

DISCUSSION

2025-0270

Master Plan 2025

(McLeod Memo dated 6/17/25, Giffels Webster Memo 6/13/25 and Draft Document Text, Draft PC Regular Minutes of 5/20/25, Planning Commission Worksession Minutes of 4/15/25, 2/18/25, 12/10/24, 11/19/24, 10/15/24, 9/17/24, 7/16/24, 5/21/24, 6/18/24, 3/19/24, Planning Commission Regular Minutes of 12/10/24, and Planning Commission-City Council Joint Meeting Minutes of 11/18/24 and 1/29/24 had been placed on file and by reference became a part of the record hereof.)

Present for Giffels Webster were Jill Bahm and Ian Hogg.

Mr. McLeod noted that Giffels Webster would lead the Commission through the draft Master Plan as it now stands along with their memo provided. He commented that this hopefully the last input of what the Commission wants to see for the Master Plan; and once this process is complete and everyone is satisfied with the text, staff will be moving on to finalize the website hub.

Ms. Bahm explained that at the last study session, the Commission looked at the hub site platform which will provide a really unique master plan experience for the community. She stressed that this will be more engaging and easier for people to find the information that they are interested in. She added that they also want to make sure that they are meeting their statutory requirements including the things that are needed for the master plan document.

She commented that there have been a lot of churning discussions about how to build the site, because it is based on the Arc GIS platform which is a mapping platform used to present spatial data. She commented that it is challenging to put in all of the bells and whistles of an interactive site that would be fun and engaging. She stated that they needed to step back and complete the whole text document to provide the information needed, which is not what they thought they would have to do at the beginning. She noted that they originally thought it would all be online; but as there were so many things they needed to ensure they captured, they thought better to have it here. She explained that the document is text heavy right now because they will be adding the photos, maps and links to embedded maps such as the regional development forecast and Oakland County information. She reviewed highlights of the document:

- The plan will be interactive and people will be able to dive in more if they are interested.*
- Planning in neighboring communities was acknowledged.*
- Community engagement included the small group workshops and the OPC meeting held last week.*
- The document dives into neighborhood planning through the maps.*
- Relative to the land use plan, there is a chapter that explains existing land use, what it is, some of the strategies that have been discussed and things that have been accomplished over the last couple of years. There are descriptions of the land use categories and the map.*

Vice Chairperson Brnabic commented that it appears the categories are changing again, noting the mapping colors. She commented that it appears that the entire Brooklands area running all the way up to Hamlin has been categorized under Neighborhood Residential, and asked why it was not categorized under Suburban Residential. She mentioned that she went back to the April 15, 2025 minutes and it stated that R-5 is proposed to change to Neighborhood Residential. She stated that she does not know why they would look at R-5 for that entire area.

She stated that she knows there was another reference to it because of some of the setbacks in the area and the way the area was platted, with 40 foot lots. She noted that most people bought side-by-side lots for 80 feet and mentioned that there are lots created that were 120 feet wide. She commented that while in general, most of the lots are within ordinance standards, there were a few odd lots where someone bought from street to street, and she stated that this causes a problem for a variance. She mentioned because of the larger lots, the City had started permitting 60 foot because with 120 foot width it was a way of getting two homes on a lot split.

Ms. Bahm responded that they were looking at the way that the lots were platted and the current conditions, and commented that they seemed to match the conditions that they were thinking of for Neighborhood Residential.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic stated that she would disagree if thinking of R-5, noting that this is not the neighborhood environment for duplexes or triplexes.

Ms. Bahm noted that what was talked about was if there was a lot that could fit two houses, they could either be done separately or two houses side-by-side; and stressed that it would be the same lot with the same number of homes. She stated that it is not saying that there is a lot with a single family home, and each home could be a duplex.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic responded that she does not think that is right for the area, and commented that it had been discussed perhaps off arterial roads such as John R or Dequindre. She stated that she does not agree with including the entire Brooklands area with a R-5 zoning perspective.

Mr. McLeod stated that for the Master Plan text right now, the Neighborhood Residential district didn't actually bring in the R-5 and it was consistent with the R-3, R-4. He stressed that one thing the Master Plan probably needs to expound on is the discussion that happened in April. He pointed out that there is the potential of connecting units along John R and along other major arterials that was discussed or in instances where natural features may otherwise push units around it; however, he stressed that the key is that the overall density or character does not change. He stressed that this does not necessarily automatically plug in R-5. He commented that he thinks realistically that it is a variation, whether it is MR or something new, that allows this to occur; noting that it would ensure that the overall density and character is maintained.

Commissioners suggested that the draft text is not consistent with the

discussion at the April worksession, as it does not emphasize that these types of homes would be allowed only on arterial roads and would not affect neighborhoods.

(Mr. Gallina entered at 5:40 p.m.)

Vice Chairperson Brnabic stated that the Future Land Use map is referenced by developers, and expressed concern that it would be the vision for the future.

Ms. Bahm stated that in looking at the old map, this is trying to give a name to the district so it made more sense. She stressed that the boundaries of this is the same as the boundaries on the map. She commented that R-4 went to Neighborhood Residential and R-5 did not appear anywhere.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic asked what is the distinguishing difference between Suburban and Neighborhood Residential.

Ms. Bahm responded that it is the size of the lots and right now they are basing it on the built environment. She commented that she believes the point is that the location is for the arterial lots and not in the middle of the neighborhood.

Ms. Neubauer commented that just in the last week someone appeared before the Zoning Board of Appeals and asked for a 1.8 foot variance on each side to allow a parcel to be divided into two parcels. She stated that it is so unfortunate that it is only 1.8 feet; however, such requests have been denied all the way back into the 1990s. She stressed that it needs to be clear so a developer cannot come in thinking that they can just get an exception because of some vague language or misunderstanding. She commented that the residents must be treated equally, whether it is in the Brooklands or on the Auburn Hills border.

Mr. Struzik noted that the Brooklands is seeing a lot of investment, and he would want to keep the character of the neighborhood.

Ms. Neubauer stated that it is the oldest, most established neighborhood in the entire city. She stressed that the Plan needs to take into consideration for the future that the Brooklands was affordable and the values have increased. She commented that it's important to preserve the integrity of those residential neighborhoods and ensure that those residents are not being displaced.

Discussions continued relative to the lot sizes currently in existence in the Brooklands area.

Ms. Bahm asked whether the established lot sizes in the Brooklands should be presented for subsequent R-4 developments.

Mr. McLeod stated that this would probably lead to an additional potential Zoning amendment. He suggested that Planning and Building have been conversing about whether the 60 foot reduction should be removed so that there is no confusion.

Ms. Neubauer concurred, stating that she thinks that would be better. She

commented that the Zoning Board of Appeals has been educational for her, as she believes that the more vagueness or loopholes that are left open, developers are led to waste money in asking for things they cannot get. She added that it is not fair to the residents and would surely eliminate the conversation if it was clear on what is being allowed or not allowed and the rules are kept the same. She commented that progress doesn't mean big dramatic change; and it can be small things that perhaps weren't done correctly before such as making school areas more walkable and protecting kids as they cross the street. She stated that these are the things that make the city number one in the state and number nine in the nation.

She commented that residents feel that there is so much overdevelopment and she encourages them to come to the Master Plan meetings. She stated that the difference between property that can be developed and green space needs to be explained better. She noted that a master plan does not mean that everything needs to be uprooted; and this needs to be communicated better.

Ms. Bahm stated that she is glad that things changed gears and whipped the car around in another direction. She commented that she wants to keep as close to the timeline as originally intended; however, they want to make sure it's right and that the Commission is comfortable with it.

(Mr. Hetrick arrived at 5:56 p.m.)

Ms. Bahm continued and asked if the plan should do a better job of explaining why the City needs a master plan or zoning, and noted that the answer is that people own property and they have a reasonable expectation that they can do something with it.

Ms. Denstaedt stated that it needs to be an overall message to everyone as no one understands what the Commission does and what a Master Plan is.

Ms. Neubauer added that there are so many people on the community media pages and suggested that an introduction be added on the community pages. She stated that it should be kept simple to state that they are not changing things, or doing this to take away or add, and to explain to the people who have property what they can do with the property they have.

Ms. Bahm cautioned that an introduction cannot be too detailed because it will have to be defended.

Chairperson Hooper commented that perhaps it can be said that 97 percent, or whatever appropriate number, will not see a change to the regulations to their existing site.

Ms. Neubauer suggested that it is the perception of change, in that 97 percent is already developed and this only affects the three percent that is not.

Mr. Weaver countered that this would be a tricky thing, as if that site falls in that percentage it could be developed or redeveloped.

Walton Oaks was mentioned, where a single owner sold and more home sites are being developed.

Ms. Neubauer suggested that explanations be included relative to a private owner and his right to sell his property, and the fact that 10 acres are needed to do some multiple-story projects.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic stated that the city has been in a stage of redevelopment for 25 years, and this will happen. She noted that expressing that the Commission tries to work toward the best possible development that can be done for the city while following the Ordinances. She stressed that she is glad that the Planning Commission and City Council opinions have worked to guide limits as the community does not generally want to see four, five or six-story buildings.

Mr. Weaver suggested incorporating a way to say that this doesn't promote new development; but sets guidelines should a property owner wish to develop his property.

Mr. Struzik suggested incorporating a history of the Green Space Millage, and that it has been a priority in the past and some parcels have been captured that will never be developed.

Results of the meeting at the OPC were mentioned, noting that four years ago, the big three concerns mentioned were traffic congestion, housing for empty-nesters, and deer. It was noted that this time, deer was not mentioned at all, but the other two topics were discussed. A third topic this year was walkability, and this topic appears to span all of the generations, along with preservation and sustainability.

Discussion ensued over where four stories should be permitted in the city, and it was noted that it has turned into a conditional use with minimum property sizes. It was noted that four stories is permitted in the FB district with 10 acres; and along Rochester Road, four acres was required. It as mentioned that developers are now buying up backyards of deep lots to allow them to amass 10 acres to construct a subdivision.

Ms. Neubauer stated that the right language should be provided as they are trying to preserve the integrity of the city as it is. She asked how to ensure in the Master Plan that people cannot use up people's backyards in order to be able to put up a four-story building, when the whole intention is to make sure that there are no four-story buildings.

Mr. McLeod countered that the only way to do this is to write four stories out of the Zoning Ordinance as an option. He stated that without this, someone will always find a loophole and a way to do it.

It was noted that Legacy Apartments have four stories; however, that was the result of a Consent Judgment approved by City Council.

Mr. Hetrick commented that this took a lot of work, and previous Council

Member Morita and the developer were willing to work together and the four-story buildings were moved on the plan so there were only two stories next to existing homes. He added that the developer had to make the money and tax abatement work to clean up the site. He commented that once the density was agreed upon, they were fine.

Ms. Neubauer commented that the developer wanted to build micro units.

Mr. McLeod noted that in the FB district there is no minimum size of the dwelling units, but it relies on parking. He explained that when a zoning ordinance is drafted, in order to have absolutes it should be one of the standards. If wanting flexibility, then the conditional use can flow with that; such as to say, for example, that it can only happen when completely surrounded by non-residential uses.

Chairperson Hooper stated that it is probably not a good idea to eliminate four stories entirely. He stated that the Commission should be careful should the Bordines property move toward redevelopment. He pointed out that the hotel next to the Holiday Inn Express is four stories.

Ms. Neubauer asked if there would be a way to tighten up the regulations without using exclusive language.

Mr. McLeod suggested that the Commission should be drafting provisions around conditions that push it in that direction.

Ms. Neubauer asked if this would be referencing commercial buildings as well or no four story apartments or apartment complexes.

Mr. McLeod stated that it would be buildings in the FB district, and explained that right now buildings in the FB district may be permitted up to an additional story and 15 feet, and it allows four stories for sites of at least 10 acres in size with conditional approval. He added that it states that the siting of the building or buildings is designed to maintain a reasonable expectation of privacy for adjacent residential uses and shall not negatively impact the residential use with respect to enjoyment of direct sunlight. Also, the ordinance requires that the site must include a third place of interest, which must be dedicated to either landscaping, natural feature preservation or open space. He added that additional setbacks in Table 10 apply, which refers to starting to step the building back for additional height.

Ms. Neubauer noted that there is no reference to density, and a developer may be able to have 500 square foot units and have 100 of them.

Mr. Weaver stated that nobody will be making a tower as it would not meet the Ordinance, and no one would rent or lease a 200 square foot room. He added that there are landscaping stipulations, and the Commission has the power to review a proposal and determine that it does not fit. He mentioned the shipping container coffee shop, and stated that it gives the Commission the authority to review it and say that it does not fit the character of Rochester Hills.

Mr. Hetrick commented that there are certain features that can be incorporated around how the buildings can be placed for sunlight or setback. He pointed out that even though Legacy was a part of a consent judgment, the four-story buildings were moved to the outside of the property and the two-story buildings were placed near the existing homes.

Ms. Neubauer mentioned that she received a phone call from a developer that stated that he wants to build something that is small and affordable.

Mr. McLeod stated that those are called micro units.

Mr. Hetrick asked if those would be considered a conditional use.

Ms. Bahm responded that some of them could be permitted.

Mr. McLeod noted that in the FB district there is currently no minimum size for dwelling or definition of unit size, and explained that it relies on the regulations of street or on-site parking.

Mr. Hetrick mentioned Old Orion Court, and noted that if they wanted to build micro units there, they would have needed more parking spaces which they would not have been able to get on that site.

Ms. Bahm noted that she is hearing that a brief land use description may not be enough for the Planning Commission to have a supporting foundation needed to make some of these decisions. She commented that they may have to go back to a longer version. She suggested that the Commission think about what they don't like about the four stories and why does it not fit well.

Ms. Neubauer responded that it is a density issue. She suggested that a minimum square footage per unit would prevent the micro units.

Ms. Bahm suggested that perhaps the Ordinance could limit the number of micro units and mentioned 10. She asked if they were worried about increased traffic.

Ms. Neubauer responded that it is not consistent with the aesthetics of the current community and did not think that it would be consistent with the aesthetics of the future community to have small micro units. She stressed that as it was mentioned in the joint meeting with City Council, Rochester Hills is not necessarily a starter community, and people move here when they are established. She commented that one of the goals in the Master Plan was to make sure that the people who are here can stay here, which may have something to do more with legislative factors such as the uncapping of taxes. She noted that if residents have lived here for more than 10 years and want to move, they have to pay the higher rates. She stated that it should be something in order to make it more affordable for them to continue to stay here. She stressed that this is not an apartment building community, such as Southfield.

Chairperson Hooper asked what the size of the typical assisted living unit is now, and mentioned that his mother lived in Sunrise for five years and it was 500

square feet.

Mr. Struzik stated that this is similar to a dorm such as in Rochester Christian University. He stated that he wanted to ensure that they would not do anything that would prohibit building student housing.

Ms. Neubauer responded that student and university housing is regulated differently, by the State.

Ms. Bahm noted that page one of the Master Plan, under Community Vision, states that "this vision aims to maintain stability and the suburban lifestyle in Rochester Hills while strengthening pedestrian connectivity and preserving natural resources". She moved on to mention the second bullet, noting that it states, "The City will maintain its current patterns of land use and development practices. Single family detached housing will continue to be the preferred choice for residents."

Mr. Struzik asked whether there is an opportunity to engage with HOAs and suggested giving them a playbook of what should be done if there is a 10-acre or five-acre parcel right next to their neighborhood to potentially preserve it from development. He noted that it could be offered that they should review their subdivision bylaws to ensure that they do not have any restrictions against purchasing property. He stated that they should talk to their membership to see how much they might be willing to spend to make a preemptive offer to the current homeowner, and look for the parcel to go for sale and be prepared to purchase it at market rate.

Mr. McLeod stated that there is a lot riding on the HOA education line of thought, including how to take care of stormwater retention ponds and how to manage their open spaces. He commented that he likes the idea of also suggesting that they buy adjacent areas for green space. He noted that unfortunately, this is not the purpose of the Green Space Fund; however, the HOAs do not understand that they have to be high on the scale in terms of environmental assets whether it is wetlands, woodlands, steep slopes or rivers. He stated that this could be a presentation with Planning, Engineering, and Parks and Natural Resources or be incorporated into the HOA forums that are done twice a year.

Ms. Bahm concurred, noting that it fits in with the section on neighborhood preservation. She commented that education for HOAs will help promote environmental stewardship in regards to tree removals and general open space maintenance and best practices. She added that there was discussion about places that do not have an HOA and how to create a framework within that to address maintaining existing housing stock, upgrading infrastructure where upgrades are desired, and providing for redevelopment that does not outscale existing homes.

Discussion moved on to the EGLE grant properties.

Mr. McLeod noted that originally it was two planning areas A and B, Hamlin and Madison Park, and then City properties were added as area C. EGLE came

back and said to open up the entire City for any contaminated property to be able to apply for funding. He cautioned that the idea is that this is initially intended for landfills and they do not want every gas station coming as that is not the purpose of the funding.

Mr. McLeod returned to respond to the question regarding assisted living square footage, and noted that floor sizes are 300 square feet for efficiency, 400 square feet for one bedroom, and 550 for two bedroom. He suggested that there could be different standards for apartments versus assisted living or nursing facilities.

Ms. Bahm pointed out that most assisted living facilities are not likely to have in-unit kitchens. She moved on to discuss redevelopment opportunities. She noted that in the last Master Plan they had three sites, including the two landfills and the Bordines site. She explained that it has been updated for today, but had not been discussed yet. She highlighted the concepts for redevelopment, including a mix of commercial uses including small, independent, and/or local retail shops and restaurants. A big box store was discouraged for this location, and it would be ideal for attainable housing including townhomes, attached condominiums or apartments. She stated that this would be the only place that the word "apartments" was used, and pointed out that it was from the last document.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic asked if the Bordines property had an FB overlay.

Ms. Bahm responded that she thought it did, but not on the entire site.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic noted that they would have the opportunity to do four stories, and it was not only dependent on the size of the property.

It was pointed out that the American House adjacent to that site had three stories.

Chairperson Hooper stated that to have a blanket statement of no four stories in the City would be exclusionary.

Ms. Neubauer suggested not using exclusionary words, but it should come back to the idea that it is not what they are looking for and should be made as difficult as possible to attain.

Mr. McLeod noted that the City has newly-acquired open space to the north, the cemetery and duplex property to the east and then roads on the south and west.

Chairperson Hooper noted that an offer was made 20 or 30 years ago by Walmart to purchase that property and it was turned down. He commented that he did not think it would sell anytime soon.

Ms. Neubauer pointed out that the property is right in the center of everything. She commented that if the Commission is saying that they do not want four stories on the outskirts on 10 acres, and now it is saying that maybe it could be on the Bordines site because how it is zoned, it makes her nervous.

Mr. Struzik commented that he gets more worried about four stories when it is directly next to residential. He noted that there is a buffer of City property to the north side. He stated that he is foreseeing more diversity in housing types in certain areas but not in the existing neighborhoods, and is not opposed to apartments in certain areas. He pointed out that when Legacy was first constructed, they heard comments that the concrete looked like jail cells; however, once the facade was put on it, he thinks they look good.

Ms. Neubauer stated that she still hears comments about it. She mentioned that Legacy has a waiting list. She commented that when talking about diversity in development, they were thinking more about ranch homes in subdivisions as opposed to the monster developments that have occurred. She stated that nobody is building 1,500 to 2,000 square foot homes anymore and they are all 3,500 square feet or more. She mentioned that the general consensus is that high and dense development is not what people are looking for.

Chairperson Hooper suggested that the vocal minority are what people are hearing, and noted the topic of deer. He stated that people came to speak that did not even live in the community; and now they have disappeared.

Ms. Neubauer stressed that she is not saying that they can please everyone; however, they are doing things right because they keep getting awards and people want to move here. She commented that property values are still going up, and suggested focusing on walkability, safety around the schools and the Master Plan.

Ms. Bahm noted that the 2018 plan showed the outside edges along Hamlin and Rochester Roads of the Bordines property as mixed use with retail on the bottom and apartments above. She stated that it would be whatever the Ordinance allowed, and would now be four stories. She added that townhomes were all in the center around a green and against some of the other residential areas with parking tucked away. Bordines was going to keep a part of it.

Chairperson Hooper noted that there were several iterations including a big box.

Discussion continued regarding three story versus four story. It was mentioned that a movie theater needed four stories for a screen; however, it would not be constructed with four stories of windows. It was also mentioned that the Imagine Theater has a business buffer between it and adjacent condominiums.

Ms. Neubauer stated that for the immediate master plan and beyond she wants to fix the walkability around the schools and neighborhoods first; and once that is done, then she wants to fix the walkability everywhere else.

Ms. Bahm related that for another community they worked with, their Commission wanted one thing and their Council wanted another relative to building heights. She suggested that they look down the road five years from now and added that it would depend on what kind of growth and change happens between now and the next Master Plan. She noted that while not ruling it out, there are things they want such as seeing the existing shopping centers

revitalized.

An image in the previous plan was mentioned relative to the Bordines redevelopment, and it was suggested that it be taken out as it was from a previous plan. It was pointed out that retail faced inwards. It was suggested to make the buildings three stories instead of four, and to have the retail face out so that it had more of a presence on Rochester Road to facilitate more walkability and visibility. It was suggested to perhaps remove that particular image and replace it with an illustration.

Mr. Struzik cautioned that if the building height is restricted down it could become a Costco, for instance, and it could be much worse for traffic. He commented that this is an option where people could live there and have shops.

Ms. Neubauer stated that she is not saying that people cannot live there; but that it does not have to be four stories. She commented that it could be two story plus retail.

Chairperson Hooper cautioned that he would not want to set the City up for a lawsuit.

Ms. Neubauer stated that she is not anti-development nor anti-progress, but she just wants to ensure that they are doing things well and do not have to drastically change. She stressed that when it comes to the Master Plan, she wants to ensure that there is enough in there that can actually be accomplished, and the big picture is trying to bring it back to walkability. She commented that it needs to be narrowly-focused and not hypothetical so that they can actually accomplish what is in the plan. She added that she wants to make sure that what is being done is not contradictory.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic stated that there would be one more workshop right before it goes to the open house. She asked if there would be renderings and picture examples.

Ms. Bahm responded that the tool would be back to the website and this will be the foundation of it. She stated that the pictures would be on the website. She stated that there would be a paper version and an online version.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic stated that she would like to have a paper version to refer to when she is not by a computer.

Ms. Bahm responded that the paper version will be the executive summary, which will be in the range of 20 pages or one-third of the online document that will meet the statutory requirements and refer to the online sections. She stated that hopefully at the next worksession most of the information will be on the website.