



Annual Report

June 1, 2012 - May 31, 2013

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, 2012 and ending on May 31, 2013, the Commission's membership was as follows:

Greg Ouellette, Chairperson
 Wade Spurlin, Vice-Chairperson
 Cheryl Verbeke, Secretary (City Council liaison)
 Sam Beidoun
 Chauncey Hitchcock
 VeRonica Mitchell
 Bob Pierce
 Lacey Salerno (Served thru 11-27-12)
 Carolyn Shearer (1-29-13)
 Eric Mendieta (2-26-13)

During this time period, the Commission held 12 meetings and recommendations were made to the City Council on 27 development related items.

Measurable	Y2007 -2008	Y2008 -2009	Y2009 -2010	Y2010 -2011	Y2011 -2012	Y2012 -2013
Meetings	10	17	10	18	11	12
Site Plans	5	10	2	6	3	5
Special Land Use Permits	6	8	6	12	6	3
Tree Removal Permits	4	3	1	4	3	5
Planned Unit Developments	2	1	0	0	1	1
Rezoning	3	2	1	3	1	8
Text Amendments	0	4	8	1	1	5
Total Projects	20	28	18	26	15	27

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.

Shawn Keenan, Water Resources Coordinator also provides staff support to the Commission. He has a Bachelor of Science and Master Degree in Public Administration from Eastern Michigan University.

Notable Commission Items

1. **Development Applications**

Notable projects reviewed by the Commission were the following:

- Plastics Plus – 46,409 sq. ft. office/industrial building
- Continental Automotive Systems – 23,296 sq. ft. office/lab addition
- Angelica’s Place – 43 resident (36 units) senior assisted living facility
- Pontiac Silverdome I-75 sign – replacement of LED display
- Faurecia - North American Headquarters – 278,000 sq. ft. high tech building
- BorgWarner Powertrain Technical Center – 15,970 sq. ft. garage addition
- Ralco Industries, Inc - World Headquarters – 124,297 sq. ft. office/industrial building

2. **Backyard Chicken Keeping Ordinance.** The Ordinance was drafted in response to increased requests from citizens wishing to raise chickens in their backyard for fresh, organic eggs. Prior, the keeping of chickens was a prohibited activity in the City unless a property was designated as a “farm” under the Zoning Ordinance.



In typical Auburn Hills’ fashion, the Planning Commission didn’t just write an ordinance for chicken keeping ... they experienced it

The following are a few general highlights of the new law:

- No more than six hen chickens may be kept at any time.
- Roosters shall be prohibited.
- Slaughtering of chickens at the property shall be prohibited.
- Chickens may only be kept at a single family detached home in certain residential districts in the rear yard.
- The chicken coop enclosure shall meet specific design standards and be setback from adjacent residential structures and property.
- An annual permit must be obtained from the City.

3. **Auburn Road Corridor (West Side) Planning Study and Rezoning Implementation**

The City of Auburn Hills adopted and implemented zoning changes for various properties along both sides of Auburn Road, between I-75 and the Clinton River Bridge. As a result, an old neighborhood - now called “West Downtown” – has new hope for the future. After the new plan was adopted by the Planning Commission on June 26, 2012, zoning changes were approved by the City Council on September 10, 2012. The new master plan and zoning will protect many good quality homes, making them legally conforming with the Zoning Ordinance and allowing property owners to reinvest and/or refinance.

4. Holiday Sales Lots Regulations – This amendment was drafted as a result of our positive experiences working with The River Church and their Christmas tree sales lot over the past few years. The change now allows seasonal Christmas tree and pumpkin sales lots to operate with an administrative permit. Under the new law, a Christmas tree lot may only operate on and between Thanksgiving Day and Christmas.



Christmas tree sales at the River Church near Downtown Auburn Hills

5. Large Format Temporary Wall Mural Regulations - Over the past decade, a few businesses have installed large temporary signs on their buildings. The message on the sign must pertain to the business in the building, such as a service provided or product produced. The City's Zoning Ordinance allows these signs to be up for 120 days. A business may erect up to four murals per calendar year, but the maximum time allowed for all the signs installed is 240 days per year. The adopted amendment now allows buildings like the Chrysler Group LLC Headquarters skyscraper to utilize these temporary signs year round.



This City-initiated amendment was proactively drafted to accommodate Chrysler Group LLC's resurgence by allowing the company to utilize these temporary signs to promote for new product launches year round.

6. Industrial Building Height Regulations - Auburn Hills refuses to rest on its laurels. We're always looking for ways to get better and stay competitive on the national and world-wide stage. Being proactive and nimble are some of the critical DNA which form our town's genetic code. So, what did we do when trusted developers and brokers warned us that potential investment, jobs, and

tax revenue could “pass on” our community because our industrial building height standards were too restrictive? We listened!

What did we learn? We found that companies which manufacture and warehouse materials are changing to adapt to 21st century demands for modern equipment and improved efficiencies. The term “clear height” was the key. Clear height is the dimension between the floor and the bottom of any device hanging from the ceiling – such as roof supports, heaters, light fixtures, indoor cranes, or sprinkler heads. We were advised that the City’s 40-foot building height limitation was becoming an obstacle for further growth. That’s a problem - when you stop growing, you start dying.



The amount of space a community allows between the floor and ceiling makes a big difference when a company is deciding where to invest millions of dollars. The taller the height, the more efficient the building.

Therefore, after considerable study, the City amended its zoning laws by making the following changes:

- *Increased the building height, allowed by right, in all industrial districts from 40 to 50 feet. Practically speaking, when you stop and look at an industrial building from the roadway, you would see very little difference between a 40-foot and 50-foot structure.*
- *Allow, via a special permit, taller building heights up to 65 feet in targeted industrial areas that are designed for such use and isolated from populated residential areas.*

7. Auburn Hills Recognized as a Leader in “Sustainability”

Experts believe that communities which intentionally take a long-term perspective and manage their resources properly today, will in turn, be healthy and resilient in the future. Thus, be “sustainable.” So it was nice that the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) recognized the City of Auburn Hills in October 2012 as a “Sustainable Community.”

The *Sustainable Community Recognition Program* was developed by SEMCOG to recognize communities that have taken the initiative to incorporate sustainable activities into their practices. For local governments, sustainability is about achieving economic prosperity while protecting the environment and providing a high quality of life for its residents.

Some of the activities the City of Auburn Hills was commended for were the following:

- Being the first municipality in the State of Michigan to adopt a Green Building Policy.
- Using multiple techniques to reduce pollutants and also serve as an educational forum for residents and developers.
- Adding a green roof on the Robert W. Grusnick Public Safety Building that reduces its heating and cooling costs.
- Creating the Riverwalk Master Plan that guides redevelopment of the Clinton River corridor.

- Developing the Tri-City Pathway Plan (with Rochester and Rochester Hills) to promote safe pedestrian travel.
- Utilizing a 5-Year Fiscal Budget.

8. Oakland County's One Stop Ready Program

On March 18, 2013, the Auburn Hills City Council formally approved our community's participation in Oakland County's One Stop Ready Program. Bret Rasegan, Oakland County's Planning Supervisor met with the Planning Commission on February 26, 2013 and reviewed the One Stop Ready Program in detail.

One Stop Ready is an economic development program established by Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson. It's built upon each community evaluating itself, information sharing between participants, and the collection of best practices in customer service from all the participants.

The initiative is aimed at streamlining the development approval processes in municipalities throughout the County. This is done to better recruit and retain businesses, which in return brings more jobs and a stronger tax base.

In addition to the City of Auburn Hills, Waterford Township, City of Pontiac, Village of Oxford, Oxford Township, Lyon Township, and the City of Wixom are in this year's program.

9. AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities Program

On March 4, 2013, the Auburn Hills City Council proactively committed to join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities program. *The City of Auburn Hills is the first municipality from the State of Michigan to be accepted into this prestigious network.*

The AARP program involves a five-year, four-stage process of the City assessing itself, creating a plan of action, implementing that plan, and evaluating its performance based on a variety of areas designed to help improve the quality of life of all of our residents. This program will include a team of staff, public officials, industry experts, and volunteers – along with a tremendous amount of input from the community.

10. Community for a Lifetime Designation

In April 2013, the Michigan Office of Services to the Aging (OSA) and the Commission on Services to the Aging designated Auburn Hills as a "Community for a Lifetime." *The recognition is for the City's efforts to be an aging-friendly community.*

The Planning Commission, along with key staff and community volunteers, led the City's effort by conducting a self-assessment on numerous issues including:

- walkability
- access to health care
- transportation
- safety and security
- housing
- supportive community systems
- commerce
- enrichment
- inclusion

The OSA noted Auburn Hills' strengths include a range of home chore services options, multiple community events to promote inclusion and civic engagement, and a comprehensive walkway system.



Auburn Hills was featured in the Michigan Municipal League Magazine

11. Plug-In Electric Vehicle (PEV) Ready Program
As the home of Chrysler Group LLC and numerous auto suppliers, the City of Auburn Hills decided in April 2011 to step up and champion the infrastructure and policy changes needed to support PEVs. Since the automotive industry has a huge footprint in our community, we have a common interest in supporting this emerging industry.

It's noted that municipalities in strategic regions across the country have been asked by the federal government and the auto industry to plan for and implement a network of public and private charging stations to support the PEV market.

Places like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Austin, Houston, Raleigh, Chicago ... and Auburn Hills have responded and led. How? Well, we do what we do best ... infrastructure planning and education.



Charging Station at Magna E-Car

It is noted that staff made the following presentations on the topic:

- Steve Cohen presented how Auburn Hills is preparing for PEVs on September 21, 2012 at the *Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Planning Conference* in Columbus, Ohio.
- Steve Cohen presented how Auburn Hills is preparing for PEVs on October 19, 2012 at the *Michigan Association of Planning Conference* in Traverse City.
- Ron Melchert, Director of Public Works presented our experiences with a PEV fleet on November 13, 2012 at the *Charging Infrastructure Expo* in Novi.

12. Staff Training

Steve Cohen and Shawn Keenan attended the Michigan APA Conference in Traverse City in October 2012. Mr. Keenan attended the National APA Conference in Chicago, IL in April 2013. Mr. Keenan also attended classes and obtained his Zoning Administrator Certificate from Michigan State University's Land Policy Institute in Spring 2013.

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 52 CM credits thus far for the current reporting period of January 1, 2012 and December 31, 2013.

13. 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 Ouellette, Mitchell, and Beidoun attended the Michigan APA Conference in Traverse City in October 2012. Several members also attended seminars locally offered by Oakland County and Michigan State University Extension.



The award-winning Auburn Hills Planning Commission

Auburn Hills has been involved with a very limited number of development-related lawsuits over the past 14 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, 2014 and Beyond

1. Lead the AARP Age-Friendly Community Project
2. Update the Parks and Recreation Plan
3. Update the Zoning Ordinance with an Improved Format
4. Focus on Being a Leader in Preparing for Alternative Fuel Vehicles
5. Finish the Complete Streets Policy

Commission Recommendations to City Council

The Commission respectfully recommends that the City Council ensure that the Y2014 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, Zoning Ordinance update, etc.)
3. Funding for educational materials and technical training for Commission members