

City of Farmington Hills, Michigan

Sustainability Study Findings/Recommendations November 2006

Introduction

Farmington Hills engaged Hooker | De Jong architects & engineers for a sustainability study in April 2006. Hooker | De Jong is pleased to report the findings and recommendations.

Farmington Hills, Michigan is a prosperous, thriving community, wanting to remain so. Census and other demographic data reveal a community with higher than average income, home values and educational achievement. The data further reveals a City that is likely to grow, while becoming more multiracial, multicultural and older.

Farmington Hills is experiencing financial pressures similar to most Michigan cities. State revenues are declining, the housing market is slumping, office vacancy rates are higher than usual, the automobile industry continues to have its challenges, land for new development is cheaper elsewhere and unemployment has increased. Facing these challenges, Farmington Hills has engaged this study to develop strategies for sustainability.

Farmington Hills wants to sustain or improve City services, continue a high level of business activity and sustain residential property values. In order to determine the best strategies for achieving sustainability, City Council members, staff community and business leaders were interviewed. Community forums were held to solicit input. Multiple reports, records and operations procedures were reviewed. Financial statements, annual budgets and previous studies were examined. Census data was reviewed and an analysis of property tax records was performed.

The City has initiated this analysis to suggest ways that the City can prepare for sustainability by employing a multi-disciplined, well-planned strategic approach. The City desires to be more anticipatory in its planning, rather than reactionary.

This effort is intended to compliment efforts of the Planning Commission, Economic Development Commission, the Redevelopment Committee and City Council as the City's master plan, zoning ordinances and economic development plans are reconsidered. Following an overview, this report will follow the outline specified in the City's request for proposal with recommendations. A summary of recommendations and conclusions will follow. Appendices will include supporting material.

Sustainability Overview

Sustainability for Farmington Hills is approached in three dimensions—financially, socially and environmentally. To remain financially sustainable, the City has to employ strategies that reduce costs, increase revenues or both. To have social sustainability, the City needs to be sensitive and reactive to the multiracial, multicultural and aging changes occurring in the population.

Delivering City services in a fair and impartial manner is important. To be environmentally sustainable, the City needs to think global while acting local. A three dimensional approach to sustainability has overlapping issues and strategies. The three dimensions are intertwined and the more they integrate, the stronger the strategy.

Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability for Farmington Hills can be achieved by employing internal operating strategies and external economic development strategies. Internally, the City is resolving under funded pension liability and retiree's hospitalization liability issues by allocating more resources to the arrears and by developing prospective policies that carry less risk of unfunded liability.

This effort should continue.

Externally, the pursuit of economic development strategies that encourage reinvestment and redevelopment will be important to the financial sustainability of Farmington Hills. A focus on City assets will enable “brand” development, positioning the City as the best in which to invest, personally and professionally. Becoming more development friendly will reinforce the effort. Most importantly, a new approach to zoning that permits more flexibility and mixed use within existing business zones will be a catalyst for new growth. Mingling commercial, residential and light industrial should encourage growth, redevelopment and new investment. Allowing higher buildings in the economic corridors should, likewise, encourage even more new investment, adding additional value to the tax base.

Social Sustainability

Essential to social sustainability are good schools and public safety. Farmington Hills enjoys both. Continuing Farmington Hill’s multicultural, multiracial sensitivity efforts will support social sustainability in Farmington Hills. Further, efforts to diversify the City’s workforce and to develop workshops and programs that focus on understanding racial and cultural differences will enhance social justice. Sensitivity to increases in the senior population will allow Farmington Hills to adjust programming and develop housing accommodations policies accordingly.

A continued emphasis on responsive cultural and recreational programming will allow Farmington Hills to continue to enjoy a very strong social justice environment that continues to be welcoming to multiracial, multicultural residents and businesses.

Environmental Sustainability

Citizens of Farmington Hills express concern for the environment. The impact that Farmington Hills can make on the global environment is minimal. A community guideline for environmental progress, however, is to think global and act local. New infrastructure projects, capital improvement pursuits and programming should be environmentally sensitive.

Development of the Costick Center, street and highway improvements, additions to City Hall and the development of a new “Farmington Hills Forest” can all contribute to sustaining or improving the local environment.

Sustainability Analysis and Recommendations/Per RFP

City Services

City services have been reviewed and several department heads and staff were interviewed.

Annual budgets and financial reports were reviewed. This study finds that the City of Farmington Hills provides outstanding services to its citizens.

Police

The Police Department appears well managed, apparently without corruption, and well staffed.

The current annual report of the Police Department was reviewed. In reviewing the City’s 2005 EEO-4 report, it was noted that the Police Department staff composition differs from the City as a whole when comparing U.S. Census Data (See U.S. Census Bureau, *Fact Sheet*, City of Farmington Hills, Michigan, 2005.) Because of low employee turnover rates in the Department and availability, the department has not been able to keep pace with the changing population.

- ✦ It is recommended that expansion of the cadet program be considered to recruit cadets that are from different racial or cultural backgrounds.

Fire

The Fire Department appears to be well managed, trained and well staffed. Employees from different racial and cultural backgrounds are shown to be underrepresented in the workforce according to the City's 2005 EEO-4 Report. This likely occurred because of the rapidly changing demographic of the City over the past decade combined with a low turnover rate of permanent employees.

- It is recommended that future recruiting reach out to people from different racial and cultural backgrounds.

Human Resources

The Human Resources Department appears to be well managed and performs the Human Resources functions effectively. Again, it was noted in reviewing the City's 2005 EEO-4 Report that employees of different racial or cultural backgrounds were under represented in the work force as compared to the U.S. Census data.

- ✦ It is recommended that future recruiting reach out to people from different racial and cultural backgrounds.

As the population and workforce of the City changes, it is expected that there will be a need for training on racial and cultural sensitivity issues. Such training can be very beneficial for social economic development efforts, particularly on a global basis. Some communities have developed programs with Sister Cities International to aid in this effort. The City of Ann Arbor, for example, has several Sister Cities.

- ✦ It is recommended that the City establish a cultural and diversity training program for city staff, which may later be expanded to the entire community.

An issue that emerged in discussions with the department heads and other staff was that many department heads were of an age and with sufficient pension credits to retire. Police, Fire and Public Works are likely to experience retirements soon. It is important that the City retain highly qualified staff to contribute to sustainability and growth.

- ✦ It is recommended that the City develop a succession plan for its departments.

Trash

The Trash Removal service appears to be well run and provides many opportunities for recycling including periodic hazardous materials collection programs. A focus group session revealed a desire on the part of some apartment dwellers to have further recycling opportunities.

- It is recommended that the City of Farmington Hills experiment with offering additional recycling opportunities to its apartment residents.

Parks and Recreation

Parks and Recreation (Senior and Youth) offers an incredible array of programming which adds immeasurably to the quality of life in Farmington Hills. Enhanced programming in this area benefits the community by making Farmington Hills a very desirable place to live, sustaining and growing property values. This is a very important dynamic in the sustainability of Farmington Hills. Programming that is designed to have appeal to people of different racial and cultural backgrounds will be increasingly important.

Development of the Costick Center and grounds can be a significant element, contributing to the livability of Farmington Hills. Further development of the Costick Center would give Farmington Hills uniqueness that neighboring communities do not have. It is suggested that future activity lead to the development of programs similar to Interlochen near Traverse City, Michigan or the Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp in Whitehall, Michigan. Such an effort is envisioned to be available primarily to the youth of Farmington Hills. Important in development of the Costick center will be attention to design. The effort should be undertaken with the highest quality design standards possible. Parks and recreation programming in Farmington Hills has been sensitive to the changing needs of the population and should continue to do so.

- It is recommended that the multi-racial, multi cultural programming that has begun be enhanced and expanded.
- It is recommended that the existing Costick Center be remodeled and upgraded, with a strong design element.
- It is recommended that the Costick center be enhanced by expansion for theater and the arts.

- ✦ It is recommended that a uniquely designed “splash park” fountain enhance the Costick Center grounds.
- ✦ It is recommended that a sculpture park be developed to enhance the Costick Center.

Other Departments

The City Manager and the activities of Assessing, the Municipal Golf Course, Planning and Development, Public Works, Engineering, Roads and Purchasing all appear to be well operated, providing a very high level of service to the public. There are no specific sustainability recommendations made for these operations.

Will the City be able to provide the current level of City services into the future?

The City has experienced a decline in state shared revenues and is likely to experience further revenue declines. Economic growth has slowed. Real estate sales have slowed. New construction is down. The City’s value increases in the near term may lag behind the rate of inflation. Sustaining future services levels is unlikely without increasing revenues—either through taxes, fees, expansion of the economic base or increased economic activity.

While the City has some reserve taxing capacity, interviews with City leaders revealed they prefer to implement economic development strategies encouraging investment and redevelopment, rather than increasing taxes, to sustain City operations.

In addition to investment and economic development strategies, interviews, observations and analysis of the demographics leads to the observation that a merger of the Cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills would have benefits to both. For Farmington Hills this would mean additional value, additional population and an identifiable downtown—all benefits with limited financial risk. Additional analysis of the merger recommendation follows in a separate section of this report.

Several areas of the City could generate redevelopment and reinvestment. The Redevelopment Committee Report to City Council, (August, 2006), suggests several corridors for redevelopment.

It is suggested that these be expanded to (1) between Twelve Mile and Fourteen Mile on Orchard Lake Road, (2) on Eight Mile from the Eastern boundary to the City of Farmington Boundary and (3) on the Eastern half of Grand River Avenue. The attached land use and corridor maps more fully develop these suggestions. Additional analysis and further economic development efforts follow in this report.

- It is recommended that the City of Farmington Hills become more proactive in pursuing a merger with the City of Farmington.
- It is recommended that the City of Farmington Hills become more proactive in encouraging reinvestment and redevelopment in the City.

Infrastructure

Water

While complex operationally the City's water supply is contracted and appears to meet the City's future needs.

Sewer

Large storm events may put increased demand on the City's sewer service, causing capacity concerns. This occurs because storm water in some areas is still flowing into the sewer system. To assure adequate future sewer capacity, the City may consider more use of sump pumps in residential developments.

- It is recommended that the city consider an ordinance requiring sump pump installation, upon the sale of a home. (This action is suggested when the City determines that it may be reaching allocated capacity for sewer services.)

Fiber Optic Cable/Technology Infrastructure

The City keeps records of fiber optic cable locations. Broadband/high speed Internet access is available throughout the City. Interviews with several business leaders revealed that their technology needs were being met. There was no apparent concern about future availability.

- It is recommended that the City continue to monitor its technology infrastructure to be knowledgeable of availability and changing technologies.

Roads

Continuous road improvements are necessary for vitality and growth. Observation and discussions suggest several improvements that will enhance the City's image and contribute to investment. The attached mapping, architectural detail and schematic renderings amplify these recommendations.

- It is recommended that Orchard Lake Road between Twelve and Fourteen Mile Roads be redeveloped as a six-lane boulevard.
- It is recommended that the City develop a strategy for upgrade of the roads, lighting and sidewalks in its industrial parks to become more attractive/competitive.
- It is recommended that the City adopt a plan to pave all streets by 2025.
- It is recommended that Middlebelt Road be improved, allowing for left turning lanes throughout its course in the City.
- It is recommended that Twelve Mile Road be improved to a four-lane road from the East to the West Side of Farmington Hills.

Bicycle Paths

The City has provided for bicycle lanes and paths as it has constructed new roads or sidewalks. Bicycle paths add to the attractiveness of the city, appealing to families, while signaling a resident friendly community. Bicycle paths contribute positively to the community's environment and image.

- It is recommended that the City formally develop a bicycle path program.
- It is recommended that the first path connect the Costick Center, City Hall, Heritage Park, the Skating and Soccer Center and the South Business District.

City Signage

Farmington Hills has made some effort to welcome visitors to the City. Signs are not consistent and design is ordinary.

- ✦ It is recommended that the City develop a well-designed signage program to be installed at entries establishing an identity for the community. (The attached schematics for Orchard Lake Road illustrate the concept.)

City Lighting

Some major corridors are without or are lacking a sufficient quantity of streetlights. Well-designed lighting will improve image as well as the feeling of safety.

- It is recommended, as road improvements are made, that a uniquely designed lighting system be installed, particularly in the Orchard Lake Road corridor.

Drainage

Drainage has long been an infrastructure issue for the City. Much has been done to improve drainage in the past. The most significant drainage issues remaining are in the area near Farmington and impact both Cities.

- ✦ It is recommended that Farmington Hills and Farmington evaluate their common drainage issues as a part of the reason to consider merging, as enhancement would benefit both.

Finance

To sustain Farmington Hills' operations, revenue enhancements will likely be required. The City's revenue sources, short and long term, are threatened. Additionally, there is an apparent weakness in the under funded pension and retirees hospitalization programs.

Property taxes or fees can be increased and the City has some remaining taxing capacity. Other options are preferred. One option is finding additional sources. A strategy with broad appeal is to devote resources and energy to expanding the taxable base, generating growth. Increased

investment and economic development in the community will add to property value and to City revenue.

Some restriction to revenue growth has resulted from the Headlee Constitutional Amendment, because the Headlee Amendment restricts growth on existing property to the amount of inflation, rather than actual cash value increases. When the City exhausts local taxing capacity and is further limited by Headlee, the City may consider a Headlee Amendment override referendum to allow for taxation at the existing approved taxable rate.

- It is recommended that the City of Farmington Hills become more proactive in encouraging reinvestment and redevelopment to expand and grow the taxable value.
- It is recommended that the City continue to implement a defined contribution pension benefit program.
- It is recommended that the City continue to implement a defined contribution retiree's hospitalization program.
- It is recommended that the City consider a Headlee Amendment override initiative if finances do not improve by 2010.

Economic Development/Redevelopment

Economic development and redevelopment are significant to the City's long-term sustainability. Specific strategies focus on investment, expansion and reinvestment in the community. Focus groups, targeted interviews and staff interviews all revealed a keen interest in pursuing additional investment in the community. An increased tax base is viewed as key to sustainability. It was further felt that the existing industrial parks and commercial corridors could be upgraded, improved and rezoned to attract additional investment.

Strategies to Increase Tax Base

A specific sustainability goal is to increase tax base and thus City revenues. An inventory of commercial property reveals sections of the City that are dated and underdeveloped. These areas,

however, are in prime locations and on major transportation corridors. The nearby residential areas have very high disposable income, making commercial redevelopment and new investment attractive.

- ✦ It is recommended that the City establish and designate a Central Business District located on Orchard Lake Road from Eleven Mile to Fourteen Mile Roads and extending west on Twelve Mile Road to the District Library and east to the High School.

This Central Business District corridor has strong potential to add to the City's tax base. The current taxable value of the corridor is about \$82 Million. One can see that doubling or tripling the taxable value by allowing density and new investment would add significantly to the City's tax base. It does not seem necessary to provide tax reduction incentives to encourage this development if the necessary zoning changes are implemented. Specific strategy recommendations follow:

- It is recommended that a New City Hall addition, if done, be distinctive and well designed to be the anchor of the south side of the corridor. (Insistence on quality design throughout the corridor will attract quality development.)
- It is recommended that the new traffic circle and appropriate entry signage at the intersection of Fourteen Mile and Orchard Lake Roads be the north side anchor. (Again, the design and look of this entry to Farmington Hills will be very important to image and attractiveness.)
- It is recommended that the City take advantage of the Corridor Improvement Legislation in the development of its business districts and particularly pursue additional liquor licenses to promote restaurant development in the Central Business District.

- It is recommended that Orchard Lake Road between Twelve and Fourteen Mile Roads be redeveloped as a six-lane boulevard.
- It is recommended that the City consider rezoning or providing “overlay” zoning for this corridor that would allow more flexibility in development including less restrictive parking requirements, the addition of owner occupied condominiums to the commercial mix and the ability to construct new buildings up to five stories.
- It is recommended that the City consider façade improvement guidelines for this district.

The schematic renderings in the Appendix illustrate issues with the existing corridor. Further, the schematics illustrate the scale and scope suggested for the corridor improvement. Mixed use will allow for new urban development. The combination of owner occupied condominiums and commercial development will allow for more growth and investment. The impact of allowing construction up to five stories in the Central Business District corridor will be negligible because of the size and width of Orchard Lake Road.

A similar opportunity exists for the City along the Eight Mile Road corridor. The area is somewhat dated and in need of some revitalization.

- ✦ It is recommended that the City establish and designate a South Business District located on Eight Mile Road from the eastern border to Farmington Road and including the triangle on Grand River that includes Botsford Hospital and Target.

To implement this recommendation, the following strategies are suggested:

- It is recommended that the City consider façade improvement guidelines for this district. (The City may want to initiate discussions with Livonia and the “Eight Mile Corridor Improvement Group” to have similar guidelines implemented for the South side of Eight Mile Road.)

- It is recommended that the City consider rezoning or providing “overlay” zoning for the South Business District corridor that would allow more flexibility in development including less restrictive parking requirements, the ability to add residential (condominium or rental) to the commercial mix and the ability to construct new buildings up to five stories.
- It is recommended that a formal bicycle path be established for this district.

Further review of the commercial property reveals opportunities on the Twelve Mile Road corridor east of Orchard Lake Road. Because of recent improvements to Twelve Mile Road, a significant separation of the residential and commercial development exists. Interstate 696 borders the south side of the commercial development. A similar situation exists on the Haggerty Road corridor that is west of Interstate 275 and north of Grand River Boulevard. In these areas, allowing for more density, higher buildings and development friendly zoning should add significantly to tax base value, with minimal impact on residential neighborhoods.

- ✦ It is recommended that the City establish two High Rise Districts. One on the south side of Twelve Mile Road along the Interstate 696 corridor from Orchard Lake Road west to the boundary. The other on Haggerty Road from Grand River west of Interstate 275.

To encourage appropriate development of these High Rise corridors specific strategies are suggested as follows:

- It is recommended that the City consider a change in the building height restriction in these Districts to allow construction of buildings up to eight stories.
- It is recommended that all new buildings in this district have fiber optic/broadband capabilities.
- It is recommended that zoning in these districts be flexible to allow for stand-alone owner occupied condominium development or hotel/condominium development.

(The hotel industry continues to fair well and many hotel developments are developing complimentary condominium units. This seems to be ideal for Farmington Hills because of its location and growing senior population and strong business community.)

Improvements for Industrial Parks

The City's industrial parks have served the area well. To increase interest in reinvestment improvements appear necessary. The zoning is restrictive. (See City of Farmington Hills zoning map.) Only industrial zoning limits reinvestment and redevelopment within these parks.

Observation reveals that some of the streets, access signage and landscaping needs improvement.

- It is recommended that zoning be modified in the City industrial parks to encourage a mix of development accommodating light industrial, warehousing and general offices.
- It is recommended that new buildings or additions be constructed up to five stories.
- It is recommended that a street and streetscape improvement program be implemented for the City's industrial parks.
- It is recommended that the City change the name of its industrial parks to Business and Technology Parks, or something similar, making them attractive to more than light industrial and warehousing operations.
- It is recommended that the City expand the existing business retention program, becoming more intensive with a very strong focus on the top 50 businesses. (This will be discussed in more detail in a following section of this report.)

What is the best strategy to sustain older areas of the community?

Recommending that the City designate and support a South Business District can be an effective strategy to help sustain the older commercial area of the City. Developing guidelines for facade redevelopment and improvements will also help. Improving the infrastructure of the existing

industrial parks will enhance sustainability in those areas. Also, allowing for five story buildings in the South Business District and in the existing industrial parks will expand economic capacity.

What is the best strategy to create more jobs in the community?

Recognizing that the Farmington Hill's economy is knowledge based and multi-cultural is important to further job creation. A positioning of Farmington Hills for knowledge-based economic development efforts is strategic. Farmington Hills has a significant research and development industry. Among the top ten taxpayers are significant research and development operations. The City is home to a Wayne State University Campus and Oakland Community College. Farmington Hills is within one hour driving distance of Wayne State University's main campus, the University of Michigan and Michigan State University. The City's population is highly educated with very high technical skills.

- It is recommended that the City economic development effort capitalize on the existing research and development operations.
- It is recommended that the City economic development effort capitalize on the resources of the Oakland Community College and Wayne State University presence.
- It is recommended that the City of Farmington Hills intensify its business retention program. (See further discussion below.)

What is the best strategy for business retention and expansion?

The City currently has a strong business retention program that compliments the efforts of Oakland County. Today's economics and business cycles require even stronger efforts. Businesses are being wooed every day to consider relocation. Competition to attract new business investment is keen. Existing businesses already know the virtues of Farmington Hills. Business retention efforts that reinforce business commitment to the City should be expected to result in more reinvestment as well as new development. Focus groups, business interviews and

the interview with the Chamber of Commerce President likewise revealed a need to call on business more frequently, particularly the ones likely to be considering an expansion.

- It is recommended that a program be developed to regularly visit with the top 50 taxpayers of the community. (Participation in this effort should involve the City Council, the City Manager and the Economic Development Director.)
- It is recommended that a regularly scheduled business round table program, perhaps with assistance from the Chamber of Commerce, be established. (Actual attendance may be light but the communication and repeated offers to meet are very important to this effort.)
- It is recommended that the City become more “development friendly” in this rapidly changing economy. (Many of the recommendations herein reflect this: more intensive retention, improved image and zoning overlays will strongly contribute to this effort.)

What is the best strategy to position our city to attract emerging 21st Century businesses?

Knowledge-based economic development with support of the area educational infrastructure should continue to allow Farmington Hills to attract emerging 21st Century businesses. Business recruitment should concentrate on knowledge-based enterprises.

- It is recommended that the City’s economic development strategy be knowledge based, capitalizing on the existing higher education infrastructure and the area’s research and development business.

Consultant Suggested Strategies for Sustainability

Environment

The focus group effort and individual interviews with business leaders, community leaders and staff suggested concerns about the environment. Specifically, there was a strong interest in preserving and conserving the environment. Further, there was strong support for the City of

Farmington Hills to be creative and take a leadership position with initiatives to preserve and conserve the environment.

- It is recommended that the City experiment with offering additional recycling opportunities to its apartment dwelling residents over the next decade.
- It is recommended that the City pursue with the Federal and State Governments (and perhaps the City of Novi) the establishment of a forest on the state and federally owned land that is located at the intersections of Interstates 96, 275 and Route 5.
 1. The land is currently owned by the Federal or State governments.
 2. The area is extensive and currently unsightly and not welcoming to the City.
 3. The area would lend itself to a managed forest with extensive plantings, including a variety of trees and wildflowers.
- It is recommended that the City continue to promote and educate the community on the importance of the Rouge River Watershed.
- It is recommended that the City implement more practices that would conserve and preserve the environment.
 1. The City may consider using hybrid-fueled vehicles for its fleet.
 2. The City may consider installing permeable sidewalks and parking lots.
 3. The City may consider Leadership through Engineering and Environmental Design (LEED) certification for any new facilities it constructs.
 4. The City may consider some form of incentive for new commercial developments that incorporate LEED certification.
 5. The City may consider developing a program of recognition for initiatives in the community that preserve and conserve the environment, particularly wetlands.

Development of Cultural Programming

A strength of Farmington Hills is its cultural and arts programming. Focus group and interviews revealed that residents, to a great extent, elect to live in Farmington Hills because of such programming and opportunities. Enhancement of cultural and arts program should improve sustainability.

- ✦ It is recommended that the Costick Center be ultimately developed as a cultural training center for youth to emulate such places located on the West side of the state such as Interlochen in Traverse City or the Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp in Whitehall.
- 1. It is recommended that programming be very complimentary to the fine programming provided in the Farmington Schools.
- 2. It is recommended that the programming be primarily focused on youth.
- 3. It is recommended that the programming be provided primarily for Farmington Hills residents.
- 4. It is recommended that the programming have three focuses: theater, fine arts and vocal music.

Senior Housing

Census data reveals a growing need for senior housing that is competitively priced for the region. There is likely to be demand for affordable housing in the Farmington Hills market.

- ✦ It is recommended that the City consider affordable housing developments in the City to accommodate senior housing needs that may emerge over the next decade.
(Development would be contingent on demonstrated markets.)

Strategy for Subdivision Road Improvements

Over the next decade, it can be expected that many subdivision roads will deteriorate, requiring maintenance or resurfacing. This will require a strategy on the part of Farmington Hills to sustain

the quality of the subdivisions. A strategy to insure subdivision roads are maintained is essential to sustaining neighborhoods.

- It is recommended that the City develop a strategy for upgrading and improving subdivision roads.

Relationship with Schools

During the focus sessions and in individual interviews, it was apparent that one of the main reasons for the success of Farmington Hills and why the City remains a very desirable place to live is the quality of the schools.

- It is recommended that the City Council continue its policy of meeting annually with the Farmington Hills Board of Education to discuss issues and trends facing the Schools and the City. (If issues emerge requiring attention, these meetings may be scheduled more often.)

Development of a Downtown

Farmington Hills does not have a downtown. The development, demarcation and identification of business districts may lead to a more defined sense of a downtown. A practical development has been that the City of Farmington serves the needs of Farmington Hills for a downtown.

- It is recommended that the City of Farmington and the City of Farmington Hills merge.

A Special Note on the Merger Recommendation

A strong recommendation is for Farmington Hills to pursue a merger with Farmington. A significant number of interviewees and focus group participants strongly favored a merger. Analysis reveals that a merger would benefit both cities. Importantly, a merger would benefit the sustainability of Farmington Hills, providing additional tax base and population. An evaluation of the benefits of a merger for each city as well as a summary of current cooperative efforts follows. It is envisioned that Farmington Hills initiate discussions with Farmington. Further

pursuit might be through a facilitator to assist the Cities or by the establishment of a “Blue Ribbon Committee,” or both.

Advantages of Merger between the Cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills

Advantages to Farmington Hills

- Adds 10,423 people to the population (2000 census).
- Adds value to tax base.
- Adds 4,991 housing units (2000 census).
- Gives Farmington Hills a downtown and a focal point for the community.
- Improves Farmington Hills’ image.
- Adds income to general fund operations.
- Simplifies jurisdictional lines for public safety and other services.
- Has the potential to reduce costs/allow for more efficient public services.

Advantages to Farmington

- Lowers tax burden.
- Improves image.
- Provides more resources for economic and downtown development.
- Simplifies jurisdictional lines for public safety and other services.
- Has the potential to reduce costs and allow for more efficient public services.
- Improves federal and state grant opportunities.

Summary of Current Shared Services/Cooperative Efforts

- Multicultural/Multiracial (MCMR) Community Council.
- Farmington Schools.
- Police and Fire back up.
- Recreational Programming.

- Cultural Programming.
- 47th District Court.
- Library District.
- Chamber of Commerce.
- Senior Programming.
- Youth Programming.

There are obvious obstacles to a merger. The debt and tax structures are different. There are two different bureaucracies. Farmington has a public safety department while Farmington Hills uses separate police and fire departments. Nevertheless, the merits seem to outweigh the obstacles, making pursuit worthwhile.

Transportation

Providing an extended mass transportation service for the City of Farmington Hills is unlikely. There is not enough mass or demand. There does appear, however, to be a need along what is recommended as the Central and South Business Districts. Service would be in addition to the “dial-a-ride” types of service that already exist.

- It is recommended that the City explore with the regional transportation provider a corridor service that would operate regularly, connecting the business districts.
(Perhaps a trolley or jitney type service would be appropriate.)

A Strong Community Foundation

A community foundation can be very beneficial to a community. It can be particularly helpful with the support of cultural and artistic endeavors.

- It is recommended that the City work closely with its existing community foundation to increase the endowment and encourage focus on the support of the cultural and arts programming of Farmington Hills.

Quality Design for Future Developments

Farmington Hills is distinguished as a quality place to live and do business. To sustain this distinction, with ever-increasing competition and aging infrastructure, Farmington Hills needs to continue to distinguish itself. It is suggested that Farmington Hills embrace an emphasis on quality design that becomes the standard for the community. Such a commitment would be incorporated into all future public projects. For example, as streets are being improved, the City Hall is being expanded, a new streetscape is being considered, a roundabout is being installed, a “splash park” is being created, or the Costick Center is being expanded, it is suggested that this be done to the very highest aesthetic design standards. The City might even consider a design “superstar” to assist with establishing the first few projects to establish a flair or identity that would be uniquely Farmington Hills’.

- It is recommended that the City pursue very high design standards for future capital improvement projects.

Inventory of Property and Property Evaluation

An inventory of property was reviewed and the City was traveled extensively to note existing conditions. In general, the property of Farmington Hills is in good to excellent condition.

A detailed review and analysis of the property tax records for the past three years was conducted.

This was done by class and by district within the City. There is no evidence that any one section of the City is declining. In general, all areas of the City enjoy property appreciation, thus far.

The comparative results reveal that all areas of the City have grown in value. While the values vary, all have increased. This is not to say that there are not areas that need attention. The southeast quadrant of the City is the oldest area and naturally needs more attention and support.

In general, the quality and condition of the commercial, industrial and office buildings in Farmington Hills is good to excellent. Likewise, the condition of single-family homes is good to excellent.

- ✦ It is recommended that the City continue to emphasize improvements to residential areas in the southeastern quadrant by using Community Development Block Grant funds to assist with improvements, and other means where possible.
- ✦ It is recommended that the City of Farmington Hills continue to vigorously enforce its building codes throughout the City, particularly with multi-family units.

Vacancy Level

The City of Farmington Hills is experiencing a higher than usual vacancy rate in its commercial office sector. This is not unusual given the current economy. Occupancy rates still compare favorably with neighboring communities. In general, the market adjusts to these variances by the adjusting of lease amounts to reflect demand. This will likely be the case in Farmington Hills, which may result in efforts to reduce property valuations. Farmington Hills should be prepared for a greater volume of tax appeals in the next five years.

Relationships of Properties

The City of Farmington Hills has neighborhoods that border industrial and commercial developments. Separations have developed that make the boundaries clear. There does not appear to be any need for further efforts in this regard. The housing infrastructure is solid, desirable and likely to hold value even in areas in close proximity to other developments. The recommendations for more height and density in the existing business and commercial corridors minimally impacts residential areas.

Available Space for New Development

There is a perception that Farmington Hills is running out of space. Development over its history has been constantly strong. A survey of land availability in the commercial and business corridors reveals significant vacant property. Further, the City's commercial and business areas are not densely developed, affording additional opportunity. The City has significant opportunity for new growth by adjusting its zoning to allow for more flexibility and density.

- It is recommended that the City change zoning between Twelve and Fourteen Mile Roads to allow for denser and higher development. (See previous recommendation for Central Business District.)
- It is recommended that the City change its zoning from (1) Orchard Lake Road, south of Twelve Mile Road and north of the Interstate 696 expressway and (2) north of Grand River Avenue on Haggerty Road west of the Interstate 275 to provide “overlay” zoning and allow for more height. (See High Rise District recommendation.)
- It is recommended that the City change its zoning in existing industrial parks to allow for more varied and dense development, including adaptive renovations of existing facilities with five story heights.
- It is recommended that the City immediately cease sending the message of “All Filled Up!” This is the wrong message/image and not reflective of reality.

Community Identity

What is the City’s identity? Our evaluation reveals that Farmington Hills suffers an identity problem. There is no one feature or condition that separates or distinguishes Farmington Hills from its neighbors. It is a suburb of the Detroit/Wayne County metro area and tends to focus/position itself accordingly.

- It is recommended that the City change its orientation to also focus westward, particularly to the multi-racial, multi-cultural, university and research oriented City of Ann Arbor. (This orientation blends well with economic efforts positioning Oakland County within 500 miles of half the nation’s population!)
- It is recommended that the development of the Costick Center and the Central and South Business Districts be done with quality of design in mind, resulting in an enhanced identity for the community.

- ✦ It is recommended that the City continue cultural arts programming as a cornerstone of the City's services.
- ✦ It is recommended that the City establish a program of recognition and promoting its significant people and institutions such as the Holocaust Museum, Tribute Restaurant, the artist and potter John Glick and the lighting designer, Ron Harwood, for example.

Summary of Significant Recommendations

This report has many recommendations. Several are related. Many recommendations allow for enhancement of other recommendations. Some may be strategic while others tactical. The following is a summary of the significant recommendations for sustainability that, if implemented, should assist Farmington Hills with a prosperous, stable future. It is suggested that these significant recommendations have the most attention.

Financial Sustainability/External and Internal

- Become even more proactive in encouraging reinvestment and redevelopment in the City, which will expand and grow the taxable value.
- Expand and intensify existing business retention efforts.
- Become proactive in pursuing merger with the City of Farmington.
- Establish and designate a Central Business District located on Orchard Lake Road from Eleven Mile to Fourteen Mile Roads and extending west on Twelve Mile Road to the District Library and east to the High School, with appropriate zoning changes to allow for easier, more flexible and denser development.
- Establish and designate a South Business District located on Eight Mile Road from the eastern border to Farmington Road and including the triangle on Grand River that includes Botsford Hospital and Target, with appropriate zoning changes to allow for easier, more flexible and denser development. Allow building up to five stories.

- Establish two High Rise Districts. One on the south side of Twelve Mile Road along the Interstate 696 corridor from Orchard Lake Road west to the boundary. The other on Haggerty Road from Grand River Avenue west of Interstate 275, with appropriate zoning changes to allow for easier, more flexible and denser development. Allow buildings up to eight stories.
- Modify zoning in the City of Farmington Hills industrial parks to encourage more mixed development, accommodating light industrial, warehousing and general offices. Allow building up to five stories.
- Orient economic development efforts to be knowledge-based, capitalizing on existing research and development operations as well as the resources of Oakland Community College, Wayne State University and the University of Michigan.
- Become more “development friendly” in this rapidly changing economy.
- Cease sending the message of “All Filled Up!” Developers and investors need to know that residential and commercial projects can still be built in the City.
- Redevelop Orchard Lake Road between Twelve and Fourteen Mile Roads as a six-lane boulevard.
- Develop a strategy for upgrade of the roads, lighting and side walks in older industrial parks, making them more attractive and competitive.
- Continue with plans to fully fund the pension and retirees hospitalization programs as well as continuing efforts to reduce this liability for the future.
- Consider a Headlee override initiative if finances do not improve by 2010.
- Continue to emphasize improvements to residential areas in the southeastern quadrant.

- Continue to vigorously enforce building codes throughout the City. Develop a well-designed signage program to be installed at entries, establishing an identity for the community—with outstanding design.
- Develop a uniquely designed street lighting system that will enhance the image and look of the community—again with outstanding design.

Social Sustainability

- Recruit and outreach to minorities and people of different cultural backgrounds so that the workforce of the City will more closely reflect the population.
- Establish a cultural and diversity-training program for city staff, which may later be expanded to the entire community, perhaps through the offices of the Chamber of Commerce or another community based entity.
- Enhance and expand the multi-racial, multi-cultural programming that has begun in the recreational and cultural services of the City.
- Expand, upgrade and rehabilitate the existing Costick Center.
- Ultimately develop the Costick Center as a cultural training center for youth to emulate such places located on the West side of the state such as Interlochen in Traverse City or the Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp in Whitehall.
- Consider additional senior housing developments in the City to accommodate growing senior housing needs.
- Continue the policy of meeting annually with the Farmington Hills Board of Education to discuss issues and trends facing the Schools and the City.
- Work closely with the existing community foundation to increase the endowment and encourage the focus on the support of the cultural and arts programming of Farmington Hills.

Environmental Sustainability

- Continue to make all infrastructure improvements and additions with regard to the best practices toward preserving the environment.
- Formally develop a bicycle path program with the first path connecting the Costick Center, City Hall, Heritage Park, the Skating and Soccer Center and the South Business District.
- Pursue with the Federal and State Governments (and perhaps the City of Novi) the establishment of a forest on the publicly owned land that is located at the intersections of Interstates 96, 275 and Route 5.
- Pursue all developments in the City with the highest design quality and environmental (LEED) sensitivity, resulting in an enhanced identity for the City as being a community that is environmentally sensitive with outstanding design.

Conclusion

The Ultimate Benefit of the Sustainability Recommendations—Maintaining or Increasing Residential Property Values

For Farmington Hills, about 65% of local taxable value is derived from residential property. Maintaining or increasing residential property values in the City is a very significant sustainability issue. Without increasing residential value, sustainability of the City is compromised. Most sustainability recommendations relate to a strategy of increasing residential property values. For example:

- Increase in cultural programming = better community image = appeal to educated citizens = citizen satisfaction = desirability of living in Farmington Hills = sustained or increased residential property value.

- Increase of jobs in high-rise district = more need for residential property = more likelihood of workers selecting Farmington Hills neighborhoods in which to live = sustained or increased residential property values.
- Continued good public safety services = low crime rate = safe community = desirability of living in Farmington Hills = sustained or increased residential property value.
- Upgrading central business district = better services to community residents = citizen satisfaction = desirability of living in Farmington Hills = sustained or increased residential property value.

Each recommendation has an ultimate outcome of sustaining or increasing residential property value.

The Relationships of the Sustainability Recommendations

The recommendations relate. The economic development recommendations of establishing business corridors, high rise corridors, bicycle paths, culturally sensitive programming and intensive retention efforts have in common a strong return on investment in terms of increase in the tax base—directly or indirectly.

Using the Sustainability Study and Recommendations

The study and recommendations should be useful to Farmington Hills in policy and program development. The recommendations are intended to guide the City's various boards and commissions and the City Council as policy is developed and decisions are made.

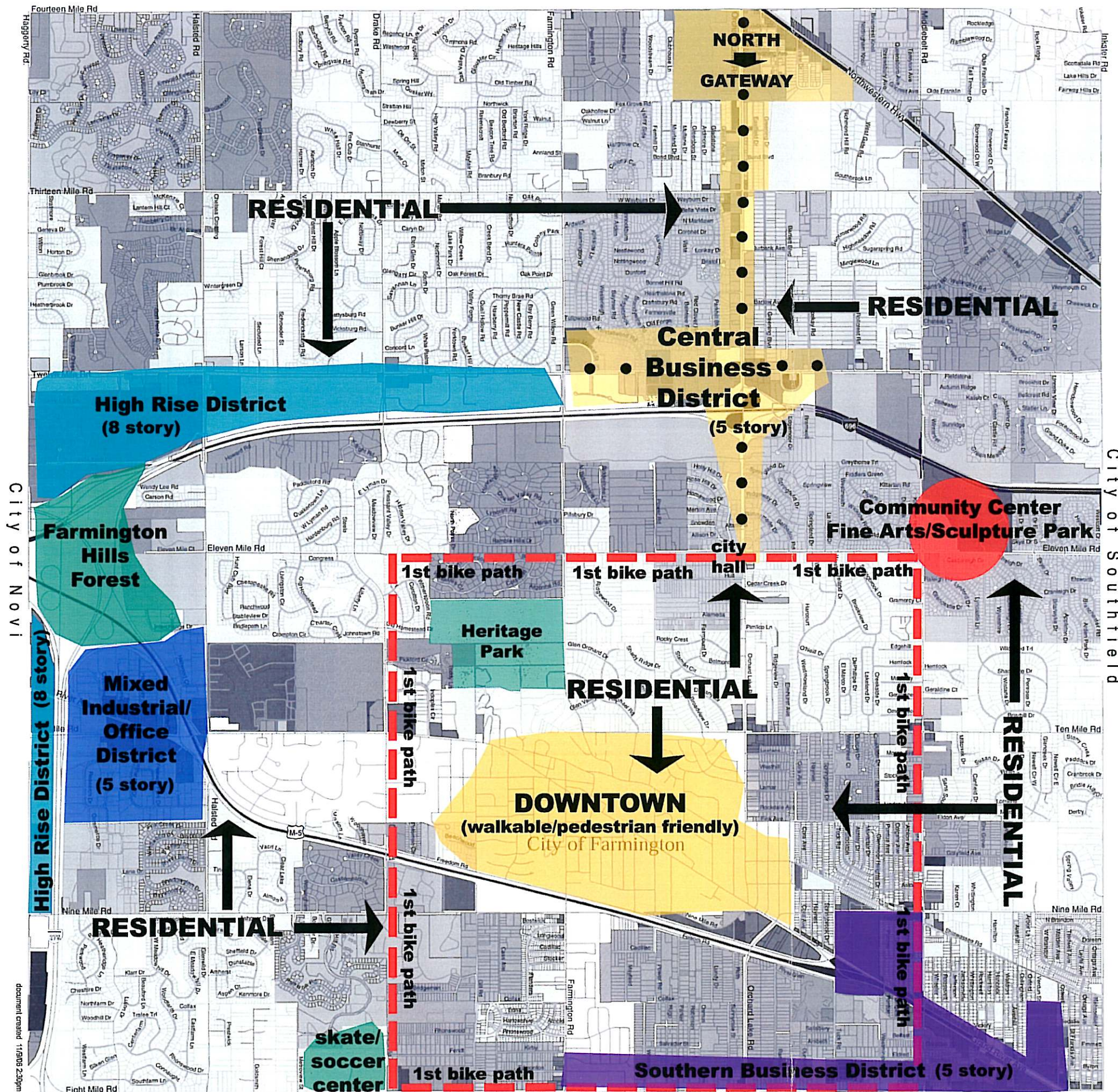
Implementation will require that the City Council, staff and others impacting policy put flesh on the recommendations to make them effective. For example, the recommendation to increase the density of the existing business and commercial development corridors needs to be implemented. It will take thoughtful work by the staff; the Planning Commission and the City Council to put in place the necessary zoning and procedural changes for implementation.

Most recommendations have a mid to longer-term horizon. Future decision making at all levels in the City should be made in the context of sustainability, both as a guide and objective.

What's Not To Like About Farmington Hills?

The City of Farmington Hills is a progressive, forward thinking community that provides a very high level of services to residents. The recommendations herein are intended to sustain the terrific quality of the city in the next decades by offering suggestions that will encourage value added investment in the community for years to come.

Farmington Hills will continue to develop as a community that is livable, walkable, bikeable, culturally interesting and safe. The City's economy will be knowledge-based and derived primarily from research and development related enterprises. It will support a successful central business corridor that provides outstanding restaurants, financial services and shopping opportunities. Farmington Hills will continue to be one of the most desirable Cities to live and work in the State of Michigan and the United States.

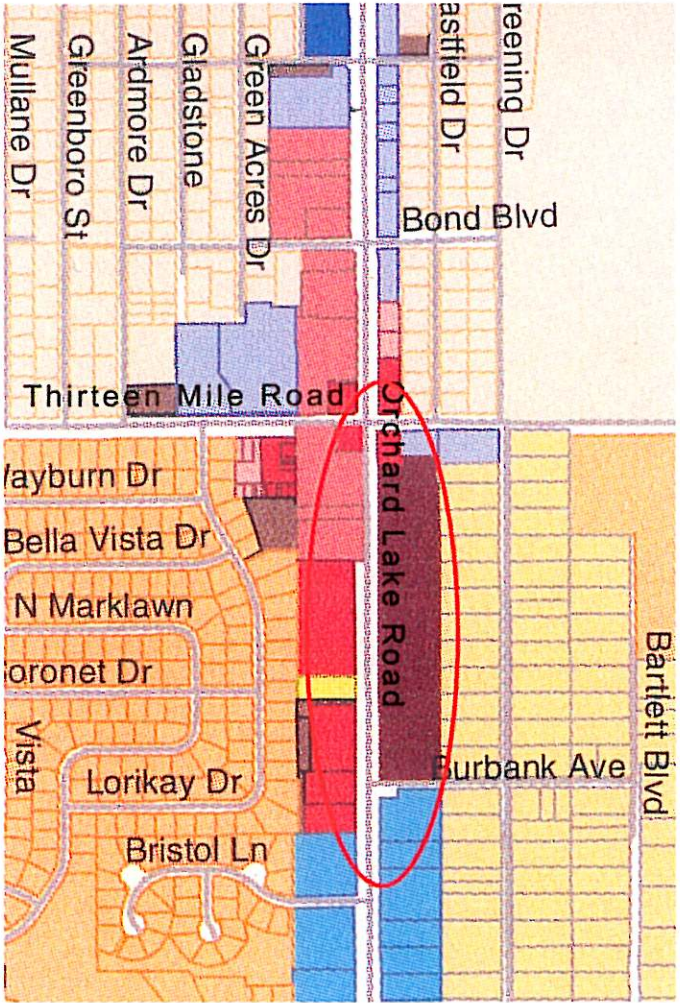


north
Conceptual Land Use Plan
 City of Farmington Hills
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 feet

Central Business District

Orchard Lake Corridor

proposed modifications



north
Partial Zoning District Map
City of Farmington Hills

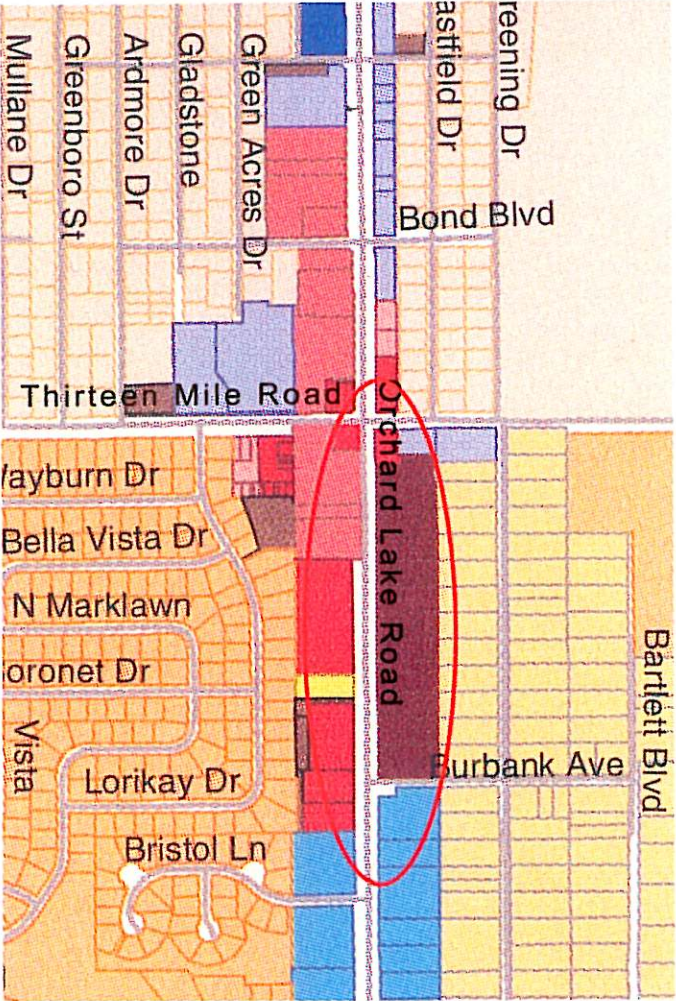
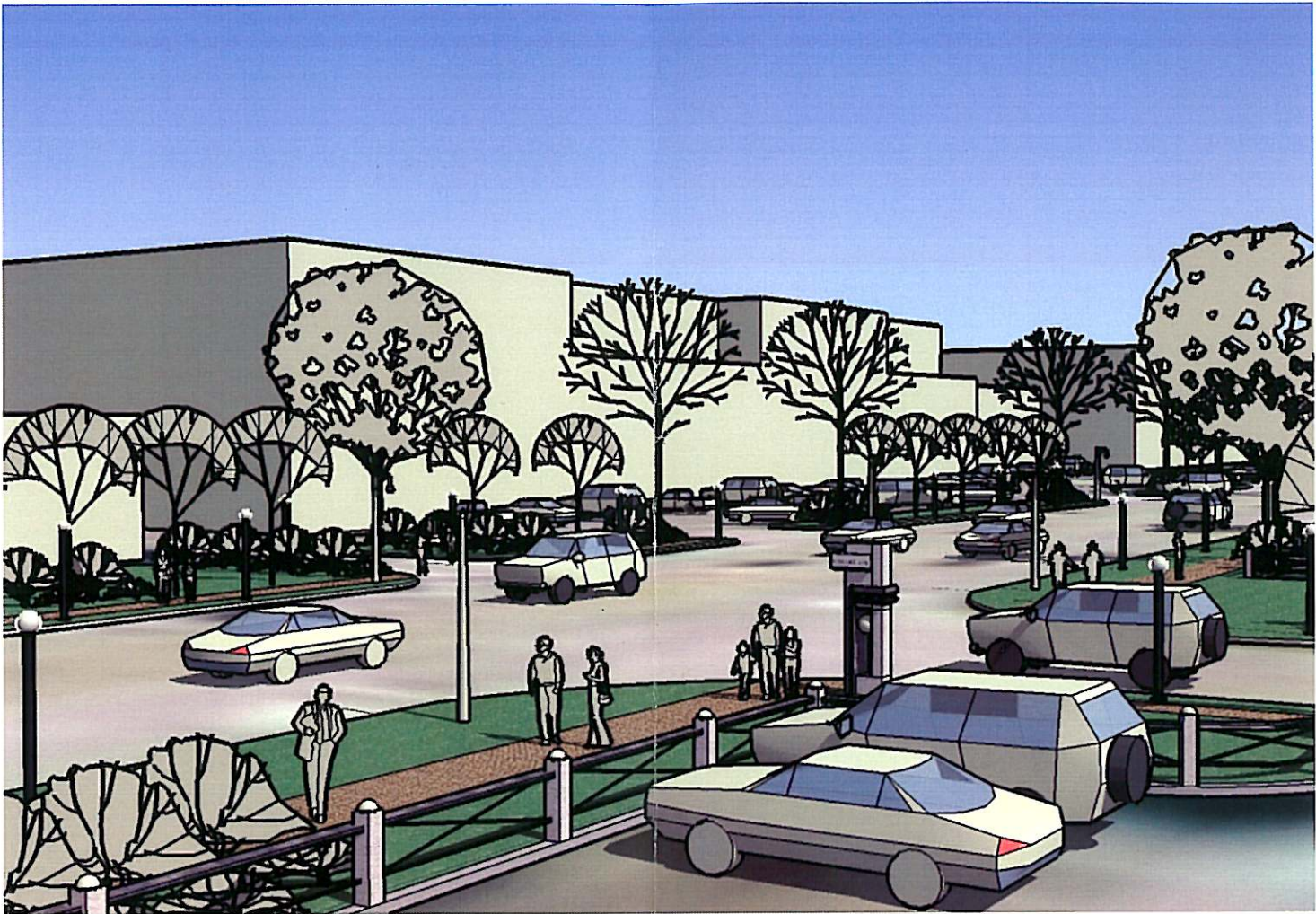
examples of acceptable developments



**Central
Business District**

**Orchard
Lake
Corridor**

proposed modifications



north

Partial Zoning District Map
City of Farmington Hills



Courtesy of Cooper Carry Inc.

