

2023-0349 Rochester Hills Gateways and Streetscapes Master Plan

(McLeod memo of 7/18/23, RH Gateways and Streetscapes Master Plan, MEDC Grant, City Council Minutes of 8/15/22 and 10/24/22 had been placed on file and by reference became a part of the record hereof.)

Present was Rachel Bush, Planner, with OHM Advisors.

Mr. Weaver recused himself from this item and left the dais due to his association with the project.

Chairperson Brnabic introduced this item and invited Mr. McLeod to begin.

Mr. McLeod stated that staff is looking for a potential endorsement of the 2023 Gateways and Streetscape Master Plan. He explained that this is an envisionment of creating a document that not only will provide a uniform branding signage to announce when someone enters into the community from all different directions but also will provide a branding opportunity for the streetscape plan where design elements can be brought in as part of any public improvement as well as potentially private improvements providing a uniformity in terms of overall development. He stated that it will reinforce the fact that when stepping into Rochester Hills, certain design elements are carried through development, roadway projects, and public improvements.

He explained that staff, along with the steering committee of Planning Commissioners, City Council Members, and City staff have been developing this plan which ultimately will be sent forward to City Council, which is scheduled for next week, in the hope that the Planning Commission will send its endorsement.

Ms. Bush stated that it was a wonderful experience to work with the Engineering, Parks, and Planning Departments as well as City Council and the Planning Commission to put this together. She stated she would provide an overview of what will be covered this evening, including project background, what went into creating the plan presented here, the Gateways Master Plan, the Streetscapes Master Plan, how they work together, and the next steps for implementing both plans. She explained that this plan is the culmination of several efforts, starting with the 2003 Gateways Master Plan as well as recent roundabout and road reconfiguration projects like the Auburn Road Corridor Project. The gateway sign outside of Chase Bank (at South Boulevard) is the only product that materialized from the 2003 Gateways Master Plan. She noted that along the way, Rochester Hills has undergone a rebranding effort with the logo, four primary brand colors, the Bebb Oak and the tagline, "Innovative by Nature"; and that brand element has been introduced to other forms in the community such as the City Hall sign and Fire Department buildings, and the four primary brand colors coordinated or integrated into the Auburn Road Corridor district sign.

She stated that what they are presenting today will guide these branding elements for the future. She explained that the overall purpose of the master plan is to design new gateway features, update the gateway feature outside of

the Chase Bank, provide new gateway feature designs and streetscape standards and create a sense of place that advances Rochester Hills' presence as a desirable place to live, study, work and play. She noted that the investigation phase of the project consisted of an existing conditions assessment where traffic volumes and available public right-of-way helped identify potential gateway locations, as well as recording furnishings and materials already found in streetscapes. She stated that the second phase of the project assessed the character of potential gateway sites to develop a family of gateways, scaling them up or down depending on available space, desired impact and character of the area. Streetscape standards were developed that maintain furnishings and materials already found in the community. She stated that the final phase of the project includes coming to an agreement on funding and the implementation approach, generating a detailed landscaping planting plan for each gateway, and integrating the gateway themes with park signage and roundabout gateway concepts.

She explained that the goals set for the Gateways Master Plan are to not only guide the development of the concepts, but to help evaluate the overall success of the plan; strengthen the sense of place with unique gateway features that communicate the updated brand; and provide an implementation framework for the City and identify what is achievable in the next three to five years. She explained that the Chase Bank gateway was the product of a public-private partnership, and there is plenty of potential for partnership to implement gateways in streetscape projects that follow the themes and concepts of this plan. Finally, the goal is for available funding sufficient to accomplish all of the gateways identified in the plan. Her presentation noted the following:

- The locations of the gateways as well as the hierarchy breakdown, higher level impact, secondary, and then tertiary. Dots on the presentation showed city boundary signage, showing consistent utilization of the Rochester Hills primary brand colors, the Bebb Oak logo, aluminum paneling and textured concrete. Brand elements were also incorporated into roundabout gateway concepts and park signage.*
- Two primary gateway features placed at the city's most traveled entry points:
 - Northeast corner of Rochester Road and the M-59 interchange, daily traffic is almost 40,000 motorists. Total width of the gateway is about 46 feet with a height of 12 feet. Illuminated nighttime perspective and negative space in the aluminum paneling creatively reflect the Bebb Oak and Rochester Hills brand. Large decorative concrete walls with exposed textures and rolling surfaces.*
 - Walton Boulevard in the median at the city boundary across from the Oakland University rock wall sign. Median location will have 10 feet of clearance on either side of the gateway. Dimensions of this gateway are 9-1/2 feet wide, 6-1/2 feet tall. This gateway will catch eastbound traffic from Auburn Hills and Pontiac, those going to Meadowbrook Amphitheater, the Village of Rochester Hills, and Busch's shopping center. This gateway will be an internally lit cabinet.**
- Six proposed secondary gateways. The last secondary gateway shown is a roundabout gateway which has a separate concept. The vertical orientation of the tertiary gateway is due to right-of-way constraints or enhanced experience visibility. The lightest touch and smallest footprint of the gateway family, it still announces one's arrival into Rochester Hills, whether entering from Oakland*

Township at Adams and Dutton, or Walton Boulevard east of Livernois Road.

- There are 27 total existing signs with four signs intended to be removed because there will be a gateway treatment nearby, leaving 23 total locations to replace with a slightly larger sign. The signs will have increased visibility for motorists moving at higher speeds, and the signposts will be wrapped in black to help distinguish the signs from other speed limit and traffic signs.

She displayed the various locations, including the concept prepared for Avon Road/Dequindre and the 23 Mile Road roundabout. Future gateways will mirror this design, and a similar form is proposed for the roundabout at Tienken Road, Runyon Road and Washington Road, but with materials that complement the historic nature of the area. Park signage will reflect each of the primary brand colors, and secondary park signage mirror the tertiary gateways.

She reviewed the next steps, noting that the survey, grading, and electrical drop utility work still needs to be done. She commented that in terms of implementation, the next step will be to get this work done and generate construction documents. Ideally, this would happen this fall and open to an RFP to bid for the actual fabrication of the gateway and park signage, followed by construction of the gateways and park signage as early as summer of next year.

Ms. Bush moved on to the Streetscape Master Plan, noting that the Auburn Road Corridor project is a demonstration and a standard of excellence that can be applied to more streetscape projects in Rochester Hills. She commented that its purpose is to guide both public projects and private developments with these standards. She added that the point is not to say that every street should look like Auburn Road or look like each other, but to communicate the Rochester Hills brand with timeless and premium streetscape materials and furnishings, creating a unified cohesive set of streetscapes and maintaining streetscape harmony as priority number one as well as ensuring flexibility in the master plan to support neighborhood and commercial character, and making sure these are standards that are realistic and achievable for implementation. She explained that components of the Streetscape Master Plan are broken down into pedestrian zone amenities (curb to sidewalk) and active zone amenities (curb to curb).

She explained that inspiration was drawn from the "Innovative by Nature" tagline. Instead of committing to use one streetscape furniture palette, two palettes were developed to respond to the character of the area:

- An Innovative streetscape meant to be implemented in commercial office or spaces characterized by retail and emphasize function and flexibility. The language of the plan is meant to demand creativity from developers if they can supply their own set of furnishings of similar or like quality.
- The Nature streetscape palette employs more composite wood accents to add warmth and reflect Rochester Hills' natural resources in the selection of furnishings. Lessons were learned from the Auburn Road Corridor, such as providing shade for benches, dark sky-approved pedestrian lighting, and a desire for more bike racks. Sustainability is in mind with the selection of furnishings, resistant to decay, damage and weather and easily customizable to reflect the brand, and ability to be powder coated to almost any finish and color.

- Active zone standards encompass everything from curb to curb and the standard striping crosswalk is becoming more and more prolific in communities, especially trying to meet requirements for a safe routes to schools plan. There was a desire to promote civic pride and even school pride through coloring and painting custom colors in the crosswalk. And also the steering committee noted the importance of making the trail crossings and mid-block crossings more comfortable for users and safer for maintenance workers. Mast arm street traffic signal posts can reduce overhead utility line clutter; black wrap on the mast arm sign is encouraged for these items. There is an impression of the Rochester Hills logo in the concrete wall, logo impressions and barriers are recommended for bridges, guardrail, concrete basis, noise barrier walls, and where there is any sort of relief is possible.

She explained that the plan also talks about the future and is attempting to anticipate streetscape solutions and challenges. Branded banner arm signage and street signage at major intersections are concepts developed by the team. She added that the benefit is that those street signs can be produced in-house by the Rochester Hills Sign Shop. Other considerations discussed were that developers may be incentivized by the State to include EV charging stations in site plans; and that requires a conversation of what Rochester Hills' standards are for EV charging stations. Bike share and public transit service providers may also have their own branding elements so that will warrant a conversation regarding how that will reflect the Rochester Hills brand. She added that the implementation framework for the Streetscape Master Plan looks a little different than the Gateway Master Plan because it is more of a guide for future projects and there is not a spatial basis for it. She stated that the next steps are to update City Ordinances regarding fencing materials and parking lot buffer standards to incorporate the recommendations of the Streetscape Master Plan, as well as coordinating with MDOT and RCOC to incorporate recommendations in future projects in Rochester Hills.

Mr. Hooper asked for the total number of primary, secondary and tertiary signs and how much was in the budget now.

Ms. Bush responded that there were 10 gateway signs, 10 park signs, and 23 city boundary signs. She explained that there was funding allocated from Planning and Economic Development and Parks to implement these signs.

Mr. McLeod stated that there is about \$750,000 between the gateway signage implementation and the park signage allowance. He commented that the grand total is enough to account for implementing the 10 main signs as outlined in the plan.

Mr. Hooper commented that this is a multi-million dollar project and \$750,000 will not accomplish it.

Mr. McLeod stated that they would ensure that the budgetary numbers were going to be accurate, and pointed out that the 23 boundary signs would be done in-house over time. He stated that there would be a total of 20 signs between general gateway and park signage, and he commented that the budget allotted to this point and the budget estimates provided sync up. He noted that it will

depend on the designs that were put there as well as materials utilized and efficiency of the design that will allow the budget to be kept in check.

Mr. Hooper stated that he works in construction, and there will be significant cost to electrifying the locations. He commented that it will look beautiful, but that it would be over a million dollars.

Mr. McLeod pointed out that only eight signs will be illuminated, with none of the park signs illuminated with the exception of maybe Innovation Hills which is still to be determined.

Mr. Hooper commented that the typicals show all to be illuminated.

Ms. Bush stated that the two primary gateways and six secondary gateways will have illumination and the tertiary gateways will not.

Mr. Hooper mentioned that City of Auburn Hills and Berlin Township signage along I-75 and asked if there was an opportunity to work with MDOT to get signage.

Ms. Bush responded that this was an opportunity discussed at length with the steering committee and is certainly a possibility, but noted that those signs were coordinated with bridge improvements and the bridge will have to be able to bear the weight of the feature. She commented that the alternative was the gateway at Rochester Road and M-59 entering Rochester Hills.

Mr. McLeod stated that this is not to say that something couldn't be done, but in terms of the physical presence on a bridge or into a bridge it would ultimately need to be part of a bridge improvement. He stated that when the time comes, the City will dive in and potentially expand it.

Mr. Hooper stated that something like what Auburn Hills did would take some engineering, but Berlin Township's did not add any weight in what they did. He commented that this is a great job by all and it is exciting to see this move forward even though he thinks the budget is yet to be rectified.

Mr. Struzik mentioned that the freeway sign was something that the steering committee thought about. He stated that he really likes what they have here, with the sign coming over the bridge on Rochester Road north of M-59. He stated that when he moved to Rochester Hills 10 years ago he remembers knowing that he arrived somewhere and realizing Rochester Hills has so many great things to offer with all of the shops and great residential neighborhoods. He commented that seeing the City's brand, logo, and colors on something significantly sized is a fantastic way to welcome people into the city. He noted that he was on the steering committee, and wanted to give those who were not on the committee a little idea of what went into this. He stated that they had many meetings with two Council members, three Planning Commissioners, City staff from Parks, DPS and the Mayor's Office, as well as Mayor Barnett all giving input. He explained that there was a lot of passion, analysis and revision, and the individuals on the steering committee were picky about the details, big and small. He commented that he loves the idea of two street palettes to allow

elements that best reflect the character of the city.

He stated that he is proud of the work that has been produced as a result of the efforts and thinks it is a great plan and helps tie into and builds on the identity that is cultivated here in Rochester Hills and will help differentiate between the city and surrounding communities.

Mr. Gallina stated that although he was not on the committee, he was excited to have a fresh look at the plan as he is a nerd for marketing and branding. He mentioned that certain cities have lanterns with a circular puck sign with branding, and each city has something unique. He stated that the Bebb Oak logo is something the city is proud of, City officials wear the pin, and Innovation Hills has the glow in the dark Bebb Oak on the stones. He commented the steering committee and everyone else involved in this did the job well using the color palette. He stressed that with the logo, the tree and the tagline, when you think about marketing, consistency and longevity is important. He commented that he was worried at first that there might be a new logo, tree, color palette or tagline, but instead the plan doubles down on that. He stated that there might be some financial hurdles along the way, but he is really hoping that it can get as close as it can to this plan.

Chairperson Brnabic stated that she obviously supports this as well and agrees with previous comments that it is very well done and very thought out, and in a way overdue. She noted that this originally started with an idea or concept to move forward 20 years ago, and the city is in a place and time where this would be really nice, and it is nice.

Ms. Neubauer stated that everyone did a great job and she cannot wait to see it implemented. She moved the motion in the packet to endorse the Rochester Hills Gateway and Streetscapes Master Plan. Mr. Gallina seconded the motion.

After calling for a voice vote, Chairperson Brnabic announced that the motion passed unanimously.

A motion was made by Neubauer, seconded by Gallina, that this matter be Recommended for Approval to the City Council Regular Meeting,. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye 7 - Brnabic, Denstaedt, Dettloff, Gallina, Hooper, Neubauer and Struzik

Abstain 1 - Weaver

Excused 1 - Bowyer

Resolved, that the Rochester Hills Planning Commission hereby endorses the 2023 Rochester Hills Gateways and Streetscape Master Plan.