

February 29, 2008

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

SUBJECT: County Code No. MP 08-01, Planning & Economic Development Services' review of A Vision for the Year 2020, Royal Oak Township Master Plan Addendum (dated 11/14/07)

Dear Chairperson Potts and Committee Members:

The Royal Oak Township Planning Commission has developed an update to its 1996 A Vision for the Year 2010 Master Plan. The following is a review and analysis of the proposed updated plan.

Under the recent amendments to the Township Planning Act, which took effect December 20, 2006, Royal Oak Township 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 March 11, 2008 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 Royal Oak Township 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 Royal Oak Township, the Cities of Ferndale, Oak Park, and Detroit; the Oakland County Drain Commission Office, the Road Commission for Oakland County, Consumers Energy, Detroit Edison, the Detroit Water & Sewerage Department, and SEMCOG were sent a copy of the draft plan. All of these communities, utilities, and agencies have received notice of the CZC meeting. Comments were received from the Road Commission for Oakland County and the City of Oak Park and are attached.

Community Changes

A significant change has occurred in the Charter Township of Royal Oak since the last master plan was adopted in 1996. Royal Oak Township used to be comprised of two physically distinct but geographically separated parts. The northern portion of Royal Oak Township was located east of Greenfield Road between Lincoln Avenue and Ten Mile Road. The southern portion, over two miles away, was located north of Eight Mile Road from Meyers Road to just east of Mitchelldale Avenue. However, in 2003 and 2004, the northern portion of Royal Oak Township was incorporated into the City of Oak Park through annexation. Therefore, this master plan update only addresses the remaining southern portion.

Public Participation Process

On October 10, 2007, the Royal Oak Township Planning Commission held a workshop where the public was invited to provide input. Residents had an opportunity to list concerns or ideas about the following four topics: Housing/Neighborhoods, Recreation/Environment, Land Use/Transportation, and Commercial/Economic Development. Attendees then voted on the

ideas generated. Based on that vote, the following were identified as the top priorities in the Township:

1. Construct a viable recreation center with space for seniors, teens, and all age groups.
2. Increase code and ordinance enforcement to address noise, rental units, abandoned cars, and vacant lots.
3. Attract sit down/family restaurants.
4. Unite the two school districts covering the Township into one district.
5. Provide a variety of housing unit types that will appeal to young professionals, empty nesters, and seniors.
6. Increase police patrols.

These priorities along with the input received at the workshop were incorporated into the goals and objectives found in the plan update.

Plan Contents

The Plan consists of the following sections: Introduction; Purpose; Demographics; Existing Land Use; Public Input; Goals, Objectives, and Vision; Future Land Use; and Implementation. The plan has several appendices containing information on retail supply and demand based on type of retail plus maps and aerials related to potential implementation projects.

As noted above, Royal Oak Township is now one small portion (approximately 360 acres) north of Eight Mile Road, adjacent to Oak Park to the west and north, Ferndale to the east and north, and Detroit to the south. Because of the annexation, the 2007 estimated population of the Township of 2,669 persons is considerably reduced from the 2000 population of 5,173. The population is 95% Black or African American. The two largest age groups in the Township are the 5-19 year olds (25.6%) and 60 and older (21.4%). *“This suggests that municipal facilities for and services to young children and seniors will need to increase in the future.”* (Page 3)

In terms of land use, 37% of Royal Oak Township is in a residential use, with almost 80% of these single and multiple family units built before 1969. Wyoming Avenue is a key north-south street that generally divides the Township into two parts. The eastern half of the Township is more residential. Single family neighborhoods make up most of the area east of Wyoming Avenue, minus the Eight Mile frontage, with a park and a recreational space conveniently located within walking distance of many residents. Most of the multiple family residential uses are in the western half where another park and a recreation center are located.

Public Right-of-way is the next highest land use with over 25% of total land area. Another 25% of the community is made up of industrial (13.5%) and commercial (about 12%) uses. Industrial uses are concentrated in the northwest corner of the Township while most of the commercial uses are found along Eight Mile Road. Additional uses found within Royal Oak Township include a hospital, a charter school, and a hotel; all are located west of Wyoming Avenue.

According to the 2007 land use inventory prepared by the consultant, only one-half percent (.56%) of the Township is considered vacant. However, the County’s 2007 Land Use Inventory shows a fair number of vacant residential lots; approximately 8% of the Township is considered vacant by our statistics. The majority of these lots are found in the eastern half of the Township.

Goals from the previous planning effort remain essentially unchanged although a new one to promote economic growth and development has been added. Goals address creating attractive neighborhoods, expanding recreational, educational, and training opportunities, public safety, and sound fiscal management. Changes have been made to the objectives, mainly adding specific actions needed. Several new objectives also have been added to the recreational goal; this is consistent with the results of the public workshop where the construction of a new recreation center was identified as one of the top priorities.

The master plan concludes with a chapter on implementation. The Township has recently established a Brownfield Redevelopment Authority and a Neighborhood Enterprise Zone. The chapter provides a description of other implementation and financing tools that may be of use to the Township.

Future Land Use Map

The visual representation of the Township's policies is shown on the Future Land Use map (attached). The largest planned land use is single family residential. Four residential classifications are shown on the map.

1. Low Density Residential (up to 7 dwelling units per acre)
2. Medium Density Residential (up to 10 dwelling units per acre)
3. High Density Residential
4. Multiple Family Residential

Most of the residential land is planned for Medium Density Residential, with much of the eastern part of the Township planned for this classification. *“During the past 15 years, the Township has encouraged in-fill housing on a block by block basis. In order to make an impact, a systematic program of infill housing, code enforcement, rental occupancy program, and governmental incentives are needed.”* (Page 17)

A smaller portion of the Township is planned for Low Density Residential. This classification is found west of Wyoming Avenue and north of Cloverdale Avenue. High Density Residential is a new category that would *“promote and encourage owner-occupied brownstone (row houses), stacked ranches, and townhouses.”* (Page 17) These new types of residential units are envisioned for the area of Pasadena and Wyoming Avenues. In order for these new high density residential units to be built, existing uses in this location will need to be redeveloped. The three locations of Multiple Family Residential shown on the Future Land Use map reflect existing multiple family developments, including the senior high rise at Wyoming and Pasadena Avenues.

Two Commercial classifications are shown on the Future Land Use map; both are located along Eight Mile Road. General Commercial is mainly located east of Wyoming Avenue and allows for a broad range of both convenient and comparison retail uses. West of Wyoming Avenue, where there is greater depth, Mixed-Use Commercial/Office is planned. *“This category has been designated along Eight Mile Road on parcels previously used for automobile dealerships. With the recent downturn in the economy and the loss of market share in the auto-industry, it is unlikely that the need for these former dealerships will continue in the future.”* (Page 18) A wide variety of commercial and office uses including, professional office, health/fitness facilities, and sit down restaurants are allowed within this new classification. The Township

envisions the redevelopment of these parcels to be done in a coordinated manner, resulting in planned developments that have shared parking, appropriate signage, and attractive design.

Industrial uses are confined to the northwest corner of the Township where industrial uses currently exist.

The Future Land Use map also shows areas planned for Institutional/Quasi-Public and Park, Recreation & Open Space. Public uses within these two classifications are shown with a diagonal line pattern. The site of the current recreation center, located at the corner of Cloverdale and Mendota Avenues, is planned to become the new municipal complex. General design guidelines for municipal buildings are included in the plan to reinforce the importance of civic structures in a community.

Comparison of the draft 2007 Future Land Use map to the 1996 map

Different Future Land Use classifications are used on the two maps so a direct comparison between the maps is not possible. For example, the 1996 map showed only a low density and a high density residential classification, and the text did not provide a number of units per acre to correlate with these classifications. The draft map shows three density classifications, low, medium, and high; however, the high density classification now refers to attached single family units like brownstones, townhomes, and stacked ranches.

Similarly, the commercial classifications have been renamed. The 1996 map has commercial planned along Eight Mile Road but it was classified as either Non Auto Commercial or Auto Related Commercial. This distinction has been eliminated with the draft map with the two classifications now being either General Commercial or Mixed-Use Commercial/Office. The previous Auto Related Commercial uses (car dealerships) are being targeted for mixed use redevelopment in this master plan update.

Another area proposed for change from the 1996 map is the block bounded by Cloverdale, Wyoming, Pasadena, and Mendota Avenues. The previous master plan map showed this area planned for Parks & Recreation for the western block then Low Density Residential for the interior and Institutional for the frontage along Wyoming and part of Pasadena. The draft map still proposes a residential character to this area but the density will be higher in the form of brownstones, townhomes, and stacked ranch units. These new units will front on Civic Center Park, now shown in the interior of the block. The western block is now divided into the northern public use of Park, Recreation & Open Space and is planned for a new municipal complex, while the southern part is planned for High Density Residential. This southern part is currently the Academy of Oak Park Charter School so redevelopment of this site is also envisioned.

The locations of two classifications that remain essentially unchanged between the two maps are Industrial and Multiple Family. While there are some minor changes in the boundary of the industrially planned land, it still is confined to the northwest corner of the Township. Multiple family is mainly shown in the same locations for both maps except that one block of multiple family west of Wyoming at Pasadena Avenue is now planned for High Density Residential.

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 Royal Oak Township's neighboring communities.

West and North Boundary – City of Oak Park: The City of Oak Park Master Plan was adopted in September 1996 and amended in 2005. Royal Oak Township shares its entire western border and the western half of its northern boundary with Oak Park. Along this entire border, the City of Oak Park has planned for Light Industrial. Along Meyers Road at its western border, Royal Oak Township has planned for Mixed-Use Commercial/Office at Eight Mile Road, then Multiple Family north of this, Low Density Residential north of Cloverdale Avenue, and then Industrial to the municipal boundary. This Industrial also extends over much of the remaining northern boundary with Oak Park. Royal Oak Township also has planned for a strip of Park, Recreation & Open Space along Meyers Road north of the Mixed-Use Commercial/Office to provide a buffer for the residential uses. Since the planned uses along Meyers Road in Royal Oak Township reflect existing uses that have co-existed with the industrial uses in Oak Park for a number of years, the border is compatible. The border is very compatible in the northwestern corner of the Township, where the industrial uses are adjacent to similar industrial uses in Oak Park. The City of Oak Park sent a letter indicating that the Oak Park Planning Commission has reviewed this draft master plan and does not find it inconsistent with their plan.

East and North Boundary – City of Ferndale: The City of Ferndale Land Use Plan was adopted in June 1998. Royal Oak Township shares the eastern half of its northern boundary and its entire eastern border with Ferndale. Royal Oak Township has planned this border exclusively for Medium Density Residential except for the Eight Mile Road frontage, which is planned for General Commercial. Ferndale has planned the northern and the northeastern part of the border for Public & Quasi-Public. This reflects the City of Ferndale's Department of Public Works yard that is located along the northern border and a high school at the northeastern corner. South of the high school, Ferndale has planned for Industrial to Eight Mile Road. Ferndale's plan indicates that the "CMI site" south of Ferndale High School could be redeveloped for industrial use, possibly as an industrial park. The Industrial area also has a notation indicating this could be a Mixed Use Redevelopment area and that a Planned Unit Development (PUD) should be considered for this site. If this site is proposed for redevelopment, the City of Ferndale should give particular attention to setbacks, buffering, and landscaping during site plan review to ensure the development is compatible with the residential uses in Royal Oak Township.

South Boundary – City of Detroit: The Detroit Master Plan of Policies is dated 1992 and is listed as the current master plan for the City of Detroit. Royal Oak Township shares its entire southern border with the City of Detroit along Eight Mile Road. Royal Oak Township has its entire Eight Mile Road frontage planned for commercial use, either General Commercial east of Wyoming Avenue or a combination of General Commercial and Mixed-Use Commercial/Office west of Wyoming Avenue. The City of Detroit has its far western and eastern borders with Royal Oak Township planned for General Commercial with the middle portion of its border planned for RL, Low Density Residential (up to 12 dwelling units per net acre). While the future land use classification is Low Density Residential for this middle portion, the existing land use in the City of Detroit is of a commercial nature along the Eight Mile Road frontage. The planned land uses in Royal Oak Township are compatible with the existing uses in Detroit. In addition, if the City of Detroit frontage does get redeveloped in a Low Density Residential manner, the separation given by the boulevard along Eight Mile Road will provide a buffer between the commercial uses in Royal Oak Township and the residential uses in the City of Detroit.

Analysis

When a community prepares a new master plan, it is important that residents know about the plan and understand what is in it. Royal Oak Township is working to ensure that both of these conditions are met. The Future Land Use map is annotated to help residents, property owners, and developers understand the meaning behind the colors used on the map. Notations explain the different future land use classifications and identify key concerns or considerations. Significant ideas expressed throughout the master plan are summarized on the map, helping even the casual reader recognize that, for example, two to three story brownstones, townhouses, and stacked ranches are envisioned in the High Density Residential areas or that a variety of uses with unique architectural features are encouraged in the Mixed Use Commercial/Office district.

In addition, the Township intends to prepare a poster/brochure of the master plan. *“To make the Master Plan more “user friendly” to residents and businesses alike, it was decided to develop the final product as an executive summary in a poster/brochure format.”* (Page 1) Copies will be distributed at key public locations throughout the Township and will be posted to the Township’s web site. This is an excellent approach to publicize the plan and put it in the hands of more residents and business owners. Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services (PEDS) staff commends Royal Oak Township for taking this proactive approach to taking the master plan to the citizens and putting it in an easy to read format. Hopefully, this will cause more residents to be aware of the plan and become involved in its implementation.

In terms of implementation, several chapters in this master plan identify actions that need to be undertaken. The final chapter on implementation provides a good explanation of various legislative and financing tools available to the Township. The text also describes next steps that should be undertaken. These include conducting a thorough review and update of the zoning ordinance, developing non-residential design standards mainly for Eight Mile Road, working with the Downtown Development Authority on streetscape and beautification projects, and improving code compliance. A long list of action items is also included in the Goals, Objectives, and Vision chapter. These include such diverse activities as creating housing options (such as brownstones, townhomes, and stacked ranches), reducing church-neighborhood conflicts, creating a comprehensive plan for updating recreational facilities, constructing a new recreation/community center, establishing neighborhood watch groups, obtaining a medical facility, and promoting economic development. Each of these activities is worthwhile to pursue and will help the Township implement its vision. However, what is missing is a comprehensive and prioritized listing of what needs to be done by whom (agency with responsibility for taking the lead).

Oakland County PEDS staff strongly encourages the Planning Commission along with their planning consultant to develop a comprehensive listing of actionable items that need to be undertaken to implement the plan. Then with the other major community groups, such as the Township Board, Downtown Development Authority, Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, and citizen and faith based organizations, each action should be prioritized and assignments should be made as to who will take the lead on each topic and what other organizations will be involved. Once this is accomplished, then timeframes could be identified for the highest priority items. Realistic timeframes should be considered such as within the next year, one to two years, three to five years, and long term actions that will take more than five years to accomplish.

Developing such an implementation strategy with all the stakeholders is a very useful exercise for a number of reasons. First, by bringing together all the appropriate groups, the goal will be to reach consensus on what the top projects are and where the majority of the time and effort will initially be focused. By identifying these primary next steps, the community has a road map to follow, and this should help elected and appointed officials from feeling overwhelmed that all the actions need to be accomplished immediately. As assignments are made, attention can be given to workload issues so no one group is saddled with all the responsibility. Finally, by having a written strategy, the community can chart its progress, and residents will understand the sequencing of actions. PEDS staff recommends revisiting this implementation checklist on a yearly basis to acknowledge progress being made, celebrate successes, and modify as necessary.

Conclusion

Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services staff commends Royal Oak Township for preparing this new update to its Vision 2020 Master Plan.

Based on the review of the surrounding communities' master plans, A Vision for the Year 2020, Royal Oak Township Master Plan Addendum is **not** inconsistent with the plan of any city, village, or township that received notice of the draft plan.

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

Enclosure