

## NEW BUSINESS

### 2026-0040 Planning and Economic Development Annual Report

*Ms. Roediger introduced Chris McLeod to present the annual report. She praised his work, noting that he had significantly improved upon last year's report to enhance transparency and interactivity. She explained that while state law requires an annual report of Planning Commission activities, the department has expanded this requirement into a more advanced and comprehensive document. She stated that the goal of the department is to remain super transparent regarding development and zoning information, ensuring that data is readily available to the public whenever requested.*

*Ms. Roediger expressed hope that the Planning Commission members had reviewed the report and would feel comfortable approving it during the session. Upon their approval, the report is slated to move forward to the City Council agenda.*

*Mr. McLeod addressed the Planning Commission and City Council to present the 2025 Annual Report. He noted that while state law defines a requirement for an annual report, the Rochester Hills Planning Department has taken that mandate to levels far beyond the typical community standard. He observed that many municipalities might simply staple meeting minutes together or write a brief paragraph to satisfy the statute, but Rochester Hills strives for a much more advanced and transparent document.*

*He explained that for the current year, the department moved the annual report onto the ArcGIS system. He highlighted the GIS department as a vital collaborator in producing both the interactive report and the high-detail maps utilized by the boards. He emphasized that such collaboration within City Hall allows the department to push projects further than they could in isolation.*

*M. McLeod noted that the Planning and Economic Development (PED) department continues to operate under three primary pillars: preserve, enhance and diversify. To preserve includes protecting established neighborhoods, irreplaceable natural environments, a healthy business community, and the city's historical assets to maintain a first-rate quality of life. The department seeks to enhance the city's role as a regional destination by improving sustainability, real estate options, pedestrian environments, and cultural resources. To diversify includes focusing efforts on broadening housing choices, transportation alternatives, employment opportunities, and the commercial tax base.*

*With regard to administrative and coordination roles, Staff provides expert advice and ordinance interpretation to residents, business owners, and various city boards.*

*Economic Development efforts include daily engagement with the business community regarding expansion and retention programs to ensure their needs*

*are heard by city leadership.*

*Mr. McLeod described planners as the "quarterbacks" or lead coordinators for city projects, a role he noted Ms. Roediger performs effectively across all departments.*

*Regarding 2025 milestones and successes, he noted that primary goal for 2025 was the update to the Master Plan, which saw Planning Commission adoption in October and City Council approval in November. Also the City's Gateway Master Plan focused on city entrances-notably at M-59 and Rochester Road-is approximately 95-97% complete, with final restoration slated for the spring.*

*He explained that the city is managing a \$72.1 million restoration and remediation environmental grant (after administrative costs). While \$2 million has been deployed for assessments, the upcoming year is expected to see large-scale spending as active remediation begins.*

*Through an accelerated effort led by Ms. Roediger and Pam Guevara, the LDFA plan was approved in approximately three months, significantly faster than the six months estimated by the county.*

*With regard to community events, the "Rhise Cup" corporate Olympics saw participation grow to 150 employees from 21 local businesses, nearly doubling its previous size. This event also facilitated the donation of 11,000 pounds of food to Neighborhood House.*

*With regard to residential growth, 55 single-family homes were approved within two developments (The Oaks and Oak Creek), along with 80 multiple-family units.*

*Mr. McLeod stated that the commercial vacancy rate remains at an exceptionally low 5.7%. The city welcomed 105 new businesses in 2025, averaging one new business opening every three days.*

*He explained that development resulted in the permitted removal of 917 regulated trees, but the city required the planting of nearly 1,400 replacement trees to ensure long-term canopy growth. Total wetland impacts were limited to 1.61 acres.*

*Mr. McLeod showcased an interactive tool for public use developed with GIS that acts as a "one-stop shop" for property data. By entering an address, users can see if a property is impacted by steep slopes or wetlands and receive a direct link to the applicable city ordinance. Additionally, an interactive development projects map is available to the public, featuring clickable pins that reveal site plans and project details.*

*At Ms. Roediger's urging, Mr. McLeod and the GIS team presented their work at the Michigan Association of Planning conference in Kalamazoo. Despite a Friday morning time slot, the session attracted 70-80 attendees interested in*

*how Rochester Hills utilizes its resources.*

*The department received a state GIS award for the "Environmental Story" project, a success Mr. McLeod attributed to the technical skill of the GIS staff in executing complex ideas.*

*Mr. McLeod provided project updates including the Adams Road project, noting that: Staff continues to move forward with the "preferred alternative" for the Adams Road project, which has been a major focus for Ms. Roediger.*

*Other notable projects discussed included the Rochester Office and Retail Center, cider mill storage renovations, and several redevelopments along South Rochester Road.*

*With regard to legislative work, he noted the Planning Commission processed administrative amendments in March, a PUD amendment to allow for restoration, and "housekeeping" amendments in December to prepare for 2026.*

*Ms. Roediger resumed the presentation, emphasizing that while Mr. McLeod is modest regarding his work, the level of transparency and technical detail in the city's mapping is likely unmatched by any other community. She encouraged the boards to explore the "Digital Property Map" in depth, noting that users can click on any parcel to instantly see zoning classifications, specific permitted uses, and required setbacks. The tool also allows residents and developers to perform measurements and view historical aerial photography, providing a comprehensive "one-stop shop" for all pertinent property information and attached ordinances, such as historic district status or wetland restrictions.*

*Ms. Roediger stressed that while the needs of the city's 76,000 residents are paramount, equal attention must be paid to the business community to ensure Rochester Hills remains a premier location for commerce.*

*Established nearly 20 years ago as one of the first of its kind in Michigan, the Mayor's Business Council (MBC) continues to serve as a primary bridge to local businesses. She noted that the Mayor's connections with the U.S. Conference of Mayors have allowed the city to host speakers of a caliber rarely seen in local government, including former Governor Rick Snyder and local celebrity Carol Kane.*

*She explained that quarterly events, including a summer fun outing and a holiday celebration both held at Great Oaks, featured prominent figures like Mayor Mike Duggan and serve as the city's primary business retention strategy.*

*Beyond traditional networking, the RHISE events and the RHISE Cup-developed by Pam Guevara-have seen rapid growth.*

*She explained that the Diversity of Thought program connects specific professional cohorts, such as HR and IT directors from different member businesses, allowing them to collaborate on hiring challenges and "think outside*

*the box" regarding talent management. Ms. Roediger explained that these initiatives create deep-rooted relationships between the City and businesses, making it more likely that companies will choose to renew their leases in Rochester Hills rather than relocate.*

*Based on the "Innovative by Nature" brand, the Innovation Forest project features "Evo Oaks" installations along the Clinton River Trail. The project received significant positive reinforcement on social media and is scheduled for final reorganization and completion this spring.*

*The Rhising Market event provides a platform for young entrepreneurs to showcase their skills and products; the department aims to create a permanent plan to highlight these creators at various city events moving forward.*

*Regarding board activities, Ms. Roediger commended the Planning Commission for being the city's most industrious board, having met 18 times in 2025 across regular meetings and study sessions. This volume of work exceeded the meeting count of all other city boards and commissions combined.*

*A major 2025 achievement was the successful renewal of the Local Development Finance Authority (LDFA) for another 20-year term just before its expiration. A key goal for the coming year is the "LDFA 2.0" plan, which will define how the authority focuses its funds for the next two decades.*

*Regarding regional leadership and strategic goals, the department's innovative approach has made it a regional model; representatives from Northville and Romulus are visiting the city next week specifically to study how Rochester Hills manages its resources to stay "ahead of the curve."*

*Following the heavy planning load of 2025, the department will focus 2026 on a new Economic Development Strategy and the implementation of ranked recommendations from the Master Plan survey.*

*After two years of preliminary environmental assessments as part of the EGLE remediation grant, 2026 is expected to be the year the city "turns the corner" toward active remediation. This phase will involve projects moving through the PUD process and coming before the boards for construction approval.*

*Ms. Roediger noted that the PED department has had a staffing transition and the team welcomed Olivia Romano in early 2026 to work alongside Jennifer MacDonald in managing customer needs, following the retirement of long-time staff member Mary Jo Pachla.*

*Ms. Roediger concluded by presenting the annual report as the "gold standard" for the state, essential for maintaining Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) certification. She then opened the floor for questions, noting the Planning Commission's pending approval of the document.*

*Mr. Dettloff expressed his appreciation for the presentation and the digital*

*initiatives, describing the work as "amazing." Mr. Hetrick concurred, noting that it was clear why outside organizations are looking to Rochester Hills for leadership. He specifically praised the transition of city data into a "clickable form" and remarked on the "positive improvement" the Gateway plans have made to the overall look and feel of the city.*

*In response to Mr. Hetrick's inquiry regarding the prioritization of remediation projects under the Eagle Grant, Ms. Roediger provided a status update on four key non-city-owned sites currently undergoing assessment:*

*Madison Park / Suburban Softball Site: Active soil borings and data gathering are underway to determine construction feasibility and methods to mitigate off-site impacts.*

*Highland Park Site: Located on Avon Road across from the mobile home park near Yates, this site is undergoing similar assessment activities to understand environmental requirements.*

*Theodora Parcels: Situated at the southwest corner of School Road and Dequindre (directly across from Sakura), these parcels are currently in the assessment phase.*

*Hamlin Road Industrial Incubator: The city recently approved an application for a parcel near the corner of Hamlin and Dequindre for an industrial incubator space.*

*Ms. Roediger provided additional details on the proposed Hamlin Road development:*

*Development Model: The project is envisioned as a mixed-use storage and office development designed to provide small-scale incubator space for businesses to establish a physical address and store supplies before graduating to larger facilities.*

*Regional Significance: This would be the first development of its kind in Michigan, though the model is currently popular in other Midwestern states.*

*Timeline: While the applicants are eager to begin, they are currently in the initial assessment phase, which involves verifying existing data and collecting fresh soil samples.*

*Ms. Roediger acknowledged that while the EGLE Grant progress may have appeared quiet to the boards, a significant amount of "behind the scenes" work is occurring. She informed the group that while no major decisions have been reached yet, staff expects significant impacts and updates to emerge within the next couple of months.*

*Mr. Hetrick addressed the departmental statistic regarding tree replacement, noting that planting one and a half times more trees than are removed is a critical figure for residents and boards concerned with tree preservation. Ms.*

*Roediger provided the interesting fact that the City-led Nowicki Park project actually accounted for the highest number of tree removals and wetland impacts in the recent reporting period. She noted that without that specific public project, the impact numbers from private development would be significantly lower. She further observed that the City is currently planting double what it takes down.*

*Mr. Hetrick inquired about the context of the 1.6 acres of wetland impact and suggested that the annual report should express this impact as a percentage of the city's total wetland acreage to demonstrate that the city is a terrific steward of its natural resources. He stated that showing the impact is a small percentage, such as 2% of total wetlands, would be vital for residents to know the City takes these features seriously. Mr. McLeod expanded on this by explaining that wetland impacts are not approved at the Planning Commission level without rigorous oversight. He emphasized that the City utilizes a top-tier professional wetland consultant to ensure projects are fully vetted and ready before any environmental impacts are considered.*

*Mr. Hetrick praised the Diversity of Thought program, encouraging the department to continue the initiative on a regular basis. Ms. Roediger clarified that the primary focus of 2025 was ensuring the continued legal existence of the Local Development Finance Authority (LDFA). She highlighted that the City secured a 75% tax dollar match from the county, which is higher than the standard 50% policy. The department's first major task for 2026 is to work in tandem with the new Economic Development Strategy to officially allocate LDFA projects for the next 20-year cycle. Mr. Hetrick concluded his remarks by commending the staff for their terrific work across these various initiatives.*

*Chairperson Brnabic inquired whether the figure of 1,388 trees represented actual trees planted or if it included contributions to the tree fund. Mr. McLeod clarified that the total included both trees currently planted and those designated to be planted, which accounts for both physical trees and tree fund equivalents. Chairperson Brnabic expressed a desire for future clarity regarding the specific breakdown of actual plantings versus tree fund contributions, noting that significant funds are sometimes directed to the tree fund rather than being planted on-site. Mr. McLeod agreed to compile this data and mentioned that he and Matt Einhauser from the forestry department are exploring ways to encourage more on-site planting, including potentially increasing the cost of the tree fund to make it a less attractive alternative for developers.*

*Ms. Mannino raised a question regarding the outlook for high-density housing and whether the City was seeing an increase in requests from developers for large apartment projects similar to those recently occurring in the City of Rochester. Ms. Roediger explained that while the City receives a fair amount of requests for apartments and "missing middle" housing, the current ordinances are quite restrictive and have been tightened over the years to address concerns regarding density. She noted that Rochester Hills is likely the second most restrictive community in the area, following only Oakland Township, and that most "easy" sites in the City have already been developed, leaving few options for high-density projects.*

*Mr. McLeod added that managing density expectations is a constant battle for staff, as the first question from many potential applicants involves getting more units or seeking a variance. He emphasized that the department filters out a significant number of developers before they ever submit a concept plan or reach the Planning Commission and City Council. Ms. Neubauer then asked if a motion was required to accept the report, and Ms. Roediger confirmed that the Planning Commission could act on it before it is presented to the City Council. Ms. Neubauer moved to accept the annual report and present it to City Council, a motion which was seconded by Mr. Hetrick. Chairperson Brnabic called for the vote, and the motion passed unanimously.*

**A motion was made by Neubauer, seconded by Dettloff, that this matter be Approved. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye** 7 - Neubauer, Brnabic, Denstaedt, Dettloff, Gallina, Hetrick and Struzik

**Abstain** 6 - Blair, Carlock, Mungioli, Limberg, Mannino and Skelcy

**Excused** 2 - Hooper and Weaver

**Resolved**, the Rochester Hills Planning Commission hereby accepts the 2025 Annual Report and associated Executive Summary for the Planning and Economic Development Department.