



Annual Report

June 1, 2011 - May 31, 2012

City of Auburn Hills Planning Commission

Under the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, PA 33 of 2008, the Planning Commission is required to provide an annual report to the City Council. This report is intended to coincide with the City Council's review of the City budget.

This report discusses the following topics:

- Summary of the Commission's operations during the past 12 months
- The status of any on-going planning activities
- Recommendations to the City Council related to planning/development and funding

Commission Operations

The Commission is governed by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act and the City's Zoning Ordinance. During the 12 month period starting on June 1, 2011 and ending on May 31, 2012, the Commission's membership was as follows:

Greg Ouellette, Chairperson
 Wade Spurlin, Vice-Chairperson
 Cheryl Verbeke, Secretary (City Council liaison)
 Sam Beidoun
 Chauncey Hitchcock
 Robert Kittle (City Council liaison / 6-01 thru 12-31)
 VeRonica Mitchell
 Bob Pierce
 Lacey Salerno

During this time period, the Commission held 11 meetings and recommendations were made to the City Council on 15 development related items, which was down from the year before as shown in the table below. *Note: 5 of the 11 meetings were dedicated to the Auburn Road West planning study.*

Measurable	Y2007-2008	Y2008-2009	Y2009-2010	Y2010-2011	Y2011-2012
Meetings	10	17	10	18	11
Site Plans	5	10	2	6	3
Special Land Use Permits	6	8	6	12	6
Tree Removal Permits	4	3	1	4	3
Planned Unit Developments	2	1	0	0	1
Rezoning	3	2	1	3	1
Text Amendments	0	4	8	1	1
Total Projects	20	28	18	26	15

Steve Cohen, Director of Community Development provides primary staff support to the Commission. Mr. Cohen has served the Commission since October 4, 1999. He is both registered as a Professional Community Planner (PCP) with the State of Michigan and certified as a professional planner (AICP) with the American Planning Association. He has Bachelor and Master Degrees in Urban and Regional Planning from Michigan State University.

Notable Commission Items

1. Development Applications

Notable projects reviewed by the Commission were the following:

- New Covenant Church – 1,734 sq. ft. addition
- Henniges Automotive – 54,435 sq. ft. world headquarters
- Downtown Apartment/Retail Building - 98,936 sq. ft.
- Municipal Parking Structure - 233 spaces
- The River Church – temporary event
- Prefix Corporation – light industrial use and outside storage
- RSC – Fields at Auburn Hills – outdoor soccer complex
- The Palace of Auburn Hills – temporary event
- COLPRO, LLC – rezoning from B-2 to I-1 district
- Community Impact Church – church use

2. Electric Vehicle Infrastructure – Text Amendment and DOE Project

The City of Auburn Hills has been at the forefront in raising awareness about the fueling needs of plug-in electric vehicle owners. On July 11, 2011, Auburn Hills was the 1st municipality in Michigan to adopt a comprehensive *Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Ordinance*. Auburn Hills has been very proactive in encouraging developers, builders, homeowners, and business owners to make electric car charging stations a regular part of construction.

The roll out of plug-in electric vehicles, which also includes plug-in hybrid gas/electric vehicles, has been compared to the growth of the cell phone industry. Without a solid network of towers, cell phones would become unreliable and people would not buy them. Like cell phones, electric vehicles need an interconnected network of charging stations to support their use. It will be important to place stations in homes, workplaces, Downtowns, malls, hotels, and other appropriate locations; so that future vehicles owners have a reliable refueling network that they can count on.

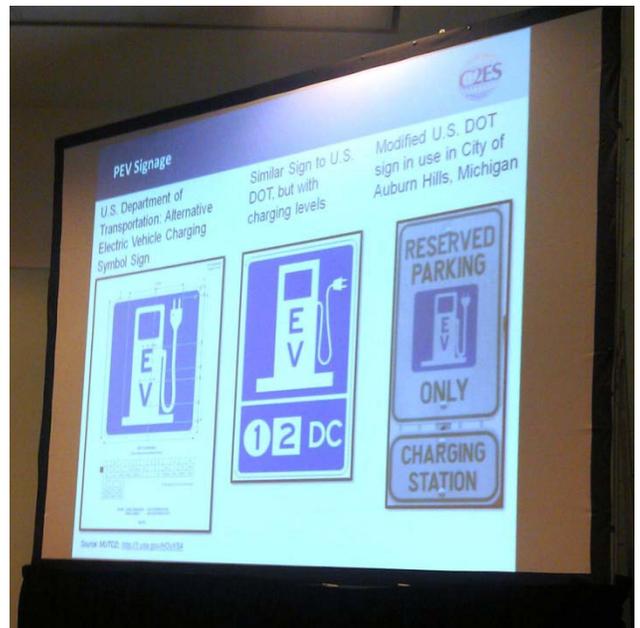
The Auburn Hills Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Ordinance encourages, but does not require, property owners to “rough in” their home garages or parking lots for future charging station installation. It raises awareness, cuts red tape, and makes them easy to install. For example, making charging stations part of a home garage is simple and similar to the electric lines needed to power something like a refrigerator or air conditioning unit, but is much cheaper to prep when the home is being built.

Activities Related to the Project:

- Gathered a team of industry experts to help with the project, which included representatives from Chrysler Group LLC, Magna E-Car, DTE Energy, ALTe, Pike Research, and the Clean Energy Coalition (CEC).
- Auburn Hills serves as a Champion City for the DOE grant project to prepare Michigan communities for plug-in electric vehicles. Numerous City staff has played a significant role in the CEC's *Plug-In Michigan EV Community Readiness Plan* by attending numerous study meetings and providing staff support.



- Auburn Hills, CEC, and Oakland County hosted a regional educational conference on September 29, 2011 held at the Community Center titled *Are You Plugged-In? Preparing Your Community for Electric Drive Vehicles*. Steve Cohen presented the “Auburn Hills EV Game Plan” at the all-day conference.
- Steve Cohen presented the “Auburn Hills EV Game Plan” on October 10, 2011 at the *Here’s Your Chance to Plug-In!* educational event in Warren.
- Steve Cohen presented the “Auburn Hills EV Game Plan” on October 19, 2011 at the *Michigan Association of Planning Conference* in Grand Rapids.
- Steve Cohen presented the “Auburn Hills EV Game Plan” on October 28, 2011 at the *MML Michigan Green Communities Conference* in Lansing.
- Worked with DTE to secure a grant and install 3 public EV charging stations in Downtown Auburn Hills as part of demonstration project. Created a national standard for on-street charging stations.
- Chrysler Group LLC provided 8 demo plug-in hybrid gas/electric vehicles for the City to test.
- City installed 5 additional public EV charging stations on City property.
- Staff developed the State of Michigan standard for EV charging station regulatory signs.
- Ron Melchert, Director of Public Services presented the “Auburn Hills EV-Fleet Pilot Program” at the *All Things Green Conference & Expo* on April 19, 2012 in Warren.
- Steve Cohen attended the *Electric Vehicle Symposium* in Los Angeles, CA at the request of the CEC, which was held May 6-9, 2012. Auburn Hills was presented to a working group and various federal and industry experts as model EV ready community. The Auburn Hills EV charging station regulatory sign was presented as potential national standard.



The Auburn Hills sign was introduced in Los Angeles as a potential standard for the nation.

2. Auburn Road Corridor Planning Study – West Side

The amendment to the Master Land Use Plan was approved by the Planning Commission shortly after this reporting date on June 26, 2012. The study was the result of an informal request from folks who own property along both sides of Auburn Road, between I-75 and the Clinton River Bridge. In a nutshell, they told the Planning Commission that their zoning was “messed up” and they needed our help.

When we met with the neighborhood, we found that property owners felt like an “afterthought, in the shadow of the Downtown, and disconnected.” They told us they wanted to be transformed into a walkable neighborhood that complimented Downtown Auburn Hills.



Entry feature designed as gateway into the Downtown area proposed near the US Post Office site.

Concept came out of the visioning meeting where the residents stated they wanted to be a part of the Downtown community and not an afterthought.

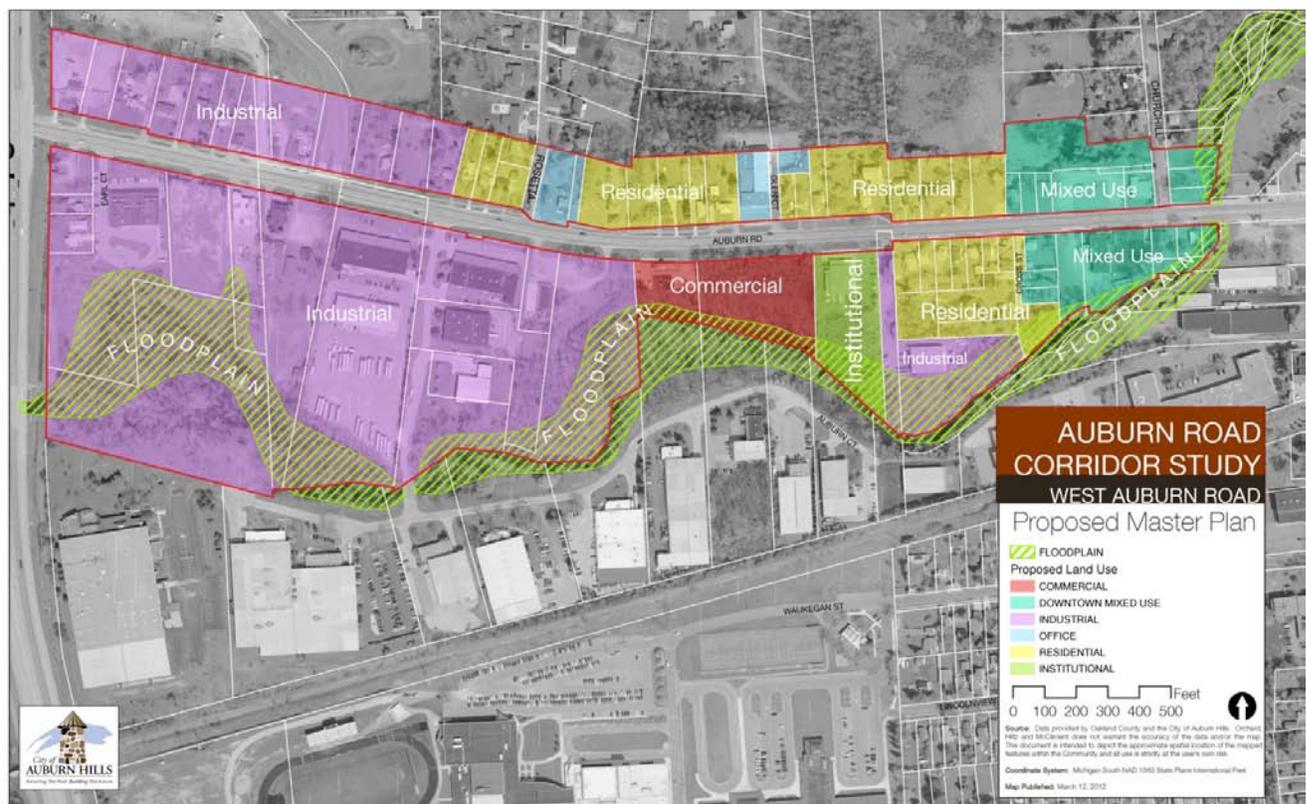
Simply, the neighborhood has had the wrong zoning for 60+ years. The old vision for the land was flawed and out-of-date. The old plan envisioned this neighborhood going away and becoming an industrial park or a strip mall; but over the years redevelopment bypassed the area and occurred elsewhere.

During the planning process, we found that good quality homes (mostly built between 1930-1945) were located on properties classified as commercial or industrial on the Zoning Map. Since redevelopment never occurred as planned, property owners were left with non-conforming homes that they could not improve. Some homes were falling into disrepair because people did not want to invest in a neighborhood that was supposed to go away.

So, after a year of study, numerous meetings, and a lot of hard work – a new vision has been cast for the neighborhood. With unanimous support, the City Council authorized the Planning Commission to proceed with amending the master plan for the area.

The new vision has these primary goals:

- Reclassify most of the parcels with homes on them from non-residential to residential use on the master plan. This would allow the zoning to be changed making these homes conforming with the Zoning Ordinance and allow property owners to reinvest and/or refinance.
- Draft a “mixed use, Downtown-style” concept designed to provide a vision and spur redevelopment of the properties located at the east end of the study area near the Clinton River Bridge. This concept visually shows how the Downtown could expand into the neighborhood, as requested by those who participated in the planning process. *Note: This type of redevelopment would only occur when the existing property owners are ready and willing to sell their property.*



3. North Squirrel Roadway Study

On September 27, 2011, the Commission recommended a long-range plan for the Squirrel Road corridor roadway improvements. In combination with City staff, several informational meetings were organized with property owners in Spring 2011. The plan will help guide road improvement projects, land use plans, and development projects along the corridor. The result of the public discussion was that the whole corridor would not be improved at once, but phased as monies became available with a focus on improving intersections. Road improvements are expected to be phased between Walton Boulevard and Tienken Road by initially constructing 3 lanes with the future plan to widen to 5 lanes when traffic warrants. Traffic studies showed no need to build the road wider than 3 lanes between Tienken Road and Dutton Road. A narrow boulevard, in locations where the center turn lane was not needed, was also presented to help beautify that particular section of roadway. The plan was developed to ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely in the future.

4. Riverwalk Plan - Implementation

The Commission reviewed the preliminary plan for the 1st phase of improvements to Riverside Park on January 31, 2012. The park is located at the corner of northwest corner Squirrel and Auburn Roads in the Downtown.

The primary feature of the project will be an amphitheatre, designed with natural tiered seating, for concerts and events in the park. Adding the amphitheatre has been a goal of the City for almost 15 years.

The 1st phase will also include a plaza, pedestrian connections to the Downtown, improvements to the riverbank and fishing dock, and water features.



This exciting project is the 1st step in the implementation of the City's award-winning *Riverwalk Master Plan*. We anticipate that construction will begin in Spring 2013 subject to funding availability.

5. Tri-City Sustainability Plan - Joint Partnership

In late 2010, the cities of Auburn Hills, Rochester Hills, and Rochester worked collaboratively in developing and submitting a proposal to Oakland County to create a Tri-City Sustainability Plan designed to help pursue the triple bottom line of sustainability (i.e., economic, social and environmental issues). The idea was in response to a Request for Proposal offered by Oakland County. It will identify and prioritize efforts needed for advancing local sustainability through the development of goals, strategies, actions, and timelines. The planning process began in January 2011 and is expected to conclude before the end of Y2012. Oakland County is contributing \$50,000 in contracted professional planning services and \$20,000 in staff resources to this effort. Other than staff time, no financial commitment is required from any of the municipalities. Mr. Keenan serves on the project's Sustainability Steering Committee and Ron Melchert, Chairperson Ouellette, Council Member Kittle are serving on the Sustainability Advisory Board. Work groups have been formed to help further identify goals and metrics.

6. Staff Training
Steve Cohen and Shawn Keenan attended the Michigan APA Conference in Grand Rapids in October 2011. Mr. Cohen also attended the National APA Conference in Los Angeles in April 2012. AICP planners, like Mr. Cohen, are required to obtain professional development training in order to maintain their credentials. AICP planners must earn a minimum of 32 CM credits (1 hour = 1 CM credit) within a designated 2-year reporting period. A minimum of 1.5 credits must be on the topic of ethics, and another 1.5 credits must be on the topic of current planning law. Mr. Cohen has obtained 36.75 CM credits thus far for the current reporting period of January 1, 2012 and December 31, 2013.

7. Commission Training
Training is a high priority for the Commission and City Council. Members are faced with an enormous responsibility to help guide the physical development of the community. Poor decisions could lead the City into costly litigation. The Commission has benefited greatly over the years from training; whether they are new members who want to learn about planning, or veteran members who need to keep up to date with changes in the law and planning practices.

Members Salerno, Mitchell, and Beidoun attended the Michigan APA Conference in Grand Rapids in October 2011. Senior Services Director Karen Adcock and Member Mitchell attended the MAP Spring Institute in Lansing on April 12, 2012 to learn about planning for the aging population. Several members also attended seminars locally offered by Oakland County and Michigan State University Extension.

Several Commission members have obtained and maintained certification as “Citizen Planners” by Michigan State University Extension over the years. Staff is evaluating the value of formally maintaining certification under this program due to its cumbersome reporting requirements. Commissioners would continue to attend the program’s training sessions, which are offered periodically.

Auburn Hills has been involved with a very limited number of development-related lawsuits over the past 13 years; which is mainly attributed to a proactive Commissioner training program and well-trained staff. It is our understanding that this record of accomplishment has helped the City lower its general liability insurance rates over the years, which saves taxpayers money.

On-Going Planning Activities through May 31, 2013 and Beyond

1. Work on “Planning for All Ages” Project
 - Look at certification via the AARP and/or State of Michigan programs.
2. Focus on Being Michigan’s Model “Plug-In Electric Vehicle Ready Community”
 - Complete the 2nd generation of amendments to the Zoning Ordinance and City Code for Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (EVI).
 - Encourage additional private and public EVI installations.
 - Supply leadership support to the “Plug-In Michigan” outreach program.
3. Develop a Complete Streets Ordinance
4. Update the Parks and Recreation Plan
5. Start internal work on the Auburn Road Corridor Planning Study – East Side.
 - Official public discussion will not occur until Summer Y2013

Commission Recommendations to City Council

The Commission respectfully recommends that the City Council ensure that the Y2013 City of Auburn Hills Budget allows for the following items:

1. Continued staff support from Mr. Cohen, Mr. Keenan, and the City's Administrative Development Review Team
2. Funding planning activities (e.g., citizen participation, maps, printing, technical research, etc.)
3. Funding for educational materials and technical training for Commission members