

DISCUSSION

2024-0618 Master Plan 2024

(McLeod Memo dated 12-10-24, Transportation and Community Health presentation, Draft PC Worksession Minutes of 11-19-24, PC Worksession Minutes of 10-15-24, 9-17-24, 7-16-24, 6-18-24, 5-21-24, 3-19-24, and Planning Commission-City Council Joint Minutes of 1-29-24 had been placed on file and by reference became a part of the record thereof.)

Present were Jill Bahm and Ian Hogg representing Giffels Webster, the City's Planning Consultant.

Ms. Bahm expressed thanks to the Commission for attending the study session and appreciation for their time dedicated to the Master Plan update process. She noted that today's session would focus again on community components. She mentioned that they came to the Joint Planning Commission-City Council meeting in November thinking that they heard the Commission's direction for the scenarios being discussed as in the Two to Three area; however, it was very clear at the Joint Meeting that this was not what the Commission was really saying in the previous two meetings. She commented that she believes that the difference came when looking at the neighborhood level. She stressed that one of the things that should be made clear is that they are not necessarily saying that the scenarios need to apply the same way throughout the entire community, but there may be places and pockets where some of those strategies would be appropriate. She stated that perhaps at the Joint Meeting that part was not heard to the extent it should have been. She commented that from working with the Commission in the past on the last plan and this plan, their job as planners is to present information and ideas and trends and what communities are doing locally, regionally, and other places. She noted that ultimately she wanted to make sure that everyone understands and feels comfortable that they are listening to the Commission and recognize that this is their community; and they want to help make it the best community that the Commission and City Council envisions. She commented that it may sound like sometimes the Commission is being pushed, but it is in the exercise of having them stretch their brains and think about different things and how they do or do not fit. She noted that the Commission will never be told what they have to do or that there is only one way to plan for the community.

She stated that tonight's session will focus on transportation, the network of roads, public transportation, pedestrians and cycling infrastructure that allows residents to access goods, services, jobs and community facilities. She added that it allows residents the access to interact with each other as well, and social factors are important. She recalled that after the last Master Plan update, the Transportation Plan followed, and commented that she will touch a little bit on what was in the Transportation Plan. She stressed that the State of Michigan and the Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires that community master plans include a Complete Streets plan. She reminded the Commission that Complete Streets does not mean that every street needs to serve every user, but the

transportation network as a whole should give people the mobility options that they need to access the business services and community facilities found in the community.

She mentioned the planning filters considered, noting that they include being an age-friendly community, a sustainable community, and a community that demonstrates innovation. Based on public input, sustainability, paying attention to natural features, the city's natural resources, and being age-friendly goes hand in hand with the community's wishes to be and to continue to be a family-friendly community. Also as people are getting older, the plan should accommodate and provide for them as well as the children in the community, that can also benefit.

She noted the scenario planning that has been undertaken for the past several months is a way to consider what the preferred future would be so that the Master Plan can support that vision and continue to illustrate the ways in which the community components are interconnected. She highlighted the following summary of the preferred vision of Timeless Tradition:

- The long-range focus of the Master Plan is preserving the stability and quality of life that centers on the city's desirable suburban single family neighborhoods*
- The city will maintain its current patterns of land use and development practices. Single family detached housing will continue to be the preferred choice of residents.*
- As a family-friendly community and one where residents age in place, the City will explore housing options that accommodate older residents and promote walkability for residents of all ages.*
- Recognizing that the local and regional transportation network primarily supports personal automobile travel, the City will strive to support other transportation modes, focusing on strengthening the City's sidewalk and pathway network.*
- Community facilities, parks, and preserved open spaces are key to the City's success; resources will be dedicated to sustainability and the ongoing maintenance of aging infrastructure and public services.*

She asked if that was what the Commissioners had in mind as a vision and focus for the whole city, stressing that it does not mean that they cannot do certain things in certain places.

Mr. Hetrick commented that with regard to transportation and the sidewalk and pathway network, it also seemed that they were trying to accomplish enhancing the recreation and health of the residents. He stressed that this did not mean he wanted to bring back Option Two, but there was a part of Option Two that they agreed was important. He noted that he can use pathway to get to the Clinton River Trail, where he can ride his bike and get fresh air.

Ms. Bahm stated that in viewing transportation and community health, transportation is important to be able to connect residents to medical services, healthy food, and recreational facilities. Sidewalks and pathways can be used for recreation but can also be used to help people satisfy their daily needs for goods and services, and potentially for commuting to school and work.

Reducing car dependency affects air quality, lowering emissions which reduces respiratory issues, and allows social connectivity. She stressed that public transportation and/or pedestrian friendly areas foster social and mental health. She noted that social isolation is identified as one of the contributing factors to depression in older adults. She stated that well-planned streets can reduce traffic accidents and protect pedestrians and cyclists. She stated that thinking about the filter of being age-friendly, master plan and land use strategies should promote good transportation, community health, and mobility for all ages. These strategies will ensure the City meets the needs of older adults, families and younger residents alike.

She noted that innovative mobility solutions could include bike or ride sharing, prioritizing pedestrian and cycle safety with well-connected sidewalks, bikeways and greenways. She mentioned integrated land uses connecting to neighborhood goods and services, parks and civic facilities so residents can live, work and play within a short distance of home. She mentioned that in 2021 the goals included creating a safer transportation system, easing traffic congestion, exploring or enhancing multimodal facilities, preparing for new technology, maintaining the current infrastructure and exploring public transportation options. She stated that the master plan included some good recommendations and strategies to alleviate congestion, improve safety, and improve non-motorized options; and focused on a lot of intersections, considered road diets and included one freeway crossing road.

She displayed a map identifying high schools and their half-mile radius which is about a ten-minute walk from each school.

Ms. Denstaedt asked why Avondale Middle School was not identified.

Ms. Roediger responded that Avondale was not included and only Rochester Community Schools were shown. She noted that Rochester's policy is elementary students do not get a bus if they live within one mile; however, Avondale provides busing for a half-mile and farther.

Mr. Struzik commented that his children were bussed to Hampton Elementary, they were not bussed to Reuther Middle School, and were bussed to Rochester High. He stated that they were just under the mile-and-a-half distance to Reuther and had to cross two main roads, John R and Auburn. He mentioned that there was two or three years in a row where a student was hit by a car going to school in the morning, and added that there is total gridlock in taking them to school. He stated that the school has some of their students walking way too far, and it is causing gridlock by not busing the kids.

Ms. Roediger responded that the schools cannot find the bus drivers; so even if they were convinced to increase their budget and add buses, there is nobody that will drive. She suggested that it could be a recommendation of the Master Plan to engage in conversations with the schools and see if there are partnerships or ways that the City can help. She noted that the schools are a huge component in walkability and congestion, and pointed out that not many kids north of Walton ride buses.

Mr. Struzik suggested that some of this can change how they do road design. He mentioned he would have done Auburn in front of Reuther Middle School differently to accommodate more right-turn queuing rather than Culbertson.

Mr. Hetrick mentioned enhancing crossings and adding lighting.

Ms. Roediger responded that it is also a bit of a challenge because of the way Rochester Hills developed. She stated that the City was so proactive in getting pathways along major roads; however, it does not have sidewalks or lighting in most neighborhoods. She commented that parents have concerns about getting their students to the pathways. She pointed out that to receive funding through Safe Routes to Schools, improvements need to be made to both sides of the road. She commented that for example in a neighborhood, they would not be able to add sidewalk to one side of the road and receive funding. She added that people also do not necessarily understand exactly where the right-of-way ends and their yard begins, and putting in sidewalks would tear up a lot of the front yard they have adopted.

Ms. Bahm added that one of the challenges is distracted drivers, so public awareness around the presence of people walking is another strategy.

Ms. Roediger noted that she sees many kids riding electric scooters to school now.

Ms. Bahm stated that there was public input related to transportation, and it was noted that traffic and congestion was listed as a major challenge facing the city. She commented that if the roads will not be made wider, then they would try to offer other ways people can get around, especially for the short trips. She mentioned one survey question which asked if someone was considering moving from their home, does Rochester Hills provide what they would look for in their next home; and she reported that 45 percent of the people answering stated that they would choose to live in an area with more transportation options. She noted that having said that, they also turned around and said that they will not ever ride or walk to community destinations.

Mr. Hetrick commented that part of it will be educational in how to bike safely.

Ms. Bahm noted that there are initiatives at the national level that communities do locally, such as ride your bike to work day in May, and a "walking school bus" where the idea is that instead of carpooling, kids walk together. She noted that asking about private transportation, most people stated that they would use Uber or Lyft as opposed to a taxi.

Mr. Struzik commented that there is a lot of inertia to a community that has been car dependent, and it will take a while for people to use the bus service. He stated that he has not used the bus service due to the frequency of only once an hour, and that is not an acceptable choice for someone who has a car to drive. He pointed out that he rode the bus for an entire year previously, driving to Troy to access it; and he noted that there are entire communities with denser populations who do not have a car or perhaps do not have a license and take the bus downtown. He commented that these opportunities will take time to

happen in the city.

Ms. Bahm added that it is similar to a chicken-and-egg scenario. They might run the buses more frequently if people were riding them, and more people may ride them if they ran more frequently.

Mr. Struzik suggested partnering with private businesses to provide park and ride lots so that people would have a place where their car would not get towed for parking on private property. He mentioned that it is a mile walk for him to access the nearest bus stop.

Ms. Bahm noted that two concerns were just raised, one the frequency and the second how to get people the last mile from their home to the transit stop. She commented that the partnerships with local business is a valid suggestion, and could be a way to better utilize some of the extra parking at some establishments.

Ms. Roediger asked if the Commissioners were familiar with SMART's Flex policy, where they essentially provide an uber-style service for the first and last mile. She explained that it is in Pontiac and Auburn Hills where it is like an app within the main app where they will pick up and drive anywhere within that area. She added that it is a dollar or two and contributes toward the bus fare. She stated that SMART is proposing adding a flex district in Rochester Hills in the Walton South area.

Mr. Struzik suggested that there might be opportunities for large events such as the Christmas Parade, providing a shuttle, for instance at the Hampton Shopping Center.

Ms. Denstaedt noted that a lot of the bars up and down Big Beaver Road use it because it is a way for them very inexpensively for them to put someone who has been drinking a little too much in a car and get them home.

Ms. Roediger mentioned OPC, and stated that OPC's Executive Director Ms. Cortright was invited to attend, but must have gotten tied up. She noted that one has to be 55 and older to use the OPC services, but they have obviously received a lot of funding from the millage and are upping their transportation options. She noted that Ms. Cortright had spoken from a senior's perspective in terms of community health about how challenging it is for them as they serve the community seniors, and that the Meals on Wheels program has doubled this year. She commented that Ms. Cortright sees a huge need for the senior population at OPC for affordability, housing, meals and transportation.

Mr. Hetrick stated that based on the conversation, they still have in the Master Plan the idea of different housing profiles, meaning the idea of duplex housing that could be more attainable for seniors who would be downsizing out of \$700,000 homes into \$400,000 homes. He added that the word "attainable" is easier to deal with than "affordable".

Ms. Bahm noted that the important qualities one looks for in a community are the school district, transportation, access to natural features, a family-friendly

atmosphere, proximity to retail and restaurants. She noted that many of these things are tied closely to transportation. She added that these were just some of the themes from the survey, and referred to environmental preservation and green space, walkable neighborhoods, reducing traffic congestion, improving road conditions, enforcing speed limits, better traffic management, and looking at community services and facilities. She mentioned increasing the number of community events, adding dog parks, and group transportation, which were common themes. She stated that there are three discussion starters, including thinking about the vision for the future and thinking about that balance, looking for opportunities to strengthen and support the things that the city already has, and some of the feelings of efficiency, connectivity, supporting maintenance and physical improvements and improving access. She stated that with the number of attendees she would break the group into two and ask that these things be considered with regard to the various neighborhoods. She asked the group to consider how things might look different from one community to the next and how it might vary from neighborhood to neighborhood.

Mr. Struzik asked if the groups should consider things like mid-block crossing locations or possible roundabouts. He stated that roundabouts increase vehicle safety and asked if they decrease pedestrian safety.

Ms. Bahm responded that there has been a lot of conversation about pedestrian and bicycle safety in roundabouts, and suggested backing up the crossings so that they are not in the roundabouts. She added that people still need to learn how to use them. She explained the maps that the groups were being given, and asked for the groups to think about ways that can help support the various neighborhoods.

Chairperson Brnabic noted that Mr. Beaton had requested to speak.

Scot Beaton, 655 Bolinger, stated that he provided the Commission with information. He stated that he was really sold on the Complete Streets idea for a long time; however, the problem is that the bike lanes are not protected by anything that sticks up in the air. He suggested that if bike lanes will be installed, there must be visuals installed too. He added that improvements will cost money and there will probably be a need for a tax increase. He suggested a bike street that is a completely separated piece of infrastructure that bicycles, e-bikes and other kinds of one-wheel modes of transportation could use. He stated that the bike paths could be made a couple of feet wider.

Mr. Hetrick suggested that Drexelgate could be an example as that path is separated.

Mr. Beaton noted that he added online links to modern architecture in the documents he provided, and stated that it is sad that 85 percent of the community will say that they do not like modern architecture. He suggested the Master Plan address this issue.

Ms. Roediger noted that the original plan for Barclay Circle called for physically separated lanes; however, Council wanted to do it as a pilot project before investing in all of that infrastructure and use just the paint. In answer to a

question, she stated that she did not know of any accidents occurring there, but recalled that there was consternation online when they were first installed because there was no dedicated turn lane. Subsequently it was tweaked, and once the turn lanes were restored, that all seemed to go away.

Mr. Struzik noted that it is much safer to be separated from the driving lane.

Mr. Beaton stated that he was passed on Barclay Circle by someone who went into the bike lane. He commented that there needs to be some separation.

Mr. Struzik stated that from the perspective of someone who lives there, they want traffic to slow down. He noted that cars on Barclay are going closer to 35 mph now because it is three lanes instead of five.

Ms. Roediger noted that Barclay was the lower cost effort, whereas Drexelgate has physically moving curves. She added that there was a lot of the same opposition in the Brooklands because of the median and roundabouts that were installed with the intention of slowing traffic. She noted that it was also an intended consequence of the city trying to slow the traffic on Barclay, to discourage people from using it as a cut-through to avoid an intersection.

Ms. Bahm directed the groups to think about how to scale improvements based on the population that will be using them.

Discussion ensued regarding expansion of bike lanes around Hampton Circle.

Ms. Roediger noted that the entire square mile of the Hampton development was designed to be an all-inclusive development that has retail, offices, single family homes, multiple family, a golf course, a community center and schools. She explained that extending the bike lanes into Hampton Circle creates that kind of first-last mile where someone's child who lives in the apartments can go to Emagine Theater without having their parent get onto the road to drive them. She noted that the Master Plan for Transportation calls for the next step.

The attendees broke into two groups and discussed infrastructure, transportation, funding, pathways and walkability.

Upon regrouping, Ms. Bahm asked if the discussion found any differences between the neighborhoods, perhaps how one neighborhood might be more well-suited to certain kinds of transportation enhancements.

Mr. Hetrick responded that they looked at it from the broader scope that they need to fill in the gaps for more students to get to school. He noted that they mentioned a person with disability that wanted to use the pathway, it had gaps.

Ms. Bahm commented that in doing things to make it easier for the most vulnerable people in the community, the disabled or the older residents, it is good for everyone.

Mr. Hetrick stated that since the cost of infrastructure is high, he knows that the City is great at putting the exclamation point on grants and any other sources of

funding so that it is not always coming out of the City's tax base.

Ms. Bahm noted that these were different comments than five years ago, when everyone was saying that there were too many deer, the roads are too congested, and there is not enough housing for empty nesters. This time it was empty nesters and no deer. Instead of congestion it is walkability.

She noted that the next study session will be on environment, and she commented that Mr. McLeod will have some good resources that he will share.

Ms. Roediger commented that there will be more study sessions in 2025 and are planning for perhaps a January session with February off, and then perhaps a draft to consider in March.

Ms. Bahm noted that at that point they will be meeting with the small groups again.

Ms. Roediger added that at that point the tentative plan will be adjusted accordingly.