March 17, 2008

City Owned Property at Ten Mile Road & Taft Road (Fuerst Property) Master Plan

Resource Book

City of Novi, Michigan
Fuerst Property Master Plan
Resource Book

City of Novi, Michigan

45175 W. Ten Mile Road
Novi, Michigan 48375

March 17, 2008
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

In January 2008, the City of Novi issued a Request for Proposal for a Master Plan study, which would determine the best long-term public use of City-owned property, at the southeast corner of Ten Mile and Taft Roads, comprising 6.5 acres. A recommendation for relocation of the Old Township Hall, which will most likely need to be moved due to the construction of the City’s new Library, was also required.

Potential uses initially identified by the City for the Fuerst Farmstead property included a historical park incorporating the Farmstead and the Old Township Hall, a use associated with the library, an active recreational use (e.g. soccer field), a community/cultural center, or other public use determined by the consultant to be the best long-term use of the site. If a use is recommended that would require relocating the facilities, suggestions for where the historic buildings should be relocated shall be made.

Input from the community was required.

THE PROPERTY’S HISTORY

The Jacob and Rebecca Fuerst family purchased the 160 acre farm in 1918 and continued the tradition of dairy, vegetable and fruit farming. Fruit produced on the farm was shipped to Eastern Market in Detroit for sale. In 1927, they removed an existing house and built the current Arts & Crafts’ style bungalow farmhouse.

The existing City-owned property is a remnant of the original 160 acre farmstead, which is in use today as the Civic Campus. In 1970, sisters Ruby and Iva Fuerst, who were the last remaining family living on the farm, sold all 160 acres to the Novi School District, maintaining a life estate of approximately 6.5 acres. The remaining 153.5 acres were developed into a municipal campus, including Novi Civic Center, Police Department, Ella Mae Power Park, the Library, and Novi High School athletic fields. The sisters passed away in 1991.

In 1997, the City acquired the 6.5 acre property from the Novi Community School District. The City paid the School District approximately $118,000 for the property. The property was listed on the State Register of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places in 1998.

A Task Force was formed in October 2000 for the Fuerst Farmstead, which developed a 5-year plan for restoration and redevelopment. No appreciable progress to complete the objectives in that plan have been made in the intervening seven years. In 2007, the citizens of Novi approved a bond for the construction of a new Library. As part of the construction of the new Library, the Township Hall will need to be relocated for all practical purposes given the proximity and grade work. Construction on the Library is scheduled for beginning Fall 2008.

In January of 2008, the City retained the services of a consultant to gather community input and study potential uses of the property and make recommendations for use and enhancement of the site. (see Map 1, Fuerst Property)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The subject site is located on the southeast corner of Ten Mile and Taft Roads and contains 6.5 acres. (See Map 2, Existing Land Use) Low density residential is located to the north across Ten Mile Road and to the west across Taft Road. Two office buildings are located on the northwest and northeast corners of the Ten Mile and Taft Road intersection.

Novi High School is located to the south of the site and school parking lots are located to the east and south of the barns. The High School’s bus drop off/pick-up driveway is located adjacent to the southern portion of the site. The former barnyard (approx. 1.25 acres), which is owned by the Novi School District, is located to the south of the Fuerst house and west of the barns.

The Townsend Hall (circa 1915) and existing Library parking lot are located to the east of the house and remaining orchard. The Township Hall was relocated from its original site, on the west side of Novi Road and south of Grand River Avenue, to its current location in 1986 on Library property. Restoration was completed in 1990.

The Novi Civic Center, Police Station and Ella Mae Power Park are located on the eastern portion of the former 160 acre farm. A non-motorized pathway bisects the northern portion of the site from east to west and a sidewalk runs parallel to Taft Road.

The inverted “L.” shape site contains the Fuerst house (circa 1927); three barns (circa 1930): the North Barn, East Barn and South Barn; and several outbuildings, including outhouse, pump house, and two dog houses. The older outhouse has been removed and the chicken coop is in severe disrepair. A former barn (circa 1876), located at the southern base of the house, was destroyed by fire. Remnants (peach and apple trees) of the former orchard are located in the northeastern portion of the site.

The house is located prominently on the highpoint of the site and faces due west. The hill slopes upward quickly, approximately 20 feet, from Taft Road to the foundation of the house and levels off behind the house to the east. The hill slopes gently to the northeast at Ten Mile Road and to the east (Library parking lot). The hill drops off abruptly to the south at the former location of the circa 1876 barn and levels off into the old barnyard and three existing barn buildings to the southeast.

Mature landscaping can be found throughout the site and is currently in an un-maintained state. A double row of black locust trees line the existing dirt driveway, which runs west to east from Taft Road up to the southern edge of the house. Lilac, honeysuckle, buckthorn barberry, common chokecherry, raspberries, slippery elm, and snowball viburnum can also be found on the site during warmer months (Source: The Fuerst Farmstead Task Force Report, June 2000).
Map 1
Fuerst Property
(6.5 Acres)
City of Novi, Michigan
BUILDING CONDITIONS

A site visit was conducted by the project team on February 1, 2008. The following building analysis is intended to be part of the Master Plan study to determine long term usage of the site.

There are 4 buildings and other minor structures on the Farmstead site. With the exception of the Old Township Hall, which is located on the library site, they are all vacant and have not been used except for storage for a long period of time. Again, with the exception of the Old Township Hall, the buildings are in general disrepair and show obvious effects of not being used, maintained or updated over many years. Based on information provided by the City of Novi, the 3 remaining barns are circa 1930.

A. Old Township Hall

This circa 1915 building is one story with a modern walk out basement that was built for the relocation. The basement contains a large room used for storage, toilet facilities and HVAC equipment. The main floor is one large room with a raised stage area. Large windows line both sides of the long axis of the single gable building. This building is currently used as a meeting space. Interior finishes on the main floor are in good condition, usable in their current state and add greatly to the historic character. The main floor in its current condition is not barrier-free accessible. Based on its historical significance, generally sound condition and its viability as a meeting space this building is a reasonable candidate for relocation.

B. Fuerst House

The Fuerst House is approximately 2,500 s.f. Arts & Crafts Style two-story bungalow that is sited on the highest point of the Farmstead. There is a large, open front porch, which is approximately 8’ deep and covers the full width of the house. The porch wall, columns and the house chimney are constructed of fieldstone. The stonework appears sound and needs only minor repairs. The remainder of the exterior is covered in wood siding and decorative shingle siding.

The north and south elevations have wide overhangs with decorative wood supports. There is a shed roof dormer to the east and west. All of these elements are indicative of the Arts & Crafts style. The wood siding is in generally good condition. The front porch deck and soffit have some areas of disrepair. The interior of the house shows the effects of being vacant and not maintained. The plaster has come off the lath in some locations and the ceilings & walls have visible bowing. The fireplace and cabinets in the living room are in disrepair. Much of the wood trim, casings, doors, etc. throughout the interior appears to be in good condition, and accurate for the time period. The enclosed porch space on the east side of the second floor has severe deterioration on most all finishes and is in a state of disrepair. An exterior door from this room must have lead to a porch over the rear entry, but all evidence of this is now removed.

The existing house does not meet current barrier free standards, which may require the following barrier-free renovations: elevator requirements, toilet & kitchen facilities, door & corridor clearances and parking and exterior access to building. The electrical, mechanical and plumbing systems are not up to current codes. They are not suitable for reuse. They would have to be redesigned and replaced.

C. East Barn

This approximately 1,540 s.f. barn is framed in heavy timber and has a partial loft that is conventionally framed. The roof is conventionally framed in typical barn, or Gambrel, roof shape. Some racking is visible in the framing. The barn is currently used for storage, and this is the only viable usage in its current condition. The exterior of the building is not weathertight. The vertical wood siding has deteriorated and has many openings to the exterior throughout. The existing doors and hardware are in disrepair. The windows in some cases are missing glazing and left open and are covered in plywood in other cases.

The roof covering is a unique shingle and has minor visible defects. The foundation was not able to be seen from the interior due to storage materials. There were no visible mechanical, plumbing or electrical systems in the barn. There is a small wing that extends south from this barn. Both the foundation and wood framing it supports are severely deteriorated. This wing is not usable in its current state.

D. South Barn

The south barn is the largest of the 3 remaining barns. It is approximately 1815 s.f. with an approximate 400 s.f. shed roofed structure attached to the north. The main structure is heavy timber construction, some structural elements appear to have been relocated and reused.

There are two conventionally framed lofts in the barn, one to the south and one to the northeast. The roof is conventionally framed in the Gambrel roof shape. There is obvious racking in the roof framing, with the structure leaning to the north. The exterior of the building is not weathertight with many openings in the vertical wood siding and no closure at the doors. The doors function, but...
are in need of repair. The lower windows have been covered over with partial wood and the upper openings are open to the weather.

The roof covering is a unique shingle like the East Barn with visible defects at the north and south overhang areas. The building is currently used for school storage, making interior inspection difficult due to large amounts of storage of material. Access was not available to the north lean-to area. There were no visible mechanical or plumbing systems. There is an indication of electric lighting in the building, but again electrical service is unknown.

E. North Barn

This approximate 1,075 s.f. barn has a loft located in the south half. This conventionally framed loft is supported by a north/south running beam with periodic columns. The beam appears to have been modified, spliced, etc. over the years and is not suitable for structural bearing. The beam and column systems for the loft should be replaced for this loft to be used. Information supplied by the City of Novi indicates that the perimeter concrete knee wall needs repair. A verification of this was impossible due to storage inside the building and site conditions.

The roof framing is done in the traditional barn or Gambrel shape. The exterior of the building is not weather-tight. The horizontal wood siding is in a deteriorated state, especially the south facing elevation. The doors and hardware are in disrepair, some windows have been boarded over and others lack glazing. The roof covering matches the other barns, the west side was snow covered, but the east side showed defects in the overhang areas. There were no visible mechanical or plumbing systems. Status of electrical service is unknown.

Adjacent Land Uses

The west wing of Novi High School is a two-story contemporary structure, which dominates the views to the south and east of the barns. The Fuerst property is hemmed in to the east and south by the Library and High School parking lots and to the north and west by City streets.

The entire municipal campus is disjointed, with six separate public driveways and entrances. There are no east-west pedestrian or vehicle cross connections in the middle of the campus between the Novi Civic Center, Ella Mae Power Park, High School, Library, and Fuerst property.

The new Library, which is slated to be constructed just east of the house and remnant orchard, will be a three-story contemporary building. The west façade of the Library, which is located approximately 80 feet from the eastern property line of the Fuerst site, is virtually all glass to take advantage of the natural beauty of the Fuerst property. However, if one stands on the Fuerst site and looks east from the property to the new Library, then the property will feel out of context with its surroundings and rural past.
Map 2
Existing Land Use

Fuerst Property
City of Novi, Michigan

Data Source: Oakland County GIS, 2006.
Map 3 Fuerst Property
Site Structures

City of Novi, Michigan
Data Source: Oakland County GIS, 2006

Views

Looking West
Looking Northwest
Barnyard

Fuerst Homestead

Rear Elevation
Front Elevation
Historic Marker
Out Buildings

Old Township Hall

West Elevation
North Elevation

Barns

North Barn
South Barn
East Barn
Chicken Coop

Novi High School

High School West Wing
Bus Drop Off (looking east)

Map legend:

1. Looking West
2. Looking Northwest
3. Barnyard

Island Creek

McKenna Corporation