

# memorandum

**DATE:** July 21, 2017

**TO:** City of Lathrup Village Planning Commission

**FROM:** Jill Bahm, Giffels Webster

**SUBJECT:** Southfield Road – Environmental Assessment

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The reconstruction of Southfield Road from Mt. Vernon Road to Thirteen Mile Road has been in the planning stages for over ten years. Up until 2009, the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) had envisioned a four-lane arterial roadway with a wide grassy median to serve the needs of not only Southfield, Lathrup Village, Beverly Hills and Southfield Township, but also the larger regional population. As the RCOC has stated,

*Southfield Road is an important component of the transportation system in the region, as it provides access to the following major roadway facilities/destinations:*

- *Interstate Highway 696 (I-696): Western Oakland County, Macomb County, and Lansing.*
- *Lodge Freeway (M-10): Detroit, Canada*
- *Southfield Freeway (M-39): Wayne County, Dearborn*
  - *Interstate Highway 96 (I-96): Western Wayne County, Ann Arbor, Lansing, Toledo*
  - *Interstate Highway 94 (I-94): Western Wayne County, Ann Arbor, Canada, Toledo*

The City of Lathrup Village recognizes the importance of Southfield Road in providing access to and from the city, as well as its larger value to the region. However, the city finds its transportation network challenging in terms of creating a cohesive community. The city is physically divided into four quadrants by both Southfield Road (north and south) and I-696 (east and west). The physical barriers presented by the roadways, for motorized and non-motorized travel, make accessing local goods, services, and civic amenities difficult at best, and unsafe at worst. The development pattern created by these transportation networks is almost exclusively auto-oriented, adding to local traffic congestion.

In 2008, during preparation of the city's Master Plan, the community recognized that the built environment along the Southfield corridor was becoming obsolete and blighted. New ideas for the revitalization of the corridor emerged, based on the development potential inherent in the city's local street network. The "Village Center" concept was embraced by the community. This concept envisioned a mixed use, dense commercial core bounded by California Avenue as it creates a circle bisected by Southfield Road. The Master Plan illustrated a concept for the Village Center as well as a mixed-use corridor that would run north and south along Southfield Road, supporting the Village Center and reconnecting the community.

The city struggled to reconcile the proposed expansion of Southfield Road with the community's vision of a more walkable, cohesive community. In February 2011, the city asked the RCOC to move away from the wide median concept and reevaluate road design improvements that would better facilitate pedestrian connectivity and access for local businesses.

In the years since, the RCOC has been working with all communities in the corridor to address local concerns while acknowledging the transportation needs of the region. The City of Lathrup Village took advantage of the opportunity to improve the Southfield Road design by creating the following planning documents:

- Access Management Plan (2009)
- Complete Streets Plan (2011)
- Illustrative Concept Plan/Model for the Village Center (2012)
- Master Plan Update (2014)

These guiding documents consistently address the following vision of the community:

- A mixed-use pedestrian-oriented Village Center that incorporates residential, retail, office, and civic uses
- A revitalized commercial corridor along Southfield Road
- Connectivity between the Village Center and residential neighborhoods
- Enhanced streetscape along Southfield Road
- Safe, comfortable, convenient pedestrian crossings for Southfield Road and I-696

The RCOC prepared several road design alternatives for the communities to consider. These were presented on several occasions and through review, discussion, and modification, a preferred alternative was recommended. This preferred alternative for the city's portion of the corridor attempts to recognize the needs of the community while striving to improve traffic congestion and safety. The preferred alternative features the following:

- A median that varies in width to accommodate vehicular movement across the corridor as well as pedestrian access.
- Pedestrian crossings at 11 Mile and 12 Mile Roads
- Pedestrian crossing at California Ave NW/NE
- Pedestrian crossing at the core of the Village Center (Annie Lathrup School)

While the preferred alternative does not completely address all the concerns of the city, it is a significant improvement over the original wide median proposal of the mid-2000's. Two overriding concerns remain in this preferred alternative that may be addressed through local planning initiatives, which are in place and can be refined.

- Pedestrian connectivity as illustrated in the Complete Streets Plan:
  - This plan outlines a complete transportation network that includes not only Southfield Road, but other collector streets, such as Lathrup Boulevard and Santa Barbara, as well

- as Goldengate Drive, Rainbow Drive, Lincoln, and Sunset Boulevard. These other roads offer opportunities for enhanced non-motorized travel in and around the city.
- Connections are provided in the plan for local destinations including the civic campus, future Village Center, community parks, and the Southfield Nature Center/Library/Civic Center.
  - This plan should be refined to reflect the preferred alternative design for Southfield Road, and perhaps strengthen the local options for non-motorized travel.
  - Right-of-way parking for local businesses as provided in the Parking Mitigation Plan. This plan is underway and will include:
    - Policy to guide public/private partnerships for the development of side-street parking areas.
    - Zoning Ordinance amendments to address parking issues, including:
      - Consideration of the R-1 option, which would permit off-street parking areas on a limited basis adjacent to the corridor.
      - Allow for an increase in the distance between a use and its required parking
      - Reassessment of parking standards adopted in 2015 to lower parking standards for certain uses
    - Continued implementation of the Complete Streets plan to encourage non-motorized travel for local goods and services, which has the potential to limit some vehicular parking demands.

In addition to the pedestrian connectivity and off-street parking, one final deficiency of note is the lack of sufficient vehicular turnarounds to allow convenient business access for motorists on both sides of Southfield Road. We recommend the RCOC continue to refine the road design with this in mind.

The RCOC has asked the City of Lathrup Village for its support of the preferred alternative to allow for refinement of the design. Doing so will allow the road construction project to move forward, which will be beneficial for city residents and businesses. The city should make it clear that as the road design is refined, it should more fully provide safe, comfortable, and convenient pedestrian crossings as well as enhanced streetscape. It will be important for the city to strive to identify required resources needed for implementation of its local planning initiatives and strategies.