

DISCUSSION

2024-0164 Master Plan 2024

Present in addition to staff were representatives from Giffels Webster, the City's Planning Consultant, Jill Bahm, Julia Upfal and Ian Hogg.

Ms. Bahm noted that tonight she would review public engagement, and she explained that the approaches have been really robust. She stated that she would go through the summaries of the things that they have heard, and after that would break the Commission into a couple of groups to talk amongst themselves about some of the themes that they have heard. After the group discussion, the Commission will reconvene to discuss these items.

(Mr. Dettloff and Ms. Neubauer entered the meeting).

Ms. Bahm recalled that they had the Joint Meeting with City Council in January and had a visioning meeting with Staff. She noted that the first outreach was a question of the day, and the online platform was promoted for three weeks with different questions that were asked, answered, and promoted during that time, providing good feedback. She stated that they received 160 comments and 250 interactions, and noticed that sometimes people will visit a page to see what others are saying and not necessarily participate themselves.

She noted the various topics that were shared back at the March work session, and mentioned the following:

- Some people were supportive of public transportation; for some traffic and calming safety were important things.*
- For others, green space was important.*
- In terms of development, for some it was quality development, for others it was overdevelopment.*
- Relative to community amenities and administration, a lot of people are very supportive of the Administration and the community facilities in the city.*

After that engagement, a number of new activities and engagement opportunities were presented, including:

- Attended the Mayor's Business Council meeting on March 22, and asked a couple of questions.*
- Meeting toolkits were created.*
- A meeting of homeowner's association presidents was attended by about 40 to 50 people, and they were encouraged to take the toolkits with them to do the same things in their own neighborhoods. Seven took toolkits but only four came back. Questions included the City's strengths, opportunities, and weaknesses.*
- A similar meeting was held at the Older Persons' Center, and people talked about walkability.*
- Small group workshops were held, and staff met with local business leaders and LDFA members. They were hoping to get several representatives from places of worship, and only one Pastor attended from a church in the northern*

area of the city. Four members from nonprofits attended, one resident, and seven members of Boards and Commissions. Feedback varied by group, and it was a helpful way to dig deeper with some of those individuals who normally may not participate in this kind of process.

She noted that a link to a Master Plan website will hopefully be made public tomorrow. She explained that there will be a lot of information on the site and it is intended to have a life longer than just the planning process and can be referred to as a resource for all kinds of long-range planning going forward.

She mentioned that a quality of life survey closed two Fridays ago, which was broken out by neighborhoods, and mentioned some of the results:

- Most folks are happy with life here in the City and most respondents are fairly satisfied.
- Traffic and congestion is the top concern, followed by development pressures, and a tie between rising housing costs and increasing population, land use conflicts, aging infrastructure and lifestyle or cultural conflicts.
- There was dissatisfaction with Adams Road, M-59, and Auburn Road.
- Comments at the end of the survey were open-ended.
- The most responses were from the Rochester West planning neighborhood, which was the largest; while the fewest were from the Stoney Creek neighborhood, which was the smallest.
- Many respondents felt like the housing is just not affordable; there were a number of comments about people who wanted to downsize such as the older generation, who could not find anything to downsize into in their price range. People talked about wanting to see smaller condos and ranch-type units for one-floor living and not being able to find what they could afford. Many have lived in their homes a long time and their tax rates are low as they have been frozen. If they downsize they will upsize their mortgage. Housing is also more expensive; and while they may sell for a good price, they still have to pay.

Chairperson Brnabic stated that it has come up with developers that they do not feel it is financial feasible or there is not enough profit in building smaller. Developers can make more profit in building up. She commented that she did not know how to encourage developers to build smaller.

Ms. Bahm responded it might be a matter of trying to determine what factors of development the City has influence over to help reduce the cost, such as lowering site plan fees for preferred housing.

Mr. McLeod mentioned that density will become the concern, as the offset will be that if a developer builds a less profitable unit, he will want to build more of them. He commented that the market has not caught up to the demand.

Ms. Neubauer noted that density came up with respect to the Barnes and Noble development, as the developer wanted to put in 96 units on four floors.

Mr. McLeod stated that the sweet spot desired is generally in the low 2,000 square foot range, with zero maintenance and all the niceties for the active seniors.

Ms. Neubauer commented that for senior living facilities, costs are in the range of \$7,000 per month or more for one bedroom units; however, the need is there for the elderly community and it seems to be the only option right now.

Mr. Hooper commented that new subdivisions are market-driven for the larger single family with more than 2,000 square feet, and three-quarters are colonials.

Mr. McLeod noted that there is definitely a market for larger single family homes in Rochester Hills; however, there is a balance point where you can have both.

Chairperson Brnabic stated that she was not surprised by the survey comments as the Commission hears this all the time. She commented that people do not want to see highly-dense developments and there should be a balance. She mentioned walkability, and commented that it might be hard to turn subdivisions into totally walkable communities the way the city is set up.

Ms. Bahm stated that if the city can move more toward walkability, it may be able to alleviate some of the traffic. She commented that the conversation will continue when the Commission gets more into the planning part of the process.

Commissioners mentioned density for the affordable housing, mentioning detached single family ranches, smaller condos, duplexes, and triplexes.

Mr. McLeod stated that some markets provide these opportunities for alternative housing better than others. He commented that unfortunately the City cannot control what a person sells their property for, and a developer incorporates that purchase price into his or her costs.

Mr. Dettloff asked if the topic of tiny housing came up, and if there is one thing that a developer would focus on in looking for an incentive.

Mr. McLeod responded that the topic of tiny homes does not come up a lot. He noted that with respect to incentives, infrastructure costs have to be spread out across the properties. He commented that the simple answer is money; and they either purchase the property for less money or have more density to help spread infrastructure and development costs.

Ms. Bahm noted that it could be valuable to concentrate development in some areas to relieve pressure on other areas. She added that 10-12 units would be too dense designed in one way, but designed in another way that it would not make it appear more dense.

Chairperson Brnabic commented that individuals wanting to leave large square footage homes may be looking for a ranch, but they might want to go into a condo or another different form of development. She mentioned Redwood, and stated that apparently it has filled up.

Mr. McLeod commented that Redwood has been so successful they are looking for property to build the next phase. He added that there is a mixture of people in there, including a younger clientele as well as downsizers.

Ms. Bahm added that it provides a lifestyle people are looking for, and stated that people choose to rent for a variety of reasons.

Mr. Hooper mentioned a development on John R north of Auburn, noting that they had a number of ranches of 2,000-plus square feet on 0.2 acres; and he mentioned that these sold a few years ago for \$450,000 to \$500,000. He asked if this was filling a need or was not enough to be considered attainable.

Ms. Bahm responded that they can look at that as a case study. She went on to summarize the survey, noting that the Commission will see feedback from the Mayor's Business Council that included interactive participatory questions that were asked regarding workforce and things they needed as employers, what they felt their employees were looking for, and how the City could help support them and their businesses. She added that both residents and businesses expressed concerns regarding a real estate shortage; yet they expressed concerns regarding overdevelopment. She commented that it is another dilemma to figure out how to help business owners.

Chairperson Brnabic stated that there were quite a few comments about community events and organized recreational activities.

Ms. Bahm responded that this topic is really outside of the purview of the Master Plan other than thinking about where space could be created for these things to happen. She mentioned that there are plazas or open spaces in the Brooklands that may allow for shutting down part of a side street for a couple of hours for a temporary location for community events.

Mr. McLeod noted that they had a conversation with someone regarding a food truck park, and he noted that with the new food truck licensing, he believes that the Commission will see more trucks at the City's events along with private events.

Ms. Neubauer commented that she thinks the community is looking for ways to all come together. She mentioned the cultural fair last week, noted that people have always asked for a dog park, and there are desires for a pump track for biking. She stated that the City should do anything it can to bring people back together and outside as people had been separated for so long during the pandemic.

Ms. Bahm mentioned that there was strong feedback from some of the business owners at the small group workshop about building drive-throughs and shutting down inside services. She commented that it is sad that those two thoughts compete with each other, convenience versus people wanting to be together.

At this point, the Commission split into three groups of three and took 15 minutes to discuss the themes presented.

After the groups reconvened, some of the comments noted were:

- *Busing and the safety of schools.*
- *Pathways and connections. Walkability and connectivity challenges. Walking for exercise versus for a purpose or destination.*
- *Affordable attainable housing within the school districts.*
- *Lack of social opportunity in various districts.*
- *Overdevelopment in certain areas and where will it stop.*
- *One group noted that John R was a park corridor, with Spencer, Borden and Bloomer, and there are multiple pathway gaps adding danger.*
- *There are opposing views on public transportation. Difficulties on getting to the bus stop, and whether people could put a bike on a bus to get from the stop to home.*
- *Isolation of some neighborhoods with no sidewalks.*
- *The City is a good place to work and raise a family, but not necessarily the best place to retire and age in. The community is getting older so something needs to be done. Seniors can become isolated in their own space.*
- *Trolleys could provide transportation locally.*
- *The Brooklands can be seen as a model for how to look at existing subdivisions to be able to create walkability.*
- *Roundabouts were only mentioned as a part of different ways to have traffic calming and traffic management. Opinions were neither positive or negative; they just stressed a desire for better traffic management.*

Ms. Bahm summarized that the next step is how to plan for managing some of the conflict points regarding housing prices, isolation, preserving open space, and what happens in the next five to ten years. She mentioned that there were some survey comments that included responses from outside of the city, multiple responses from the same households, and one response that came from out of the country that will be weeded out. She commented that some people will say to stop doing everything, and it will still not fix the traffic problem. She stated that the next step is to determine how the City can do things differently and better.

Discussed