

Livonia wants to build a downtown. First, it has to tear down city hall.

By [Elizabeth Schanz](#)/Crain's Detroit Business/02.04.25

The city of Livonia is envisioning a transformational development that officials believe will take the suburban and segmented community and strengthen it with a city center.

Officials are targeting an area occupied by municipal buildings for demolition to start over and create a downtown area with residential opportunities,

spaces for a park, retail and restaurants and a wider bikeable and walkable network to connect the greater community.



The future of the vision is contingent on a series of steps to clear approximately 27 acres of the city's property at Five Mile and Farmington roads to become a residential, commercial and community anchorage point.

Livonia is working to clear its Civic Center campus to open up the real estate for redevelopment, but it has to move departments on the property — a senior center, city hall, police station, fire department and library — which requires both renovations and construction of new buildings. This phase of the project alone is expected to take until 2028.

The project — although seemingly a long way off — has been a long time coming.

The town labeled as a “bedroom community,” a suburb of Detroit for workers to live, has lacked a central space to



create a sense of community. Now, this project could change that image, said Martha Ptashnik, Livonia City Council vice president. “We don't want to build something or 2025; we want to build

something that's going to be sustainable in 2075,” Ptashnik said.

“While we're moving quickly, we're also taking our time to really make sure we do it right.”

Credit: Screenshot

A view looking southeast from the intersection of Five Mile and Farmington roads in Livonia of what the city-owned property could look like by 2027.



Project with potential

The idea of a downtown center was not included at Livonia’s inception and now the city needs a “huge renovation” as it is almost completely built out, Livonia City Council President Brandon McCullough told Crain’s.

Economic development fell to the center of attention in the Livonia Vision 21 master plan created in 2017, which aims to direct citywide policy and future decisions for land use, transportation, neighborhoods, infrastructure and open space, according to its website.

To create space for redevelopment at Five Mile and Farmington roads, a four-phase approach was created to move, renovate and construct municipal buildings to free up space for future economic and residential development.

Preparing the land for development is expected to cost \$250 million.

“The beauty of this project is that we get to do this all on land that we own, where we control our own destiny,” Livonia Mayor Maureen Brosnan said.

The first phase called for the senior center, at 15218 Farmington Road, to move to be connected with the Jack E. Kirksey Livonia Community Recreation Center. The city secured \$21 million in state, federal and county funding in 2023 to move the center, Brosnan said. The \$28 million project is underway and expected to be completed in December.



Phase 2 of the project focuses on the removal of a vacant courthouse, the nearby Sam's Place Family Restaurant — which the city owns — the current senior center and city hall opening up more than 9 acres at the site.

City hall operations would move east to a new building that is to be constructed closer to the city's new courthouse at 32765 Five Mile Road. The new city hall project will be paid for by leveraging a \$45 million bond and

is to be completed by December 2026, Brosnan said.

The next phase will be to rebuild the police station closer to the Livonia courthouse, which is where their line of work transpires on a more regular basis, the mayor said.

In the first two phases of the project, Livonia residents did not have to make “an investment” with taxes or other millage.

However, for Phase 3 the city will ask residents to help invest in the new police station and renovation of the fire stations — a measure that tentatively will be on the ballot in August, Brosnan said.

“The catalyst for a lot of this was getting that senior center done. Now we’re moving ahead with City Hall, which has to happen ... and getting the police headquarters moved,” Ptashnik said. “Once we can get those three big cogs rolling, then we’ll be able to open up for the retail and the multi-family housing and all the other pieces that could be exciting at that corner.”

Moving all of the necessary buildings is slated to be completed by 2028; from there, opportunities for development would open up, Brosnan said.



Credit: Screenshot

A conceptual rendering of the proposed vision for Civic Center looking west across Farmington Road into the proposed residential neighborhood from the Livonia 21 master plan.

Dreams of development

City officials say they are operating under the “if we build it they will come” perspective — once the land becomes available development for the City Center will spur.

The end goal of the City Center is to create an environment that’s “rich with residential opportunities.” This includes housing, programming with central gathering and park space, a revitalized library, and bikeable and walkable areas that extend from Five Mile Road to Hubbard Street to where the Livonia Senior Center and recreation center are.

“It’s meant to function very differently in the city, and this is a transformative process that’s designed to make sure that our kids are coming back to Livonia to live,” Brosnan said. “So all of this will be pulled together with a lot residential opportunities, things like townhouses, condominiums, apartments, designed to attract more young people and find options for some of our older folks to be living in the city, and then built around retail and a restaurant community and a lot of outdoor activated space.”

Once the land becomes available there will be many ways to build out the property to this vision. This could include the sale of the land through RFPs and RFQs, lead opportunities and partnerships, Brosnan said. She noted the

project doesn't have one fixed solution but Livonia is looking to meet a lot of its objectives by creating a city center that will "withstand the test of time."

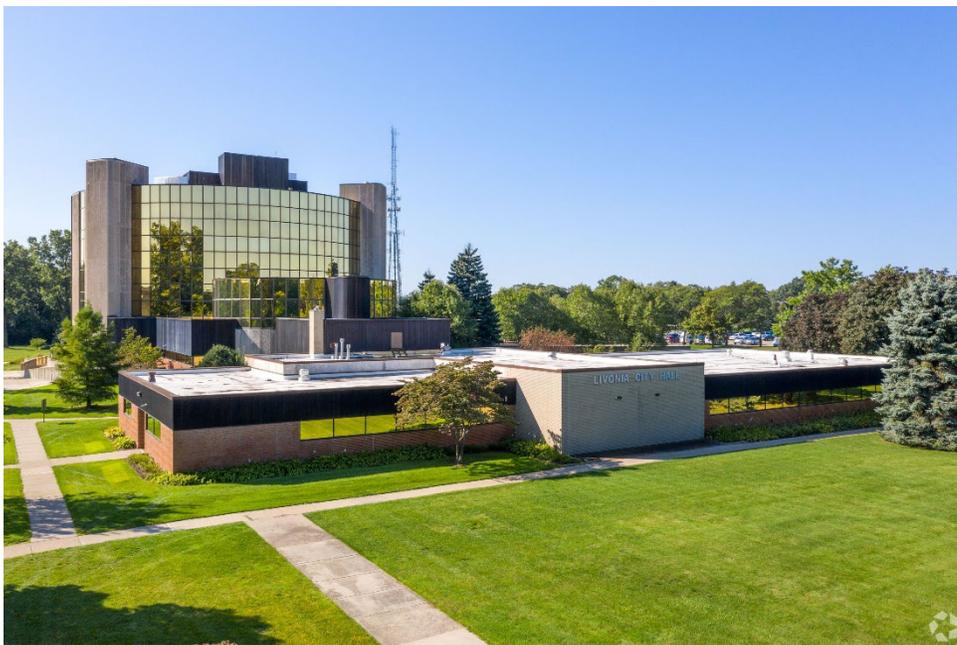
McCullough said although the project is sometimes referred to as a "downtown" effort, it is more of an economic development that fits into the suburban and farming community structure of the area.

McCullough and his wife grew up in Livonia and are "lifelongers" for the city. For him, the City Center development opens up opportunities for people to stay and come to Livonia to live, noting the development has the potential for new housing options in a community that otherwise is built out.

"So having that downtown-ish area (there) are newer types of housing — could be lofts, it could be condos, some retail, and then obviously, pair that with a municipal side, I actually think it's got the recipe of great success, truthfully," McCullough said. "I think we're just trying to re-vision the corner."



Ptashnik said the vision for housing at the city center would attract younger families and open up the opportunity for older community members who are looking to downsize but stay in Livonia.



Livonia is not alone in the journey to establishing a town center in a community built to be without one. Southeast Michigan, a region of 5 million people, could statistically have about 20 town centers but there "really aren't any," said Robert Gibbs, director of Birmingham-based Gibbs Planning Group.

Gibbs is the designer on another suburban [city center project in Warren](#), which is in its early planning stages of community engagement after the initial plan was tabled in

2022.

As suburban cities like Warren and Livonia take steps to formulate the future of a central city area, several aspects make successful downtown projects. This includes generous park space, walkability and mixed-use land with a variety of housing, retail and dining, Gibbs said.

The investment cost to create city centers is often higher than other developments because of the infrastructure needed to make it possible. However, the payoff from the community is much higher, such as driving employers to set up offices in the area, increasing property values, opening up social benefits and creating a variety of housing that appeal to a diverse set of incomes, Gibbs said.

"(City centers) cost more to build. Once they're built, they tend to give three to four times the profitability of suburban shopping centers," Gibbs said. "They're really high economic drivers."

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