

July 12, 2017

To: John Robert Smith
Senior Policy Advisor, Smart Growth America

Re: Royal Oak Progress Report #2

Dear Mr. Smith:

Smart Growth America (SGA), in partnership with Clarion Associates, completed a sustainable land use code audit for the City of Royal Oak in July 2016. This audit covered three main topics – stormwater management, green infrastructure, and housing diversity – and was the focus of an all-day workshop in Royal Oak on October 5, 2016.

After receiving feedback from Royal Oak city staff, a final “next steps” memo was released on November 16th, 2016. This memo was circulated to the attendees of the October workshop, in addition to the city commission and multiple boards and task forces, including the Stormwater Task Force and the Environmental Advisory Board.

On January 12, 2017, Royal Oak submitted its first progress report to SGA which summarized two key takeaways that resulted from SGA’s workshop:

1. The Royal Oak City Commission’s request to research a possible tree ordinance;
2. The commission of a target housing assessment study

Tree Ordinance Report and Recommendations

As part of its FY16/17 goals and objectives, the City of Royal Oak adopted a goal to maintain, replace, and enhance city infrastructure in an environmentally and fiscally sustainable manner; and an objective to investigate options for preserving or increasing the number of trees including tree replacement requirements for developers and a citywide tree replacement fund. The commission directed that this goal would be measured by the number of trees removed, replaced, and added.

Royal Oak has 30.5 percent tree canopy coverage. However, in the last three years, approximately 1,800 trees have been removed by the city, while only 250 have been replaced. This year, 190 trees are planned to be planted. Additionally, the city’s tree planting program has sold an average of 93.4 trees per year to residents. In order to live up to its distinction as a “Tree City, USA,” Royal Oak must aggressively address the loss of its canopy coverage.

After considerable research, internal discussion and cost-benefit analysis, city staff recommended the following changes to city policies and ordinances:

1. Hire a Parks Maintenance Worker I and promote a PMW I to Parks Maintenance Worker II in order to allow city arborists to focus on issues regarding the urban forest
2. Expand the tree planting program by improving public outreach and offering public education on tree planting and maintenance
3. Create a tree education plan utilizing the city's online presence and creating in-person classes to disseminate information and promote tree growth
4. Direct city arborists to create an urban forest plan to capture the state of Royal Oak's urban forest, analyze its urban forest management, develop species and maintenance standards, identify the threats to a healthy urban forest, and create short- and long-term tree goals
5. Amend the zoning ordinance to include a tree protection plan for sites passing through site plan review, and require the replacement of all trees removed on these sites
6. Create an urban forest funding mechanism based on fees when planting on-site is not practicable; fees would be used to fund the planting of trees off-site

On June 12, 2017, the Royal Oak City Commission approved city staff to update the city's tree survey. The city's last full tree survey was conducted in 1999 and utilized the Treekeeper software. The survey showed that Royal Oak had 26,794 trees. However, the system only mapped trees removed or serviced by the city; it did not provide information on tree changes by the public (on private property). An updated survey will allow the city to better track its green resources, target areas in need of trees for planting. To be included in the study for the commission to consider are the ramifications of enacting a 2-to-1 tree replacement mandate in the city.

This survey is currently underway. The entire report can be found here:
<https://www.romi.gov/DocumentCenter/View/17988>

Target Housing Assessment Study

The city of Royal Oak invited the public to hear the results of its residential target market analysis (TMA) on April 18, 2017. The TMA was prepared by LandUseUSA, and the TMA initiative was endorsed by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. The full report can be found here: <https://www.romi.gov/1124/Residential-Target-Market-Analysis-TMA>

The city is continuing to receive feedback pertaining to the findings in this report.

Sincerely,

Todd E. Fenton
Economic Development Manager