

March 31, 2009

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

SUBJECT: County Code No. MP 09-02, Planning & Economic Development Services' review of the City of Bloomfield Hills Master Plan Draft Dated 2-13-09

Dear Chairperson Gosselin and Committee Members:

The Bloomfield Hills Planning Commission has prepared a new master plan; the previous plan adopted in 1987 consisted of a Future Land Use map only. 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, Bloomfield Hills 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 April 7, 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 Bloomfield Hills 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 Planning Consultant for Bloomfield Hills, Bloomfield Township, the City of Birmingham, and SEMCOG 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

During the preparation of this master plan, the City of Bloomfield Hills provided many opportunities for citizen involvement. First, a Master Plan Task Force was created to assist the Planning Commission in preparing the plan. *"The Task Force supervised and reported on the city-wide survey of residents, arranged public meetings with neighboring communities, governmental agencies, community leaders, and city residents."* (Page ii) To further publicize the status of the planning effort, the City used the Internet, the City newsletter, local newspapers, and cable television. A public workshop was held to present findings of the plan. County staff was invited to a Task Force meeting to explain what information was available that could be used in the preparation of the plan. County staff also attended one of the local agency meetings to provide further input.

Plan Contents

The plan consists of the following four chapters: Introduction; Bloomfield Hills Today; The Bloomfield Hills of Tomorrow; and How to Get There. The appendix contains the results of the city-wide survey that was mailed to residents, which had a 31.5% response rate.

Bloomfield Hills is a small, mainly residential city located in southeastern Oakland County. Key events in the City's history are documented in the plan. Many of the land uses that distinguish the City have been in existence for a long period of time. The Bloomfield Hills Country Club was completed in 1912, Stonycroft Hills golf course was opened in 1928, and the Cranbrook Academy of Art was founded in 1932. *"This plan seeks to find ways to attract redevelopment while maintaining the significant natural and cultural resources currently enjoyed."* (Page 1-2)

According to the 2000 Census, Bloomfield Hills had a population of 3,940, an 8.1% decrease from its 1990 population of 4,288. A 2008 estimate shows a small decrease to 3,676 persons. The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) forecasts that Bloomfield Hills' population will be 3,941 by 2035. The stability of the population reflects a community that is mostly built out with limited land available for new development.

Other demographic characteristics from the 2000 Census help to define the current population. The median age of City residents was 52 years old, considerably older than the median age in Oakland County of 37 years old. Residents also are more educated when compared to Oakland County as a whole. Sixty-six percent (66%) of City residents have a Bachelor's Degree or higher compared to 38% in Oakland County.

In terms of land use, almost 62% of the City is in a single family residential use. Residential lots range in size from $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre to more than 2 acres. The neighborhoods are mostly developed, although two of the newer subdivisions still have vacant lots. The land use survey conducted by the planning consultant shows approximately 200 acres classified as vacant. *"However, in some cases this category may encompass lots being used as lawn areas and under common ownership with contiguous developed lots. Nonetheless, since such properties are separate and a new home may be permitted by the Zoning Code, each is shown as vacant."* (Page 2-11)

Seventy-one percent (71%) of the housing units were built prior to 1980. The established nature of the neighborhoods accounts for the mature tree cover that is found in Bloomfield Hills, especially along the roadways. The Natural Features map shows abundant woodlands throughout the City. Wetland locations are generally depicted on the map and are near the lakes and are along the Rouge River that flows through the City. Bloomfield Hills is in the Main 1-2 Rouge River Subwatershed. *"One of the more important reactions discovered during the public involvement process was the desire for added protection of sensitive environmental features in the City."* (Page 3-19) One option is a Woodland Preservation Ordinance to protect "landmark" trees. The plan also addresses the need for development to be more sustainable; green building and site development practices are encouraged. Two examples of sustainable practices cited in the plan are Low Impact Design techniques to manage stormwater on site and the use of LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification for buildings.

The next largest land use is the Cranbrook Educational Community, located on the north side of Lone Pine Road. With a campus comprising almost 300 acres, Cranbrook accounts for 10% of the land area in the City. While the City does not have any public parkland, private recreational uses make up another 7.5% of the land area. These private uses include the Bloomfield Hills Country Club, Stonycroft Golf Club, Bloomfield Open Hunt, and the Village Club. All of these uses are in the northern half of the City.

Woodward Avenue is the main thoroughfare in the City and traverses the community in a northwest-southeast direction. It is under the jurisdiction of the Michigan Department of Transportation and carries over 60,000 vehicles per day. At Woodward Avenue and Long Lake Road, the City has a concentration of higher intensity uses. Commercial and office uses are located here along with City Hall. A limited number of multiple family developments are located along Woodward Avenue as well.

The plan discusses a number of transportation issues, including access management, traffic calming, and protection of wooded and tree lined corridors. A map shows the classification of all the major roads in the City, their 24-hour traffic volumes, and the areas with the highest crashes (accidents).

The topics of sidewalks and transit are also broached. *“A resident survey conducted as part of this project noted that a comprehensive city-wide sidewalk or pathway system is not desired. During focus group sessions and the public workshop, opponents noted their potential conflict with the more natural character of much of the City, the potential need for the removal of mature vegetation, complex engineering over varied terrains, perceived safety concerns, construction and maintenance costs, and liability concerns.”* (Page 3-17) However, the plan notes that in selected locations, like the City Center, sidewalks might be an asset in the future. Sidewalks also relate to potential future transit service. Bloomfield Hills does not currently contribute to SMART so there are no bus stops in the City. But if this situation were to change, sidewalks might be necessary to get transit users to their ultimate destinations.

As residents and City officials came together to discuss Bloomfield Hills’ future, key values emerged for which there was universal support. These values were translated into the following goals that are identified in the master plan:

1. Remain a great place to live, learn, work, and play.
2. Maintain status as a readily identifiable and distinctive metro Detroit city.
3. Be environmentally and fiscally responsible.
4. Be safe, clean, and friendly.
5. Lead by example applying the planning values and goals on public property and projects.

Specific items under each goal provide more guidance on implementing the goal statement. Recommendations to retain the City’s existing residential character address zoning changes, subdivision regulations, and design issues like home size, gates, and front yard walls. Because there have been some substantial home expansions as well as some tear downs and rebuilds, the plan raises the possibility of establishing an architectural review committee.

The last chapter of the plan is appropriately named “How to Get There”. An Implementation Matrix identifies the actions the City needs to undertake to implement the plan and the priority rating of each item. Actions are divided into the topics of zoning and land use, transportation, and community services and communication. One key action is to evaluate the entire zoning ordinance to see what changes need to be adopted to bring it in conformance with the plan.

Land Use Plan Map

The visual representation of the City's policies is shown on the Land Use Plan map (attached). The single largest planned land use is residential. Bloomfield Hills shows two residential classifications on the map: Single Family Residential and Multiple Family Residential. Most of these residential areas are already developed. Existing single family neighborhoods are low density with $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre lots in the northern part of the City and two acre plus sites in the middle portion. In the area south of Lone Pine Road, lots are mainly one acre minimums. These density patterns should be respected; major changes are not envisioned for the Single Family Residential classification.

The Multiple Family Residential areas are shown along the Woodward Avenue corridor and along Long Lake Road between Woodward Avenue and the railroad. Multiple Family Residential areas allow up to 4.5 units per acre.

The most intensive uses shown on the map are Office and City Center. The City Center classification encompasses the intersection of Woodward Avenue and Long Lake Road. This is the commercial and office area of the community. *"Consistent with the resident survey results to limit commercial and office uses to what currently exists, the intent is for the City Center to retain its current character of primarily office with some limited supporting commercial to meet the convenience needs of residents and office employees within a 1 to 2 mile radius."* (Page 3-7) As redevelopment occurs in this mixed use area, building and site issues like architectural quality, parking, landscaping, lighting, and signage should be given serious attention. A long term goal is to bury overhead utility lines in the City Center to improve the visual character of this focal point of the community.

Office uses are concentrated in the area of Long Lake Road and Woodward Avenue but are also shown at Woodward Avenue and Opdyke, and at Woodward and Lone Pine Road. Parcels shown on the map as Office are all currently developed with either large office complexes or smaller, stand alone office buildings. As these Office areas are adjacent to Single Family Residential, buffering, landscaping, lighting, and parking need to be considered if redevelopment is proposed.

Private Recreation and Institutional uses are designated separately on the map. As a helpful addition, the name of each use is listed. Because of its size and impact on the community, the Cranbrook Educational Community is called out with its own classification, separate from other institutional uses. *"Cranbrook is viewed as a jewel in the City, with its historic designation and the national recognition achieved for its educational programs and facilities. The campus setting also respects the wide array of sensitive natural features, including lakes, streams, wetlands and woodlands."* (Page 3-11)

The Land Use Plan map also includes numbers from one through ten. These numbers tie locations on the map to specific paragraphs in the master plan text. For example, areas labeled #4 relate to the discussion of gates and walls under residential recommendations, and #7 relates to the exploration of the RR Railroad zoning district for the CN North America Railroad.

Comparison of the draft 2009 Land Use Plan map to the 1987 map

In comparing the two maps, the first observation is that the names of the future land use classifications have changed. Multiple Family Residential and Institutional are the only two classifications with the exact same name as before. Single Family Residential was previously called One-Family Residential while commercial and office uses were either called Intensive Non-Residential (Office and Commercial) or Transitional Non-Residential (Office). Three classifications no longer exist: Transitional Residential, Greenbelt, and Parking. New classifications are City Center, Private Recreation, and Cranbrook. The three large areas now called out as Private Recreation were previously included in the One-Family Residential classification. The fourth Private Recreation site of the Village Club was included in the Transitional Non-Residential classification. Cranbrook was previously shown under the Institutional classification. The 2009 map calls Cranbrook out separately and reflects the expansion of Cranbrook's property to include the entrance on Woodward Avenue.

Even with these nomenclature changes, the basic land use patterns remain the same, with one difference. On the 1987 map, almost the entire frontage of Woodward Avenue, outside the Long Lake intersection, shows a strip of Transitional Residential with a thin area of Greenbelt behind it. The Transitional Residential classification must have included institutional uses like churches and schools since they are noted on the map. However, there is no description of this classification since no text was prepared as part of the 1987 master plan. It appears these two classifications were used to buffer One-Family Residential uses from the traffic, noise, and other impacts of Woodward Avenue. Since 1987, single family residential has developed in some of the areas planned for Transitional Residential and Greenbelt. Now Single Family Residential is planned up to the Woodward frontage for much of Woodward Avenue outside of the Long Lake intersection.

Coordination with Surrounding Community Boundaries

Under the new 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. Each of the two adjacent communities has been encouraged to provide Bloomfield Hills with comments if they have any concerns.

West, North, East, and South Boundary – Bloomfield Township: The Charter Township of Bloomfield Master Plan Update was adopted in March 2007. The City of Bloomfield Hills shares nearly its entire border with Bloomfield Township. The predominant land use planned along this border by both communities is Single Family Residential. Exceptions to single family are mainly located at Woodward Avenue in both the northern and southern portions of the City of Bloomfield Hills. At Woodward and Hickory Grove in the north, Bloomfield Hills has planned for Multiple Family Residential. This is adjacent to Multiple Family Residential in Bloomfield Township. At its southern end of Woodward Avenue, Bloomfield Hills has planned for Institutional (Manresa Jesuit Retreat House), which is adjacent to Single Family Residential in Bloomfield Township. There are a few other locations where institutional is adjacent to single family residential. Bloomfield Hills has planned for an area of Institutional (church and school) at Opdyke and Hickory Grove, which is kitty corner from Institutional/Civic in Bloomfield Township. Three other Institutional/Civic sites in Bloomfield Township are at the city/township border at various locations. This border is very consistent and is compatible.

Southeast Boundary – City of Birmingham: The Birmingham Future Land-Use Plan was prepared in 1979 and has been amended since then, most notably for the downtown and the Triangle District. Bloomfield Hills shares its southeastern corner with the City of Birmingham. Along this short border of Quarton Road, Bloomfield Hills has planned for Single Family Residential and then Institutional (Manresa Jesuit Retreat House) at Woodward Avenue. Birmingham has planned for Single-Family Residential with a strip of Office and Low-Intensity Commercial and Conditional Permit Parking at Woodward Avenue. This border is compatible.

Analysis

Through the preparation of this master plan, the City of Bloomfield Hills finally has a document that lays out policies for the future development of the City. The previous master plan, adopted over 20 years ago, was literally a map. While it showed future land uses, the land use classifications were not described, and goals and policies were not listed. This plan does a good job of analyzing the current conditions that make up the community today and provides a road map for the community to follow in the future. In addition, the draft plan is reader friendly. Photographs highlight key cultural and natural features of Bloomfield Hills. Side bar notes are used to summarize major points and relate the text to the goal statements or the Land Use Plan map to the text.

The plan makes effective use of the results of the citizen survey that was mailed to all residents. Out of 1,361 mailed surveys, the City received 430 responses. A response rate of over 30% is very good for this type of survey. The survey asked questions regarding land use, natural features, transportation, library services, and historic districts. It appears the plan is responsive to the concerns identified through the survey. Findings from the survey are integrated throughout the master plan, and the full results are included in the appendix.

The plan also introduces some new topics for further consideration, including context sensitive solutions (CSS) and low impact design. Both of these are topics in which Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services (PEDS) staff are becoming more involved. Context sensitive solutions involve designing road improvement projects with the surrounding area, the context, in mind. PEDS staff is working with the Road Commission for Oakland County to see how the CSS process can be used in local road projects. Since Bloomfield Hills wants to preserve their tree lined corridors, this approach should be considered when road improvements are being proposed.

Low impact design (LID) is intended as a way to manage stormwater runoff by keeping the stormwater on the site. SEMCOG has prepared a manual documenting a number of effective LID techniques that may be of interest to the City. PEDS staff is starting to identify best management practices as well. As the City of Bloomfield Hills gets more involved with either LID or CSS, City staff should feel free to contact Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services to see what assistance our office can offer.

One of the most important parts of the plan is the implementation matrix that shows the next steps the City needs to take to implement the plan. The matrix or table lists actions and specifies their priority of short, mid, long term, or ongoing. The master plan text indicates that there is a third column showing group or individual responsible for each task; however, this column is not

included in the draft plan. Oakland County PEDS staff strongly encourages that this column be added to identify the party who is to take the leadership role in following through on that task. By clearly identifying who is the responsible party, roles are delineated, and ownership of the task is established.

One of the implementation tasks is to hold an annual town meeting. This is an excellent way to annually review the progress being made on the plan and solicit input to see if priorities have changed or if action items need to be adjusted. This also would be a good venue to reintroduce the planning process to the community and keep the plan fresh in the minds of citizens.

Conclusion

Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services Staff commends Bloomfield Hills for preparing this new Master Plan. It is well written and provides a good road map for the community to follow.

Based on the review of the surrounding communities' master plans, the City of Bloomfield Hills 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