

November 20, 2008

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

SUBJECT: County Code No. MP 08-14, Planning & Economic Development Services' review of the City of Lathrup Village Community Master Plan (Draft dated September 2008)

Dear Chairperson Potts and Committee Members:

The City of Lathrup Village Planning Commission has prepared a new master plan to replace its 1980 The Lathrup Village Plan. The following is a review and analysis of the proposed plan.

Under the amendments to the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, which took effect September 1, 2008, Lathrup Village 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 December 2, 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 Lathrup Village 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 City's Planning Commission, the City of Southfield, Consumers Energy, AT&T Michigan, Detroit Edison, Southeastern Oakland Water Authority, and Comcast were sent a copy of the draft plan. All of these communities and agencies have received notice of the CZC meeting. No comments were received as of November 20<sup>th</sup>.

### **Public Participation Process**

Residents were invited to attend a Visioning Workshop on January 20, 2007. At the workshop, attendees participated in a number of exercises to identify assets and challenges within the City, needed improvements, and their preferred vision for the future of Lathrup Village. Through collective voting on priorities, the following five main ideas rose to the top:

1. Expansion of the City Center Concept
2. Business Improvements Through Architecture
3. Walkable Community
4. The "Lathrup Promise"
5. Improved Entrances

*"Other issues raised at the January 2007 "vision session" related to transportation included mass transit, pedestrian and bike travel, the idea of a pedestrian bridge across Southfield and the potential of a boulevard." (Page 13)*

## Plan Contents

The Plan consists of the following four sections: Our Community, Our Vision, Our Plan, and Our Program. An existing land use inventory, transportation overview, and demographic statistics are included in the first section under Our Community. The implementation strategies identified in the plan are included in the last section entitled Our Program.

Lathrup Village is a small, nearly built out city located in southeastern Oakland County. Much of the growth in the community occurred between 1960 and 1980. Lathrup Village had a 2000 population of 4,236, which is approximately a 2.2% decrease from its 1990 population of 4,329. The plan indicates that SEMCOG projects a further decline to 3,863 persons by 2030. However, it should be noted that SEMCOG has released a new version of its Regional Development Forecast that looks at population projections to the year 2035. The new forecast differs from the previous 2030 numbers cited in the plan in that there is now an increase forecasted for Lathrup Village. The new forecast shows a 2030 population for Lathrup Village to be 4,287, compared to the 3,863 previously forecasted. The population forecast for 2035 is 4,335. It is recommended that before the master plan is adopted, these new numbers be included in the plan.

The history of Lathrup Village contributes to its unique physical layout. The City was developed as a planned community by Louise Lathrup Kelly, beginning in the 1920s. She was strongly influenced by the Garden City Movement that was started in England in the late 1800s. A key principle that she transferred to the 1,000 acres she acquired was a “*clearly defined city center with roads geometrically planned around civic spaces and buildings.*” (Page 33) An aerial view shows how Sunset Boulevard and Goldengate Drive radiate out from this city center planned along Southfield Road. California Drive encircles this octagonal shaped center.

Unfortunately, the town center never developed as it was envisioned. Southfield Road instead became the commercial focus. However, it developed as a commercial strip. In addition, its right-of-way width of approximately 160 feet creates a barrier for pedestrians and serves to separate the community rather than bring it together. Much of the plan concentrates on ways to reinvent Southfield Road so it functions as it was originally intended with a strong city center.

The plan recognizes the work being done by the Road Commission for Oakland County to redo the roadway. “*The Oakland County Road Commission is in the design phase of reconstructing Southfield Road as a boulevard incorporating in several locations the “Michigan Left” turn lane. The width of the boulevard median will range between 40 feet between intersections and 60 feet at the intersections and will look similar to portions of the Woodward Avenue median.*” (Page 16) Creating a boulevard on Southfield Road will require sacrificing some (or all depending on location) of the off-street parking currently situated in the front of the businesses. About 333 parking spaces will be lost. Parking improvements, including new parking lots and changes to the zoning ordinance, are needed to make up for this shortage.

In the core “Village Center” area, the City would like to encourage a pedestrian friendly area with mixed retail, residential, and civic uses, improved landscaping, and coordinated signage. To have the Village Center function as envisioned, a speed limit of 35 miles per hour (down from the currently posted 45 mph) is deemed necessary. Other recommendations include on-street parking within the Village Center and traffic signals at both ends of California Drive. The

plan also mentions the need for access management to limit the number of driveways currently along Southfield Road.

Since there are functionally obsolete buildings located along Southfield Road, redevelopment is envisioned. The Planned Unit Development zoning technique is preferred for select parcels to allow for flexibility in redevelopment along this main corridor. In addition, height increases will give prominence to this part of the City. Four stories will be allowed within the core of the Village Center with height stepped back to 2.5 stories near the residential. Two and a half (2.5) to 3 stories will be allowed along other segments of Southfield Road.

Other commercial corridors mentioned in the plan are Twelve Mile Road and the service drives to I-696 Expressway along Eleven Mile Road. Office is the predominant use along Twelve Mile Road. A mixture of office, commercial, and multiple family uses are found along the north side of Eleven Mile Road. Only about eight (8) acres are classified as vacant land.

While much of the plan is devoted to improving the commercial corridors, the residential nature of the City is also addressed. Approximately 55% of Lathrup Village is in a single family residential use. Since another 33% of the City is composed of rights-of-way, the City is, in essence, mainly residential. The City is divided into five neighborhoods, and neighborhoods are compared based on housing characteristics. *“The City has developed over an extended time frame and thus, the neighborhoods display considerable diversity of housing size, lot size, age, and architectural form.”* (Page 6) Ninety percent (90%) of the homes were built prior to 1980, and much of the City is in a historic district. The historic district encompasses almost the entire portion of the City north of I-696 and a small area on the south side of the expressway. Lot sizes vary depending on the neighborhood although most of the lots range in size from 8,000 square feet to under an acre. The largest lots are located west of Santa Barbara Street and north of Eleven Mile Road. This Northwest neighborhood is where Louise Lathrup Kelly built her home in the 1920s. The newest homes are found in both the Southwest and Southeast neighborhoods, located south of I-696.

The final chapter gives specific recommendations on implementing the plan. Enhancing walkability is a primary goal. The plan notes a study should be undertaken to identify needed sidewalk additions and replacements. Traffic calming techniques may need to be employed to address pedestrian safety. Zoning ordinance text changes will be needed to allow for a mixture of uses. The plan recommends the development of a Village Center Overlay District to regulate the new development that is desired. The Downtown Development Authority could play a role in community revitalization by acquiring select properties and land banking them for future redevelopment. Other recommendations included in this chapter are participation in mass transit options, paving all residential streets, and increasing code enforcement. An Action Program identifies nine key projects that should be undertaken in the near term to implement the plan.

### **Future Land Use Map**

The visual representation of the City’s policies is shown on the Future Land Use map (attached). Most of Lathrup Village is already developed; Single Family Residential is the predominant use planned and is found in all four quadrants of the City. *“This master plan does not recommend*

*any change to the existing residential land use pattern but suggests that a property maintenance program be used to manage blight and ensure that buildings are properly repaired.” (Page 35)*

Multiple Family Residential use is limited to the north side of I-696 along the Eleven Mile Road Service drive and the east side of Evergreen Road. These are the same areas shown as Multiple Family Residential on the Existing Land Use map.

One large area of Institutional use is shown at the northwest corner of the City along Twelve Mile Road. This is primarily the Southfield Lathrup High School but a small portion is the City’s Department of Public Services facility.

The central feature of the map is the Village Center located on Southfield Road. As was previously described, this area is intended to serve as a town center with a mixture of retail, office, residential, and civic uses in a pedestrian oriented environment. South of the Village Center, Pedestrian oriented Commercial is planned. Uses in this classification would include lower intensity offices and retail shops, like real estate offices or bookstores and coffee shops.

North of the Village Center and south of I-696, Mixed Use is planned along Southfield Road. Due to the depth limitations of the existing frontage parcels, the plan includes a Mixed Use Residential Component Expansion Zone. *“These zones would accommodate the expansion of only attached residential structures along the side street and supporting off-street parking. Parking would be internalized in the development and screened from adjacent single family residences.” (Page 44)*

Nodes of Commercial with a Vehicular orientation are planned at the intersections of Twelve Mile Road and Southfield Road, and Eleven Mile Road and Southfield Road. While the map shows small areas of Commercial-Vehicular: Expansion Zones, there is not a description of this term in the master plan.

Office is planned along Twelve Mile Road and at Eleven Mile and Evergreen. Due to the small size of the community, no Industrial is planned.

### **Comparison of the Draft 2008 Future Land Use Map to the 1980 Map**

The biggest change between the 1980 map and the draft 2008 map is the construction of I-696 along Eleven Mile Road. This construction was highly contested by the City of Lathrup Village; I-696 serves to isolate the southern portion of the City from the northern part.

Another new feature on the 2008 map is the Historic District Boundary that was approved by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior in 1998.

Looking at both maps, some classifications have changed and some new classifications have been added. The 1980 map described commercial and office use by levels of intensity. The classifications were called Office and Low-Intensity Business, Medium-Intensity Business, and High-Intensity Business. These same areas are now called either Office, Mixed Use, Commercial-Pedestrian, or Commercial-Vehicular. The Mixed Use category is planned for areas that were primarily Office and Low-Intensity Business previously. The Village Center is a new

classification that encompasses areas previously planned for Single Family Residential, Public and Semi-Public, Office and Low-Intensity Business, and Medium-Intensity Business in 1980. The Mixed Use Residential Component Expansion Zone and Commercial-Vehicular: Expansion Zone are new designations on the 2008 map.

The 1980 map showed Single-Family Residential planned throughout the City with the exception of one circular area located in the Northwest neighborhood. Here, Single-Family Cluster Housing was envisioned to develop adjacent to Louise Lathrup Kelly's original home. On the 2008 Future Land Use map, there is only one Single Family Residential classification because traditional single family detached homes eventually developed in this area that was planned for cluster housing.

Multiple Family Residential was previously called Two-Family/Multi-Family Residential. This classification has decreased from the 1980 map as the multiple family developments between Eldorado Place and Santa Barbara Street along Eleven Mile Road were demolished for the construction of the expressway.

Two areas of Open Space and Recreation were shown on the 1980 map. Only one Open Space area is now shown on the 2008 map. The previous Open Space and Recreation parcel in the northwest corner of the City, close to La Crosse and Wiltshire Boulevard, is now planned for Single Family Residential. However, a larger Open Space corridor is now shown on the southeast corner of Eleven Mile Road and Rainbow Drive. This park not only serves as a buffer to the I-696 Expressway, but also provides a recreation site for the City's southern population.

The Institutional category, previously called Public and Semi-Public, has remained the same with the exception of a small parcel on the west end of Sunnybrook Avenue that was added to the 2008 map. In addition, some of the Village Center area was previously Public and Semi-Public.

### **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. Lathrup Village is completely surrounded by the City of Southfield. The following provides detail on how the draft plan coordinates with its only neighboring community.

**North, South, East, and West Boundary – City of Southfield:** The City of Southfield Master Plan Executive Summary is dated November 1988. The Future Land Use Plan map is undated. However, the City of Southfield is nearing the completion of a master plan update. While the Oakland County Coordinating Zoning Committee has not yet received the Southfield draft master plan for review, Southfield does have a draft Future Land Use map on its web site. This 2008 draft map was used for purposes of this review. Lathrup Village is completely surrounded by the City of Southfield. For most of the border, Southfield is planning for Moderate Density Single Family Residential (lots less than 20,000 square feet). This coordinates well with Lathrup Village's eastern, southern, and western border where either Single Family Residential or Multiple Family Residential is planned. Southfield is planning for Low Density Multiple-Family Residential adjacent to the Institutional planned at Lathrup Village's northwest corner.

Along Twelve Mile Road, Lathrup Village has planned for Institutional at the western edge then mainly Office for the rest of the frontage. This is compatible with the Local Mixed-Use that Southfield has planned east of Southfield Road. However, west of Southfield Road, the City of Southfield has planned for Moderate Density Single Family Residential. At the Southfield Road intersection both communities are planning for commercial uses, Commercial-Vehicular in Lathrup Village and North Southfield Road Subarea in Southfield (a unique area that contains a mixture of multi-cultural retail and services).

Adjacent to Lathrup Village's western border, south of I-696, the City of Southfield has planned City Centre Subarea. This portion of the Southfield Civic Center is next to Single Family Residential in Lathrup Village; however there is a significant amount of setback and vegetative buffer that separates homes from this more intensive institutional use where the Southfield Public Library and other civic uses are located. Overall, the boundary between the two communities appears compatible.

### **Analysis**

It has been almost 30 years since the last master plan for Lathrup Village was prepared. While the City was mainly built out by 1980, there have been some significant changes since the last plan, mainly the construction of I-696 through the southern part of the City. The expressway separates the southern part of Lathrup Village from the northern part. Similarly, Southfield Road divides the eastern part of the City from the western portion. The key focus of this plan is to redevelop Southfield Road in such a way that unites the City rather than divides it. The Village Center concept envisions a vibrant city gathering place with mixed uses and a pedestrian orientation. Photos from other locations help illustrate how the Village Center could look and function. Specific land uses are suggested to give further definition to this concept. County staff commends the City for its strong emphasis on re-establishing the town center concept that was a key feature of the original plan for the City. If developed as planned, the Village Center will strengthen the identity of Lathrup Village.

According to the master plan, it is essential that the function of Southfield Road change to allow for slower speeds in the Village Center area and opportunities for pedestrian crossings. For this reason, County staff recommends that Lathrup Village share this master plan with the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) to ensure that RCOC understands what the City wants to accomplish in this area. The reduction in speed limit and the addition of traffic signals will require the involvement of the Road Commission; therefore, it will be important that they comprehend the significance of the Village Center within the City of Lathrup Village.

While the plan focuses on the main topics identified through the public visioning session, the Planning Commission may want to consider adding other dimensions to their master plan. For instance, there is no mention of environmental components in this draft plan other than the possible need for a tree preservation ordinance. Stormwater management is a topic being addressed in many master plans. Specific designs for Southfield Road and the Village Center are listed as future action steps. County staff recommends laying the foundation in the master plan for the incorporation of stormwater management in both of these projects. Stormwater management may be a key objective in the design of the medians along Southfield Road, while stormwater management techniques like pervious pavers might be appropriate when the Village

Center is being designed. Rain gardens could be promoted in both locations as well as in the residential neighborhoods.

In addition, Lathrup Village administrative staff participated in the Green Infrastructure Visioning session held with City of Southfield officials on April 17, 2007. Inclusion of the results of this session in the plan would acknowledge the opportunities for linked open spaces with the City of Southfield. If Lathrup Village wants to include this information, graphics from the visioning session can be obtained from Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services by calling Kristen Wiltfang at 248/975-4267.

Finally, the Planning Commission may want to consider if any emerging topics like the impact of foreclosures on a community should be added to the plan. Since Lathrup Village relies on its residential base for a large portion of its tax base, this may be a timely topic to consider.

### **Conclusion**

Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services Staff commends the City of Lathrup Village for preparing this new Master Plan.

Based on the review of the surrounding community's master plan, the City of Lathrup Village Community 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

Enclosure