

June 30, 2008

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

SUBJECT: County Code No. MP 08-05, Planning & Economic Development Services' review of the City of Ferndale Master Plan (dated May 2008)

Dear Chairperson Potts and Committee Members:

The Ferndale Planning Commission has prepared a new master plan to replace its 1998 Master Plan. The following is a review and analysis of the proposed plan.

Under the amendments to the Municipal Planning Act, which took effect December 20, 2006, the City of Ferndale 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 July 8, 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 Ferndale 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 Ferndale Community Development Services Department, the Cities of Hazel Park, Oak Park, Pleasant Ridge, Royal Oak, and Detroit; Royal Oak Township; the Ferndale and Hazel Park School Districts; the Ferndale Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Development Authority; AT&T, Consumers Energy, DTE Energy, Canadian National Railways; and SEMCOG were sent a copy of the draft plan. All of these communities, agencies, and utilities were sent a notice of the CZC meeting. Comments were received from the Cities of Royal Oak and Oak Park, and are attached. It should be noted that the letter to DTE Energy was returned as "unable to forward".

Public Participation Process

The City of Ferndale started the master plan updating process in 2007. Since public participation was to be an important component, *"the City hired a professional planning firm, ENP and Associates to conduct a thorough process that included two visioning forums, a series of focus groups, and a web survey."* (Page 1-6) Over 50 people attended the visioning forums, while nearly 100 surveys were completed. The appendix of the plan contains detailed information from the two visioning forums. In addition, a separate report prepared by the consultant summarizes the public participation process and results.

Key issues identified through this public involvement process include downtown development, mixed use commercial, mass transit, neighborhood development, and tax base enhancement.

Plan Contents

The Plan consists of the following sections: Introduction; Vision, Goals and Actions; Land Use Plan; Population; Physical Features; Economics; Housing; Public Facilities; and Implementation. Four supplemental plans are to be included in the appendix although they were not included in the draft sent out for comment. They include the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the 2006 Downtown Development Plan, the Woodward Avenue Corridor Study, and Rethinking 8 Mile: A Framework for Unifying Elements.

Ferndale is a small, inner ring city in southeast Oakland County, adjacent to the City of Detroit. Its 2000 population was 22,105, which is almost a 16% decrease from the 1980 population of 26,227. According to SEMCOG's 2030 Regional Development Forecast, the population of Ferndale will decline slightly to 19,143 persons in 2020. Surrounding communities show a similar decline in population; this may be attributed to the national trend of shrinking person per household numbers.

The median age in Ferndale in 2000 was 33.5; this is lower than in some of the surrounding communities and lower than the Oakland County median age of 36.7. The largest age group in the City was the 25-34 year olds (23.4%). *“Also considered the “family forming” age group, this trend has been noticeable in the City as more young professionals and couples are moving into Ferndale’s affordable housing stock. Ferndale’s neighborhoods draw young families looking for close ties to neighbors and community.”* (Page 4-2)

In terms of land use, approximately 47% of Ferndale is in a residential use of single family homes and duplexes. *“Housing in Ferndale is composed primarily of older single-family homes on tree-lined streets in quiet neighborhoods. Over 85% of the housing units were built prior to 1960.”* (Page 7-2) Another 1.2% of land area is devoted to multiple family dwellings of condominiums, townhouses, and apartment buildings.

Street right-of-way is the next highest land use with over 26% of total land area. Woodward Avenue, located in the middle of the City, is the main north-south route. This principal arterial handles between 40,000-51,000 vehicles per day, according to 2005 traffic counts. To a much lesser degree, Hilton Road provides north-south access in the eastern part of Ferndale, and Livernois and Pinecrest provide north-south access in the western part. Mile Roads provide good east-west access. From a transportation standpoint, Ferndale is well positioned as I-696 forms part of its northern boundary, and Eight Mile Road forms its southern boundary. Both of these roads carry a tremendous amount of traffic. According to 2005 traffic counts, Eight Mile Road carries between 69,000 and 79,000 vehicles a day, while I-696 carries upwards of 202,000 vehicles per day. The Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) provides transit service to Ferndale.

Over 5% of the City of Ferndale is devoted to commercial and office uses. One percent of these uses are in downtown Ferndale, which is centered on the area of Nine Mile Road and Woodward Avenue. Ferndale's strong downtown contributes to the identity of the City with its mixture of shops, restaurants, and night life entertainment.

Industrial uses are mainly confined to the Grand Trunk Railroad corridor in the eastern part of the City. Almost 10% of land area is in an industrial use.

Another 9.1% of land area is devoted to institutional uses and parkland. These sites are scattered throughout the City with some large institutional sites located on Woodward Avenue, Pinecrest, and Woodward Heights. Ferndale City Hall is located on East Nine Mile Road, adjacent to the Library. The Library will be expanding its facility this summer. Many who participated in the public involvement process felt City Hall should expand as well. The plan identifies the need to evaluate the feasibility of expanding the Civic Center in the future.

According to the 2008 land use inventory prepared by the City, only 1.5% of Ferndale is considered vacant (39 acres). Ferndale is essentially a built out city where there are limited opportunities for redevelopment. Four sub-areas are identified in the plan where mixed use and infill development are appropriate.

The plan includes a brief discussion of environmental and historic resources. Since Ferndale has no rivers, lakes, or streams, there are limited natural resources to inventory. Ferndale is in the Clinton River watershed. Environmental concerns relate to storm water runoff and sites of environmental contamination. In terms of historic resources, there are still some significant structures that exist in the City of Ferndale. A listing of historic structures and sites is included in the plan.

Two important chapters in this master plan address goals and objectives and implementation. Goal statements have been prepared for the following topic areas: Land Use Patterns, Neighborhoods, Downtown, Economic Development, Image and Identity, Transportation, and Public Facilities. Three words that summarize the City's goals (and that are included on the cover of the master plan document) are **preserve, enhance, and diversify**. The City of Ferndale wants to preserve its unique identity of established neighborhoods and its downtown, enhance those elements that set it apart in the region, and diversify its tax base and housing and job opportunities. Specific action steps are identified for each goal statement. These action items are reiterated and expanded upon in the Implementation chapter. In addition, primary responsibility is identified for each action item, and a timeframe of ongoing, short term, or long term has been determined.

Future Land Use Map

The visual representation of the City's policies is shown on the Future Land Use map (attached). Slightly more than half (51.4%) of the City is planned for single family residential. Low Density Residential mainly encompasses neighborhoods of single family detached homes but institutional uses like parks, schools, churches, and municipal facilities are also allowed and included in this classification.

A second residential classification, Urban Residential, identifies those areas where a mixture of single family homes (detached and attached) and multi-family units such as townhouses, lofts, live/work units, and apartments are appropriate. The largest area of Urban Residential is shown both north and south of the downtown where the City wants to encourage a diversity of housing choice. *“Heights should not exceed 40 feet, except when abutting the downtown, where*

additional height may be desirable to offer more housing opportunities to provide increased density to support downtown businesses.” (Page 3-5)

A separate Downtown classification distinguishes the area of Nine Mile and Woodward Avenue from other Commercial/Office areas. The Downtown classification allows for a mixture of uses including retail, entertainment, service, office, institutional, and residential. Maintaining a walkable downtown with improved streetscape amenities, public art, appropriate signage, and adequate parking is a significant goal identified in the plan.

Key corridors for other commercial and office uses are Woodward Avenue both north and south of downtown, Eight Mile Road, and Nine Mile Road both east and west of downtown.

The Industrial classification on the Future Land Use map is confined to the Grand Trunk Railroad corridor. While this area currently consists of manufacturing, warehousing, and research and development uses, the City of Ferndale is looking for some redevelopment in this area. Green industries and high tech uses are especially encouraged. However, since much of the industrial land abuts residential neighborhoods, attention to landscaping, screening, and buffering will be required. *“New development shall be designed to minimize adverse effects to the community such as truck traffic, noise, or odors and shall be constructed with the best ecological practices to protect Ferndale’s neighborhoods.” (Page 3-7)*

Four separate sub-areas are included on the Future Land Use Map. The following are brief overviews of each sub-area.

South Livernois Sub-Area extends along Livernois from Marshall south to Eight Mile Road. The City would like to see a more pedestrian oriented district with *“creative businesses such as studios, galleries, photographers, designers, supporting businesses, limited retail, restaurants, cafes, live/work units, lofts and other appropriate and complimentary uses.” (Page 3-7)* Adding a narrow, landscaped boulevard to this section of Livernois is identified as a possible improvement that would enhance the district.

West Marshall Business Neighborhood Sub-Area encompasses Marshall from Woodward west to Allen. The current mixture of residential and small business uses should remain, and new uses should be of a smaller scale to co-exist with the adjacent neighborhoods. The pedestrian orientation of Marshall Street should be enhanced through lighting and landscaping; more on-street parking should be studied.

Hilton Corridor Sub-Area extends along the entire length of Hilton from Ten Mile to Eight Mile Roads. This two-mile stretch is the longest sub-area and has distinct land use characteristics in the north (neighborhood retail), central (industrial and office), and south (residential) portion of the corridor. Opportunities for infill development exist but scale and buffering need to be considered to be compatible with adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Hayes Lemmerz Sub-Area involves a large, former industrial site on Eight Mile at the southwestern edge of the City, adjacent to Royal Oak Township. The site presents an opportunity for a mixed use development of industrial, office, healthcare, recreation, and residential. However, due to the prior industrial operation, there may be some contamination

issues that need to be addressed. The City is interested in working with a developer to explore redevelopment possibilities. A key concern will be to ensure that new uses will be compatible with surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Comparison of the Draft 2008 Future Land Use Map to the 1998 Map

The two maps use different Future Land Use classifications so a direct comparison between the maps is not possible. While the 1998 map had eight classifications, the draft map has only five (with four additional Sub-Areas identified). Although they are defined differently, both maps have a Downtown, Commercial/Office, Industrial, and two Residential classifications. Public/Quasi-Public and two Mixed Use classifications from the 1998 map are no longer shown on the draft map. Areas that were classified as Public/Quasi-Public (which included schools, parks, churches, municipal buildings, etc.) are now included in the Low Density Residential and Urban Residential classifications, while Ferndale's municipal offices and library are now included as part of the Downtown classification. The previous Mixed Use classifications are now incorporated into the new Sub-Area classifications along Hilton and Livernois.

While the bulk of Ferndale remains Residential, with Industrial along and east of the railroad, and Commercial/Office along major thoroughfares, some significant changes have been made. The Downtown classification at Woodward Avenue and Nine Mile Road has been expanded west from Planavon to Livernois and east from Bermuda to Paxton, and also one block farther to the north and south along Woodward. On the 1998 map, Multi-Family Residential was planned to the northwest, northeast, and southeast of the Downtown. Urban Residential (which includes single family detached, attached, and multiple family units) is now planned in these same locations as well as to the southwest of the Downtown. This represents the City's desire to increase density around Downtown Ferndale. Four separate areas along Eight and Nine mile Roads that were classified Industrial on the 1998 map have been changed to Commercial/Office on the draft map. Also, a site at Woodward Heights and Huron, and one at Hilton and Bennett have been changed from Business & Office to Low Density Residential.

The four Sub-Areas described above under the Future Land Use Map section of this review also are additions to the draft map.

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 Ferndale's six neighboring communities.

North Boundary – City of Pleasant Ridge: The City of Pleasant Ridge Community Master Plan was adopted in September 1999. Ferndale shares the western half of its northern border and the northern part of its western border with the City of Pleasant Ridge. Starting at Ten Mile Road, going south, both Ferndale and Pleasant Ridge have planned for Industrial east of the Grand Trunk Railroad. From the railroad to Woodward Heights, Pleasant Ridge has planned for Institutional, Parks, and Single Family. Ferndale has a small amount of Industrial on the west side of the railroad, Low Density Residential, and then Commercial/Office at Woodward Heights. This Commercial/Office at the Woodward Heights and Bermuda intersection is

identified as a neighborhood shopping node but restrictions are called out in the plan. *“These neighborhood shopping nodes shall be permitted to continue and be enhanced for neighborhood retail use, however shall not degrade the integrity of the surrounding residential neighborhoods. All sites shall be designed to minimize noise, light and traffic impacts on abutting residential areas.”* (Page 3-7)

The remainder of the border, basically south of Woodward Heights to the western municipal limits is mainly residential in both communities. Ferndale is planning for Low Density Residential while Pleasant Ridge is planning for Single Family with one area of Institutional at Ridge Road (Pinecrest Road in Ferndale). The one exception to this residential use is at Woodward Avenue. Pleasant Ridge has planned for Commercial along Woodward, and Ferndale has planned for Commercial/Office, two very similar classifications. The boundary between Pleasant Ridge and Ferndale is primarily consistent; the few areas where there are differences in uses represent existing conditions.

North Boundary – City of Royal Oak: The Master Plan City of Royal Oak was adopted in August 1999. Ferndale shares the eastern half of its northern border with the City of Royal Oak. Both communities have planned for residential uses along the Ten Mile service drives of I-696 making this a compatible border. In Royal Oak, north of the service drive is planned for Single Family Residential-Medium Density (minimum 5,000 square foot lot) with two areas planned for Multiple Family Residential. In Ferndale, the Ten Mile frontage is planned for Urban Residential, which allows for a mixture of single and multiple family units, and in this location serves as a buffer between the service drive and lower density single family to the south. In addition, the wide expanse of the I-696 Expressway separates uses between Ferndale and Royal Oak so there is no impact between uses at this border. The City of Royal Oak sent a letter indicating “no objections” to the draft plan.

East Boundary – City of Hazel Park: The Master Plan Hazel Park was adopted in March 2000. Ferndale shares its entire eastern border with the City of Hazel Park. Ferndale has its entire eastern border planned for Low Density Residential. Exceptions to this are the frontage areas of Woodward Heights (Urban Residential planned here) and Nine and Eight Mile Roads (Commercial/Office). Hazel Park has similarly planned this border for Single Family Detached Residential with two large areas of Public planned at Woodward Heights and between Jarvis and Meyers (Marshall Road in Ferndale). At Nine and Eight Mile Roads, Hazel Park has planned for Light Industrial and Parking. Given the shallow depth of frontage along these two Mile Roads, Industrial uses in Hazel Park are compatible with the commercial and office uses in Ferndale.

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. Ferndale shares its entire southern border with the City of Detroit along Eight Mile Road. Ferndale essentially has planned its entire Eight Mile Road frontage for Commercial/Office. Exceptions to this are the Grand Trunk Railroad area planned for Industrial and two sub-area plans that front on Eight Mile Road: the South Livernois Sub-Area and the Hayes Lemmerz Sub-Area. The City of Detroit has a mixture of future land use classifications planned along Eight Mile Road. Based on the scale of the Detroit map, it is hard to see exactly where the western edge of the border with the City of Ferndale starts but it appears that Detroit has planned for Light Industrial across from the Hayes Lemmerz Sub-Area and then General Commercial to just east of Livernois. From this point to Woodward

Avenue, RL, Low Density Residential (up to 12 dwelling units per net acre) is planned. Between Woodward Avenue and the railroad tracks, Detroit has planned for Comparison Commercial and the State Fairgrounds. Just east of the railroad tracks, Low Density Residential is again planned. While the border is not consistently planned for commercial and office uses, there is much compatibility between uses planned on both sides of Eight Mile Road. In addition, the separation given by the width of the right-of-way along Eight Mile Road (including the boulevard) provides a buffer between the commercial uses in Ferndale and the residential uses in the City of Detroit.

Southwest Boundary – Royal Oak Township: The Royal Oak Township A Vision for the Year 2020 Master Plan was presented to the Oakland County Coordinating Zoning Committee on March 11, 2008 (MP 08-01) and was adopted on April 9, 2008. The City of Ferndale shares its southwestern corner with Royal Oak Township. Royal Oak Township has planned this border area exclusively for Medium Density Residential (up to 10 units per acre) 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 Low Density Residential. It should be noted that while planned for residential use, current boundary uses are institutional and municipal. The City of Ferndale’s Department of Public Works storage yard is located along the northern border, and a high school is at the northeastern corner.

South of the high school, Ferndale has identified one of its sub-areas, the Hayes Lemmerz Sub-Area. This former industrial site is being planned for possible redevelopment with a mixture of industrial, office, healthcare, recreation, and residential uses. The plan acknowledges the need to consider surrounding neighborhoods when redevelopment is proposed. *“Redevelopment of this site shall be designed to respect the surrounding residential neighborhoods and non-residential uses shall be oriented towards Eight Mile Road with truck traffic prohibited on Pinecrest.”* (Page 3-9) 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.

West Boundary – City of Oak Park: The City of Oak Park Master Plan was adopted in September 1996 and amended in 2005. Ferndale shares part of its western border with the City of Oak Park from Oak Ridge Avenue to just south of Marshall. Ferndale has planned for Low Density Residential along this entire border except for the frontage of Nine Mile Road where Urban Residential is planned. Oak Park has planned for One & Two Family north of Nine Mile Road and then Neighborhood Shopping for the frontage of Nine Mile Road. South of Nine Mile Road, more One & Two Family and a School are planned. This portion of the boundary is very compatible.

However, Oak Park has an area of Light Industrial planned from Capital Avenue (Pearson in Ferndale) to Northend that fronts on Republic Avenue. This three to four block older, industrial area along Republic Avenue is adjacent to single family residential in Ferndale. These land use classifications (Light Industrial adjacent to Low Density Residential) represent a condition that has been in existence for a number of years. While the residential uses in Ferndale have co-existed with the industrial uses in Oak Park, it is recommended that buffering and landscaping be considered if any of the industrial uses along Republic Avenue are proposed to change in the

future. The City of Oak Park sent a letter indicating the draft plan was “not inconsistent” with their plan.

Analysis

The City of Ferndale Master Plan is highly readable and gives a good overview of what the City is planning for in the next ten years. Several of the chapters are descriptive, providing background data on the City in terms of population, housing, and land use statistics. In particular, the Public Facilities chapter is very informative, and residents reading the plan should come away with a better understanding of municipal services and facilities.

However, the heart of the plan consists of the two chapters that identify goals and implementation. Goal statements are prepared for Land Use Patterns, Neighborhoods, the Downtown, Economic Development, Image and Identity, Transportation, and Public Facilities. General action steps are identified in the Vision, Goals and Actions chapter and are augmented with more specific action items in the Implementation chapter. This concluding chapter provides next steps for the Planning Commission, City Council, City Staff, Downtown Development Authority, and other groups to follow. The Ferndale Planning Commission and Staff should be commended for the time and effort they took to prepare a plan that includes such a strong implementation strategy.

Three action items in particular should be noted for their possible coordination with county initiatives. Under the Economic Development goal, the City wants to “*target and recruit technology and knowledge-based industries to locate in Ferndale.*” (Page 9-6) Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services Division (PEDS) is working on a Technology Planning Toolkit document that will help communities review their master plans, zoning ordinances, and permitting processes to see what changes should be made to prepare for the technology and knowledge-based industries of the New Economy. This document should be available in the next few months, and hopefully the Ferndale Planning Commission and City Staff will use it to help identify any needed changes to their zoning ordinance and their site plan review and permitting processes. The toolkit provides considerations for commercial, office, and industrial zoning districts as well as offering suggestions for home occupation businesses. This dovetails nicely with a second stated action to “*encourage home businesses in areas where they will not detract from their surroundings.*” (Page 9-6)

When the Technology Planning Toolkit is complete, PEDS will be offering one or more training sessions for planning commissioners and professional planners to explain all the information that is available. We hope the City of Ferndale will use this resource as they implement the steps necessary to attract these emerging sector and technology businesses.

The third action item expressed in the plan that relates to county resources is to “*work with the Historical Society to evaluate the feasibility of a local historic district.*” (Page 9-7) Under the Planning Group of PEDS, there is a Historic Preservation Program. Ronald Campbell, AIA, is the new Principal Planner/Preservation Architect on staff. The Historical Society and City Staff have been assigned primary responsibility for this action item. They should feel welcome to contact Ron at (248) 858-5436 for assistance as he has expressed his willingness to help Ferndale in this effort.

Finally, PEDS Staff recommends two additions to the City of Ferndale Master Plan. Since the completion of the Ferndale draft master plan, SEMCOG has released a new version of its Regional Development Forecast. This forecast looks at population projections to the year 2035. The new forecast differs from the 2030 numbers in that there is now a smaller decrease forecasted for Ferndale. The new forecast shows a 2020 population for Ferndale to be 21,634, compared to the 19,143 previously forecasted for 2020 and cited in the draft master plan. The 2035 forecast is for a population of 21,147. It is recommended that before the master plan is adopted, these new numbers be included in the plan.

Also, it would be helpful to include a regional map in the master plan that shows Ferndale's geographic location in context with its neighboring communities. Ferndale has many of the essential elements of place making that will make it attractive to the technology and knowledge-based industries. These elements include strong, walkable neighborhoods, a healthy downtown, a central location in the region, and good transportation access. A regional map will highlight Ferndale's phenomenal access via I-696 and I-75 that is not visible from any of the maps currently included in the master plan.

Conclusion

Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services Staff commends the City of Ferndale for preparing this new Master Plan. It is well written and includes a detailed implementation plan for the City to follow.

Based on the review of the surrounding communities' master plans, the City of Ferndale Master Plan 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

Enclosures