

October 30, 2007

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

SUBJECT: County Code No. MP 07-04, Planning & Economic Development Services' review of the City of Huntington Woods Master Plan (Draft September 2007)

Dear Chairperson Potts and Committee Members:

The City of Huntington Woods Planning Commission has developed a new master plan to replace its 1993 Huntington Woods Land Use Plan. The following is a review and analysis of the proposed plan.

Under the recent amendments to the Municipal Planning Act, which took effect December 20, 2006, the City of Huntington Woods is required to send a copy of the draft plan to Oakland County and neighboring communities for comment prior to adoption. Oakland County has 63 days to submit comments on a draft plan. The November 6, 2007 Oakland County Coordinating Zoning Committee (CZC) meeting falls within our 63-day comment period. Neighboring communities also have 63 days to submit comments directly to Huntington Woods and are asked to send a copy of any comments to the County as well. Once the comment period has expired, the Planning Commission can hold a public hearing and take final action to adopt the plan.

According to the Chairman of the Huntington Woods Planning Commission, the Cities of Berkley, Royal Oak, Pleasant Ridge, and Oak Park, as well as 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 the City of Oak Park and are attached.

Public Participation Process

In October 2006, the master planning process began. After collecting inventory data, the Planning Commission solicited input from the public through a community survey and a Vision Workshop. Response from the survey was good; about 25% of all Huntington Woods' households completed the survey. Input obtained from these two sources was used in the development of the goals and objectives articulated in the plan. *"By working closely with residents, business owners, City officials, planning experts, surrounding communities, and other stakeholders, the City of Huntington Woods has developed a Plan that balances the competing interests that affect land use decisions. These include, for example, jobs and tax base on one side and protection of quality of life, community character, and natural resources on the other."*

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Plan Contents

The Plan is divided into the following four chapters: What Do We Have? (Background Data); What Do We Want? (Vision & Goals); How Do We Get There? (Future land use and other plans); and Getting There (Implementation). Preceding these chapters is a brief introduction to planning that clarifies the distinction between the master plan and the zoning ordinance.

Huntington Woods is a small city, well situated in southeast Oakland County. Residents have good regional access through either Woodward Avenue at the eastern edge of the city or through I-696, which forms its southern boundary. According to the Census Bureau, Huntington Woods had a 2000 population of 6,151 persons, which is a 4% decrease since 1990 and almost a 30% decrease since 1960. Some of this population loss can be attributed to the construction of I-696 when 55 homes were either demolished or moved out of the city in the 1980s to make way for the freeway. However, this gradual decline in population is shared by similar built out, inner ring suburbs due to the trend of families having fewer children and little land available for new construction. Another factor may be at work in Huntington Woods as well. The 18-34 age group has been declining since 1980. This is the family formation age group that tends to have a higher person per household number than older empty nesters or seniors. The lack of affordable housing for this age group is mentioned in the plan.

The high median home value of \$245,400 is not the only above average characteristic of Huntington Woods. The median household income of \$87,086 is well above Oakland County's \$61,907 median household income. Educational attainment of residents is also well above average. In Huntington Woods, 72.5% of residents over the age of 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 38% of Oakland County residents. In fact, 40% of the residents of Huntington Woods have a graduate or professional degree. This high educational attainment translates into higher incomes and higher home prices.

In terms of land use, 2/3's or 66% of Huntington Woods is in a single family residential use. Known as "*The City of Homes*," 97% of these homes were owner occupied, leaving few rental opportunities within the city. Only one two-family unit is located within the city. The other 1/3 of the city (31%) is mainly in a recreational or open space use. Most of this recreational use is made up of two regional uses, the Detroit Zoo and Rackham Golf Course, both located in the southern part of the city along I-696. Small pocket parks with benches or fountains are scattered throughout the city. Office and commercial uses make up less than 2% of the city and are located along the perimeter roads of Coolidge Highway, Eleven Mile Road, or Woodward Avenue. Public uses like City Hall, the library, recreation center, community parks, and an elementary school are located along Scotia Road, a main north-south route in the middle of the city. Only 2 acres are shown as vacant, according to the 2006 Existing Land Use Inventory.

The master plan contains both an extensive vision statement and a listing of goals and objectives. Goals touch on a variety of topics including maintaining city services without increasing taxes; protecting residential neighborhoods while promoting quality infill development; encouraging walkability; promoting high quality mixed use developments along perimeter roads; and retaining the Detroit Zoo and the Rackham Golf Course. Preserving the special residential quality of Huntington Woods, especially in historic neighborhoods, is important.

In addition to the Future Land Use Plan that is described in the next section of this review, the master plan contains several other special topic plans. They are a Life Cycle Housing Plan, Neighborhood Character Plan, Preservation Plan, Detroit Zoo and Rackham Golf Course Plan, Wireless Facilities Plan, and a Crosswalks Plan. Each of these plans is addressed in the Analysis portion of this review.

The master plan concludes with a chapter on implementation. Action items are listed at the end of each special topic plan. These items are consolidated into an implementation summary matrix in the last chapter of the master plan and are identified as either short term or long term activities.

Future Land Use Map

The visual representation of the City's policies is shown on the Future Land Use map (attached). The Future Land Use map mainly mirrors the Existing Land Use map due to the built out nature of the community. The largest planned land use is single family residential. Because there are varying lot sizes throughout the city, the following five classifications of single-family residential are shown on the map.

1. Single Family Residential (1.5 Dwelling Units/Acre or less)
2. Single Family Residential (1.5 Dwelling Units/Acre to 4.8 Dwelling Units/Acre)
3. Single Family Residential (3.6 Dwelling Units/Acre to 6.2 Dwelling Units/Acre)
4. Single Family Residential (4.8 Dwelling Units/Acre to 6.2 Dwelling Units/Acre)
5. Single Family Residential (4.8 Dwelling Units/Acre to 8.7 Dwelling Units/Acre)

The largest lot sizes with a density of 1.5 dwelling units/acre or less are found in a small area east of Henley and west of Scotia between Lincoln and Eleven Mile Road. The majority of the residential land has densities in the 4.8 to 8.7 dwelling units/acre range or 5,000 to 9,000 square foot lots.

The next largest planned land use is Parks & Recreation. This classification includes both the Detroit Zoo and the Rackham Golf Course. Community parks and numerous small pocket parks are also included in this category. Public & Quasi-Public uses are planned for either Eleven Mile Road or Scotia Road. This category includes a church, school, and governmental buildings.

Small areas of Neighborhood Commercial are planned along the perimeter of Huntington Woods. The largest concentration of Neighborhood Commercial is located at Coolidge and Lincoln where an existing drugstore, restaurant, and bank are found. Two individual parcels along Eleven Mile Road are also planned for this classification and reflect existing use.

The most intensive land use planned in Huntington Woods is mixed use. This classification allows townhomes, condominiums, green space, offices, and small commercial uses. *“Mixed-use buildings with first floor retail and/or office uses, second floor office and/or residential, and third floor residential use would be appropriate, as well as freestanding offices, retail buildings, and townhouses.”* (Page 46) The only place in the city planned for mixed use is the Woodward Avenue frontage at the northeastern edge of the city. The Life Cycle Housing Plan provides guidance on the architectural elements that should be present in new construction in this area.

Comparison of the draft 2007 Future Land Use map to the 1993 map

The planned land use patterns on the draft map are very similar to those on the 1993 map, but the classifications have been restructured. The previous map had one Single Family Residential category and the new map has five. These new residential divisions are based on existing density, ranging from 1.5 dwelling units per acre to 8.7 dwelling units per acre. Single Family Residential continues to be the predominant land use planned in Huntington Woods, and the extent remains the same except for three parcels. A 3.1-acre parcel owned by the Berkley School District, adjacent to Burton Elementary School on Nadine Avenue, has been changed from Single Family Residential to Parks & Recreation. The site, Burton Community Park, contains athletic fields and playground equipment. Additionally, two formerly planned residential parcels in the eastern portion of the city are now planned for Parks & Recreation. These two interior parcels serve as small subdivision parks for the surrounding homes.

In terms of non-residential, the location and extent of non-residential uses have not changed. However, the 1993 map had eight non-residential classifications, which have been consolidated into four on the new map. Municipal Office, Elementary School, Municipal Library, House of Worship, and Public Safety, Public Works & Related Facilities, all separate classifications on the old map, have been consolidated into the Public & Quasi Public classification on the new map. The two classifications of Office and Retail Sales & Service located along Woodward Avenue on the 1993 map have been changed to the new Mixed Use classification in that area. Finally, the former Retail Sales & Service classification located at Coolidge and Lincoln and along Eleven Mile Road is now Neighborhood Commercial.

The eighth non-residential classification was Parks & Recreation, which has essentially remained unchanged except as noted above. In addition, a portion of the City Hall site on Eleven Mile Road (formerly classified as Municipal Office and Public Safety, Public Works & Related Facilities) has been designated Parks & Recreation to reflect the Gordon L. Hassig Senior Park.

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. The following provides detail on how the draft plan coordinates with each of Huntington Woods' neighboring communities.

East Boundary – City of Royal Oak: The Master Plan City of Royal Oak was adopted in August 1999. Huntington Woods shares its entire eastern boundary from Eleven Mile Road to I-696 with the City of Royal Oak. At Eleven Mile Road and Woodward Avenue, Royal Oak has planned for Public/Institutional at the corner then Mixed Use-Residential/Office/Commercial for the remainder of the Woodward Avenue frontage. This is across from the Mixed Use planned for the Woodward Avenue frontage in Huntington Woods. From this point south, Huntington Woods has planned for Single Family Residential (4.8 to 6.2 dwelling units/acre) and then Parks and Recreation (Detroit Zoo). Royal Oak has this portion of the boundary planned for Single Family Residential-Medium Density and Parks and Open Space (Detroit Zoo). This is an extremely consistent border where the mixed use classification allows for the same uses, the residential is a continuation of the same neighborhood, and the Detroit Zoo spans both communities.

Southeast Boundary – City of Pleasant Ridge: The City of Pleasant Ridge Community Master Plan was adopted in September 1999. Pleasant Ridge and Huntington Woods share a short border along I-696. In Pleasant Ridge, the border area is planned for Single Family. In Huntington Woods, the border area is planned for Parks and Recreation (Detroit Zoo). As these two uses are separated by a wide expanse of I-696 and the I-696 service drives, there is no incompatibility of planned uses.

South and West Boundary – City of Oak Park: The City of Oak Park Master Plan was adopted in September 1996 and amended in 2005. Huntington Woods shares half of its border with Oak Park, both the southern border along I-696 and its western border along Coolidge Highway. Along the southern border, Huntington Woods has planned for Single Family Residential (with densities ranging from 3.6 to 8.7 dwelling units/acre) from Coolidge Highway to Scotia Road. In Oak Park, this area is planned for Neighborhood Shopping at the corner of Coolidge and I-696 and then One and Two Family to Scotia Road. From Scotia Road east to the Oak Park boundary, Huntington Woods has planned for Parks and Recreation (Rackham Golf Course and the Detroit Zoo) while Oak Park has planned for Low Rise Multiple Family with a small amount of Neighborhood Shopping at Scotia and I-696, One and Two Family, and another small area of Low Rise Multiple Family. As these uses are separated by a wide expanse of I-696 and the I-696 service drives, there is no incompatibility of planned uses along the southern border.

Huntington Woods' western boundary along Coolidge Highway is primarily planned for Single Family Residential (4.8 to 8.7 dwelling units/acre) with a small area of Neighborhood Commercial planned at Lincoln and another area planned at Eleven Mile Road. This is fairly consistent with the Oak Park master plan where Neighborhood Shopping is planned both at Lincoln and at Eleven Mile Road with the remainder of the Coolidge frontage planned for One and Two Family. The only exceptions to this are a small area of Office and Service at Coolidge and I-696, and a small Quasi-Public use two blocks north of the Office and Service use.

The Oak Park City Planner/Deputy Director sent a letter indicating the master plan “*was not inconsistent with the City of Oak Park Master Plan.*”

North Boundary – City of Berkley: The City of Berkley Master Plan Update was adopted in January 2007. Huntington Woods shares its entire northern border along Eleven Mile Road from Coolidge Highway to Woodward Avenue with the City of Berkley. Along Eleven Mile Road, from Coolidge to Scotia Road, Berkley has planned for Suburban Commercial and Mixed Use. In this stretch, Huntington Woods has planned for Neighborhood Commercial, Parks & Recreation, and Public & Quasi-Public with one block of Single Family Residential (4.8 to 8.7 dwelling units/acre). This mixture of uses is compatible. For the remainder of Eleven Mile Road, east to Woodward Avenue, Berkley has planned for Single Family Residential with two exceptions for small areas of Institutional. This is compatible with the Single Family Residential (4.8 to 8.7 dwelling units/acre) that Huntington Woods has planned for most of this border. Two small areas of Parks & Recreation and one existing Neighborhood Commercial complete the planned uses in Huntington Woods for this portion of Eleven Mile Road.

At Woodward Avenue and Eleven Mile Road, both communities have planned their Woodward frontage for commercial. In Berkley the frontage is planned for General Commercial & Service, while in Huntington Woods the frontage is planned for Mixed Use. Adjacent to the commercial, Berkley has planned for a small area of Multiple Family Residential. These uses are compatible.

Analysis

The most striking aspect of the Huntington Woods master plan is its visual quality. Well over one hundred photographs are used throughout the document to display the character and condition of existing homes and neighborhoods. In fact, almost every page contains a photograph, chart, or graph making this a highly engaging master plan to read. And the plan is intended to be read, especially by residents. When data is presented there is usually an explanation of the relevance of the information and what it means. Even chapter headings, such as “What Do We Have?” or “How Do We Get There?” explain in lay terms how the data relates to the planning process.

Six special topic plans are included in the master plan. Each is notable. The Neighborhood Character Plan addresses the essence of Huntington Woods—its well maintained homes, tree lined streets, and interconnected sidewalks that form desirable neighborhoods. Five different neighborhoods are identified in the plan; each with their own distinctive characteristics and architecture. The purpose of the Neighborhood Character Plan is two-fold. One purpose is to help residents identify what makes each neighborhood special. Photographs amply illustrate the different housing styles found in each neighborhood. These photographs also highlight certain architectural details that are common among the neighborhoods, such as single front door entries, detached and recessed garages, masonry exteriors, and double hung windows. Cataloging these elements leads to the second purpose of the Neighborhood Character Plan, which is to encourage appropriate and compatible infill development. Since there is so little vacant land available, new residential development has occurred through demolition of existing structures or substantial renovations and additions to existing homes. It is important that this new residential construction have proper proportions, compatible materials, and appropriate details so these new structures fit into the existing character of the neighborhood. The compilation of information and photographs in this part of the master plan is a good first step in preparing a “pattern book” to help residents understand what acceptable infill development is.

The Preservation Plan complements the Neighborhood Character Plan by identifying historic resources in the community. Huntington Woods appointed a Historic District Study Committee that recommended the establishment of two local historic districts. In 2004, the first district was established. The Hill Historic District is a residential neighborhood in the northeastern corner of the city, made up of 108 homes and two parks. Most of the homes were built in the 1920s and 1930s, some by famous architects. The second district was established in 2006 and covers the 123-acre public Rackham Golf Course. *“Its historic value not only comes from the prominent individuals responsible for its creation and design, but also from its history of being one of the earliest racially integrated courses in the country.”* (Page 72) The Detroit Zoo is also being studied by the Committee to determine if it too should be designated a local historic district, which provides legal protection of the historic resources.

The Detroit Zoo and Rackham Golf Course are regional attractions owned by the City of Detroit. Having both of these gems located within its boundaries has helped define the City of Huntington Woods. However, recent budget problems in the City of Detroit have caused repercussions in Huntington Woods. In the last few years, the City of Detroit has stopped contributing to the Detroit Zoo's budget. In addition, the City of Detroit has considered selling the Rackham Golf Course to a private developer for residential development. This has been a very controversial proposal that has been opposed by Huntington Woods' residents. *"Almost 96 percent of respondents to the community survey strongly agreed or agreed that Rackham Golf Course should remain a golf course or open space in perpetuity."* (Page 79) The Detroit Zoo and Rackham Golf Course Plan provides the history of both of these recreational uses. Action items include pursuing National Register and State Historic Site nominations for the golf course and designating the Detroit Zoo as a local historic district. The Detroit Zoo is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is designated a Michigan Historic site.

The emphasis of the Life Cycle Housing Plan is having housing for seniors who want to remain in Huntington Woods but are not able or do not want to maintain a single family home. New townhomes or condominiums are allowed in the Mixed Use classification planned along Woodward Avenue. Another alternative is to allow residential units on the second or third floors of new retail or office buildings redeveloped along Woodward. The plan encourages new senior housing in this area. While it is commendable to stress the need for housing for older residents, it is a little surprising that the Life Cycle Housing Plan does not advocate the need for new residential units for younger residents as well, given the affordability issue mentioned in the plan. These new townhomes or condominiums may appeal to the 18 to 34 age demographic that is leaving the City. Ways to address the affordability issue are not included in the Life Cycle Housing Plan, and the Planning Commission may wish to consider this topic in more depth in the master plan.

The Crosswalks Plan addresses pedestrian crossings over Woodward Avenue and other perimeter roads. Huntington Woods' residents are within walking distance of the downtowns in both Royal Oak and Berkley. *"Over 73 percent of survey respondents indicated that they do or would walk to downtown Royal Oak, and nearly 42 percent do or would walk to downtown Berkley."* (Page 98) But pedestrians need to cross fairly busy streets to reach these and other destinations outside the city limits. Several recent pedestrian fatalities on Woodward Avenue accentuate the need to improve pedestrian crosswalks to make drivers more visually aware that pedestrians could be present. The Crosswalks Plan recommends colored brick or stamped concrete crosswalks and sidewalk approaches plus additional signage and crossing signal enhancements. For safety's sake, the crosswalk design recommendations are appropriately identified as short term rather than long term action items in the implementation chapter.

Finally, the Wireless Plan identifies structures within the city where additional wireless communication facilities like antennas or towers could be located. Like many cities, Huntington Woods favors colocation of equipment to minimize the number of towers present in the community. Given the number of wireless facilities present in Oakland County, a chapter like the Wireless Plan should be standard in master plans. However, this is the first master plan I recall that has addressed this topic. Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services is working on a parallel effort under the Wireless Oakland Initiative to develop a

guidebook on Planning for Technology. One of the recommendations is to address this topic in the master plan. Huntington Woods has provided a good example of how to address this topic, including a Frequently Asked Questions section to explain to residents what wireless facilities are and how they can be regulated.

Conclusion

The Huntington Woods draft master plan is a well written and well illustrated plan. Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services staff commends the City of Huntington Woods for preparing this new plan and for including additional “plans” that add depth and breadth to the master plan.

Based on the review of the surrounding communities’ master plans, the Huntington Woods Master Plan (Draft September 2007) is **not** inconsistent with the plan of any city, village, or township that received notice of the draft plan. Comments were received from the City of Oak Park and are attached.

Oakland County has not prepared a countywide development plan, so there is no countywide plan to which to compare the plan.

Sincerely,

Charlotte P. Burckhardt, AICP, PCP
Principal Planner

Enclosures