



# Rochester Hills

## Minutes

### Planning Commission

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*Chairperson Deborah Brnabic, Vice Chairperson Greg Hooper*  
*Members: Sheila Denstaedt, Gerard Dettloff, Anthony Gallina, Dale Hetrick, Marvie Neubauer, Scott Struzik and Ben Weaver*  
*Youth Representatives: Janelle Hayes and Siddh Sheth*

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Tuesday, March 19, 2024

5:30 PM

1000 Rochester Hills Drive

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## CALL TO ORDER

*Chairperson Brnabic called the Planning Commission Special Work Session to order at 5:30 p.m.*

## ROLL CALL

**Present** 7 - Deborah Brnabic, Sheila Denstaedt, Gerard Dettloff, Anthony Gallina, Greg Hooper, Marvie Neubauer and Dale Hetrick

## Others Present:

*Sara Roediger, Planning and Economic Development Director*  
*Chris McLeod, Planning Manager*  
*Jennifer MacDonald, Recording Secretary*  
*Siddh Sheth, Rochester Hills Governmental Youth Council Representative*

*Mr. Weaver provided prior notice that he would not be in attendance and was excused.*

*Chairperson Brnabic welcomed attendees to the Special Work Session. She noted that there were no members of the public in attendance and closed public comment.*

## PUBLIC COMMENT

*None.*

## DISCUSSION

[2024-0164](#) Master Plan 2024

*Present in addition to staff were representatives from Giffels Webster, the City's Planning Consultant, Jill Bahm, Julia Upfal and Ian Hogg.*

*Ms. Roediger explained that this is the kickoff for the Planning Commission study sessions in advance of the Planning Commission meetings, and she stated that staff is excited to have the Giffels team a part of the plan update. She stated that there will be a very robust public involvement effort.*

*Ms. Bahm explained that for the past two months the team has been working hard to develop a community engagement plan that goes beyond public meetings and includes creative ways to get people involved who normally do not participate. She mentioned the following efforts:*

- The first phase was undertaken through the online platform and focused on understanding what the community is feeling, thinking and wanting. This phase will continue through the end of March.*
- The next phase is envisioning, and will include small focus groups, including the Youth Council, the Older Persons' Commission, and Mayor's Business Council; and each group will have their own unique set of exercises and questions. A survey will be a part of this phase as well.*
- A community quality of life survey for all residents will gauge things they like, things they see and things they feel they need. Another survey will be a market study, and another is a consumer spending survey. The consumer spending survey will look to identify where dollars are spent here and what dollars are leaving the community that might stay here if certain things were offered.*
- Toolkits are intended to be opportunities for people to facilitate meetings on their own. It will allow efforts to blanket the city effectively with more people and more meetings than they could do as staff and consultants, and the community will be asked to help out. Youth Council will be involved, along with homeowners' association presidents; and hopefully planning commissioners might be interested in hosting a meeting at their house or with their neighbors.*
- Specialists at the Chesapeake Group will be helping with the market study that will be undertaken with business leaders and other community facility leaders in the school systems, hopefully Oakland University, Rochester Christian University, and different places that have a unique perspective on the status of the city and the trends they see.*
- Small group workshops that are subject-related will provide people focused in on the area that they have a lot of expertise in will get more people engaged.*
- A hands on workshop will include those from the middle school and high school group working together with representatives from the OPC on a project that is intended to be creative, visionary and very fun.*
- These efforts will run during April and part of May, and the Commission will be provided with a summary of what they are hearing hopefully in May and then get to work to build a plan from there.*

*Ms. Bahm explained that these efforts will go on for at least another year or more, after taking into account the public hearing requirements and other efforts that are currently in process. She noted that the plan will be an online product and will be accessed through the City's website and live on the City's GIS platform, and will allow people to drive around on their map to see different things and be linked to other opportunities to be aware of what is going on. She stated that after tonight the whole plan of community engagement will be shared with dates confirmed so far; and every time a new event is scheduled, they will let the Commission know. She pointed out that the City's PR team is involved in social media for these events, but there is nothing like a personal invitation from the Commissioners to friends and neighbors to get them to participate.*

*Mr. Dettloff asked how the response was to the initial survey sent out.*

*Ms. Bahm responded that even with the amount of press given to it, she was a little disappointed in the number of responses. She commented that it did provide some interesting feedback.*

*Ms. Roediger explained that it was posted on Facebook, NextDoor, postcards were passed out with a QR code link, and it was advertised on social media.*

*Ms. Bahm stated that she does not know that people really understand what a master plan is. She noted that this is why so many different things are planned, such as meetings, online activities, open houses, meeting toolkits and small group involvement.*

*Mr. Dettloff stated that master plans are typically cut and dried type of approaches, with public hearings and a handful of attendees; but he loves this approach. He asked if a staff person will be attending these meetings.*

*Ms. Bahm responded that they will, except for the meeting toolkits as those will be on their own.*

*Ms. Roediger stated that the Commissioners will be the guinea pigs for the meeting toolkits and the idea is that the Commissioners can go out and find neighbors and HOA presidents to use the toolkits among their own contacts.*

*Ms. Bahm added that they want to track who takes the kits as well. She noted that in the past the communities that identified the people who took the kits, followed up with them, suggested deadlines and offered help received the kits back. Those who did not know where they were released to were unable to follow up.*

*It was suggested to use a facilitator sign-in sheet.*

*Julia Upfal and Ian Hogg introduced themselves as a part of the Giffels team. Ms. Bahm added that Joe Tangari is also a part of the team, and was unable to attend this evening due to another meeting.*

*Mr. Hogg reviewed a breakdown of the results from the five questions that were posted on the community engagement pages, the City's website, and social media from March 1 to March 11. He noted that the responses were posted online as anonymous sticky notes, and participants could upvote and downvote the responses. He reported that there were 163 total comments throughout the five questions and 248 interactions of upvotes and downvotes. He noted that the majority of the interactions were upvotes. He listed the following themes and responses:*

- Does your independent access to work, school, healthcare services, housing and social opportunities depend on your age? What is missing? This question got 47 total comments and 52 total interactions including 49 upvotes and three downvotes.*
- There are five major themes that can be taken from the responses. The first three are relative to connectivity and a lot of the respondents were talking about the lack of sidewalks between neighborhoods and commercial corridors*

throughout the city. Another group of responses highlighted safety, especially for seniors and young children on paths and streets versus walking on an actual sidewalk. Comments were received on transportation and improving the options. Overall public transportation was viewed favorably in the city.

- The next theme was focused on open space and green space throughout the city, and multiple individuals talked about a desire for more green space and ensuring efforts to preserve what is already there versus developing it.

- The next set of themes talked about development and specifically affordability when people are looking to downsize. There was some disagreement between people in favor of growth versus those who are concerned about overdevelopment in the city.

- Community amenities and City Administration was another prevalent theme. Overall there was a favorable view of the City and that the City provides adequate amenities, but sometimes it is difficult to find information regarding activities and programs. A few responses talked about establishing more or different community centers, such as a recreation center or pool outside of the OPC.

- Ten comments directly answered the question whether age affects independent access, and overall people did not think age was a factor and the City did a great job accommodating everyone.

- How cars impact the livability and accessibility of the neighborhood received 29 answers, and 59 interactions with the majority of interactions being upvotes.

Mr. Hogg noted that the themes were fairly similar throughout, and connectivity was a major concern especially regarding safety and accessibility for everyone. Orion Road was specifically called out in a few comments, sidewalks were another issue to be addressed. He stated that they visited the following topics:

- For transportation, the length of time to get across certain intersections was noted, and people wanted to make sure that proper planning and design for pedestrians was a priority. Preserving open spaces and creating more opportunity for parks and recreation was a similar theme. Overall, there was a favorable view of the City purchasing green spaces.

- There were concerns about multifamily housing at busy intersections, along with the overdevelopment theme. He added that there were some critiques on development and that the Ordinances cater to developers. One comment requested improving recycling and introducing a composting program.

- Question Three dealt with the topic of safe access to transportation options other than driving automobiles and Rochester Hills could improve access to and encourage use of these different types of travel. Twenty-three answers were received with 41 interactions. Connectivity was mentioned, along with sidewalks, expanding and tying in with other sidewalks, and adding pathways for biking and walking. For transportation, there was some disagreement as there were people in favor of public transportation, and those with concerns about whether there would be enough activity and ridership. Some individuals offered ways to increase rideshare options.

- Question Four dealt with neighborhood walkability and bikeability, and how the City could make the physical health of its residents better through planning. Thirty-seven answers and 53 total interactions were received. Sidewalks and pathways were another key concern, and specific answers noted implementing pedestrian bridges or reworking pedestrian bridges over M-59 and the Paint

*Creek Trail at Tienken Road. Transportation comments highlighted safety for pedestrians, implementing traffic calming measures and improving signage throughout the city for pedestrians.*

*- Regarding open space, people had a positive view of the City's park system, and had concern about preserving more park land for residents. Comments included allowing for more accessible and walkable commercial spaces, and stricter enforcement of traffic laws to help people get to where they need to be in a safe and efficient manner.*

*- The last question asked where people connect with other people in the community and how the Rochester Hills planning environment makes it easy to connect with others. Seven comments were received, with 44 total interactions. Connectivity, safe and easy access, and the park system were listed. Sidewalks were mentioned again, including specific callouts for Orion and Dutton Roads. Preservation of green spaces along with mentions of the historical spaces in the city were listed. Changing the zoning ordinance to allow for outdoor seating was mentioned. A couple of the comments mentioned diversifying businesses, and one comment stated that there are only bars and gyms in the city. Improving and increasing the number of community events and programs was suggested, along with developing new community centers, having art fairs or summer concerts.*

*Ms. Bahm stated that she would send the complete results to the Commissioners. She noted that they did receive comments as expected about development being out of control, and saving trees; however, there were a lot of other things that people were really interested in, including transportation, connectivity, sidewalks, and places where people can age. She noted that this can help through the planning process to determine where the City will put roads and commercial activity, how these can be connected, and how the natural features add to lives.*

*Mr. Hetrick noted that he took the quiz and felt that one of the primary themes is connectivity, and he got to thinking how it will affect his neighborhood and how he can get to open spaces, green spaces, parks and travel safely.*

*Ms. Bahm stated that the quiz was trying to get people past the topic of traffic. She noted that in 2018 the big items were traffic, deer, and turnover housing and empty nesters in particular. She commented that she expected traffic and housing to continue to be raised as concerns; but it is also helpful to think whether driving is the only way to get anywhere, as traffic will be a problem.*

*Ms. Neubauer stated that the community Facebook pages express concern over traffic issues that have a lot to do with the dismissal times of schools; and noted that the lack of sidewalks once children cross the roads leads to parents sitting in the car lines.*

*Mr. Struzik commented that many of the traffic issues result from the busing range of the schools. He noted that his children are not eligible to take the bus and would have to walk 1.4 miles and cross John R at Auburn, and would be doing so in the dark most of the year. He noted that children have been hit by cars in two of the last three years. He stated that he has tried to suggest to school administrators that the problem can be solved by busing more kids, and*

he suggested that he does not know what kind of influence the City might have. He mentioned transportation ridership, and stated that once transportation is available, habits will have to be built. He suggested that there will be opportunities to work with SMART, and offered that many of the over-provision parking lots are off Rochester Road and could offer park-and-ride opportunities. He noted that he works in downtown Detroit and would love to take a bus there, and suggested that the Meijer and Hampton Shopping Center might allow a partnership.

Ms. Neubauer stated that she approached the school about adding busing, and the answer is that they are already deficient in bus drivers and there aren't enough. She pointed out that there are already some staggered start times, or the problem would be even worse.

Ms. Denstaedt stated that the timing of the lights are an issue as well, as some of the lights along Rochester Road, Auburn and Hamlin are very short.

Mr. Hetrick noted that connectivity of sidewalks to the schools is important to parents.

Ms. Neubauer pointed out that there are no sidewalks in her subdivisions and kids have to cross Avon to walk home. She noted people walk in the street even when walking their dogs, and commented that kids are walking in the dark in the morning.

Mr. Dettloff asked if there will be outreach to schools, churches, and various other groups, and when it would happen.

Ms. Roediger noted that there will be invite-only small groups, and this will include a small group for the Youth Council, staff members, various boards and commissions; and places of worship will be considered. She commented that groups for local businesses and large property owners will generally be set for April or early May. She noted that there is no interfaith council; however, perhaps the Mayor's office connections could be helpful.

Chairperson Brnabic noted that at one point the schools district was trying to get rid of busing. Now they have gone with an outside company.

Ms. Roediger stated that she has not heard of any recent discussions about getting rid of the buses, but at this point a lot of the students will not use them because they are so inconsistent and unreliable.

Ms. Neubauer noted that kids are getting dropped off because the buses would show up an hour and a half late. She noted that Council receives correspondence regarding school busing even though City Council has nothing to do with it. She commented that busing is not a primary concern for the School Board as they have other issues.

Ms. Bahm noted that this ties back to what the city can do to improve pedestrian crossings and make subdivision streets safer.

*Ms. Roediger noted that tomorrow the CIP Review Committee will meet and this will come before the Commission in April. She explained that two crossings will be presented that hopefully will be funded in the next five years, one per the Walton Oaks project that came forth on Walton from Firewood to Oakland University, and one presented by residents on Medinah for a mid-block crossing to get students to Van Hoosen and Adams.*

*Mr. Struzik commented that he hoped the mid-block one will be a Hawk signal which is safer than the rectangular rapid-flashing beacons, as cars technically by law do not have to stop for those. He asked what the Commissioners can do, noting that he would suggest some sort of program to help promote carpooling to and from school. He pointed out that if motorists obey the actual law and do not drive down the center turn lane on Auburn Road, the road would be unusable for 20 to 30 minutes every morning.*

*Ms. Neubauer stated that this is why school pick up and drop off time is a huge safety issue in Rochester Hills. She commented that this is why the Commission was so worried about the new Starbucks coming in, as it has a lot to do with the schools. She stated that she does not know if Rochester getting their own busing system back would help as contracting it out has not worked. She commented that there should be sidewalks where there is any school in the city. She stated that while it is a huge funding issue it is a safety issue.*

*Mr. Hetrick responded that if a master plan takes into account these issues, it will help to facilitate suggesting what a school can do. Whether they choose to do it is up to them.*

*Ms. Bahm stated that they will continue to talk about these things, as well as their conflicting themes of open space versus development and how they balance that.*

*She explained that for the next 20 minutes Ms. Upfal will walk through an accelerated version of the meeting toolkit, which typically takes one hour.*

*Ms. Upfal explained the toolkit, noting there was a number of tips and tricks the facilitator can read through prior to the meeting, along with directions, agendas, sign-in sheets, evaluation forms for feedback, comment cards, and a map for people to review their neighborhoods. She explained the toolkit process, and took the Commission through the exercises:*

- Exercises start with a welcome and introduction describing the master plan and the planning process.*
- The first exercise is about strengths and weaknesses in Rochester Hills as far as planning and development, what is special about Rochester Hills and what can be improved. The Commission broke up into groups and strengths and weaknesses mentioned during the Commission's exercise included:*

- \* School quality was a strength, although school board management was a weakness.*

- \* Recreational opportunities were a strength, including the trail system, open spaces, and parks.*

- \* Strong youth representation and governance.
- \* Quality shopping, variety, and restaurant variety.
- \* The OPC was seen as a strength.
- \* Diversity of the community. Inclusive and diverse quality housing.
- \* Transportation and traffic congestion were a weakness; a need for more roundabouts was mentioned.
- \* Freeway access was a plus.
- \* Lack of a community center, pool, and activities for kids was a weakness.
- \* Lack of affordable housing in general, along with homes on one floor for the aging population. There are some square miles that do not have a lot of family options.
- \* Connectivity is lacking, along with a need for sidewalks and walkable neighborhoods. Gaps in the pathways.
- \* Funding for infrastructure is needed; stormwater management is needed. Many HOAs do not know that it is their responsibility to maintain their drainage systems.
- \* A desire to bring the neighborhoods back.
- \* Good fire response and safety.

*Ms. Upfal noted that if this had been a real meeting toolkit, they would go on to opportunities and threats, and look at the external factors and changes happening outside of the city that will affect it in the future. This would include national and state trends, changes in the surrounding area, and how to be proactive and not just reactive; and make sure these threats and opportunities are considered.*

*Ms. Roediger stated that they will be recruiting people to facilitate these toolkits and suggested that the Commissioners think of people from local clubs, groups, churches or wherever that might be good to hold one of these sessions. She stated that they will be back before the Commission in May for more discussion on the Master Plan.*

## **ADJOURNMENT**

*Chairperson Brnabic noted that the Planning Commission would adjourn the Work Session and reconvene for the Regular Meeting after a short break. Upon motion by Neubauer, seconded by Hetrick, Chairperson Brnabic adjourned the Work Session at 6:55 p.m.*

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*Deborah Brnabic, Chairperson  
Rochester Hills Planning Commission*

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*Jennifer MacDonald, Recording Secretary*