public walkways are available. In the southern part of the City, the Clinton River Trail, a converted rail (railroad) to trail, links to the West Bloomfield Trail. While this provides for pedestrian circulation, a major concern is its crossing at Orchard Lake Road. There is no signal at this location nor is the pavement marked to alert drivers of potential bikers and hikers. Recommendations to address this potentially dangerous intersection are included in the plan.

The more intensive uses of commercial, office, and industrial are confined to the Orchard Lake Road corridor. Together, these land uses make up almost 13% of the City. Only 2.5% of the City's land area is considered vacant.

Orchard Lake Road is the only principal arterial in the City other than the tenth of a mile portion of Telegraph Road that is in the far northeastern corner of the City. Given its prominence in the community, Orchard Lake Road's appearance is important to the image of Sylvan Lake. The City was one of six communities, along with Oakland County and the Road Commission for Oakland County, that participated in the Orchard Lake Corridor Study, which was completed in October 2002. The study examined Orchard Lake Road from Twelve Mile in Farmington Hills to Telegraph Road in Bloomfield Township. In Sylvan Lake, the major concerns along this roadway relate to aesthetics—excessive signage and inadequate screening, buffering, and landscaping. A key objective is to “*Implement streetscape improvements, including but not limited to pedestrian-scale street lighting, continuous sidewalks, street trees and plantings, seasonal street banners, benches, and trash receptacles.*” (Page 46) The master plan references the Orchard Lake Corridor Study and indicates it should be referred to when implementing these streetscape improvements.

Another major focus of the City is the lake itself. Given the large recreational aspect of Sylvan Lake, water quality is of prime concern. The importance of storm water management on the quality of Sylvan Lake is recognized in the plan. A good overview of the City's storm sewer system is provided to help residents understand upgrades that may be needed if redevelopment occurs. Maintaining and repairing the seawall along the shoreline of city parks is also listed as a priority for this lakefront community.

The master plan contains a comprehensive listing of goals and objectives. Goals were developed for land use, environment and recreation, non-motorized transportation, the Orchard Lake Road Corridor, and planning and administration. Maintaining the City's small town character is important.

The plan concludes with a chapter on implementation. Twenty separate projects are listed in the implementation summary matrix. Priority, responsibility, and funding are listed for each project. Of the twenty projects, five are identified as having the highest priority and a good chance of being implemented in the next few years. They are:

1. Update the Zoning Ordinance
2. Improve compliance with building code and zoning ordinance
3. Renovate or replace the Community Center building
4. Improve Orchard Lake Road Corridor streetscape
5. Maintain and repair seawall

### **Future Land Use Map**

The visual representation of the City's policies is shown on the Future Land Use map (attached). The largest planned land use is single family residential with one classification of single-family residential, Neighborhood Residential, shown on the map. Few changes to existing residential areas are anticipated, except along Greer Boulevard where redevelopment is planned.

Medium Density Residential is only planned for one location in the extreme southwest portion of the City. This represents an existing apartment complex.

Two types of commercial are planned, Sylvan Center and Neighborhood Commercial. Both are confined to Orchard Lake Road. Sylvan Center is planned for the north side of Orchard Lake Road and allows for a mixture of retail and office uses. Residential is allowed on the upper

stories of the commercial buildings. The City would like to foster a pedestrian orientation in this area and take advantage of the Clinton River Trail. *“Parking should be located behind buildings or underground, and buildings should be oriented toward the street with minimal setbacks...Development in the Sylvan Center area must complement the character of the City, provide adequate buffers and transitions to adjacent residential areas, and be consistent with plans for the Orchard Lake Road Corridor.”* (Page 50)

Neighborhood Commercial will allow for a wide range of retail uses that require greater land area than is available in the Sylvan Center. Mixed use developments are encouraged and live-work units will be permitted. The only area of Neighborhood Commercial is on the south side of Orchard Lake Road, adjacent to the Greer Boulevard Redevelopment Area.

Two redevelopment areas are shown on the map. Greer Boulevard Redevelopment Area is located on the south side of Orchard Lake Road in the southwestern corner of the City. The Whitfield School Redevelopment Area is on the north side of Orchard Lake Road at the eastern edge of the City, adjacent to Bloomfield Township. In both areas, the City would like to see a mixed use development planned in a comprehensive manner. A mixture of commercial and residential uses is envisioned for Whitfield School, while high technology businesses would be encouraged as part of the mixed use development in the Greer Boulevard area. Both areas could take advantage of the Clinton River Trail.

Locations for Recreation/Open Space and Municipal uses on the Future Land Use map mirror their existing locations in the City.

### **Comparison of the draft Future Land Use map to the 1997 map**

In comparing the two maps, the major changes occur along the Orchard Lake Road frontage where both plans envision the most intensive uses in the City. The draft Future Land Use map shows only the following three future land use classifications along Orchard Lake Road: Sylvan Center, Neighborhood Commercial, and Redevelopment Area. The 1997 map showed four classifications: Neighborhood Commercial, General Commercial, Industrial, and Mixed Use. Areas now planned Sylvan Center were previously shown as Neighborhood Commercial, while the area now called Neighborhood Commercial was previously called General Commercial.

The Greer Boulevard Redevelopment Area was previously planned for three separate uses. The frontage of Orchard Lake Road at Greer was planned for Neighborhood Commercial, Single Family Residential was planned to the south on both sides of Greer Boulevard, and then a large area of Industrial was planned to the east. This was the only area of industrial planned in the City in 1997; on the draft map, industrial is no longer a future land use classification. In the draft plan, the City would instead like to see this area redeveloped with a mixture of uses including high technology businesses. There are less than ten homes in this area, and they are sandwiched between the commercial to the north and the industrial uses to the south. The City would like to have these residential parcels incorporated into a larger mixed use development in this location. The Whitfield School Redevelopment Area was previously planned for Utility, Mixed Use, and Neighborhood Commercial. The City would still like this area developed for mixed use, primarily a mixture of commercial and residential uses with building heights of 2 to 3 stories adjacent to Orchard Lake Road and 1 to 2 stories next to the Clinton River Trail.

### **Coordination with Surrounding Community Boundaries**

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. Each of the adjacent communities has been encouraged to provide Sylvan Lake with comments if they have any concerns.

**North and East Boundary – City of Pontiac:** Pontiac 2010 A New Reality: A Comprehensive Plan for the City of Pontiac was adopted in December 1991 and has been amended several times since. The Future Land Use Map was last amended in July 2006. Sylvan Lake shares its border with the City of Pontiac in two places. The first border is in the northeast corner of the City of Sylvan Lake along James K Boulevard. In this location, Sylvan Lake has planned for Neighborhood Residential (including the two parcels currently used for commercial along Telegraph Road). The City of Pontiac has planned the James K Boulevard area for Low Medium Density Residential (1-7 dwellings per acre), with Retail/Office along the western frontage of Telegraph and Medium Density Residential (1 to 20 dwellings per acre) along the eastern frontage of Telegraph. This portion of the border is very compatible.

The second part of the border is that area of the City of Pontiac that is west of Telegraph Road, where Telegraph starts to bend to the southeast. This area is planned for Heavy Commercial/Distribution and is adjacent to Neighborhood Residential in Sylvan Lake. According to Pontiac's Master Plan, Heavy Commercial/Distribution allows for sales and service of motor vehicles, boats, landscape and building materials, and cabinets and furnishings, as well as wholesalers, and moving and storage operations. This classification permits very intense uses adjacent to single family residential in Sylvan Lake. While this border raises compatibility concerns, it also represents a long standing situation. The current industrial-type buildings on the parcel in Pontiac, adjacent to Sylvan Lake, have existed at least since 1974 per a review of our aerial photographs. Therefore, the future land use classifications represent a condition that has existed for over 30+ years.

**East Boundary – Bloomfield Township:** The draft Charter Township of Bloomfield Master Plan Update was just reviewed by the Oakland County Coordinating Zoning Committee on February 27, 2007. Bloomfield Township and Sylvan Lake share a short border along the north side of Orchard Lake Road. At this location, the City of Sylvan Lake is proposing the Whitfield School Redevelopment Area. Bloomfield Township has the adjacent parcel planned for Institutional/Civic (DTE utility site). The redevelopment that Sylvan Lake envisions for the Whitfield School area would consist of mixed commercial and residential uses and would take advantage of the Clinton River Trail immediately to the north. When the draft Bloomfield Township Master Plan was out for comment, the City of Sylvan Lake sent a letter requesting that Bloomfield Township 1.) change the future land use classification for the DTE site from Institutional/Civic to Mixed-Use, and 2.) discourage DTE from further expansion of their more industrial-type activity at this site.

The Bloomfield Township Planning Commission adopted their Master Plan on March 7, and it is awaiting Township Board adoption at their March 26 meeting. At their March 7<sup>th</sup> public hearing, the Bloomfield Township Planning Commission addressed Sylvan Lake's concern. According to the Bloomfield Township Planning Director, the Planning Commission decided to leave the designation of Institutional/Civic unchanged, but expressed a commitment to work with Sylvan Lake when redevelopment is proposed for the Whitfield School site to strive for compatibility between the two communities.

In addition, Bloomfield Township sent an email indicating no objections to the proposed Sylvan Lake Plan.

**South Boundary – West Bloomfield Township:** The Charter Township of West Bloomfield 2005 Master Land Use Plan Update was adopted in July 2005. West Bloomfield Township and Sylvan Lake share a short border essentially along Orchard Lake Road and then south of the Clinton River Trail. East and west of Middlebelt Road on the south side of Orchard Lake Road, West Bloomfield Township has planned for Shopping Center Retail. On the north side of Orchard Lake Road, the City of Sylvan Lake has planned for Sylvan Center and Whitfield School Redevelopment Area. From the Clinton River Trail intersection at Orchard Lake Road to the City’s western municipal border, West Bloomfield has planned for a small area of Non-Center Retail, then Multiple Family and Quasi-Public/Private. Sylvan Lake has planned for Neighborhood Commercial and Greer Boulevard Redevelopment Area. The Clinton River Trail acts as a buffer between uses in this area. Finally surrounding the little tail of Sylvan Lake, West Bloomfield has planned for Low-Medium Density Single Family to the east, Quasi-Public/Private to the south, and Multiple Family to the west. These uses are compatible with the Neighborhood Residential and Medium Density Residential planned in Sylvan Lake. Generally, this is a compatible border between West Bloomfield Township and Sylvan Lake, as the more intense commercial uses are planned along Orchard Lake Road in both communities.

**West Boundary – City of Keego Harbor:** The City of Keego Harbor Comprehensive Master Plan was adopted in September 2002. Sylvan Lake shares its western border to the Clinton River Trail with Keego Harbor. Keego Harbor has this border planned for Neighborhood Residential with a small area of Fringe Central Business District planned at Orchard Lake Road. North of Orchard Lake Road, Sylvan Lake is very compatible with Keego Harbor having Neighborhood Residential planned as well and Sylvan Center along the Orchard Lake Road frontage. However, south of Orchard Lake Road, the Greer Boulevard Redevelopment Area is adjacent to the Neighborhood Residential in Keego Harbor. Currently, there are some industrial uses in Sylvan Lake adjacent to the residential in Keego Harbor. When this area is proposed for redevelopment, attention should be paid to setbacks, buffering, and landscaping to protect Keego Harbor residents from possible noise and visual impacts of the new mixed use development.

Keego Harbor sent a letter indicating no inconsistencies with the proposed Sylvan Lake Plan.

**Northwest Boundary – Waterford Township:** The Waterford Township Master Plan 2003-2023 was adopted in January 2003. Waterford Township is physically separated from the City of Sylvan Lake by the lake itself. Therefore, there is no impact on Waterford Township at the border, and there is no inconsistency between the plans.

### **Analysis**

Sylvan Lake is a very small city that is mainly built out. The plan acknowledges the lack of new residents and the need to attract additional people to sustain the City. Two redevelopment areas are identified in the plan that will provide opportunities for new uses and potential new residents. Once redeveloped, each area can significantly impact the image of the community. As these redevelopment areas are at the entrances to the City, they can become welcoming gateways into Sylvan Lake.

The first redevelopment area at the eastern edge of the City currently consists of a mixture of commercial, utility, and vacant property. The old Whitfield School has been demolished. If the school site is combined with some of the adjacent parcels, this can provide a sizeable site for new development. Similarly, the Greer Boulevard Redevelopment Area consists of a number of parcels that will need to be consolidated for a larger redevelopment activity to occur. The City will need to work closely with the property owners to effectuate this redevelopment potential. The plan also identifies the possibility of working with neighboring communities on these projects.

Streetscape improvements to Orchard Lake Road within the city limits will also contribute to a more vibrant image for the City. Working in concert with the Orchard Lake Road Corridor group will allow for improvements that provide a unified approach to the corridor while still allowing the City to maintain its individual identity and small town character. Oakland County is a member of the Orchard Lake Road Corridor group and applauds the City for including the recommendations from the study in its master plan.

### **Conclusion**

Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services staff commends the City of Sylvan Lake on its master plan update. The plan is well written and provides a good overview of the current conditions within the City and recommendations for the future. In addition, the Implementation Chapter contains a detailed listing of potential funding sources to help finance some of these recommended actions.

Based on the review of the surrounding communities' master plans, the City of Sylvan Lake Community Master Plan (Draft December 2006) is **not** inconsistent with the plan of any city, village, or township that received notice of the draft plan. Comments were received from Keego Harbor and Bloomfield Township, and are attached.

Oakland County has not prepared a countywide development plan, so there is no countywide plan to which to compare the Sylvan Lake Draft Master Plan.

Sincerely,

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Principal Planner

Enclosures