

Chapter One

Introduction

WHY DEVELOP A MASTER PLAN?

The City of Fenton is a stable community with many assets - quality residential neighborhoods, good schools, beautiful views of the Shiawassee River, an historic downtown and residential neighborhoods, a solid industrial base, and convenient freeway access. Periodic events and festivals, such as the 4th of July Freedom Festival and Applefest contribute to Fenton's "small town" sense of community. So why does the City need a Master Plan?

While leaders in the community are proud of Fenton, there are still a number of issues to address to help sustain the high quality of life residents have come to expect. The Master Plan is intended to provide community leaders with a written philosophy to deal with these issues. It also meets the requirements of the City and Village Zoning Act (PA 207 of 1921, as amended) which requires the City's Zoning Ordinance to be based on an adopted plan.

The Master Plan Goals and Recommendations and Future Land Use Plan will assist City leaders in substantive, thoughtful decisions which consider the long-term implications on the City. These community-wide implications may not be immediately apparent to the individual property owner or citizen. But the impacts of growth and development mount over time. For example, approval of an auto body shop adjacent to a residential neighborhood may individually seem like a minor issue. But the cumulative impacts of these types of decisions affect the long term quality of life in Fenton. A look around Fenton illustrates once a land use decision is made, good or bad, it stays there for a long time.

The last version of the City of Fenton Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1996. This Plan is an update of the existing Master Plan that addresses some new issues since 1996. The issues addressed by this Plan update include:

- The desire to maintain the long term viability of the downtown area, arguably one of Fenton's most valuable assets. This will be covered in detail under the Downtown Subarea Plan Section of this Master Plan.
- Situations where one land use is not compatible with an adjacent land use.
- Intersections and roadway sections which need attention due to rapidly increasing traffic volumes.

- The changing needs of City residents. For example, the Plan discusses approaches to deal with housing and service needs for the City's increasing percentage of residents over age 65.
- The desire to provide a land use pattern which translates to a diversified tax base and keeps the City's tax rates relatively low while providing quality facilities and services.
- The recognized need to amend sections of the Zoning Ordinance and other City ordinances. The Master Plan describes some immediate changes needed to the Zoning Map, zoning district regulations, and other sections of the Zoning Ordinance.

The City of Fenton Master Plan includes six chapters that:

- Provide an overview of existing conditions and trends in land use as they relate to the community.
- Identify a series of land use issues with goals and recommendations for dealing with each.
- Indicate what the future land uses should be throughout the City of Fenton.

The Master Plan also includes subarea plans for North Leroy Street, Silver Lake Village, North Road/N. Leroy Road, and Downtown Fenton. These subarea plans provide a more specific analysis of these locations. Design guidelines for use in the design and review of development proposals are also included.

This Master Plan represents a six month update effort by the City of Fenton Planning Commission and numerous other City officials, residents, and representatives of business and industry. Their extensive effort included research, focus groups, numerous public meetings, and reviews of draft information throughout the master planning process. In particular, the Planning Commission spent a considerable amount of time preparing the final Future Land Use Map, considered a key element of the Plan.

Public involvement was an important consideration in the planning process. All of the Planning Commission meetings were open to the public. An open house was held for residents, business owners, and community leaders on September 25, 2002. Between 150-200 people attended the session. There was a tremendous amount of participation from those in attendance. A Fenton Business Meeting and Agency Focus Group were both held on October 9, 2002 to gather more information on specialized topics including the central business district, Silver Lake Village, North Leroy Street, and future plans in surrounding communities. In response to comments at these public meetings, the Planning Commission undertook additional analysis of several items.

**WHAT IS IN THE
MASTER PLAN?**

**HOW THE
MASTER PLAN
WAS
DEVELOPED**

The public was involved in a more formal manner at two public hearings held in December 2002. Following the public hearings the Plan was re-examined and edits were made.

**DIFFERENCES
BETWEEN THE
MASTER PLAN &
ZONING
ORDINANCE**

The Master Plan provides general direction on the future development patterns, policies, and actions for community leaders to consider. While the Master Plan itself does not change the Zoning Ordinance or zoning of any property, some of the Plan recommendations will be implemented through text and map amendments. Some of the other differences between the Master Plan and the Zoning Ordinance are listed in **Table One**.

Table One Master Plan vs. Zoning Ordinance	
Master Plan	Zoning Ordinance
Provides general policies, a guide.	Provides specific regulations, the law.
Describes what should happen in the future – recommended land use for the next twenty years, not necessarily the recommended use for today.	Describes what is and what is not allowed today, based on existing conditions.
Adopted under the City Planning Act, Public Act 285 of 1931, as amended.	Adopted under the City Zoning Act, Public Act 207 of 1921, as amended.
Includes recommendations that involve other agencies and groups.	Deals only with development-related issues under City control.
Flexible to respond to changing conditions.	Fairly rigid, requires formal amendment to change.

Source: LSL Planning, Inc.

In early 2002, the State of Michigan passed the Coordinated Planning Act, which significantly changed the master planning process by requiring input from surrounding communities and approval of the Plan by the County. Since the master planning process was well underway in Fenton when this Act was passed, the City was not required to follow these requirements. However, voluntary efforts were made to solicit input from surrounding communities and Genessee County.

**USING THE
MASTER PLAN**

The Master Plan is intended as a guide for city leaders in land use, development, zoning, and capital improvement decisions. The City Council, Planning Commission, and the public should continuously strive to ensure effective use of this document and should reference the Master Plan in order to:

- Visualize what can be reasonably expected to occur - to provide some assurance and security with individual investment decisions.
- Review development proposals – to confirm the proposal meets the goals and objectives of the Master Plan.
- Review rezoning requests – to confirm the request is consistent with the City’s criteria to consider rezonings including existing conditions, the future land use map, the appropriate timing of the change, consistency with the goals and policies of the Master Plan, and potential impacts on surrounding communities.
- Provide a basis for amendments to the Zoning Ordinance - to help realize Plan goals.
- Identify and give priorities to decisions on physical improvements - elected officials can look to the Plan to identify desired capital improvements for roads, pathways, parks, and public facilities.
- Make spending decisions on physical improvements - City leaders should consider the initial set of priorities listed in the Master Plan.
- Review variance requests and appeals - The Zoning Board of Appeals should check to see if the goals and recommendations of the Master Plan would be significantly compromised by the granting of a variance or appeal.

The Master Plan is intended to be a living document, not a book that sits on a shelf. City Council and Planning Commission should have an annual meeting to review the Master Plan goals and recommendations, and the Future Land Use Map. The City should deny rezoning requests that do not follow the Future Land Use Map. If City officials wish to amend the Future Land Use Map to reflect changing conditions, this should be done before a change in zoning is approved.