



# Annual Report

## June 1, 2013 - May 31, 2014

### *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, 2013 and ending on May 31, 2014, the Commission's membership was as follows:

Greg Ouellette, Chairperson  
 Wade Spurlin, Vice-Chairperson  
 Susan Emery, Secretary (10-1-13)  
 Cheryl Verbeke (Served as City Council Liaison and PC Secretary thru 11-26-13)  
 Sam Beidoun  
 Chauncey Hitchcock  
 VeRonica Mitchell (City Council Liaison)  
 Bob Pierce  
 Carolyn Shearer  
 Eric Mendieta

During this time period, the Commission held 12 meetings and recommendations were made to the City Council on 28 development related items.

Measurable	Y2007 -2008	Y2008 -2009	Y2009 -2010	Y2010 -2011	Y2011 -2012	Y2012 -2013	<b>Y2013 -2014</b>
Meetings	10	17	10	18	11	12	<b>12</b>
Site Plans	5	10	2	6	3	5	<b>12</b>
Special Land Use Permits	6	8	6	12	6	3	<b>6</b>
Tree Removal Permits	4	3	1	4	3	5	<b>6</b>
Planned Unit Developments	2	1	0	0	1	1	<b>3</b>
Rezoning	3	2	1	3	1	8	<b>0</b>
Text Amendments	0	4	8	1	1	5	<b>1</b>
<b>Total Projects</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>

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, Assistant City Planner also provides staff support to the Commission. He is certified as a professional planner (AICP) with the American Planning Association. He has a Bachelor of Science in Public Law & Government 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:

- GKN – North American Headquarters – 168,056 sq. ft. office building
- TownPlace Suites by Marriott – 49,542 sq. ft. extended stay hotel
- TSM Corporation – 57,800 sq. ft. building addition
- The Parkways – 76 townhouses, 72 stacked flats, and a 160 unit congregate care facility
- Atlas Copco – U.S. Headquarters – 120,000 sq. ft. research & technology building
- Rivers Edge – 52,895 sq. ft. mixed use bldg. (first floor commercial and 31 residential units)
- BorgWarner Powertrain Technical Center – 46,555 sq. ft. office addition
- Forester Hills - 28 unit single-family housing development
- Visioneering, Inc. U.S. Headquarters – 181,122 sq. ft. office/industrial building

2. **Shoppes at Baldwin Square – New Driveway**

The Planning Commission examined plans for a second driveway and the vehicle traffic patterns associated with the Shoppes at Baldwin Square. This was initiated by the number of complaints the City received from residents living on Alberta about the number of driveway “turn-arounds” made by customers mistakenly turning down Alberta in an effort to enter the shopping center. The Planning Commission invited the residents and businesses to provide comments and/or concerns related to the proposed new driveway, designed to alleviate the driveway “turn-around” problems residents on Alberta are experiencing.

3. **Gas and Oil Drilling and Exploration Ordinance**

The Ordinance was drafted in response to a company showing interest in setting up a drilling operation on a residentially zoned site in the northeast corner of the City. Subsequently, a large number of residents attended a series of City Council meeting to express their concerns with the industrial nature of the land use and the potential negative impacts such operations could have on their neighborhood. The ordinance was amended to regulate the location, setbacks and related items associated with oil and gas wells.



***In typical Auburn Hills’ fashion, the Planning Commission didn’t just write an ordinance for gas and oil drilling ... many experienced it***

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

- Requires a City permit to install a gas and oil well.
- Prohibits hydraulic fracturing, a.k.a. fracking, within the City.
- Permits oil and gas wells only on industrial zoned property (e.g., I-1, I-2, and I-3 districts).
- Requires oil and gas wellheads be setback 1,000 feet from homes, religious institutions, child care facilities, and hospitals.
- Created standards to address potential nuisance concerns.

4. AARP Age-Friendly Community Project

The City's Age-Friendly initiative officially kicked off on Thursday, February 27, 2014, when it held its' first of seven community conversation gatherings. The City gathered an assortment of thoughts and ideas from its residents revolving around improving housing, transportation, and programs for seniors. The goal of this effort is to assure Auburn Hills is a place where all can live, work, play, and age in the years to come.

The City has partnered with the AARP and is one a few communities who is part of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities initiative.

Each of the seven Community conversations, listed below, lasted about two hours.

- February 27 – Great Lakes Golf & Sports Complex - six people attended
- March 4 – Auburn Hills Christian Center - nine people in attended
- March 26 – R.G. Graham Elementary - 37 people in attended
- April 1 – North Auburn Hills Baptist Church - 70 people in attended
- April 16 – Avondale High School - 40 people in attended
- May 8 – Meadow Creek Village - 14 people in attended
- May 14 – Meadows of Auburn Hills – 32+ people in attended



5. Auburn Hills Awarded Planning Excellence Award for Best Practice  
Each year the Michigan Chapter of APA presents Excellence Awards in 15 different categories. The awards recognize group achievement by planning agency, planning team, or firm, community group, or local authority in helping civic leaders and citizens play a meaningful role in creating communities that enrich people's lives. The City of Auburn Hills was the recipient of the Planning Excellence Award for Best Practices for its efforts to assist in the development of the State of Michigan's Electric Vehicle Readiness plan, as well as, developing and implementing an ordinance and Plug-In Electric Vehicle Ready Program to assure Auburn Hills is prepared for the next generation of alternate fuel vehicles.



*Charging Station at Magna E-Car*

6. Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2014–2018 (**Recreation Commission**)  
The Recreation Commission updated and adopted the City's Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The highlights of the 2014-2018 Plan include:
- Emphasis is placed on developing and enhancing parks and properties the City already owns.
  - To further develop and complete the downtown river walk.
  - Improve pedestrian pathways and filling in gaps that currently exist. Continuing in the northeast corner of the City to complete the looping system.
  - Improve the bus stops within the City to include a hard surface and possibly a bench and some shade.
  - Offer programs and events that meet the needs of a diverse community.
  - Continue to develop new partnerships to enhance programming and events while reducing operating expenses.
  - Develop more programming to reduce obesity and promote healthy choices – targeting youth and teens.
  - Clinton River Trail improvements including new directional signage.
  - A development operations plan for Hawk Woods Nature Center.
  - Consideration of a refrigerated ice rink downtown.
  - Form partnerships with Oakland University and Avondale Schools performing arts programs.
  - Operations for the Downtown Educational Nook.

7. Staff Training  
Steve Cohen, Shawn Keenan, Karen Adcock and Elizabeth Brennan attended the *Michigan APA Conference* in Kalamazoo City in October 2013. Mr. Cohen and Mr. Keenan attended the *National APA Conference* in Atlanta, GA in April 2014. Mr. Cohen also attended the *ICMA Gettysburg Leadership Institute* in Gettysburg, PA in April 2014 to learn about different perspectives on city management and leadership with a small group of 30 senior local government managers from across the country.

AICP planners, like Mr. Cohen and Mr. Keenan, 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 two-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 39 CM credits thus far for the current reporting period of January 1, 2014 and December 31, 2015. Mr. Keenan has obtained 38.25 CM credits thus far for the current reporting period of January 1, 2014 and December 31, 2015.

8. 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 and Beidoun attended the *Michigan APA Conference* in Traverse City in October 2013. Several members also attended seminars locally offered by Oakland County, the most noted seminar related to Oakland County's Planning & Economic Development program called, Main Street Oakland.

Auburn Hills has been involved with a very limited number of development-related lawsuits over the past 15 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, 2015 and Beyond**

1. Update the City's Master Land Use Plan
2. Lead the AARP Age-Friendly Community Project
3. Finish the Complete Streets Policy
4. Update the neighborhood plans as needed
5. Update the Zoning Ordinance and prepare for a major re-write in Y2016 (*staff recommends the project be delayed from Y2015 due to cost and other priorities such as the Master Land Use Plan update*)

**Commission Recommendations to City Council**

The Commission respectfully recommends that the City Council ensure that the Y2015 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, Master Plan and Zoning Ordinances updates, etc.)
3. Funding for educational materials and technical training for Commission members