The Charter Township of Orion Planning Commission held a workshop meeting on Wednesday, March 17, 2021, at 6:00 pm VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE - GoToMeeting Access code 599-669-285 or VIA TELEPHONE 1-(571) 317-3122 Access Code 599-669-285 (Meeting being conducted via video/telephone conference due to the health concern of COVID-19 and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services)

PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT (Commissioner location):
Don Walker, PC Rep to ZBA (Orion Twp./Oakland County) (arrived at 6:30 pm)
Scott Reynolds, Chairman (Orion Twp./Oakland County)
Kim Urbanowski, BOT Rep to PC (Orion Twp./Oakland County)
Don Gross, Vice-Chairman (Orion Twp./Oakland County)
Joe St. Henry, Secretary (Orion Twp./Oakland County)
Jessica Gingell, Commissioner (Orion Twp./Oakland County)
Garrett Hoffman, Commissioner (Orion Twp./Oakland County)

PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS ABSENT:
None.

1. OPEN MEETING
Chairman Reynolds opened the workshop meeting at 6:00 pm.

2. ROLL CALL
As noted

CONSULTANTS PRESENT:
Rodney Arroyo, (Township Planner) of Giffels Webster
Eric Fazzini, (Township Planner) of Giffels Webster
Eric Pietsch, (Township Planner) of Giffels Webster
Mark Landis (Township Engineer) of Orchard, Hiltz, and McCliment, Inc.
Tammy Girling, Township Planning & Zoning Director

OTHERS PRESENT:
Annette Battaglia
Sofija Kalaj
Jason Wisniewski
Ken Zmijewski
Penny Shults

3. AGENDA REVIEW AND APPROVAL
Moved by Vice-Chairman Gross, seconded by Trustee Urbanowski, to approve the agenda as presented.

4. NEW BUSINESS
A. PC-2021-07, 5 Year Master Plan Update

Planner Arroyo showed the Commissioners’ a brief slide deck. He stated that they will be going over the status of the existing conditions chapter, a work program schedule, 15-minute neighborhoods, an online survey, the May Open House, and the vision statement.

Planner Arroyo said that the Commissioner’s had already seen a preliminary draft of the existing conditions chapters, and they are in the process of completing those. He added that they are not 100% complete, but they anticipate that it will be done within the next two weeks or so. So, by the end of March, they should be getting an update on those chapters.
Planner Arroyo said that he did provide in their packets, a work program, an updated one, and he wanted to go through that with them, just so they all have his understanding of the anticipated roadmap over the next few months. He said that they have been working on the existing conditions, which they are close to having finished, and then they are in the process of doing an online survey for the market assessment, which has been ongoing. The Township Supervisor requested that it be extended to the first of May as a deadline. He said that the Township Supervisor had an opportunity to get the word out through some appearances he was making and wanted to get as many responses as possible. Planner Arroyo thought that the response rate had been doing well and that they were well over 500. He said that much of that information informs the market assessment. They were hoping that with the Open House being pushed towards the end of May, they will have some concluding information from that market assessment that they could share as part of the Open House. Next will be the goals, objectives, strategies, and a lot of public engagement. They are going to be doing that final push for the online survey. They would like more people to participate in PictureThis!TM. He said he didn’t have a current tally yet on that but that will be their next push, once the survey is done. They are going to extend the PictureThis!TM probably through June, so there is still plenty of time for people to participate in that. They also have the art contest, where they want to get some of the students and school systems within the Township to draw either what they like best about the Township, or what their vision is, how they see the future, and draw a picture or provide some other type of art. They are hoping to get that out right after spring break, so they can get it finished before school is out. Then they will be going through all that information through the summer and what their hope is, and what they will be doing is using some of the best artwork to have in the Master Plan. They might have some full-page examples of some of the art in the Master Plan. He thought it would be nice to see what the students think of the future of the community.

Planner Arroyo said then they will be overriding the vision for the Township and then the goals and objectives. They want to dive into that, right after the Open House is completed. They want them to have the opportunity to hear what the public says, and interact with the public, and get the results of the survey. He thought then they will be prepared to then start talking about goals and objectives, because they should have a lot of good information.

Planner Arroyo said then they will start reviewing the Future Land use map over a series of four meetings. They will be breaking it up into geographic chucks, and the first time, will probably be at the main meeting. Then in June, July, and August meetings, they will do the same thing. He added that at the same time, they will start bringing the pieces of the plan of chapters. The housing and neighborhood plans, they are targeting that to be in June to August, roughly, they will be working on that. They will have some initial discussions, probably at the June meeting. The employment plans that deals with all the residential categories will be June to August, as well, and then the Future Land Use, and the thoroughfare plan, complete street plan, they are looking at August, September, is a likely scenario for those months, for discussion and presenting the information in October. Their expectations are in September, they probably will start to finalize all of these plans in a draft form a final draft to start to prepare to disseminate, and then the implementation section we would talk about in October. They are looking to have a second public Open House once the rough draft is together and would likely be in November or early December. If they are satisfied with the draft as it put together at that point, they would then have them ask the Township Board for permission to distribute it to the reviewing agencies and other communities, the surrounding communities. Then that would kick off the 63-day review period, and then potentially targeting and adoption by the Planning Commission in February, and then it would also then be going to the Township Board for action, potentially that same month or could slip into the beginning of March. Then final printing in their online story maps summary, which can be an interactive summary of the Master Plan that will live on the website, and would be the final product, besides printing the final document.
Planner Arroyo said he wanted to spend some time talking about 15-minute neighborhoods. He wanted to talk about building this concept and see if there was support for it. If there is support, what they would like to do, is get some input, during the Open House from the public, on this concept of 15-minute neighborhoods. He added that there are different ways to define neighborhoods, they don’t always have to be 15-minutes, it could constitute less time. Usually what they are talking about is some form of nonmotorized transportation and moving from a center point out. The idea is, the center of the neighborhood, would be a place that has some mixing of uses, and some level of commercial activity, and some employment centers and some services, and then as they go out from that center, they would be getting into more residential areas. The theory behind the 15-minute neighborhood is if they establish one and they build out a solid nonmotorized network, then people can go to the center of the neighborhood for everyday goods and services, and they can choose to take a mode of transportation that doesn’t involve a car. If they want to, they could ride a bike, or they could walk. The way they have structured it, is a bicycle ride of 15-minutes, which is about a 3-mile bike ride, a quarter-mile walk is roughly five minutes, depending on the pace, a quarter-mile walk is 15-minutes, a two-mile bike ride is 10 minutes, and then a 3-mile bike ride is 15-minutes. If they wanted to throw electric bikes in there, which can go faster, they can get a five-mile distance and in 15-minutes with that. So just as a guidepost for how we might establish some boundaries. What they did was they looked at wherewith, it makes sense, potentially to center some 15-minute neighborhoods. Lake Orion is one, that is already a Village and it is an established place that has a mixing of uses, and it influences the Township and their City.

Planner Arroyo said that the second place that seemed to make a lot of sense in establishing a walkable place is in the Gingellville area along Baldwin Rd. This too would function much like a Village, but it has a wide variety of recreation, retail, restaurant, office, and residential uses, and will likely include mixing of residential densities as well with more-dense residential, closer to the core area.

Planner Arroyo said that the third one is a little more interesting, and maybe not as obvious, and they wanted their input. In this case, they are talking about Silverbell and Squirrel. They are calling it Decker because the Decker Park and Decker field are right there. Decker has a historic element within the Township. Although it doesn’t have a formalized place, as we think about some of the other areas, like Gingellville, it is recognized in that it has been within the community for many years, and obviously, Decker Park and Decker Field are part of that. They use the power of GIS to actually take their existing networks of transportation and then map out these same distances based upon what you can travel on, right now.

Planner Arroyo showed the Board the GIS map.

Planner Arroyo said if they decide that, as a community that 15-minute neighborhood are important, and we want to build upon these, then one of the things we would want to do as part of the Master Plan, is starting to think about their nonmotorized plan and their road plan and they want to build out the transportation network to focus on these core areas of these neighborhoods so that it becomes easier for people to get to those core areas. What that does is helps to support those core areas so those businesses can thrive and do better because they are identified as being the center of an important neighborhood. They have networks in place, and people will hopefully feel comfortable going there to walk or ride a bike to go to dinner, and maybe they will choose other forms of transportation besides them being inside a car.

Planner Arroyo wanted to talk about the Decker area and give them some background. It is at Silverbell and Squirrel. They have several projects going on in this area or about to happen. They got the Cottages of Bald Mountain, Lavender Ridge, and Decker Field. They also have
Goddard School, and Eagle Creek Academy. The idea is to potentially make this not a village and not more intense but more of what they have traditional they refer to as a hamlet. A hamlet is something that is a small commercial area that is still walkable but doesn’t necessarily look like a village or a city. The buildings are not up to the roadways, there is grass in front, it is much more of that small-town feel to it, and they could have seating areas out front. It is not intense, there is a lot of one story, they might have two-story, but it is mostly just one story, low-key, relaxed, commercial area, where they might have some stores, restaurants, or some offices in that area.

Trustee Urbanowski thought that the hamlet idea was interesting, especially in that spot by Goddard School and then they have Eagle Creek Academy. There are plenty of families in the area. It is quaint, it feels like something they might see up north. She liked the idea.

Chairman Reynolds thought that the two primary ones, the Village in the Baldwin Court because of how well established they are, and Jesse Decker Park has a lot of development on that corner of the Township. He thought that there was some more food for thought, and felt there was a lot of possibilities there, especially connections to Auburn Hills. There is Culver’s that is a big community piece within that region, there is a lot of residential development, and a lot going on there, and thought that there was great stuff in Rochester Hills. He added that the other one that he was going to bring up was the intersection of Clarkston and Baldwin Roads, Friendship Park, a development that is going on there. He thought there was a lot of potential in that corner of the Township also. Maybe a similar level of, you know, neighborhood, if there is a network there, maybe not a downtown, maybe not a Gingellville district but thought that there was two primary and two secondary sections of the Township.

Vice-Chairman Gross thought that the Friendship Park area rides the four quadrants in the community. Friendship Park has got so much going on over there with the Miracle Field and other things that are walkable to it. He thought it makes sense to include that one in the discussion.

Secretary St. Henry thought that the hamlet approach was there already to a certain extent if they go west on Clarkston Rd. They will see businesses set off the road 50-yards. The whole notion of developing the Decker Park area, with the hamlet approach, he found that intriguing especially considering the kind of pushback they got on the Lavender Ridge development. He didn’t know if traditional commercial development would be welcome there, just based on the pushback they received less than a year ago on that. He added that his biggest concern about the hamlet approach is that in Orion Township, for whatever reason most developers insist on being along Lapeer Rd., even if they are not an ideal location, or on Baldwin Rd. He asked the Planner based on his experience what would be the image of commercial development in a hamlet-type setup off of those main drags? It will not be as attractive as Lapeer Rd. because they don’t have as much traffic there, but they will still have significant roadways, Silverbell & Squirrel. He thought that there was a potential to attract a smaller scale level of development there, which is exactly what is intended. They are talking about potentially converting houses into small businesses, that type of scale, and then build off of that and improve it. It is not a major strip developer coming in and building a brand-new downtown. That is not that vision the vision is much smaller in scale, and really just serves a neighborhood, whereas when they are on Lapeer, they may have some locale service element, but they are also serving a region because they have regional traffic going through, but that is not what this would be. It would be much smaller in area and the scale of it would be different.

Commissioner Hoffman stated that he would like to see Friendship Park included. He said the one thing he liked about Decker is they have a hotel there too, so the people visiting, would have stuff for them as well.
Secretary St. Henry asked if they explore the hamlet idea in the community survey? Planner Arroyo replied they did not, they are looking to do that at the Open House.

Planner Arroyo felt that there was some general support in trying to build upon this idea and then get some public input. He added that they were going to add the Clarkston, Baldwin, Friendship Park area, modify this and then bring it back to them.

Chairman Reynolds thought it was one tool among the walkable neighborhood component. They used to refer to it as the live, work, play. Those are common resources that people would like to add in those neighborhood regions.

Secretary St. Henry said he was curious to see what kind of feedback they get from the public because historically people have moved to Lake Orion, Orion Township, looking for more space and to get away from, quite frankly, these types of neighborhoods, as they find in some of the southern Oakland County communities. He wasn’t saying it is bad, that was not his point, he was just saying he would love to hear feedback from the community and what they think of these walkable neighborhoods.

Planner Arroyo said he was interested too because they are hearing more from different communities now. There is a change in attitude about the use of non-motorized transportation and creating walkable places because they can still preserve the character that they enjoy in Orion Township without hurting that character but also still establishing places and having a non-motorized network. They already have an established track record for non-motorized with the pathways plan and all the non-motorized paths that have gone in, that is not new to this community. The Village of Lake Orion and the Gingelville area are, but Baldwin Rd. is not new to this area, what they are doing is refining it and improving it. The Decker concept is not trying to put something there that is radically different in terms of they are not trying to put Lake Orion right in the middle of Decker it is more of that small hamlet area. So, they are trying to enhance, he thought, what they already have and build upon their established framework of supporting bicycle transportation. He thought that in a rural setting like this, creating routes that people can bike on, where they feel safe to bike and then can go somewhere and have a destination. He thought it was consistent with what they have been doing in a lot of ways, but kind of transforms it to a little bit of even a higher level because he thought that there was a general trend toward people wanting that.

Planning & Zoning Director Girling asked when trying to get that look of a house converted to a commercial operation in a hamlet, is it in the ordinance as an overlay so that they can have design standards to keep it looking like a house? How do they stop a developer from not following what they see it as and not coming in with a typical commercial-looking building? Planner Arroyo said that it would require a unique ordinance. It might be its own district or it might be an overlay district over a geographic area. The only way they are going to promote this type of vision is to have an ordinance that requires it. Yes, there would be a very unique ordinance for the Hamlet, and it would be much different than the ordinance they would use in the Gingelville area.

Planner Arroyo stated that the online survey is open until the end of this month. He asked them to keep pushing anybody you know, that might be interested to have them fill that out. They are looking now at having the Open House somewhere in the area of late May. He would be working with Planning & Zoning Director Girling to identify some potential dates. He added that the other advantage to postponing this is maybe they can get lucky and do it in person. He felt that an open house in person is much different than one that is online. They have to see where all the COVID rates go, how the vaccination occurs, what the general feeling of the community
is, and what the state regulations are. He thought that in about a month, they are going to have to make a call on it as to whether or not they are going to be able to do it in person. He thought as long as they can be in a position where they could gather 50 people, right now, they are at 25 is the max, if they can get it up to 50 people, they can break it into two segments. Normally 100 people were about the most he sees. The typical attendance, he would say, tends to run from 50 to 100 for these types of events. If they get it up to 50 then potentially, they could have two-time slots and try to still make it happen in person.

Planner Arroyo said that open house stations, typically, what they like to do with these is establish stations where people can go and visit and talk informally about different topics. They would propose a land use station, housing station that deals with residential and there they are considering having a visual preference survey where they can show people different housing types, including some missing middle housing types, and ask them to provide their comments on where they see these housing types by location. First what they think about them, and to what areas do they think it makes sense. They also want to talk about rural corridors, particularly up in the north-west portion of the Township. What could be done there to preserve rural character? They would like to do some visual preference photographs and look at things like additional setbacks from the main road to preserve a rural corridor in those areas. Trying to treat different areas of the Township differently and get some feedback on that. Employment, they will be focusing on industrial, office, and retail. They have statistics on that and this is where they will hopefully have the results of the market assessment, and they can share how much additional development the Township can support based upon the findings of the market assessment. Natural features and community facilities will be a one combination board where they look at natural features, recreations, other community facilities, and this is where they might start to explore the public’s thoughts on the re-use of a land-fill, for example. A lot of communities have closed landfills and they are not quite sure what to do with them. So that would be the natural features community facilities station. The complete streets station will deal with non-motorized, motorized transportation. The place-making station would address the 15-minute neighborhood concept. It might address also some other place-making elements that could go elsewhere in the Township to create places where people want to spend more time. That might be associated with some of the other retail areas that are not necessarily in one of the three neighborhood centers.

Vice-Chairman Gross said that one of the things that they may want to consider talking about is, home occupations. Now with more companies and businesses, being outsourced to their homes, how extensive that might become, what problems might come along with that. Planner Arroyo asked if there were certain scenarios that he had in mind. Vice-Chairman Gross replied by increased traffic on residential streets, and the types of businesses that are going to increase the flow of delivery trucks into residential areas.

Chairman Reynolds said specifically to people who live and work in the Township versus people who live here and telecommute to other places, just expanding on employment. He thought those needs are different verses, are they driving past it, or are they working from home, they might have a different radius from each of those situations versus I live in Orion Twp. drive to Detroit. He didn’t know if that was just getting some population data or something that they should be talking about and what are their needs.

Trustee Urbanowski asked what is the station was going to look like? Planner Arroyo said what they expect to happen is to have some information boards, so they would be presenting, for example, some of the information that you have seen in the existing conditions chapter that deals with housing. They might have a board that provides some statistics about housing information with the Township. Then what they typically try to do is develop short questionnaires by topic, usually no more than 3 or 4 questions. If there are specific topics or
questions, they think it might be appropriate to ask a question they would put that on a sheet, someone could fill it out quickly while they are at the station stick it in a box, and move on to the next station.

Planner Arroyo said they also like to have one location where they do what is called a dot exercise. What they like to do, for example, is to give them 6 dots and say, each one of those dots represents a million dollars, and then they will have maybe 12 different areas of spending within the community. For example, building new bike paths, building new parks, whatever the topics might be, and allow people to take those dots and put them where they think the spending priorities might be. They can test some examples for different community facilities or anything that will involve a public expenditure, they can test the popularity of it by seeing if people are willing to spend money on it.

Vice-Chairman Gross asked if this was not intended to get into a debate with anybody, it is more of an information-gathering? Planner Arroyo said this is not the place for a debate it is a place to listen. This is where they want people to be able to share their ideas. They want is to have at least one Planning Commissioner at each station, and then they would be floating around to the different ones. They want them to interact with people, and they want them to listen to what they have to say. They want people to feel comfortable and see familiar faces and to feel willing to share their opinion about how the Township is going to evolve.

Planner Arroyo showed the Commissioner’s pictures of what the stations would look like. Typically, they set them up, they have boards with information, and they set them up on large tables. Then they have other tables set up where people can sit down and fill out questionnaires if they want to. The whole idea is to allow people the opportunity to informally walkthrough. They don't typically have a presentation that is there but what he found is they may do an impromptu discussion and welcome, a couple of times during the Open House. Sometimes people come to the Open House and ask when is the presentation. While it isn't intended to be a presentation it is more of "hey this is why we are here". We are here to listen to you, get your ideas, and we are about to start diving into the plan.

Secretary St. Henry stated that it was very similar to the format that they did five years ago. He thought it was very informative and thought that good information come out when they start talking to folks.

Planner Arroyo said that the final thing he wanted to talk about is the vision statement.

Planner Fazzini said they provided a memo dated February 20, 2021, before the last meeting that was canceled. So, this would be something that they would pick up right after the Open House. They have had a couple of points of public input, so far, and the Open House is the big one. They like to wait till after they have most of the public input, and especially after the Open House before they start to think about goals or objectives. They have talked about going through the existing Master Plans goals to see what they would like to keep, strengthen, or what doesn't apply. That is something they can do now to familiarize themselves with how those are structured. In the memo, they discuss how the structure of the current goals is not user-friendly. They are spread over 25 pages and are not organized in a way that is easy to reference for rezoning or for other Township planning initiatives. That is something that would come out of this, is a clear implementation table with priorities, timelines, and who is responsible for certain items.

Planner Fazzini added that the big thing that they do is create a vision statement. The current Master Plan doesn't have a vision statement. This is helpful because as they create these paragraphs, these themes, they can extract each sentence and that there then becomes their
goals. That is how he tries to think about creating goals, is to start with the vision statement. To get everyone’s input on that, to develop those and agree upon those. Then from there, a mix of creating of goals and objectives. He stated that is something they can also try to think about in addition to the existing goals are the 4 or 5 driving themes that they would like to see worked into a vision statement. Those could include vision statements, quotes, or slogans from other township initiatives, or from the community that they can try to work in or reference. He showed them an example from Clay Township’s vision statement.

5. ADJOURNMENT
Moved by Commissioner Gross, seconded by Trustee Urbanowski to adjourn the meeting at 6:52 p.m. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Walton
PC/ZBA Recording Secretary
Charter Township of Orion

April 7, 2021
Planning Commission Approval Date