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PLANNING COMMISSION-CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
CITY OF LOWELL, MICHIGAN  
AGENDA  
FOR THE SPECIAL MEETING OF  
MONDAY, AUGUST 14, 2017 AT 6:30 P.M.  
AT THE  
LOWELL CITY HALL  
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
SECOND FLOOR  
301 EAST MAIN STREET

1. CALL TO ORDER: PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE, ROLL CALL
2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
3. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND COMMUNICATIONS CONCERNING ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA
4. OLD BUSINESS
5. NEW BUSINESS
  - a. Master Plan Review
6. COMMISSIONERS REMARKS
7. ADJOURNMENT

MEMORANDUM

**To:** City of Lowell Planning Commission  
**Date:** June 7, 2017  
**From:** Andy Moore, AICP  
**RE:** **Master Plan Review**

The City of Lowell Master Plan is a broad policy document that sets Lowell's community vision for land use and development, capital investment and growth management. It is a vision that articulates what community desires to become, and it establishes a framework for achieving that vision through a series of specific strategies and tasks.

The existing City of Lowell Master Plan was adopted in late 2007. It was developed over the course of several months and required significant work by City staff, Planning Commission, and elected officials. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act, (Act 33 of 2008, as amended) requires that a Master Plan be "reviewed" every five years after adoption. The Planning Commission reviewed the Master Plan in 2012 and determined that the 2007 Plan was appropriate, so no changes were made at that time. At a minimum, a similar review is required in 2017.

The purpose of this memorandum is to review each chapter of the 2007 Master Plan in order to facilitate the Commission's review of the document. It is intended to aid in determining if changes to the Plan needed. This memorandum is not intended to criticize existing policies or to find possible shortcomings in the document; rather, it highlights areas where changes could be appropriate to guide the Planning Commission's review.

**Chapter 1. Demographics and Housing.** A review of existing conditions is an important component of any long-range plan as it identifies current conditions and trends that are required to effectively plan for future changes in the City. In general, Chapter 1 of the 2007 Master Plan could be updated to include more recent data from the 2010 Census.

As an example, 2010 Census data shows that the City's population decreased from its 2000 population of 4,013 to a 2010 population of 3,783. The City's 2010 median age increased from 34 to 37.1. Additionally, the number of households decreased from 1,492 in 2000 to 1,457 in 2010, and the average household size decreased from 2.69 in 2000 to 2.50 in 2010.

These trends are common in small cities in throughout Michigan and are reflective of a few larger national trends. First, as the "baby boomer" generation nears retirement age, and as young families have fewer children than their ancestors, the median age has been increasing for some time. This also contributes to smaller average household sizes and a smaller number of households.

Page 8 of the Master Plan lists several conclusions relative to the City's demographics and housing data. While much of the data on the preceding pages of the plan could be updated, the conclusions generally remain valid.

**Chapter 2. Existing Conditions.** This Chapter primarily addresses existing conditions in three general areas: (1) physical geography and land use, (2) public facilities and services, and (3) public input.

For the most part, the city's physical conditions have not changed appreciably since 2007. Land use patterns are generally the same (although there are few changes), and the City's physical geography in terms of wetlands, steep slopes, soils, floodplains also has not changed much since 2007.

However, there may be some edits to make related to City services such as water, wastewater, light and power, cable, parks, etc. as it is likely that conditions have changed somewhat during the last ten years. Obviously, no changes to the public survey summary would be made since that was a specific survey related to the 2007 Master Plan.

**Chapter 3. Goals and Objectives.** Goals and Objectives comprise the policy foundation of the Master Plan. More than any other section, Goals and Objectives state the community's vision for the long-term (20 - 30 years or more) and establishes what the community desires how it will realize its vision. The 2007 Master Plan sets forth goals and policies related to growth and development, community image, land use, transportation, housing, and community services.

The Planning Commission should carefully review this Chapter and discuss whether or not these goals are still relevant, if they reflect the desires of the community, and/or if there are additional goal and objectives that should be included.

**Chapter 4. Future Land Use.** The future land use plan of the City of Lowell is contained in Chapter 4. The future land use plan describes the City's neighborhoods, districts and corridors. It also presents a future land use map which establish the City's land use policy. Each designation on the future land use map is described in the chapter in terms of land use, density and character. The future land use plan does not necessarily have to reflect the zoning map, but it should generally reflect land uses that are expected or desired to remain over the long term. However, as new development or redevelopment occurs, the City should refer to the future land use map to ensure that development is consistent with the Plan. The future land use map is frequently consulted when the City makes special land use and rezoning decisions, so its accuracy is very important in day-to-day zoning administration as well.

In its review of the Master Plan, the Planning Commission also should carefully study the future land use map and text and note whether or not it represents the desired development form long-range land use policy of the City.

Downtown Design Guidelines. Beginning on page 44, after the future land use map, there is a discussion related to urban design and how it affects a community. Many of these topics were

utilized in the development of language for the Mixed Use zoning district that was enacted a few years ago. There is also discussion relating to parking and energy efficient development.

**Chapter 5. Implementation.** This chapter outlines several specific tasks that should be completed by the City and, if these tasks are completed, the vision outlined in Chapters 3 and 4 will be more likely to be realized. Of the tasks listed in this Chapter, several have been completed, as outlined below:

1. Adopt New Downtown Zoning Standards / Mixed Use Zoning District. A few years ago the City approved a new Mixed Use zoning district that enables a variety of land uses and requires building design consistent with the guidelines discussed in Chapter 4. There may be further steps needed to fully implement this task.
2. Landscaping, Parking and Lighting. Landscaping provisions were revised as part of the review of the zoning ordinance in 2017. Further, a parking study was completed in 2015/2016, although few changes have been made to the City's parking requirements. Lighting standards were reviewed in 2011.
3. Review the Master Plan. This has been done in accordance with the MPEA.
4. Review and Update the Parks and Recreation Plan. This was done in 2008, amended in 2012 and is being drafted again in 2017.

The following items have not been addressed (to my knowledge):

1. Green Building Incentives.
2. Review of Site Condo and Subdivision Control Ordinances
3. Conditional Rezoning. (It should be noted that the Zoning Enabling Act allows for conditional rezoning presently, so this is a tool that can be used by a landowner in the City even if the Zoning Ordinance does not specifically address it. In my experience, however, it is an option rarely exercised by landowners).

**Conclusion.** It is up to the Planning Commission and City Council to determine if the Master Plan should be updated in 2017/2018. In several sections of the Plan, there is an opportunity to update the data and maps relating to demographics, housing, city services and existing land use. In our opinion, there is some benefit to an update of the 2007 Plan. It would be beneficial to the City's staff and elected and appointed officials, as there are many new council members, planning commissioners and staff members whose ideas should be reflected in an updated plan. However, we also believe the majority of policies of the existing plan remain relevant and appropriate for the foreseeable future. A significant overhaul is probably not needed.

Most importantly is if the City feels that an update to the goals and objectives, future land use plan, and/or implementation strategies is warranted. If the Commission and City Council believes so, then it may be appropriate to develop a supplement to the 2007 plan to present additional data, articulate additional policies, and define additional strategies for implementation.

This memorandum is intended to serve as a tool for the Planning Commission to facilitate the discussion and review of the 2007 Master Plan when it is scheduled later this summer.

As always, please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.