

July 11, 2008

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

SUBJECT: County Code No. MP 08-07, Planning & Economic Development Services' review of The Village of Wolverine Lake Master Plan (May 2008)

Dear Chairperson Potts and Committee Members:

The Wolverine Lake Planning Commission has prepared a new master plan to replace its 1986 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, Wolverine Lake 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 22, 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 Wolverine Lake 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 Wolverine Lake Clerk, the City of Walled Lake, Commerce Township, Consumers Energy, Detroit Edison, and SEMCOG were sent a copy of the draft plan. All of these communities, agencies, and utilities have received notice of the CZC meeting. No comments were received.

### **Public Participation Process**

Although no process is described in the draft Plan, it is noted that the Planning Commission received public input through surveys and public forums.

### **Plan Contents**

The Plan is divided into the following six chapters: Introduction; History and Character; Demographic Analysis; Existing Land Use; Natural Resources; and Future Land Use Goals. The Introduction notes that the plan contains "New Goals and Objectives" along with current land use and demographic data. Two items are to be included as appendices but they were not provided with the draft document. They are Goals as Established by the Village Council and the 2007 Lake Management Plan.

The Village of Wolverine Lake is a small residential community in Commerce Township surrounding Wolverine Lake. This 286-acre man-made lake, for which the community is named, accounts for over one-quarter of the Village's 1.69 square miles. The plan states that "*the lake is the nucleus and heart of the community. The citizens are dedicated to preserving and protecting the quality of the lake which they consider as their 'main street.'*" (Page 3)

The Village is serviced by the Walled Lake School District and Commerce Township Fire Department; however, it operates its own Police Department. While there are few local businesses, residents have convenient access to retail, services, and hospitals in nearby communities.

The Plan describes the Village's boards and commissions that are typical of most communities. One unique board is the Water Management Board, "*a recommending body which is responsible for monitoring and investigating lake issues, including water quality, weed treatment, fish stocking, and boat counts among others.*" (Page 6)

Wolverine Lake's population has slowly declined from 4,968 in 1980 to 4,415 in 2000 because the Village is built out and fewer people are living in each household. In 2000, the largest age group within the Village was 35-44 year olds (20%). Similar to many communities in the region, the 65 year old and above demographic is projected to increase significantly (118.4%) through the year 2030. The median family income is slightly lower than Oakland County, but higher than the State of Michigan.

In terms of existing land use, almost 43% of the Village is single family residential, accounting for nearly 60% of the community's non-water area. Many of the cottages that originally surrounded the lake are gradually being expanded or replaced by larger homes. The homes off the lake are described in the Plan as being very well maintained and provide a positive image due to modernizations and expansions. There is also a small amount of multiple family residential located on the roads bounding the Village, especially along South Commerce Road.

Excluding water and road right-of-way, the second most predominate land use within the Village is Recreation/Conservation. Clara Miller Park, situated in the northwest corner of the Village, is the only Village-owned park. Adjacent to the park is part of a multi-jurisdictional trail (Vita Trail) that provides a pedestrian connection to recreational areas in both Commerce Township and the City of Wixom. It is noted in the Plan that over half the Village residents do not have pedestrian access to Clara Miller Park without utilizing the edge of a major road. While Wolverine Lake does provide a focus for the Village, it also physically separates neighborhoods. In addition to Clara Miller Park, non-riparian residents have access to the lake at the MDNR boat launch adjacent to the Village Offices on the north side of the lake and at numerous subdivision-owned beach lots.

There are several small commercial/office establishments in the Village including a convenience store, auto wash, ice cream store, restaurant/tavern, credit union, and several professional offices. The Plan cites six specific areas with commercial/office uses and notes whether there is potential for additional development within each area. There are no existing industrial uses within the Village primarily due to the lack of major transportation corridors through or near the Village. There are less than 60 acres of vacant land remaining in the Village, which accounts for only 5.5% of its total area. The plan indicates "*the current zoning designation of these (vacant) parcels reflects the desired future land use.*" (Page 33)

The natural resources chapter was taken from the Village of Wolverine Lake Recreation Master Plan, adopted February 28, 2001. It describes the geology, soils, and vegetative features of the

Village and region. The chapter also summarizes a report that addressed the water quality of Wolverine Lake along with the health of fish, waterfowl, and lake plant life. Three specific concerns were identified in the report—invasive species (such as zebra mussels and purple loosestrife), Canada geese control, and educating residents about water quality. Wolverine Lake has recently joined the Huron River Watershed Council to work on environmental and watershed issues.

The eight Future Land Use Goals in the Plan are “*a summary prepared by the Planning Commission from those established by the Village Council in a March, 2005 work session.*” (Page 33) They emphasize providing the best possible quality of life for Wolverine Lake residents by providing adequate infrastructure, financial stability, a safe and healthy community, and recreational opportunities, in addition to enhancing property aesthetics.

### **Future Land Use Map**

The Future Land Use map (attached) is a visual representation of the Village’s land use policies. As the Village is predominately built-out, the map generally represents existing conditions and relates very closely to the current zoning map. Single Family Residential is the largest planned land use. On the map, there is a distinction between Single Family Residential and Lake-Front Residential; however, the Plan does not include text that describes policy differences between the two classifications. In fact, none of the future land use classifications are described in the text.

The map shows several areas planned for Multi-Family Residential. The largest area planned for Multi-Family is in the northeastern corner between South Commerce and Glengary Roads. With the exception of one vacant parcel (currently being developed as multiple family residential) and an existing church, all of the areas planned for Multi-Family Residential are currently being used as such.

There are four future land use categories for commercial and office use: Office, Neighborhood Commercial, Shopping Center Commercial, and General Commercial. The areas planned for commercial and office use generally represent existing conditions with two notable exceptions—the 15 acre vacant parcel in the northeast corner of the Village that is planned for Shopping Center Commercial and several single family homes on Glengary Road that are planned for Office.

The final future land use category on the map is Recreation & Conservation, which also generally reflects existing conditions. There are several large vacant parcels planned for Recreation & Conservation that are almost entirely wetland, but are currently held in private ownership. One is at the corner of Brisbane Street and Glen Court in the northwest part of the Village, and another is an island northwest of Helmsford Drive.

### **Comparison of the draft 2008 Future Land Use map to the 1986 map**

One primary difference between the draft future land use map and the 1986 map is the future land use categories used. The 1986 map includes Low Density Single Family Residential and a Medium Density Single Family Residential, whereas the draft map differentiates between Single Family Residential and Lake-Front Residential. Also, the 1986 map had two commercial/office categories—Office and Restricted Commercial, and General Commercial, while the draft map

depicts four—Office, Neighborhood Commercial, Shopping Center Commercial, and General Commercial. Aside from these categorical differences, the two maps are very similar.

### **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 Wolverine Lake’s neighboring communities.

**North, South, East, and West Boundaries – Commerce Township:** The Commerce Township Master Plan 2011 was adopted in June 2004 and amended in November 2006. The Village of Wolverine Lake shares its entire western and northern borders, as well as a portion of its southern and eastern borders with Commerce Township.

At the southern border east of Ladd Road, Commerce Township has planned for Industrial while the Village has planned for Single Family Residential. The area planned for Industrial in Commerce Township is currently a mixture of single family residential and vacant land and is largely covered by wetlands. It should be noted, however, that if this land does get developed for industrial, Commerce Township needs to give particular attention to site design, buffering, and access during site plan review to ensure that potential negative impacts are minimized for surrounding homes. West of Ladd Road along the southern border, both communities have planned for single family residential as currently exists. The uses are compatible along the border.

The western border, along Benstein Road, is planned for single family residential by both communities except near the Glengary Road intersection. Both communities have planned for Neighborhood Commercial at the intersection of Benstein Road and Glengary Road. This border is compatible.

Along the northern border, Wolverine Lake has planned several parcels fronting on Glengary Road for Office. While most of these office parcels are currently homes, two are in a commercial/office use. As the remainder of these single family residential parcels transition to an office use in the future, the Village should ensure that neighboring homes are not adversely affected. On the north side of this boundary, Commerce Township has planned for single family residential as currently exists. Farther eastward along Glengary Road, the Village has planned Single Family Residential with the exception of two parcels. The existing Village Offices are planned for Office and an existing commercial/office parcel is planned Neighborhood Commercial. Across from this is Commerce Township’s Hickory Glen Park. The uses along this border are compatible.

The northeast corner of the Village, surrounded on three sides by Commerce Township, is planned Multi-Family Residential, Shopping Center Commercial, and General Commercial. The entire western border abuts Commerce Township’s Hickory Glen Park. The northern portion of the eastern border is directly across South Commerce Road from Walled Lake Central High School. The remainder of the border is planned for Single Family Residential by Commerce Township. The northern border along South Commerce Road is planned for General

Commercial in the Village and Single Family Residential in Commerce Township. These future land use classifications represent existing conditions. The border in this area is compatible.

The southern portion of the Village's eastern border with Commerce Township is planned for Single Family Residential, Multi-Family Residential, and Recreation & Conservation. Commerce Township's border is planned for Single Family Residential. These planned land uses reflect existing conditions, and the border is compatible.

**South and East Boundaries – City of Walled Lake:** The City of Walled Lake Master Plan was adopted in August 2002. The Village of Wolverine Lake shares its southern border and a portion of its eastern border with the City of Walled Lake.

The portion of the Village's eastern border with Walled Lake north of Decker Road is planned for multiple family residential by both communities with two exceptions. Two parcels in the Village are planned for Single Family Residential, and the northwest corner at South Commerce Road and Decker Road is planned for Office. The planned land use in this area is compatible.

The Village's eastern border south of Decker Road is planned for Single Family Residential as is the City of Walled Lake. Two parcels in Walled Lake along this border are planned Public/Semi-Public (two existing churches). At South Commerce and Wolverine Drive, Wolverine Lake has planned for Multi-Family Residential and Neighborhood Commercial. The Neighborhood Commercial is adjacent to a telephone utility building (Public/Semi-Public) and across South Commerce Road from an existing shopping center in Walled Lake. The border is compatible in this area.

Wolverine Lake's southern border is planned for Single Family Residential and is adjacent to an existing apartment complex in Walled Lake planned for Multiple Family. Trees along the rear property lines provide a buffer between these existing land uses.

### **Analysis**

The Village of Wolverine Lake is a unique community that finds its identity and character from Wolverine Lake itself. As noted earlier, the Plan refers to the lake as the resident's "main street." The Plan does a good job of communicating the importance of the lake as a natural and social resource within the community. The history of the lake and how it contributed to the creation of the Village is explained in the plan. Photographs of residents enjoying the lake and of homes on the lake help the reader understand the importance of the lake and the special character of this small village.

However, two essential elements are missing from the plan. The Village of Wolverine Lake Master Plan is mainly descriptive in nature. It contains the requisite land use and demographic information but does not include an explanation of future land use categories or any future action steps to implement the plan.

The Future Land Use map is included but none of the classifications are described. The "Commercial and Office Development" portion of the Existing Land Use chapter provides a detailed assessment of the location and types of commercial/office within the community in

2003. While the Future Land Use map differentiates between four intensities of commercial/office use, the master plan text does not provide any description of these categories. It appears that these classifications relate to the same four categories in the zoning ordinance, but readers may not have access to the zoning ordinance. By defining each future land use category within the master plan, the Village will provide residents, property owners, and developers with a much clearer understanding of the character, types of uses, and vision that is planned for each category. Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services (PEDS) staff recommends the Wolverine Lake Planning Commission add a description of each future land use category to the Plan.

The Plan also cites eight future land use goals that were summarized from goals identified by the Village Council in March 2005. The Plan does not, however, provide any means through which these goals will be implemented. More and more, PEDS staff is seeing implementation strategies included in master plans. These strategies identify specific action steps that will be undertaken, assign responsibility to the appropriate board or staff, and indicate priority and a timeframe for accomplishment. The goals contained in this plan are very broad. Once the plan is adopted, the Planning Commission and Village Council should have some road map to follow. Even though the community is mainly built out, the plan should let residents know what steps will be taken to address key issues like pedestrian access, property maintenance, lake quality, and recreational facilities. The Wolverine Lake Planning Commission is encouraged to prepare an implementation strategy that addresses how goals will be achieved. If they are interested in seeing how other communities have addressed this, PEDS staff can share with them recent examples of well done implementation plans.

One potential action step that the Village could consider would be to participate in the Oakland County “Green Infrastructure” Visioning process. The purpose is to *“identify an interconnected network of green space that conserves natural ecosystem values and functions, guides sustainable development, and provides associated economic and quality-of-life benefits to our communities.”* It is evident that even though the Village of Wolverine Lake is small in area, it has potential to provide several important green connections with its neighbors utilizing natural areas and the lake itself. Jim Keglovitz with our Environmental Stewardship Unit will be contacting the Village of Wolverine Lake in the future to invite them to participate in this effort. We hope representatives from the Village will be involved as this process complements the natural resource protection ethic already demonstrated by the Village.

PEDS staff also recommends that updated population forecasts be included in this plan. SEMCOG has recently 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 a much smaller decline in population from 2000 to 2035. The new forecast shows a 2030 population for Wolverine Lake to be 4,122, compared to the 3,875 previously forecasted for 2030 and cited in the draft master plan. The 2035 forecast actually shows an increase from the 2030 population to 4,234. While these numbers may be small overall differences, it shows that instead of an 18% population decrease from 1990 to 2030, only a 10% decrease from 1990 to 2035 is now projected.

The Planning Commission may want to consider updating some other references in the Plan as well. On page 18, the listing of commercial and offices uses was based on a 2003 inventory while the goals were based on a 2005 work session. Updating this will set the right tone that this is a 2008 master plan.

Finally, it is noted in the Introduction of the Plan that the Planning Commission and Planning Consultant received input through surveys and public forums. Including the results of these public participation opportunities in the Appendix would further support the notion that the Plan is a community vision.

**Conclusion**

Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services staff commends Wolverine Lake for preparing this new Master Plan.

Based on the review of the surrounding communities' master plans, The Village of Wolverine Lake 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

Chris Moshier  
GIS Technician

Enclosure