

January 20, 2009

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

SUBJECT: County Code No. MP 08-16, Planning & Economic Development Services' review of the Master Plan City of Farmington (Third Draft dated November 11, 2008)

Dear Chairperson Gosselin and Committee Members:

The City of Farmington 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 Michigan Planning Enabling Act, which took effect September 1, 2008, Farmington 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 Farmington 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 Farmington Planning Commission, the Cities of Farmington Hills and Livonia; the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments; the Road Commission for Oakland County; and the Michigan Department of Transportation were sent a copy of the draft plan. All of these communities and agencies have received notice of the CZC meeting. Comments have been received from the Michigan Department of Transportation and are attached.

Public Participation Process

No public participation process is documented in this draft plan.

Plan Contents

The Plan consists of the following seven chapters: Introduction; Community Profile; Goals and Objectives; Land Use; Sub-areas and Redevelopment; Transportation and Community Facilities; and Implementation. An appendix contains illustrations showing housing redevelopment options.

Farmington is “*one of the oldest communities in Oakland County...During the time of slavery, Farmington served as a station on the Underground Railroad...and was the home of Michigan’s 26th Governor, Fred Warner, who served from 1905 to 1911.*” (Page 2-1) This rich history contributes to the City’s unique character. Located in south central Oakland County, this historic city is mainly surrounded by the newer city of Farmington Hills, which incorporated in 1973.

Farmington had a 2000 population of 10,423 which is a modest increase from its 1990 population of 10,132. The plan indicates that the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) projects a slight decline to 10,317 persons by 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 a very small increase forecasted for Farmington. The new forecast shows its 2030 population to be 10,530, compared to the 10,317 previously forecasted. The population forecast for 2035 is 10,488. County staff recommends that before the master plan is adopted, these new numbers be included in the plan.

Approximately 44% of the City is in a single family residential use. Residential lots range from 5,000 to 22,000 square feet, and density varies depending on location. Some of the smallest lots are in the eastern part of the City while the larger lots in newer subdivisions are mainly located in the western part of the City. Historic neighborhoods are found north and west of the downtown.

Farmington has a somewhat higher percentage of land devoted to multiple family units than surrounding communities as 8.5% of land area consists of condominiums and apartments. A large condominium complex is located on Drake Road, north of M-5. Many of the apartment complexes are found along the Grand River corridor.

A central feature of the City of Farmington is its traditional downtown, located at the intersection of Grand River Avenue and Farmington Road. Historic buildings, a mixture of uses, and a pedestrian orientation define the downtown. The city-owned Shiawassee Park is located immediately to the northeast of downtown providing a site for civic functions. The Rouge River flows through the park providing an additional amenity for residents. Connecting the downtown to the park through pathways and open space is recommended in the plan to provide greater pedestrian access to public spaces.

A separate Downtown Master Plan has been developed for the Farmington Downtown Development Authority (DDA). This plan is summarized in the master plan but the reader is advised to consult the Downtown Plan for more detail. (The Oakland County Coordinating Zoning Committee reviewed this plan, County Code 04-05, in August 2004.) The plan addressed three key aspects of the downtown: land use, parking, and circulation. Design guidelines were identified, which are illustrated in this draft master plan through photographs. The DDA has been successful in implementing some of the action items recommended in the Downtown Plan. A new pavilion has been built in the downtown. It provides a significant new public gathering space and is used in the summer for a weekly Farmers and Artisan Market.

A parking study has been recently completed by the DDA as well. *“The Parking Study indicates that while the existing parking supply exceeds current demand, they anticipate the need for more spaces throughout the downtown, based on a 10-year prediction of redevelopment and new demand. The Study recommends the City proactively plan for the development of parking decks to help meet future demand if various downtown sites are redeveloped.”* (Page 5-8)

General commercial uses and shopping centers are located along the remainder of the Grand River corridor, both to the east and west of downtown. One of the concerns noted in the plan is

the interface between these commercial areas and the edges of residential neighborhoods. The plan encourages buffering between these uses with landscaping or walls.

The community has a small industrial base that makes up less than 3% of the land area. All industrial uses are located in the southern half of the City, either south of Freedom Road (M-5) or along Eight Mile Road.

As the City of Farmington is mainly built out, new development can only occur through infill development or redevelopment of existing areas. The plan identifies several locations suitable for redevelopment. Conceptual illustrations show possible options for redevelopment, and guidelines are provided. When redevelopment is proposed, the City encourages the use of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards that promote “green” building and site development. On site stormwater management should be considered through the use of low impact development techniques. Impacts on adjacent properties should be given particular attention in any redevelopment proposal to mitigate potential problems between residential and non-residential uses.

Circulation issues are addressed in the plan; all modes of transportation are covered. The plan gives equal emphasis to roads, transit, pedestrians, and bikes. Two corridors are especially called out in the plan—Grand River Avenue and Farmington Road. Grand River Avenue extends throughout the whole City in an east-west direction and is under the jurisdiction of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). As it is a major transportation artery, the plan identifies the need to balance traffic volumes with the desired “Main Street” character through the downtown. Access management is recommended to limit the number and spacing of driveways to help with traffic flow. Improvements for pedestrian access, like sidewalk flares and cross walk markings, are noted for the downtown. MDOT provided comments on the recommendations made for Grand River; their comments are attached.

Farmington Road south of Grand River Avenue is under the jurisdiction of the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC). At this location, the City would like to investigate the possibility with RCOC of reducing the roadway from four lanes to two lanes and add on-street parking. MDOT did have concerns with only having two lanes at the Grand River/Farmington Road intersection.

Two important chapters in this master plan address goals and objectives, and implementation. Goal statements have been prepared for the following topic areas: Downtown, Neighborhood and General Commercial, Housing and Neighborhoods, Industrial, Community Facilities, and Transportation. *“In general, the goal of the master plan is to maintain a quality “small-town” character and mixture of uses to provide a sustainable and attractive community with a tax base to support desired public services.”* (Page 3-1) Other themes found in the goal statements include preserving the historic nature of Farmington, creating a pedestrian oriented community, and encouraging redevelopment and appropriate infill development that is compatible with surrounding land uses, especially adjacent neighborhoods.

The last chapter addresses implementation of the plan. An implementation matrix has been prepared that lists the action items identified under the goal statements and assigns responsibility.

A timeframe of short term, long term, or ongoing is also identified. Depending on the action item, responsibility is divided among the Planning Commission, City Council, DDA, Historic Commission, staff, or other city boards.

Enhancing walkability is a primary goal. The plan notes the need to improve pedestrian access to the downtown and maintain sidewalks in the neighborhoods. Other action items include working with the City of Farmington Hills on the Farmington Road, Orchard Lake Road, and Grand River Avenue corridors for streetscape improvements and reviewing the zoning ordinance to ensure compatibility with the master plan.

Future Land Use Map

The visual representation of the City's policies is shown on the Future Land Use map (attached). Most of Farmington is already developed; Single-Family Residential is the predominant use planned, and only one classification of single family residential is shown on the map. A variety of locations are planned for Multiple Family Housing, reflecting existing use. These locations are mainly along Grand River Avenue and along Farmington Road.

Commercial and office uses are represented by five different classifications on the map. Neighborhood Centers allow less intense uses such as restaurants, personal services, banks and small offices that are designed to serve the daily needs of residents. Much of the Grand River Avenue frontage in the eastern part of the City is planned for this classification. Another large area planned for these lower intensity uses is at Grand River Avenue and Drake Road.

General Commercial allows for more intensive retail and office uses normally found in strip shopping centers. *“General Commercial areas typically do not include residential uses; however, future redevelopment of some of the outdated shopping centers could look at creating a new mixed use environment.”* (Page 4-11) The plan provides some site-specific guidelines if these shopping center are to be redeveloped. Some of the key locations planned for General Commercial include Grand River west of Orchard Lake Road, Nine Mile and Farmington Roads, and Grand River and Freedom Road at the far northwestern corner of the City.

The Mixed Use classification is confined to the Grand River corridor, both west and east of the downtown. Areas planned for Mixed Use are envisioned to be redeveloped with a mixture of commercial and residential uses. Retail areas with second story residential is one approach while live/work units might also be viable.

The Central Business District classification encompasses downtown Farmington. The goal is to maintain the traditional downtown with its mixture of uses in a pedestrian friendly environment. Adding more residential uses to the downtown is important. This can be accomplished by either second story residential development or building new townhomes on the edge of downtown. New residents will add “24-hour” vitality to the downtown providing night and weekend activity.

A few locations have been reserved for Office uses only. These areas are intended for larger, stand alone office buildings. The largest area planned for Office is on Farmington Road north of Freedom Road.

Planned Industrial areas are limited to either Eight or Nine Mile Roads.

The last classification shown on the Future Land Use map is Public/Quasi-Public. Parks, schools, municipal buildings, religious facilities, and cemeteries fall within this category. Sites for Public/Quasi-Public uses are scattered throughout the City. In addition, a Greenway Overlay is shown for the Upper Rouge River that flows through the eastern part of the City. Much of the length of the Rouge within Farmington is on Public/Quasi-Public lands, although the river does flow over some private lands as well. The intent of the Overlay is to designate an area 100 feet wide along the river for a linear park that provides pedestrian access and links to parkland.

In addition, the Future Land Use map includes an interesting element. Small stars denote Landmark Features, such as gateways, landmark buildings, or distinctive views.

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

In comparing both maps, some small changes were noted. In addition, two future land use categories were renamed and two new categories were added to the 2008 map. The classification of Neighborhood Centers was previously called Neighborhood Commercial, while Central Business District - Mixed Use was previously called just Central Business District. The Mixed Use and Greenway classifications are the two new designations on the 2008 map.

Most of the areas planned for single family residential in 1998 remain unchanged, with one notable exception. In the western part of the City, west of Drake Road, Public/Quasi-Public is now shown for large areas of open space that were previously classified as Single Family Residential.

The Central Business District – Mixed Use classification continues to contain a mixture of uses in a pedestrian-oriented downtown. Some areas that are part of the CBD – Mixed Use had been specifically planned for Multiple Family Housing on the 1998 map.

The Office and the Industrial categories have basically the same concentration on both maps.

Since Mixed Use is a new classification, this is where there have been changes between the two maps. Areas planned for Mixed Use, west of the downtown, were previously planned for either Multiple Family Housing or Neighborhood Commercial. The Mixed Use area east of the downtown, on the south side of Grand River Avenue, was previously a mixture of Neighborhood Commercial, Multiple Family Housing, Single Family Residential, and General Commercial. Here the City envisions redevelopment of a more urban nature with buildings built to the road to create a pedestrian scale environment. Residential above first floor retail uses and/or “brownstone style townhouses” would inject a residential component desired in the Mixed Use classification. The Rouge River flows through the Public/Quasi-Public property adjacent to the proposed Mixed Use. This amenity should be considered as part of a redevelopment plan. Design guidelines are included in the master plan for this area as it is an important gateway for visitors and residents entering the City from the east.

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 its neighboring communities.

North, East, and West Boundary – City of Farmington Hills: The City of Farmington Hills Master Plan for Future Land Use was just adopted on January 15, 2009. Farmington Hills completely surrounds the City of Farmington except for that portion of Eight Mile Road where Farmington is adjacent to the City of Livonia. In reviewing the whole perimeter of Farmington, there is general compatibility with the planned uses in Farmington Hills.

At the northwest corner of the City of Farmington, along Grand River Avenue, both communities have intensive uses planned. Farmington Hills has a large area of Multiple-Family Residential with some Large Office, Shopping Center Type Business, and Non-Center Type Business on Grand River between Halsted and Gill Roads. Farmington has General Commercial, Mixed Use, Multiple Family Housing, and Neighborhood Centers along this same frontage with a small area of Single-Family Residential. A small area of Industrial is planned in Farmington Hills at Gill Road and Grand River Avenue. This is across from Neighborhood Centers in Farmington.

Both communities then have Single Family Residential to Orchard Lake Road. Within these single family neighborhoods, the City of Farmington has some park areas planned Public/Quasi-Public. At Ten Mile and Orchard Lake Road, Farmington has Neighborhood Centers planned for the southwest corner while Farmington Hills has Non-Center Type Commercial for the other three corners. The plan identifies the need to work with Farmington Hills on upgrading the streetscape along Orchard Lake Road as this is an entry point or gateway for both communities.

The border then heads south where Farmington has Single-Family Residential or Public/Quasi-Public while Farmington Hills has Small Office for the rest of their shared frontage along Orchard Lake Road. The remainder of the eastern border of Farmington continues to be compatible as residential is planned in both communities—single family is adjacent to single family, and multiple family is adjacent to multiple family.

The consistency continues for the southern part of the City of Farmington. Commercial is planned along Grand River in both communities. Multiple-Family is planned along Nine Mile Road in Farmington Hills adjacent to the new Mixed Use classification in Farmington. As Mixed Use allows for multiple family units this is compatible.

The southern extension of the City of Farmington between Eight and Nine Mile Roads is surrounded by similar uses in the City of Farmington Hills. The Industrial at Nine and Eight Mile Roads is adjacent to Industrial in Farmington Hills, while the General Commercial on the east side of Farmington Road is adjacent to Non-Center Type Business in Farmington Hills. Around the rest of the southern extension, single family residential is adjacent to single family residential.

The remainder of southern border is compatible; however, there are two areas along this part of the southern border where industrial is adjacent to single family residential. One area is on Nine Mile Road, west of Farmington Road to Gill Road, where Industrial in Farmington is adjacent to Single-Family Residential in Farmington Hills. This represents an existing condition. The other is where Single Family Residential in Farmington is adjacent to Industrial in Farmington Hills at Freedom Road and Halsted. Here the right-of-way of Freedom Road (M-5) provides a buffer for the residential uses. Overall, the boundary is compatible.

South Boundary – City of Livonia: The City of Livonia’s Future Land Use map, referenced from the City’s web site, was last amended in February 2005. Farmington shares its entire southern border with the City of Livonia along Eight Mile Road for approximately one-third of a mile. Along the Eight Mile border both communities have planned for a small area of General Commercial at the corner of Farmington Road and Eight Mile and then Industrial for the remainder of the border. This is a very consistent border.

Analysis

The City of Farmington is mainly built out; therefore, the plan respects the established land use patterns in the community. Major land use changes are not proposed but redevelopment opportunities are identified for outdated buildings or shopping centers. The plan does a good job of providing conceptual ideas to show how design principles should be incorporated into redevelopment plans. The City of Farmington has recently joined the Michigan Suburbs Alliance, an organization that helps first tier suburbs ready themselves for redevelopment. One of the tools to help communities prepare for redevelopment is to identify where and what type of redevelopment is appropriate for your community. The plan provides good guidance in this regard and communicates to residents, property owners, and potential developers what is envisioned for selected redevelopment areas. The City should be commended for taking the time to develop and include redevelopment concepts in the plan.

In a similar fashion, the plan provides homeowners with conceptual ideas for how homes could be remodeled. Many of the homes in Farmington are smaller ranches or bungalows that do not have the interior spaces current home seekers may desire. The appendix contains illustrations and schematics to show how remodeling or additions could provide modern amenities while keeping the architecture of the house compatible with the surrounding neighborhood. These ideas are an excellent beginning point for homeowners who want to stay in Farmington but require more room.

One of Farmington’s greatest assets is its downtown. The City of Farmington is part of the Main Street Oakland County (MSOC) Program. After being accepted into the program, Farmington Downtown Development Authority (DDA) promptly developed a downtown plan. The City and DDA has since been working diligently towards implementing the plan. Creating public gathering spaces is an important goal for the downtown. A downtown pavilion was recently constructed that provides a significant space for residents and is used for a weekly Farmers Market in the summer. This master plan complements the downtown plan and reinforces the importance of the downtown to the whole community.

Finally, Oakland County staff is pleased to see an implementation strategy included in the plan with responsibility assigned for completing tasks. Including an implementation matrix provides the community with a “road map” to follow once the plan is adopted. It is recommended that the implementation matrix be reviewed at least annually to chart progress, re-evaluate priorities, and celebrate accomplishments.

Conclusion

Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services Staff commends the City of Farmington for preparing this well done Master Plan. Photographs and conceptual plans further illustrate how design principles should be applied and provide guidance to readers of the plan.

Based on the review of the surrounding communities’ master plans, the Master Plan City of Farmington 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