

DISCUSSION

2025-0308

Master Plan 2025

(Giffels Webster Memo dated 7/15/25 and Updated Draft Full Master Plan Text, Draft Plan Recommendations, Land Use, Housing and Economic Development, Draft Plan Recommendations - Transportation, Draft Plan Recommendations, Parks and Natural Features, Draft PC Worksession Minutes from 6-17-25, 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 stated that the plan text included in the packet is the content of what the plan will ultimately include. He explained that barring any additional changes as it is reviewed, based on State statute there will be a 63 day review period with the clock beginning as soon as the Planning Commission and Council sends it out. He mentioned that it has been challenging to generate the plan into the format that they ultimately want to get it to; and they wanted to get back to basics and focus on the content. As the review period is ongoing, they will take that time to put all the bells and whistles back together to have ready for adoption at the end of the review period. He stressed that they will be focusing now on content versus glam, and he turned the discussion over to Ms. Bahm.

Ms. Bahm stated that the content presented last time was further refined based on feedback from the last meeting. She referred to the cover memo, and noted that it was discussed that Neighborhood Residential on page 28 was revised to be more clear.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic stated that she still did not agree with the entire area north of South Boulevard to Hamlin Road being covered by Neighborhood Residential, and commented the language that it is compatible with four to six units per acre bothers her. She noted that there are many lots that are 120 or 150 feet wide and disagreed with grouping that in with R-5 and Multi-Family. She pointed out that they never identified an area where R-5 would work showing small scale homes and attached duplexes, triplexes and quad units appropriate in Neighborhood Residential. She stressed that the most discussion was about John R and maybe along arterial roads, not in the middle of neighborhoods.

Ms. Bahm responded that they tried to make that clear in the second paragraph of Neighborhood Residential description right after the land use designation that Mixed Residential R-3, R-4 and R-5 were located along major thoroughfares. She quoted that attached dwellings may be appropriate as a transition along major thoroughfares or to preserve natural features when new development meets the density of the adjacent neighborhoods, and she stressed that they were trying to be more clear about that. She asked that the current Future Land

Use Map from 2018 be displayed, noting that she thought it might be helpful to see where R-5 was included on that map.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic commented that the way this is presented it looks like an overlay. She stated that the four to six units is bothering her, and Suburban calls for three to four units.

Ms. Bahm read from page 28 of the draft, noting that where it does overlay the R-3 and R-4 particularly in the southern part of the City, lot sizes range from three to four dwelling units per acre based on existing development patterns.

Chairperson Hooper commented that the verbiage of density conflicts with the zoning of the property. He noted that it is a guide and not zoning, and they would have to change the setbacks and zoning in order to make the density even a chance.

Ms. Roediger stated that she does not think there was a plan to change the zoning districts. She commented that she is trying to understand the concern because she thought the concern was about allowing attached units anywhere, and that is not the intent. She stressed that the intent is only along major roads.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic concurred that it is the understanding she had.

Ms. Bahm stressed that it says that in both Suburban Residential and Neighborhood Residential.

Ms. Roediger stated that she will review that page because she thinks that the intent is not to allow attached units anywhere in the middle of the neighborhood, except along major roads. She mentioned that they talked about clustering to save natural features.

Ms. Neubauer asked if clarifying language could be added so that there is no chance for misinterpretation.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic moved on to read from page 38 of the draft, the descriptions for Suburban Residential and Neighborhood Residential. She expressed concern that this is the vision for the future and they are calling for smaller lots. She asked why they did not consider the Brooklands area Suburban Residential versus Neighborhood Residential.

Ms. Bahm reiterated that it is the same language as on page 28, and to be clear it is on the major thoroughfares and not within the neighborhoods. She suggested that perhaps they should come up with a different way to express it; however, she thought it was pretty clear.

Mr. Hetrick suggested that the problem is that when viewing the pictorial, it gives the appearance that the entire area has a possibility of having multifamily dwellings when they are trying to keep the location in the case of the Brooklands around Auburn Road. He stated that what Vice Chairperson Brnabic is implying is that she does not want a developer six blocks from the Brooklands believing that it would be permitted. He commented that this is the Master Plan and is not

changing the zoning. He noted that as Chairperson Hooper stated, the Ordinances will support someone not suggesting cherry-picking an area.

Ms. Bahm confirmed that the Ordinance language will really tell the developer what they can and cannot do. She stressed that the language can say that the parcel has to have frontage on a major thoroughfare.

Ms. Roediger countered that she does not think that they are trying to add more multiple family. She stressed that by trying to categorize it along the major roads it would be misleading. She stated that they are not trying to say that it has to be attached; however, she mentioned that there are developers out there like Jim Polyzois who always plans projects with a lot of duplex-type dwellings and currently they would not be permitted. She commented that the map contains general categories; but the text goes hand in hand, and says attached only along major corridors and to preserve natural features.

Ms. Neubauer asked if a compromise was possible, perhaps adding an asterisk at the map that states that the map is to be interpreted in conjunction with the language of whatever it is clarifying.

Ms. Bahm noted that there most likely was a disclaimer in the old map, a general sort of statement of the purpose of the map.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic asked if the districts in the Ordinance were going to be renamed and the text amended to coordinate.

Ms. Roediger responded that the only reason it is tied to the zoning is because the Planning Act indicates that the future land use categories have to be affiliated with current zoning. She stressed that it does not state that the zoning ordinance, map or district names have to be changed. She added that they are not trying to change zoning districts, create a new district, or change anything within the zoning districts. She explained that it is for classifying the kind of character in the area of the different districts and neighborhood. She commented that they struggled with this quite a bit internally, trying to almost differentiate Suburban versus Neighborhood; and explained that the Neighborhood felt like more of the older established neighborhoods that tend to have more of a grid network. She stated that it is more traditional rather than what she would call the suburban sprawl of the 80s and 90s. She mentioned that they were debating using Traditional Residential.

Ms. Bahm noted that it is not like they are small lots, but they are smaller than they are in places in the north end of the city for example. She stressed that the effort was to look at the existing built environment and how the city developed over so many years.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic asked additional questions about R-5 and commented that she did not think that it would support duplexes, triplexes and quadplexes. She commented that they have not figured out an area where that would work. She questioned why manufactured housing was grouped in with that area as well. She stressed that a lot of small builders might find a lot that would encourage attached housing.

Ms. Bahm responded that in thinking about rezoning, it is not possible to rezone a lot in the middle of an R-4 district to R-5.

Chairperson Hooper added that this would be spot rezoning and is not allowed.

Ms. Bahm noted that the zoning change was made to create the R-5 district, but it is currently a paper district, and it needs to be included.

Ms. Roediger responded to the comment regarding mobile home parks, noting that they would want those areas open to single family residential should something happen and the park go away. She noted that this is why they were lumped in with Neighborhood Residential.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic mentioned nonconforming lots in the R-4 district. She cited page 41 of the draft.

Ms. Bahm responded that the change was to say that this is an area of study to assess whether the lot sizes in the Brooklands should be influencing or guiding the alignment with the R-4 district. She noted that this would make it easier for homes and lots in the Brooklands to not have to go to the ZBA for certain variances.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic stated that on the ZBA they have seen more requests relative to R-3 as it requires 90 feet and applicants wanted to do a lot split for two 80-foot lots which are not permitted in that district. She noted that applicants brought up that there were some 80-foot lots in the surrounding area. She commented that she cannot recall seeing a lot width variance request in the Brooklands.

Mr. McLeod responded that they have denied a lot of requests, and stated that right now the Zoning Ordinance says that in the R-4 District they do have the ability to get to a 60-foot lot if the context allows for it; and he explained that this is something that they have struggled with administratively between Planning and Building. He questioned whether they should look at the block, or several blocks, or the Brooklands as a whole. He noted that they have had perhaps four, five or more lot split requests that have been attempted in the Brooklands trying to get to 60-foot lots that have been denied based on the character that the neighborhood is 60 percent over the zoning requirements versus being smaller. He suggested that staff would like that provision eliminated. He stressed that this area needs to be studied as to whether it makes sense to eliminate the provision or some areas where it might make sense. He stated that perhaps it needs further definition to say that the context has to be within 500 feet, 1,000 feet, or two blocks, whatever is determined. He commented that one of the main surveyors the City has dealt with has said that 10 years ago these were approved every week as they used to look at the entirety of the Brooklands.

He noted that they try to discourage people from going to the ZBA as much as possible; and stated that in reality just because someone did it 50 years ago, that does not give justification to do it now.

Ms. Roediger noted that the Master Plan calls for an evaluation to determine whether the Ordinance should be amended.

Mr. Hetrick stated that what Mr. McLeod is inferring is that something needs to go in the Master Plan about evaluation, and once it's in there, it gives Staff the opportunity to adjust the Ordinance accordingly.

Ms. Bahm stressed that it would be to bring it to the Planning Commission, and the language gives the foundation of understanding the context of why they should be studying it.

Mr. Hetrick added that the Plan will promote some discussion about ordinance changes. He concurred that he would not want to be in a neighborhood and have someone build a duplex next to them.

Ms. Neubauer stated that she had an interesting discussion with the City Attorney after a court opinion was rendered that favored the City. She noted that they were discussing the language ensuring that there are not so many exceptions in the ordinance language and that across the board Planning and Zoning, ZBA, and Building were consistent. She stressed that litigation is such an unnecessary cost on the City.

Ms. Bahm stated that they will tweak the language a bit more so that it is clear and when zoning changes are discussed after the first of the year, they will remember what the context was and why it is being studied.

She moved on to discuss redevelopment and the Bordine property, and following the discussion it was noted that perhaps nothing specific needed to be included on this topic. She referred to page 30 of the draft, noting that it describes a tiered approach, including a Facelift or Refresh, Outlot Development, and Full-Scale Redevelopment. She mentioned giving the Commission or staff leverage for opportunities to make suggestions to further enhance a site and make things happen.

Ms. Roediger noted that this is something that they try to encourage in practice. She cited the old Genysis Credit Union that is now an Enterprise, explaining that they just wanted to move in and do a change of occupancy; and mentioned the shopping center on Walton that used to house the keg liquor store. She explained that the shopping center wanted to do a quick facade change and they made them install parking lot islands, redo the lot, connect to the pathway, change lighting and install street trees. She stated that the plan helps establish that middle ground where they are getting improvements on some not-brand-new buildings, but are improving the site incrementally.

Mr. Struzik commented that older developments look tired and often include a paved parking lot with no islands or trees, and he stated that this is huge.

Mr. McLeod stated that so many of these things happen on a regular basis, and stated that perhaps things can be changed incrementally. He mentioned Walton Boulevard, noting that if there are two or three different developments, all

of a sudden the complexity of the south side of Walton has changed. He mentioned that there is a fine line of pushing just enough but not discourage the development.

Ms. Neubauer asked if there is any remedy for properties like the old Barnes and Noble where the developer gets denied, the Ordinance has changed, and now it is wasting away. She stated that Ordinance is out there almost every week, and two homeless families have been removed from there. She mentioned that there is hanging electrical, it is an eyesore, and it is next to the beautifully redone Ford dealership.

Ms. Roediger stated that this would be a recommendation to work on a vacant building ordinance.

Ms. Neubauer suggested that if they cannot get a developer to work on a building right away, perhaps one of these intermediate development phases might get them to correct it. She mentioned listing various steps that need to be accomplished, and if they are not, the City would just tear it down.

Ms. Roediger stated that they have tried to encourage the owner to demolish it. She noted that he is paying all of the citations. She suggested perhaps adding a section about redevelopment, or about vacant buildings. She added that this would not be a part of the zoning ordinance, and is a code ordinance modification.

Ms. Neubauer suggested adding a section that says that they will study available remedies for vacant, abandoned, or unkempt properties.

Ms. Bahm stated that they were in another community this morning where they were having the exact same conversation and they were asking about a vacant building ordinance or one for property owners who just sit on their properties thinking that they are worth millions of dollars, while they continue to deteriorate.

Ms. Roediger mentioned that they went to a lawsuit with the Bosana property and they were going to have to demolish the building unless they made improvements; and they subsequently made the improvements so it looks better and is no longer a safety concern.

She stated that she feels that the culmination of the plan after all of these meetings is that there are not really a lot of land use changes, if any. She commented that it was more of a consolidation, trying to simplify it with focus on some of the attached units along major corridors, which they have historically done with Mr. Polyzois' type of projects. She explained that the next step is to take the plan to the joint meeting with Council, and approve it for distribution. During that 63-day public period, there would be an open house and then it would return for a Public Hearing with the Commission in October. She noted that probably before the Joint Meeting or at the Joint Meeting there will be a summary of changes from the last Master Plan to this Master Plan, because there really are not a lot. She stressed that they are really focusing on and enhancing what they already have.

She mentioned that the City received the community public opinion survey back, although it has not been presented to Council yet. She noted that 95 percent of the responders said that they would recommend Rochester Hills as a place to live. She commented that comparing with other communities, for example, Orion Township's recommendation rate was 67 percent. She stated that they know that they are doing something right and they want to continue and preserve it and keep it new. She pointed out that they do not want to become stale and not attract future generations, and want to ensure that they do not have old shopping malls that fall into disrepair.

She noted that after consulting with the City Clerk, it looks like the joint meeting would be held on August 11, at 5:30 p.m., right before the regularly-scheduled Council meeting. She mentioned that Council has a lot of meetings in August because of the budget, and they are trying to minimize another night meeting.

Ms. Neubauer suggested that when the proposed Plan is presented to Council, it should be stressed that there are minimal changes.

Ms. Roediger stated that their focus is on developing architectural guidelines that everyone agrees on. She commented that she doesn't think the Plan will win awards for creative new ideas; however, hopefully it will be winning awards for how it is presented through the website.

Ms. Bahm added that they believed that having this traditional version helped the Commission feel more comfortable with what is in it; and stated that she thinks that there was a feeling when presenting it a couple of months ago that no one was really sure where everything was living. She commented that this lack of confidence made the document tonight more useful; and she noted that it will be useful for Council too to know that this is the content of the web page, which will be presented in a more interactive way.

Ms. Neubauer suggested that they remind Council that this may prompt zoning changes to ensure consistency, as this is a very big issue for them.

Ms. Denstaedt asked about a reference to Green Acres in the Avondale Section.

Ms. Roediger noted that the demographic profiles for each neighborhood were compiled by ESRI, the data company.

Mr. McLeod explained that all of the mapping that the City does is based out of the ESRI software program, and he commented that they think it's fun to come up with cute little names.

Ms. Roediger stated that she felt ESRI's snapshots were interesting, barring the names of what they called these areas; however, she thought that it was a really nice description of the people and the demographics of the area.

Chairperson Hooper mentioned a reference on page 47 about a study about the need for increased office and commercial, and asked where that came from.

Ms. Bahm responded that this was done last October and the Chesapeake Group was hired. She noted that not all of the office will be in office buildings. She mentioned that some of it may be work-from-home space too.

Ms. Roediger noted that a lot of it is medical because of the proximity with Beaumont and Henry Ford. She pointed out that the city hardly has any office vacancy, while the national mentality is that there is too much office. She noted that for industrial, there is no vacancy.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic commented that a lot of medical offices are looking for upgrades because so much has been here for a long time. She questioned whether they like a newer facility.

Ms. Roediger responded that the successful doctors want their own private practice buildings, like the one built on Auburn. She added that dentists want their own specialty office, or a group of specialists will want a custom-built facility.

Mr. McLeod noted that it is big now for medical offices to bring in surgery centers and they can range from 15,000 to 30,000 square feet. He commented that they do not want to be in with anyone else.

Ms. Roediger asked if there were any more comments.

Ms. Neubauer reiterated that it should be super clear for Council to remind them that everything got turned around.

Ms. Roediger stated that they will create a one-pager summary of the highlights.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic commented that maybe there is no solution, but would question whether they have dropped the idea of encouraging or offering an incentive to come in and build ranch homes. She noted that there is one developer that does this and considers it financially feasible, and wanted to know if there was a way to incentivize it.

Ms. Roediger responded that the way to incentivize a developer is with density bonuses, and she commented that height and density are considered two dirty words in Rochester Hills. She noted that she does not know of any way other than cash. She stated that this is what they are trying to do along the main corridors to open up more areas for opportunities for attached ranch units so that they can be built. She noted that this can set the stage for ordinance amendments that could state that attached duplexes or triplexes could be on major roads under these circumstances, perhaps along a road with a minimum 90-foot right-of-way. She added that perhaps it could be incentivized to allow more units as long as it was compatible with the density of the surrounding neighborhood.

Mr. Struzik asked if the goal was to make housing more attainable or to have homes where individuals with mobility issues can have everything on one floor.

Ms. Neubauer suggested that if someone comes in to build a new subdivision,

perhaps a percentage of 25 or 30 percent would have to be ranch-style homes.

Ms. Roediger stated that she would make a note regarding the possibility of a zoning amendment requiring a minimum percentage of single-story homes. She commented that Rochester Hills has primarily been known as a family-forming community, with four bedroom suburbia houses; however, the population is aging and only a third of the households have children under 18. She stated that the demand for four bedroom colonials is not what it used to be. She commented that they will take note of this and envision a call-out that talks about the demand for ranch housing.

Chairperson Hooper referenced page 25 where existing land use percentages were mentioned, and suggested that public institutional and brownfield landfill percentages could be added.

Ms. Roediger commented that it would be interesting to do a comparison of the existing percentages of the city versus the percentages of the city with the future land use, which shows that it is still single family. She commented that this is very good to point out to Council.

She stated that they will have an updated version of this to go out, along with a one-page summary. She stated that the point of the Joint Meeting will hopefully be to gain Council support for it to go out for public distribution. She stressed that it is not an adoption, and is to get it sent out to all of the neighboring communities, having an open house sometime during the 63-day period, and coming back in October for the public hearing.

Discussed