

October 28, 2009

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

SUBJECT: County Code No. MP 09-04, Planning & Economic Development Services' review of the Orion Charter Township Master Plan 2009 (September 2009 Preliminary Draft)

Dear Chairperson Gosselin and Committee Members:

The Orion Township Planning Commission has prepared a new master plan to replace its 2003 plan, which was amended in 2006 with an update for the Lapeer Road corridor. 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, Orion Township 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 November 3, 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 Orion Township 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 Orion Township Planning Commission, the Village of Lake Orion; the Cities of Auburn Hills and Rochester Hills; Oakland, Oxford, Independence, Addison, Brandon, and Waterford Townships; Grand Trunk RR/Canadian National RR; DTE Energy; Consumers Energy; Michcon; AT&T; Road Commission for Oakland County; and MDOT were sent a copy of the draft plan. All of these communities and agencies have received notice of the CZC meeting. Comments were received from the Road Commission for Oakland County and the City of Auburn Hills and are attached.

Public Participation Process

In February 2009, the Orion Township Planning Commission sponsored an Open House to solicit comments from the public. Attendees were invited to visit six different information stations dealing with environmental, parks and recreation, development procedures and zoning, water/sewer/drainage, traffic, and land use. Planning Commissioners were posted at each station to hear comments. Questionnaires were also available at each station for more detailed comments. *"The Open House attendees provided over 200 comments regarding various land use issues facing the Township. In addition to these comments, over 100 questionnaires were completed and returned to the facilitators."* (Page 85)

Plan Contents

The plan consists of the following eleven chapters: Introduction; Physical Profile; Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile; Community Facilities; Parks and Recreation; Environmental Resources; Historic Preservation; Transportation and Thoroughfares; Goals; Future Land Use; and Implementation.

Orion Township is a suburban township located in north central Oakland County. Internal to the Township is the small Village of Lake Orion, located in its northeastern quadrant. According to the 2000 Census, Orion Township had a population of 30,748, a 46.1% increase from its 1990 population of 21,047. A 2008 estimate shows an increase to 32,096 persons. The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) forecasts that Orion Township's population will be 35,538 by 2035, a 15.6% increase over its 2000 population.

Orion residents are younger than Oakland County as a whole with a 2000 Census median age of 34.1 years compared to 36.7 for Oakland County. This is reflected in the age compositions; almost 50% of Orion Township's population in 2000 was between 21 and 44 years of age. Correspondingly, only 36% of Oakland County's population fell within this same age group. Orion Township also has a smaller percentage of its population in the 65+ age category, only 5.4%. Oakland County's percentage of 65+ residents was 11.4% in 2000. However, this age group is projected to increase significantly according to the SEMCOG 2035 report. By the year 2035, Orion Township's residents aged 65+ will comprise between 20 to 25 percent of the total Township population. This suggests that the Township may need to increase services in the future to cater to the needs of seniors. Policies in the plan mention providing incentives to construct senior housing complexes within residential neighborhoods and the importance of considering the senior population when designing recreation facilities.

A brief history is given in the plan that explains how the area developed. The Township's first settlements revolved around agriculture and forestry; farm homesteads dotted the Township. At the turn of the century, the interurban rail system brought more people to the area, as Lake Orion's reputation as a resort area grew. The lake was an attraction for city residents looking for a summer respite location. Over time these small lake front cottages were converted to year round residences.

"Prior to 1950, eighty (80) percent of all housing was concentrated in and around the Village or in the southwest quadrant of the Township." (Page 10) Over time, more subdivisions were developed, many with a lake focus. Single family residential is now the largest land use with 34% of the total. Much of the Township is served by municipal water and sanitary sewer service; densities of 1.2 to 3.9 dwelling units per acre are allowed where service is available. The more rural parts of the Township have septic systems and private wells and require 1.5 to 2.5 acres for minimum lot sizes.

In an effort to document the historic resources remaining in the Township, in 2006 a consultant was hired to identify structures over 50 years old. A map showing the location of these historic structures is included in the plan. These sites were then field surveyed to find *"the most significant and well-preserved historic resources."* The consultant narrowed the list of approximately 2,500 structures over 50 years of age to 215 buildings, which were further

analyzed for their potential to be significant structures worthy of listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Twenty-seven (27) properties met the criteria; these properties are listed by address and are located on the map. While further research is needed before these structures could apply for this prestigious designation, the plan recognizes the importance of preserving the Township's past. These structures not only represent the Township's history but contribute to its unique identity.

Remnants of Orion Township's rural past linger in other ways as well. *“Empty barns and silos remain on scattered sites throughout the Township as reminders of the Township's history when thousands of acres were used for agricultural production. Other large portions of the Township had only marginal value as agricultural lands, and were never built upon. Much of this land is heavily wooded or is wetlands, providing an ideal habitat for wildlife.”* (Page 10) These remaining wetlands and woodlands are highlighted in the plan for their value to the environmental health of the community and their contribution to this rural character. The Township has separate wetlands and woodlands ordinances to protect these critical natural resources, which regulate activities that can be undertaken.

Orion Township lies totally within the Clinton River Watershed, and the Township has been involved in three sub-watershed planning efforts—the Upper Clinton, Stony/Paint, and the Clinton-Main watersheds. This involvement has allowed the Township to gain a better understanding of the impact of stormwater on water quality; an important topic given the Township's 27 lakes (2,000+ acres), numerous streams, and wetlands. The plan identifies the need to reduce impervious surfaces and to employ low impact development techniques to allow stormwater to filtrate into the site as opposed to producing run off that deposits pollutants and nutrients into storm drains and creeks. Techniques like pervious pavement, rain gardens, green roofs, and maintaining vegetated buffers of at least 25 feet are encouraged.

Due to the wealth of natural resources in the Township, Orion Township officials, planners, and residents worked with Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services staff to develop a Green Infrastructure plan. The plan uses potentially significant natural areas as defined by the Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI) as the foundation of an interconnected series of natural areas and open space for wildlife habitat, natural resource protection, recreation, and open space preservation. Five Priority One sites (the highest ranking sites throughout the County) are located within Orion Township. Three of these sites are located within public recreation areas and are therefore protected; however, two other sites west of Baldwin Road are in areas that could be developed. The Township is planning this area for low density residential development. Illustrations in the plan show how clustering can preserve large areas of natural features while still allowing development to occur within the Priority sites. *“A conservation easement can be placed on the open space so that a land conservancy, who has technical knowledge regarding natural feature management, can oversee this area.”* (Page 60)

A separate chapter in the plan is devoted to Parks and Recreation. As the second largest land use, recreation and conservation lands constitute 24% of the Township and almost 5,400 acres. Their presence adds a “semi-rural” character to certain parts of this more suburban Township. The largest recreation area, Bald Mountain State Recreation Area, covers almost 3,000 acres within Orion Township, and consists of two separate land areas. One area is centrally located

between Joslyn and M-24; the other area is east of M-24 on the border with Oakland Township. The second largest park in the Township is owned by Oakland County, the 927-acre Orion Oaks County Park. It is located between Baldwin and Joslyn Roads on the south side of Clarkston Road. Orion Oaks contains a dog park, trails, restrooms, and a boat launch. Five Township-owned parks provide space for more active recreation with baseball and soccer fields, play structures, tennis courts, picnic areas, and trails. The master plan contains a detailed inventory of parks and recreation facilities. This information was taken from the 2008-2012 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan that was adopted in 2007 by the Orion Township Board. Proposed capital improvement projects and a five year action plan lay out next steps to enhance and expand the recreational opportunities available to residents.

In terms of access, there are two main north-south routes, M-24 (Lapeer Road) in the east and Baldwin Road in the west. Most of the commercial development is concentrated within these two corridors. M-24 is under the jurisdiction of the Michigan Department of Transportation and carries the greatest amount of traffic, between 20,000 to 27,000 vehicles per direction depending upon the road segment. All the other public roads in Orion Township are under the jurisdiction of the Road Commission for Oakland County. Baldwin Road traffic ranges from approximately 28,600 vehicles (both ways) in the southern area near Brown Road to 17,600 vehicles (both ways) north of Clarkston Road. Other key roads include Joslyn for north-south travel and Clarkston Road for east-west access. The plan includes a Master Right-of-Way Plan for County Roads that shows the existing or desired right-of-way widths for county roads. *“The right-of-way plan is an important planning document because setbacks and other development standards should be established in relationship to the existing or future right of way width.”* (Page 75)

Other important aspects of the roadway system addressed in the plan include Natural Beauty roads, access management, traffic calming, and roadway aesthetics. Particular attention is given to the Township’s safety path system for pedestrians and bicycles. The Paint Creek Trail in the northeastern part of the Township and the Polly Ann Trail in the central part of the Township provide residents with pathway systems that connect to the adjacent communities of Oakland Township and Oxford Township respectively.

The other major land use in Orion Township is industrial, which is mainly confined to the southern part of the Township. The prime locations for these more intensive uses are along Brown Road, along Silverbell Road, and in the very southern part of the M-24 corridor. Industrial uses range from research/high technology businesses to the heavy manufacturing that is still done at the General Motors Orion plant. Industrial parks are located within the southern M-24 corridor as well.

The foundation of this plan is the chapter on goals. Goals, objectives, and policies have been prepared for the following topic areas: Economic Development; Community Facilities; Recreation Facilities; Environmental Resources; Historic Preservation; Transportation and Thoroughfares; Residential Areas; Office Areas; Commercial Areas; and Industrial Areas. While the goal statements are intentionally broad, the objectives and policies provide specific direction for the Township. The policies in particular provide concrete action steps for the community to follow. Some of the policies encourage cooperation with Oakland County particularly in the areas of Emerging Sectors and environmental techniques like Low Impact

Development. Other interesting policies involve providing educational workshops, information packets, or cable access segments for residents on wetland protection, water quality, and sustainable building techniques.

The last chapter provides a detailed description of the tools available to implement the plan. The chief tool is the zoning ordinance. Changes to the zoning ordinance will be needed, including the creation of two new zoning districts to allow for the mixed use classifications on the Future Land Use map. Other tools and techniques include clustering housing to preserve open space, land trusts, and conservation easements. Funding is briefly described to give the reader an overview of possible sources for capital improvement financing. Because the plan recognizes the need for the Township to be proactive in job and tax base creation, tax credits, incentives, and special districts like a Corridor Improvement Authority are listed as possible economic development tools.

Future Land Use Plan Map

The visual representation of the Township's policies is shown on the Future Land Use Plan map (attached). The single largest planned land use is residential. Orion Township shows the following six residential classifications on the map:

1. Single Family Low Density (1 dwelling unit per 2.5 acres)
2. Single Family Medium Low Density (1 dwelling unit per 1.5 acres)
3. Single Family Medium Density (1.2 dwelling units per acre)
4. Single Family Medium High Density (2.5 to 3.9 dwelling units per acre)
5. Multiple Family/Low Density (5.8 to 7 dwelling units per acre)
6. Multiple Family/Medium Density (6.5 to 8 dwelling units per acre)

Orion Township provides for such a wide range of residential densities because sanitary sewer service is not available in all parts of the Township. *"The northwest quadrant of the Township is planned to remain rural in nature, with larger lots, no municipal sewer service, and some unpaved roads."* (Page 116) Single Family Low Density and Single Family Medium Low Density are planned for the northwest corner, most of the area west of Baldwin, and part of the extreme southeast corner of the Township. These densities correspond to areas not served by sanitary sewer and that contain abundant natural resources.

The northeast quadrant of the Township can support higher densities as sewer and water are available in this area. Residential densities around the Village of Lake Orion are shown as either Single Family Medium Density or Single Family Medium High Density. Most of the other areas in Orion Township shown for these higher density classifications appear to be subdivisions already developed at those densities. The Village Green Mobile Home Park at the southern boundary of the Township is also classified as Single Family Medium High Density.

Two multiple family classifications allow for alternatives to single family housing. Several locations within the M-24 corridor are planned for Multiple Family/Low Density. *"Since the majority of these areas are presently vacant and/or occupied by single family residences, there is great potential for additional development in these areas. The proximity to a major thoroughfare, utilities, commercial amenities and the limited presence of significant natural*

resources makes these areas even more viable.” (Page 104) Conversely, most of the Multiple Family/Medium Density areas are already developed, leaving little opportunity for expansion. Areas planned for Multiple Family/Medium Density are mainly located along Waldon Road from Baldwin to Joslyn Roads.

After residential, the second largest planned land use in Orion Township is recreation. The Recreation classification covers Township parks, Orion Oaks County Park, and Bald Mountain State Recreation Area. Many of the Private Recreation sites (mainly golf courses) are located in close proximity to the public Recreation sites. The current Eagle Valley Landfill on Silverbell Road, west of M-24, is shown to be redeveloped for recreation use in the future.

Orion Township has a number of office, commercial, and industrial classifications shown on the Future Land Use Plan map. These more intensive uses are planned for the southern part of the Township and along the two major north-south routes. The most heavily traveled route is Lapeer Road (M-24) in the eastern part of the Township, and it is the major commercial corridor. Almost every type of land use is planned along M-24 from residential (single family and multiple) and recreation to office (General Office and Office Research), commercial (Neighborhood Commercial, Comparison Commercial, and General Commercial), and industrial (Research Industry and Light Industry).

Baldwin Road is the north-south route in the western part of the Township. The Baldwin corridor is planned mainly for residential and recreation uses north of Waldon Road. From Waldon south to Brown Road, the character of Baldwin Road changes, and this is reflected on the Future Land Use Plan map. This section of road from Judah to Maybee was the site of a historic settlement area called Gingellville. The Township is interested in reinforcing the cultural history of this hamlet area through its Village Center designation. *“This classification is also intended to encourage the development of a pedestrian friendly atmosphere; an attractively landscaped boulevard and sidewalks; rear parking lots; unified architectural theme and streetscape; and to continue the vitality and quality of life in nearby residential neighborhoods through the creation of public spaces and amenities.”* (Page 108)

Joslyn Road, more centrally located in the Township, also provides north-south mobility but to a lesser degree since it ends at Indianwood Road and does not extend completely through the Township. Along Joslyn is found the one area planned for Special Purpose. This is the Olde World Canterbury Village collection of gift shops and restaurants. Across from this site is a key Institutional use, the Civic Center and Township Hall.

Higher intensity uses like Research Industry, Light Industry, and Heavy Industry (General Motors) are concentrated in the southern part of the Township along Silverbell Road and M-24. A new classification called Industrial/Commercial Mixed Use Development is planned for the Brown Road corridor between Baldwin and Joslyn Roads and along M-24 on the west side of the road, north and south of Silverbell Road. *“Light manufacturing and research firms would be best suited to Orion Township, especially within the Brown Road corridor, because such firms generally produce low levels of waste, noise, traffic, air and water pollution, and other harmful impacts. Attention must be focused on the design and layout of industrial areas to be certain that new development achieves the high standards desired by the Township.”* (Page 120)

Comparison of the draft 2009 Future Land Use Plan map to the 2003 map as amended

In comparing the two maps, there are two changes to the legend. One is the new classification identified above, Industrial/Commercial Mixed Use Development. The other change is the elimination of the Brown Road Overlay from the 2009 map. The Brown Road corridor received considerable attention in previous planning efforts. This area between Baldwin and Joslyn Roads had been planned for General Commercial near Baldwin, then Research Industry for most of the frontage, and finally Office Mixed Use close to Joslyn Road. The Research Industry classification was a way to capitalize on Brown Road's proximity to I-75, which is just south of this area in Auburn Hills and was intended to encourage emerging sector/high technology uses to locate in this area. The new classification of Industrial/Commercial Mixed Use Development expands upon this idea. *"The intent is a mix of industrial, commercial, medical and office uses within a well-planned business setting. The Township will promote economic development initiatives for the area. Economic incentives may include Brownfield Redevelopment, Local Development Finance Authority (LDFFA), Industrial Facilities Tax Exemption (IFT), infrastructure investments and State grant programs."* (Page 108) This location is still targeted for key economic investment to create jobs and tax base but the new classification now allows for a greater range of uses along the whole frontage, especially with the addition of medical.

Obviously, the new Industrial/Commercial Mixed Use Development classification along M-24 on the west side of the road, north and south of Silverbell Road, is a change as well from the previous master plan when it was shown as Office Research. No other changes were noted within the M-24 corridor as Orion Township studied the land uses within this corridor in 2005. In 2006, the Orion Township Planning Commission amended its master plan with the addition of the Lapeer Road Master Plan Update and made some changes to the future land use classifications at that time, which are reflected on the draft 2009 map.

Two other changes are noted between the draft 2009 map and the 2003 map. One is in the extreme southeast corner where there is an increase in density of the residential classifications. The Single Family Medium High Density, Recreation, Single Family Medium Density, and the Multiple Family/Low Density were previously planned for Single Family Low Density. These changes may have resulted from a consent judgment agreement that was negotiated several years ago. The other change is on the south side of the Bald Mountain Recreation Area near the utility corridor. The parcels now shown as Private Recreation were previously planned as Recreation, implying more of a public use.

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 adjacent communities has been encouraged to provide Orion Township with comments if they have any concerns.

North Boundary – Oxford Township: The Charter Township of Oxford Master Plan was adopted in July 2005. Orion Township shares its entire northern border with Oxford Township. Both communities are planning this border for single family residential of varying densities. From the western edge to Newman Road, Orion Township has planned Single Family Low

Density (2.5 acre minimum lot size). Oxford Township has planned Acreage Estates (5 acres minimum lot size) and Suburban Residential (1 acre minimum lot size). Oxford Township also has a small portion planned Park/Conservation/Open Space that is part of an existing residential open-space development.

Between Newman Road and the Polly Ann Trail, Orion Township has planned for Single Family Medium Low Density (1.5 acre minimum lot size) and Oxford Township has planned for Suburban Residential (1 acre minimum lot size). From the Polly Ann Trail to the eastern municipal boundary, Orion Township has planned mostly for Single Family Medium Density (1.2 dwelling units per acre or approximately 30,000 square foot minimum lot size). This is adjacent to Suburban Residential (1 acre) in Oxford Township. While not identical, these densities are similar and are compatible.

At the far eastern edge, Single Family Medium High Density (2.5 to 3.9 dwelling units per acre or lot sizes between 8,400 – 14,000 square feet) in Orion Township is across from Rural Residential (2.5 acres) in Oxford Township. The residential densities are significantly higher in Orion Township at this location because this is the Bunny Run subdivision that was built during Orion Township's early resort era and contains some of the smallest lot sizes in the Township. The Single Family Medium High Density classification reflects existing conditions.

The one area along this border where single family residential is not planned is at M-24. In Oxford Township, Multiple Family Residential and Public/Institutional are planned. These uses are adjacent to Institutional on the west side of M-24 and Single Family Medium Density on the east side in Orion Township. These classifications reflect existing conditions and are not inconsistent.

Even though densities differ along this border, generally, the Orion/Oxford border is compatible.

East Boundary – Oakland Township: The Oakland Charter Township A Community Master Plan was adopted in January 2005. Orion Township shares its entire eastern boundary with Oakland Township. Most of the boundary between Orion and Oakland Townships is compatible as the Bald Mountain State Recreation Area overlaps this boundary and provides a buffer between more intensive uses that are in one Township or the other. From the northern boundary to Stoney Creek Road, Orion Township has planned for Single Family Medium High Density (2.5 to 3.9 dwelling units per acre) and Recreation. This is adjacent to Natural Resource Conservation (10 acres preserved for each 1 acre developed) in Oakland Township. Most of the Natural Resource Conservation covers the Bald Mountain Recreation Area so even though the densities are dissimilar, the border is compatible since there is a park next to a more developed residential area (the Bunny Run subdivision).

From Stoney Creek Road to just south of Greenshield Road, most of this border in Orion Township is Recreation. In Oakland Township, this same border is a mixture of Rural Residential (1 acre or more lots), Natural Resource Conservation, Low Density Conservation (5 acres preserved for each 1 acre developed), and Suburban Residential (1/3 to 1 acre lots). Again there is residential (mostly low density) adjacent to a park. Finally from north of Silverbell Road to Dutton, Orion Township has planned for Single Family Low Density (2.5 acre minimum lot

size) and Single Family Medium Density (1.2 dwelling units per acre or approximately 30,000 square foot minimum lot size). In Oakland Township this border area is planned for Suburban Residential (1/3 to 1 acre lots). Overall, the boundary between Orion and Oakland Townships is compatible as residential uses are adjacent to either other residential uses or are adjacent to recreation parcels.

South Boundary – City of Auburn Hills: The City of Auburn Hills Master Land Use Plan was adopted in November 2002 but has been amended several times through the adoption of various sub area plans. The Auburn Hills' Master Plan only uses three types of land use classifications on its map: Residential, Non-Residential, and Public; although more detail is given in locations where a sub area plan has been adopted. All three uses are shown along its northern boundary with Orion Township. Orion Township's southern boundary is where its most intensive land uses are planned.

Starting at the western boundary with Auburn Hills, I-75 forms the boundary line, separating Single Family Low Density from Residential in Auburn Hills. At the Baldwin Road interchange, to the west, Auburn Hills has planned for a small area of Residential (2 dwelling units per acre or approximately 22,000 square foot lots) and Non-Residential. Orion Township has planned for Single Family Medium Density (1.2 dwelling units per acre or about 30,000 square foot lots) and General Commercial. East of the Baldwin Road interchange to Bald Mountain Road, Auburn Hills has planned for Non-Residential with one small area of Public, which represents Oakland County's Brown Road facilities (Animal Control). Along this stretch, Orion Township has planned for Industrial/Commercial Mixed Use Development, Light Industry, Research Industry, Heavy Industry, and Single Family Medium High Density (Village Green Mobile Home Park). This border is quite compatible when actual uses in Auburn Hills are considered. Between Baldwin and Joslyn Roads, on the south side of Brown, the "Auburn Mile" of big box retailers is found. From Joslyn to east of Giddings, Auburn Hills has high technology/research firms. At M-24, on the south side of Brown Road, there is an existing landfill facility. Overall, these existing high intensity uses in Auburn Hills are compatible with the high intensity uses existing and planned in Orion Township.

Finally, from Bald Mountain Road east to the municipal border, Auburn Hills has planned for Residential; this area falls within the Northeast Corner Neighborhood Master Plan. Residential densities in this area are planned for 2 units per acre for conventional development and 2.5 dwelling units per acre for open space development. This translates to between 17,500 to 22,000 square foot lots. This is adjacent to Single Family Low Density (2.5 acre minimum), Multiple Family/Low Density (5.8 to 7 dwelling units per acre), and Single Family Medium Density (about 30,000 square foot lots) in Orion Township. Densities may differ on either side of the border but the residential uses are compatible.

The City of Auburn Hills sent an email indicating that the Auburn Hills Planning Commission has no objection to the plan. The email is attached.

West Boundary – Independence Township: The Independence Township Vision 2020 Update Master Plan was adopted in November 2008. Orion Township shares its entire western boundary with Independence Township. Both communities have planned exclusively for single family

residential along the border. Independence Township has planned for Estate Residential (1.5 acres per dwelling unit) for the north half of the border and Suburban Residential (1 acre per dwelling unit) for the southern half. Within the Suburban Residential, there is some Recreation/Conservation at the border reflecting the open space portion of the residential development. Orion Township has planned this border mostly for Single Family Low Density (2.5 acres per dwelling unit) with two exceptions. Single Family Medium Low Density (1.5 acres per dwelling unit) is planned around Heather Lake, while a concentrated area of Single Family Medium High Density (2.5 to 3.9 dwelling units/acre) is planned for an area about ½ mile south from Maybee Road. The border between these two Townships is extremely compatible.

Internal to the Township - Village of Lake Orion: The Master Plan 2002-2020 Village of Lake Orion was adopted in January 2003 and amended in March 2008. As would be expected in a compact village center that has sewer service, residential densities are much greater in the Village of Lake Orion than in the surrounding Orion Township.

The lake itself (Lake Orion) separates the Village and Township in the west. A few “fingers” of residential in the Village do connect to and are part of the existing residential in Orion Township in this western boundary area. Along the northern village limits, the Village of Lake Orion has planned for Lake Single Family Residential (6,500 square foot lots), Corridor Commercial at M-24, and Village Single Family Residential (larger than Lake Single Family but no lot size given). Public and Multiple Family Residential (8 to 15 units per acre) are at the northeastern corner. Orion Township has Single Family Medium Density (30,000 square foot minimum lot size) along this northern boundary except for a small area of General Office at M-24.

Along the eastern border, Multiple Family Residential is planned to Atwater Road and Village Single Family is planned to the southern village boundary. In Orion Township, Single Family Medium High Density (2.5 to 3.9 dwelling units per acre) is planned for the north half of this border and Single Family Medium Density is planned for the south half. Again, the densities in the Village are greater than that shown in the Township.

Finally, along the southern boundary, from east to west, the Village of Lake Orion has Village Single Family Residential, Mixed Use: M-24 Corridor (office/commercial and residential) at M-24, and Lake Single Family Residential. Orion Township has Single Family Medium Density, General Office at M-24, and then Single Family Medium High Density that connects into the “fingers” of residential extending into Lake Orion. Based on reviewing Lake Orion’s Future Land Use map, it appears that the residential in the Village is an extension of the residential areas in the Township. The street network extends from the Township into the Village forming adjacent neighborhoods. From a land use perspective the borders are compatible.

The commercial role of the Village of Lake Orion is acknowledged in the plan. *“Commercial development should not be encouraged in the Township at the expense of the Village commercial district. The community’s retail and service needs can best be served through the coordinated growth and development of both the Township’s commercial corridors and the Village’s commercial district.”* (Page 100)

Coordination with County Property

Orion Oaks County Park is located on the south side of Clarkston Road between Baldwin and Joslyn Roads in the western half of the Township. Its presence contributes to the rural, natural character envisioned for the northwest quadrant of the Township. Single family residential classifications of varying densities surround the park, except for its eastern boundary along Joslyn Road where Institutional is planned. These uses are compatible with the County Park and no changes in land use are proposed from the 2003 master plan for the park or the surrounding area.

The plan mentions ways to work with the County on providing recreation opportunities. It suggests that the Township “*partner with the county, state, village, schools, library and others to cross-advertise each other’s service.*” (Page 39) One of the policies under Recreational Facilities states “*Encourage the County and State to develop more complete, year round park facilities.*” (Page 90)

Analysis

The most impressive aspect of the Orion Township Master Plan is its comprehensive nature. The plan addresses a variety of subjects; the usual topics of demographics, land use, natural resources, recreation, and transportation are covered very well. However, this plan also contains chapters on historic preservation, early history of the community, community facilities, and economic development. By touching on all facets of the community, a more well-rounded approach to land use and development is achieved.

“Many residents have settled in Orion Township because they were attracted by its natural features-lakes, woodlands, wetlands, rolling hills and open space. These features are significant not only because of their strong appeal to residents, but because they constitute a functioning ecosystem that provides benefits to people that can’t be fully replaced by built systems.” (Page 45) How these features contribute to the environmental health of the community is well documented in the plan. The reader is given a good understanding of how stormwater and impervious surfaces can negatively affect water quality; the role wetlands and woodlands play; and how green infrastructure provides wildlife habitat, recreation, and improved quality of life for Township residents. The desire to protect these natural resources is woven throughout this master plan. By viewing their natural resources as part of a holistic system, Orion Township demonstrates its understanding of the value of its resource base.

Just as it is important for a community to plan for its environmental health, it is especially crucial now to address the economic health. The plan provides a good description of the economic development tools available for use by Orion Township. It should be noted that the Township’s Planning Consultant met with staff of Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services to ascertain if there were any other tools beyond those he had already identified that should be included in the plan. This proactive approach to economic development is necessary in this economy to ensure that tax base and jobs are retained and enhanced. The Township has identified specific locations where additional light industrial and research/high technology uses would be appropriate. The plan makes clear that the Township needs to support its existing businesses while it also works on bringing new jobs to the community. Positive marketing

efforts and streamlining zoning procedures are listed as action steps to move the Township forward in its economic development efforts.

The plan contains an extensive listing of goals, objectives, and policies. These statements are well thought out and many of the policies identify concrete action steps the Township should undertake in the future. One thing the Orion Township Planning Commission may want to consider in the future is to prioritize these action steps. By establishing priorities, residents and officials have a clearer understanding of when tasks will be accomplished. When priorities are being established, it would be helpful to identify the party responsible for taking the lead in implementing the action item (Township Board, Planning Commission, Recreation Commission, or other groups, including grass root volunteers). In this way, roles are delineated and ownership of the task is established.

Conclusion

Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services Staff commends Orion Township for preparing this new Master Plan. The plan is well written and very comprehensive, addressing a variety of topics important to the Township.

Based on the review of the surrounding communities' master plans, the Orion Charter Township Master Plan 2009 is **not** inconsistent with the plan of any city, village, or township that received notice of the draft plan. Comments were received from the Road Commission for Oakland County and the City of Auburn Hills and are attached.

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