

January 20, 2009

Commissioner Robert Gosselin, Chairperson  
Oakland County Coordinating Zoning Committee  
1200 North Telegraph Road  
Pontiac, MI 48341

SUBJECT: County Code No. MP 08-15, Planning & Economic Development Services' review of the Master Plan City of the Village of Clarkston (Draft dated August 2008)

Dear Chairperson Gosselin and Committee Members:

The City of the Village of Clarkston Planning Commission has prepared a new master plan to replace its 1997 Master 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, Clarkston 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 January 27, 2009 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 Clarkston 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 Manager's Office, Independence Township, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, Detroit Energy, and Consumers Energy 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.

### **Public Participation Process**

While the plan notes the importance of citizen participation and public support, no public participation process is documented in the draft plan.

### **Plan Contents**

The plan consists of the following three main chapters: Introduction, Background Studies Summary, and Master Plan. Land use, demographic, circulation, and natural resource information is summarized in the plan with more detailed information included in the appendix.

Clarkston is a small, nearly built out city located in the middle of Oakland County. *"In 1992, Clarkston made the transition from a village form of government to a city form of government, which allowed greater autonomy as a governing body under Michigan State Law. The City of the Village of Clarkston kept "Village" in its title to convey that the small town character of the community should be preserved."* (Page 5)

Clarkston had a 2000 population of 962, which is approximately a 4.2% decrease from its 1990 population of 1,005. The plan indicates that the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) projects a further decline to 957 persons by the year 2030. However, it should be noted that in April 2008, SEMCOG 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 Clarkston. The new forecast shows a 2030 population for Clarkston to be 1,131, compared to the 957 previously forecasted. The population forecast for 2035 is 1,114. County staff recommends that before the master plan is adopted, these new numbers be evaluated for inclusion in the plan.

Over half (59%) of the City is in a single family residential use. Smaller residential lots sizes of less than a ¼ acre are found surrounding the downtown area. Somewhat larger residential lots are in the northern and southern parts of the City, especially surrounding the lakes. A few multiple family sites are located on the periphery of the City. Much of the northern part of the City is in a historic district. The historic district encompasses all of the downtown and includes the residential districts immediately surrounding the downtown, extending along Main Street to the northern city limits. The stately homes fronting on Main Street contribute to the historic character of this small city.

A traditional, Nineteenth Century downtown defines Clarkston. The downtown is centrally located on both sides of Main Street north of Waldon Road. Another key feature of the community is Depot Park, a relatively large park located to the southwest of the downtown. Due to the small size of the City (approximately one-half square mile), all residents are within walking distance of the downtown and Depot Park. Sidewalks provide good pedestrian circulation throughout most of the City; this pedestrian-friendly orientation is considered a major asset for the City.

Main Street is M-15, a state trunk line that provides regional north-south access in this part of Oakland County. The plan acknowledges the importance of M-15 but also its potential impact on the downtown. As a regional arterial it carries larger traffic volumes but when it traverses through Clarkston, the City desires it to function as a “Main Street” with slower speeds and on-street parking. *“A re-configuration of pavement is recommended for M-15, to narrow excessively wide vehicular lanes, widen sidewalks and create sidewalk expansions between groups of on-street parking spaces for street trees and street furniture.”* (Page 33)

Environmental issues are addressed briefly in the plan. The Clinton River flows through the City and flows between several of the lakes and wetland areas contained within Clarkston. The plan indicates a need for a stormwater management ordinance, especially since the City relies on groundwater for its drinking supply.

The plan includes a lengthy listing of goals and objectives. Goal statements have been prepared for the following nine topic areas:

1. Maintain Community Character
2. Preserve Historic Character
3. Ensure Compatible Land Uses Within the Village
4. Protect Village Integrity

5. Minimize Non-local Vehicular Intrusion
6. Promote Pedestrian Atmosphere
7. Protect Natural Resources
8. Preserve and Enhance Parks and Public Open Space
9. Ensure On-going Planning and Implementation

The implementation section goes into considerable detail on specific recommendations to implement the plan. Additional planning is recommended for the downtown in the form of more specific plans such as a Business District Retail Plan that would examine the types of retail that should be recruited and a Parking Improvement Plan that would evaluate current parking needs and necessary changes. Revisions to the zoning and sign ordinances may be in order to bring these regulations in line with the master plan once it is adopted. As Clarkston does not have a Recreation Master Plan, developing such a plan also is recommended as it would make the City eligible for grant funding. Other recommendations in the plan include developing a Capital Improvement Program and encouraging cooperation and coordination with Independence Township. Potential funding sources to undertake some of the projects envisioned in the plan are listed as well.

### **Future Land Use Map**

The visual representation of the City's policies is shown on the Future Land Use map (attached). Most of Clarkston is already developed; Single Family Residential is the predominant use planned. Two densities are shown on the map: Single Family Suburban Density Residential (fewer than three units per acre) and Single Family Village Density Residential (two to five units per acre). The Village Density is located east and west of the downtown, while the Suburban Density is mainly north and south of the downtown. Many of the areas planned for the Suburban Density are adjacent to the lakes located within the City.

Planned Multiple Family Residential use is limited to the following three locations: the western edge of the City at Madison Street, one parcel on the east side of Main Street at the northern city limits, and two parcels on the west side of Main Street south of the downtown. Density for Multiple Family Residential should not exceed six dwelling units per acre.

The downtown, centered on Main Street, is planned for Village Commercial. *“This land use category is designed to satisfy the need for a vital mixed use village center with pedestrian-oriented retail and office uses on the ground floor and office or residential uses in the upper floors. The intent of the Plan is to maintain the existing village center with the potential for infill development of the same character.”* (Page 31)

The only other classifications shown on the map are Civic and Park. Civic uses include a church site, City offices, and the site of the current but soon to be relocated Independence Township offices on Main Street. Depot Park and small lake access sites represent the areas planned for Park on the Future Land Use Map.

It should be noted that there is one area of possible change on the Future Land Use map. Several vacant parcels are at the southeast corner of Main Street and Waldon Road. The Future Land Use map shows this area planned for Single Family Suburban Density Residential. However, the

severe slope on these parcels and their proximity to the Clinton River may make them more conducive to a recreational/conservation use. The plan text indicates these parcels as a “potential park acquisition site”.

### **Comparison of the Draft 2008 Future Land Use Map to the 1997 Map**

The same future land use classifications were used on both the 1997 map and the 2008 draft, so a direct comparison is possible. Both maps contain boundary lines depicting the 100 Year Flood Plain Boundary and the Historic District Boundary.

The 1997 map and the draft 2008 map are almost identical except for two parcels that are now planned for Multiple Family Residential. The first parcel is located on the east of Main Street at the northernmost border and was previously planned for Single Family Suburban Density Residential. The second parcel is located on the southwest corner of Holcomb Street and West Washington Street and was previously planned for Single Family Village Density Residential.

### **Coordination with Surrounding Community Boundary**

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. Clarkston is completely surrounded by Independence Township. The following provides detail on how the draft plan coordinates with its only neighboring community.

**North, South, East, and West Boundary – Independence Township:** The Independence Township Vision 2020 Update Master Plan was adopted on November 18, 2008. Independence Township completely surrounds the City of the Village of Clarkston. Clarkston has planned for Single Family Suburban Density Residential (fewer than three units per acre) for all areas adjacent to Independence Township except for an area of Civic at Waldon Road in the southeast corner, Multiple Family Residential at the west central edge and one parcel on the east side of Main Street at the northern city limits, and Park at White Lake Road.

Similarly, Independence Township has planned for Suburban Residential (one dwelling unit/acre) and Single Family Residential (15,000 square foot minimum lots) for all areas around Clarkston except for the M-15, Waldon Road, and White Lake Road corridors. North of Clarkston along M-15, Independence Township has planned for Office Service, while Office Service and General Commercial are planned on M-15 south of Clarkston. At Waldon Road, Independence Township has planned for Public, Semi-Public (school) adjacent to the Civic (church) planned in Clarkston. At White Lake Road, Independence Township has General Commercial and Public, Semi-Public (cemetery). These non-residential classifications represent existing uses. While the border is mainly compatible, the Clarkston Master Plan includes a Resources and Constraints map that shows the northern and southern entryways along M-15 as “Suburban Commercial incompatible with Village character”. *“The surrounding suburban commercial setting emphasizes the Village’s unique characteristics, and helps to establish its edges. Maintaining these edges and the existing pedestrian-friendly character is important to maintaining the Village’s character.”* (Page 27)

## **Analysis**

One of Clarkston's greatest assets is its downtown. The plan acknowledges the need to preserve the historic character of the downtown and encourages mixed uses by allowing residential use on the second floor of retail buildings. The City of the Village of Clarkston recently was accepted into a new Mentoring Program that is part of the Main Street Oakland County (MSOC) Program. This program is designed to educate communities about the MSOC Program and help position them so they can be accepted into the full Main Street Program if they decide to apply. It is hoped that the City will take full advantage of this opportunity, as the Main Street Program could be an excellent tool for Clarkston to use in strengthening their downtown. Free training workshops and consultation with County staff are provided under the Mentoring Program. The City may want to add the Main Street Oakland County program to the list of tools found in the implementation section of the plan.

According to the master plan, it is essential that M-15 through the City of the Village of Clarkston function as a "Main Street" with slower speeds, on-street parking, and opportunities for pedestrian crossings. *"The Plan recommends the Village work with the Michigan Department of Transportation to ensure communication of Clarkston's intent and vision for M-15 as a small town Main Street rather than a high-speed through road."* (Page 33) As a good first step, County staff recommends that Clarkston share this master plan with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to ensure that MDOT understands what the City wants to accomplish in this area.

## **Conclusion**

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

Based on the review of the surrounding community's master plan, the Master Plan City of the Village of Clarkston 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,

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Principal Planner

Enclosure