



CITY OF AUBURN HILLS PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

October 8, 2025

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Ouellette called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Present: **Carolyn Shearer, Darlene MacMillan, Jack Ferguson, Cynthia Pavlich, Sam Beidoun, Dominic Patrus, Dominick Tringali, Raymond Saelens, Greg Ouellette**
Absent: None
Also Present: Director of Community Development Steve Cohen, Assistant Director of Community Development Devin Lang, Director of Senior Services Jacqueline Monroy Krieg, Senior Services Advisor Karen Adock, Mayor Pro-Tem Hawkins
Guests: 4

LOCATION: Council Chambers, 1827 N. Squirrel Road, Auburn Hills, MI 48326

3. PERSONS WISHING TO BE HEARD

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – September 10, 2025

Moved by Beidoun to approve the minutes of September 10, 2025.

Second by Saelens.

VOTE: Yes: Shearer, MacMillan, Ferguson, Pavlich, Beidoun, Patrus, Tringali, Saelens, Ouellette
No: None **Motion Carried (9-0)**

5. PETITIONERS

5a. Oakland Christian School – Automatic Changeable Copy Sign (7:01 p.m.)

Public Hearing / Motion – Recommendation to City Council for Special Land Use Approval

Mr. Cohen explained that this is a request from Oakland Christian School for approval to install a monument-style automatic changeable copy sign on the school's property located at 3075 Shimmons Road. The property is zoned R-1A, One-Family Residential District.

The new automatic changeable copy sign will feature an LED message board, located below the illuminated cabinet, measuring 20.3 square feet and accounting for 57% of the overall sign area, which is less than the allowed. The Zoning Ordinance permits the LED message board to be no more than 60 square feet and to occupy up to 75% of the sign area. The proposed LED message board will allow the school to display new messages to its students, parents, and the community.

The proposed sign will be six feet in height to be respectful of the area's residential character, which is less than the 10 feet allowed by the Zoning Ordinance.

The new sign is designed to meet the following additional City zoning regulations.

1. The sign will be equipped with photosensitive equipment, which will automatically adjust the brightness and contrast of the sign, in direct relation to the ambient outdoor illumination.
2. The pixel pitch/resolution of the LED sign is 10 mm, which meets the City's requirement of being 25 mm or less.
3. The message will appear in intervals of no less than 15 seconds.
4. The use of animation, flashing, scrolling, or blinking characters is prohibited.
5. The sign will be made of the highest quality materials, which include a masonry base.
6. The hours of operation of the sign will not exceed 6:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. This provision shall not apply to public emergency alerts. The school has agreed to display Amber Alerts and emergency messages upon request from the Police Department.

James Butler, with PEA Group, and Susan Brock, Superintendent of Oakland Christian Schools, were available to answer any questions of the Commission.

The Commission had no questions.

Mr. Ouellette opened the public hearing at 7:04 p.m.

There being no public comments, Mr. Ouellette closed the public hearing at 7:04 p.m.

Moved by Beidoun to recommend to the City Council approval of the Special Land Use Permit for Oakland Christian School – Automatic Changeable Copy Sign, subject to the conditions of the City’s Administrative Review Team.

Second by MacMillan.

VOTE:

VOTE: Yes: Shearer, MacMillan, Ferguson, Pavlich, Beidoun, Patrus, Tringali, Saelens, Ouellette

No: None

Motion Carried (9-0)

6. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

6a. Text Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance (7:09 p.m.)

Motion – Recommendation to City Council for approval of a text amendment to amend Article IX. B-2, General Business Districts of the Zoning Ordinance.

Mr. Ouellette advised the audience that the public hearing for this item was held at the September 10, 2025 Planning Commission meeting.

Mr. Cohen explained that although outdoor storage and the sale of merchandise and materials outside gasoline service stations have been prohibited for decades, the issue has become a challenge for the City in enforcing the ordinance.

On September 10th, the Planning Commission held a public hearing to review an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance, aimed at addressing the issue of allowing the sale of ice and propane tanks outside the store, provided they are located in a screened outdoor sales enclosure area. After reviewing the practicality of installing enclosures at existing gas station sites, the Planning Commission asked Mr. Cohen to provide additional options for them to consider that would be implemented by the Zoning Ordinance to permit the outdoor storage of ice chests and propane tanks at gasoline service stations, as this service provides convenience to Auburn Hills residents and the general public.

Mr. Cohen offered the following options:

1. Do nothing – continue not to address the issue
2. Enforce the current ordinance, which prohibits outside sales
3. Amend the ordinance to only allow outdoor ice and propane sales if it is screened with a three-sided enclosure (*proposed on 9-10-25*)
4. Amend the ordinance to only allow outdoor ice and propane sales, subject to City staff review and approval. Require screening with a three-sided enclosure for new or expanded gas stations

Mr. Cohen stated that, based on the Planning Commission’s deliberations on September 10th, Option #4 is recommended. The proposed generalized ordinance language would give City staff flexibility to craft tailored solutions for each property, taking into account barrier-free access, safety, and other relevant factors. Enclosures would be required at newly constructed stations.

The Commission asked the following:

- The materials the proposed enclosure would be constructed of
- Placement of the ice chests, propane cages, and future enclosures
- Materials that are allowed to be stored outdoors
- Cost to implement the proposed enclosure

Mr. Cohen advised that the enclosure requirement would be triggered during a substantial remodel, expansion, or site reconstruction. The enclosure would be constructed on the side of the building, and the materials, typically

masonry, would be selected to match its aesthetic. Since these enclosures will be built during major renovations, the construction costs for the property owner will be minimized.

Mr. Cohen also stated that outdoor displays would be limited to ice chests and propane cages. Items such as firewood and washer fluid will remain prohibited outdoors.

Moved by Shearer to recommend to the City Council approval of the enclosed Text Amendment to Article IX. B-2, General Business Districts of the Zoning Ordinance.

Second by Saelens.

VOTE: Yes: Shearer, MacMillan, Ferguson, Pavlich, Beidoun, Patrus, Tringali, Saelens, Ouellette

No: None

Motion Carried (9-0)

7. NEW BUSINESS

7a. Age-Friendly Auburn Hills – Next Steps in Implementation (7:17 p.m.)

Discussion – Facilitating Universal/Inclusive Design in New Single-Family Home Developments.

Mr. Cohen explained that the City's goal is to provide a diverse housing stock that accommodates people of all ages and abilities, including children, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. During the Age-Friendly Auburn Hills visioning process, the City learned that smart planning involves making homes accessible to all whenever possible, which can be achieved through universal or inclusive design.

In 2017, the Planning Commission and City Council took action to encourage this type of design for new homes by adding incentives through the Planned Unit Development Option, as outlined by Section 1836. Universal Design and Visitability in the Zoning Ordinance. The idea behind this initiative was that incorporating universal design features during initial construction is significantly cheaper than retrofitting them later.

Under the City's current ordinance, Section 1836, to be considered for Planned Unit Development Option eligibility using this criterion, 75% or more of the homes in a proposed development must include the following minimum universal design elements and features:

1. Zero-step front door entryway
2. First floor master bedroom and bathroom with zero-step entry to shower
3. 36-inch wide doorways and 42-inch wide hallways
4. 60-inch wide maneuvering radius in the kitchen and bathrooms
5. First floor laundry room

Mr. Cohen advised that universal design is an important long-term strategy for the City for a number of reasons:

- It "future-proofs" a home. As needs change due to aging, injury, or family circumstances, the home is ready for minor adaptations that make it safe and user-friendly for all.
- It enables people to age in place without the need for costly renovations
- It also supports the independence and dignity of individuals with mobility challenges or cognitive limitations, enabling them to live at or visit a home.

Mr. Cohen asked the Planning Commission to consider taking the next step in boldly leading on this issue and influence the market by moving to require all new Planned Unit Developments with single-family homes to build universal design homes.

The Commission discussed the following:

- The percentage of units in a development that would be required through the proposed change
- Incentive for developers to implement universal design
- Projected costs of adding universal design
- Safety benefits of universal design

Mr. Cohen stated that it has been almost nine years since the City Council amended the Zoning Ordinance to encourage this type of housing; however, no homes have been built that fully meet this standard. He explained that such requirements generally exceed Michigan building codes; therefore, they cannot be mandated by the City. The

law allows universal design to be implemented through the Planned Unit Development Option, as it is a mutually agreed-upon approach among all parties. The City has seen some developments, such as Villa Montclair and Summerlyn, that cater to seniors (e.g., ranch-style homes with first-floor bedrooms and bathrooms). Still, they lack many key visitability requirements (e.g., zero-step front-door entryways, wider hallways, and a larger maneuvering radius in the kitchen and bathrooms) to ensure someone with a mobility disability, whether temporary or permanent, can access the home safely.

Director of Senior Services Krieg announced to the Planning Commission that AARP has accepted the City's 2025-2028 Age-Friendly Action Plan. As a result, the City will continue to be recognized as a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities.

Senior Services Advisor Adcock shared that universal design benefits not only aging adults but also everyone, regardless of age or ability. Adding a diverse housing stock helps ensure that no one is excluded from living in Auburn Hills.

Mr. Lang stated that while there may be a slight increase in costs to implement universal design during construction, these costs are substantially less than the costs of a significant renovation in the future. Further, Mr. Cohen added that the increase in housing density offered and additional profit made through the Planned Unit Development Option should help offset the developer's costs.

Mr. Cohen explained that he conducted a detailed study earlier this year showing that the City is near build-out in its residential areas. He anticipates that many of the future residential developments on the City's remaining buildable land will seek density increases or design flexibility due to the site constraints (e.g., wetlands, topography, site size, etc.) and now would be the time for Auburn Hills to take the next step in furthering this innovative initiative by requiring developers, through the Planned Unit Development Option, to offer more accessible homes in their developments.

Mr. Cohen explained that little land remains, and only about 500 more homes could be built. Thus, the City is running out of opportunities to encourage this type of housing; now is the time to lead, or this design innovation will likely not be realized in Auburn Hills. Universally designed homes provide a framework that can be modified now or in the future to create a more inclusive design, benefiting everyone throughout their lifetime.

The Planning Commission agreed that this was an important initiative and supported the City's next steps to lead in this area. Members thanked Mr. Cohen for his initiative in bringing ideas like this to them for improving Auburn Hills for people of all ages and abilities, and for advising them on how to proactively implement the recommendations of the Age-Friendly Action Plan.

Mr. Cohen advised that he prepare a final proposal and bring it forward for discussion at the Planning Commission meeting on December 10, 2025, for potential implementation in Y2026.

8. COMMUNICATIONS – None.

9. NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

The next scheduled meeting is on Wednesday, November 12, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. in the Auburn Hills Council Chambers.

10. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chairperson Ouellette adjourned the meeting at 8:02 p.m.

Submitted by:

Devin Lang.

Assistant Director of Community Development