



15 Minute Neighborhoods and More Part of Orion Master Planning Discussions

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“The Master Plan is coming at a great time,” said Orion Township Director of Planning and Zoning Tammy Girling. “COVID didn’t slow us down. Our phone is ringing off the hook from developers.”

Girling and others on the Orion Township leadership team were on hand Wednesday evening for a Master Plan Workshop where residents were invited to share their ideas and opinions about development in the community.

“The State of Michigan requires municipalities to review their Master Plan every five years. They don’t have to write a new one every time, but they have to review it. Orion Township has decided this is a good time to go through this public process to update it,” said Rob Arroyo of Giffels Webster who is Project Director for the Master Plan process.

“Orion has a lot to offer,” Arroyo said, noting such amenities as access to I-75 and M-24, high quality natural resources, parks and trails, a strong educational system, and “a real sense of community.”

“With this process it’s time to look at what you have now; what’s your opinion; are you happy with development patterns, and what can we do differently,” he said.

The plan looks at various aspects of community development, including zoning which determines what types of buildings and businesses go where, as well as land use, and design features such as density, green space, environmental considerations, and walkability.

One concept on the table is the idea of 15-minute neighborhoods.

Scott Reynolds is the Chair of the Planning Commission, and a proponent of the idea that no matter what quadrant of Orion Township one lives in, they should have features and amenities within a 15 walk or bike ride from their home. This includes shopping, education, recreation, and socializing. It also looks at what barriers there are to people



accessing amenities. For example, someone may live a mile from a grocery store, but be separated by a freeway. Or there may be a park nearby, but without an entrance on the resident's side.

When considering development projects, the Planning Commission would be able to consider if they fit into this community need. Areas could also be rezoned to create hubs of businesses within residential areas, giving neighbors a shared destination where they might pick up items as well as get to know each other.

"As an example," Reynolds said, "[Meijer came to us with this smaller grocery store concept](#) for the former Kmart building on M24. There are bigger Meijer stores in nearby communities, but this type of store fits into that 15-minute neighborhood, where someone could just hop on their bike or walk to the store to pick something up." The 15-minute neighborhood concept helps Township leaders to identify what each area needs, so their economic development efforts can be targeted for those things.

Gary Roberts has been contracted to do economic development for Orion Township. "I'm the sales guy," he said. "It's my job to talk to developers, and show them why they should be here, and help them through that process."

But for Roberts, it's not just about bringing in the dollars.

"We want to bring in the developments that fit with the community's needs," he said.

Housing is one area where there is room to grow, but there's also a focus on doing it right. "Orion has space and finding people to build houses is not difficult. There are a lot of builders out there. But what we're looking for is more than just your standard 3 bedroom or 4-bedroom house. We need more rentals, more in the affordable housing range. We need starter homes for new families, and places for seniors to live," Roberts said.

Arroyo shared similar sentiments.

"What can be done to make sure Orion is a place where people can live through every stage of life?" he said. "We've got people whose kids grew up here, and they go off to college. And they want to come back to Orion and start their families here, but they don't necessarily have the housing stock for affordable starter homes."



When people think of housing, it's easy to think of single-family homes or big apartment complexes. But there are many types of housing that can be created to suit community needs and to fit into different spaces.

"We're really talking a lot about housing and showing people options to see what types of developments they'd prefer," said Chairperson Reynolds as he pointed out options on one of the poster boards which included pictures of attached townhouse, multiplex buildings, cottage courts, duplexes, and courtyard buildings. Residents also got to weigh in on what single family home styles and features they prefer.

Another concept that is gaining popularity is having mixed use developments that combine residential with supportive retail spaces mixed in, for example stores with apartments above them.

"It ties into that 15-minute neighborhood idea," Reynolds said. "We don't need everyone driving to a big box store all the time when we can support smaller community businesses by designing neighborhoods with them in mind."

The Master Plan looks at a number of other topics including land use, streetscape design, setbacks, balancing development with maintaining natural areas, and funding priorities. Township leaders have been pushing for community involvement, so residents can weigh in on the features that matter to them.

"If you're going to make changes in the community, you have to be part of the solution," said Planning Commission Vice Chair Don Gross. "Not everyone loves going to a Planning Commission meeting, but this is a way for people to guide us on the commission, and let us know what they want. We work for them."

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