

Industrial retention, EV transition, policy alignment, infrastructure investment

Why GM Orion Assembly and why Orion Township? The GM Orion Assembly facility shows how existing sites can be modernized to fit the needs of today's industrial landscape. The project also shows that industrial attraction is really only part of the story. Retention and reinvestment are critical components of industrial development, and they often hinge on whether or not a community can align zoning, approvals, and infrastructure to meet production timelines while staying true to the goals of the community.

In 2022, GM announced that Orion Assembly would be converted to build full-size electric pickups as part of a broader Michigan investment. This was made possible by the State of Michigan's Strategic Outreach and Attraction Reserve (SOAR) fund. Locally, Orion Township processed key approvals (including a Special Land Use request for expansion) and adopted an Industrial Facilities Tax Exemption to support reinvestment at the site. Today, due to shifting market conditions, the line being built at this facility is pivoting from being a hub for all-electric vehicle production to focusing on internal combustion engine products.

Asset Class: large-format automotive manufacturing. The site established an industrial environment for EV truck production and its associated systems.

Tools Used:

 **2. Master Planning for Industrial** ●○○○

 **7. Industrial Zoning District Guidelines** ●○○○

 **9. Site Design** ●●○○

  **10. The Development Review Process** ●●○○

 **13. Brownfields and Incentives** ●●○○

ORION TOWNSHIP, MI

GM Orion Assembly

Site Context and Facility Details

GM Orion Assembly is an established manufacturing campus on Giddings Road in Orion Township, within the Township's Industrial Complex zoning district.

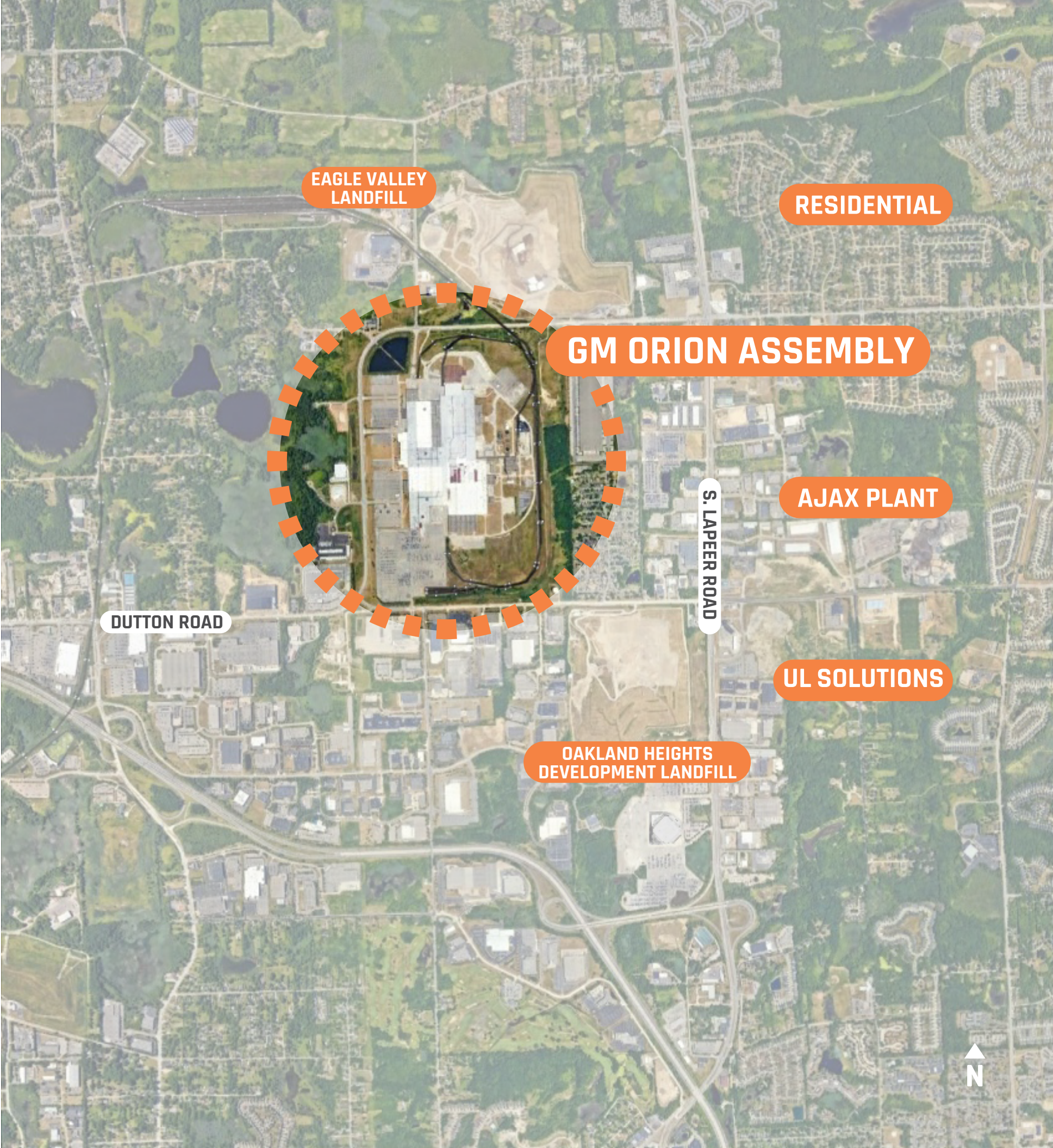
By the Numbers

- Site:** 433 acres
- Facility Scale:** 4,300,000 square feet; 805,000 square foot body shop addition
- Investment:** \$4 billion
- Jobs:** According to planning commission notes, the project will create more than 2,300 new jobs, retaining 1,000 current jobs.
- Project Components:** New truck gates, body assembly expansion, a paint shop connected by a closed conveyor system, new employee parking, and expanded on-site stormwater features, including bioswales and added landscaping/screening.

Site Location: 4555 Giddings Rd, Lake Orion, MI 48359

A Note on Schedule Risk

The Township's planning commission approved a special land use permit along with wetland and site plans at the first meeting at which the Orion project was presented in July 2022. This indicates that Township staff worked closely and quickly with company officials to prepare a thorough application.



Planning Policies

A few moves that translate well to other municipalities:

Treat industrial retention as a planning goal.

Orion Township's approach shows how a community can use existing industrial districts and adopted policies to say “yes, with standards” instead of improvising in real time.

Use zoning district and SLU standards as a decision-making framework.

In the public hearing, GM's representative explicitly tied the expansion to the intent of the Industrial Complex district and presented the expansion as a scaled up version of existing uses. This is a strong way to keep discussion focused on adopted standards.

Make infrastructure a parallel track, not an afterthought.

The planning record discussed anticipated turn lanes, signal modifications, and a new electric feed/easements as part of the expansion story, not as later engineering.

Facility Expansion

What the Expansion Required

Local meetings highlighted a set of practical issues that often decide whether a modernization stays on track:

Truck circulation and gates that work operationally

New truck gates and reconfigured access were part of the presented plan, along with limited but targeted roadway modifications, like turn lanes.

Utilities that scale with the user

Wastewater and natural gas were described as supportable with existing services, while electric service required a new feed tied into existing easements. In addition, the plant's adjacent rail spur was reactivated to respond to high-volume production.

Stormwater handled on-site, with no new discharge points

The plan described on-site storage improvements and bioswales, with added perimeter landscaping and screening to meet ordinance standards and improve the corridor.

Parking

Approximately 1,000 new employee spaces plus temporary construction parking were identified as part of the build-out.



The Public Toolbox that Supported the Project

Local Approvals and Risk Reduction

There was a special land use approval pathway for industrial expansion in the Industrial Complex district, which kept the decision tied to adopted standards.

An Industrial Facilities Tax Exemption (IFT) was approved for the project. The IFT is a 12-year exemption with a 3-year construction period (15-year total structure).

State-Level Incentive Alignment

At the state level, Michigan approved a performance-based Critical Industry Program grant of up to \$600M supporting GM's Orion conversion alongside the Ultium battery plant. They also authorized a State Education Tax abatement to pair with Orion Township's local PA 198 abatement for the Orion expansion.

Off-Site Infrastructure Investment that Matches Industrial Reality

A visible example is the Brown Road / Giddings / M-24 corridor work, which is a construction project funded by a state grant awarded to Orion Township. The project includes non-motorized pathways, a new traffic signal at Brown and South Giddings tied to a new gate into the GM plant, and new turn lanes near GM Gate 8.

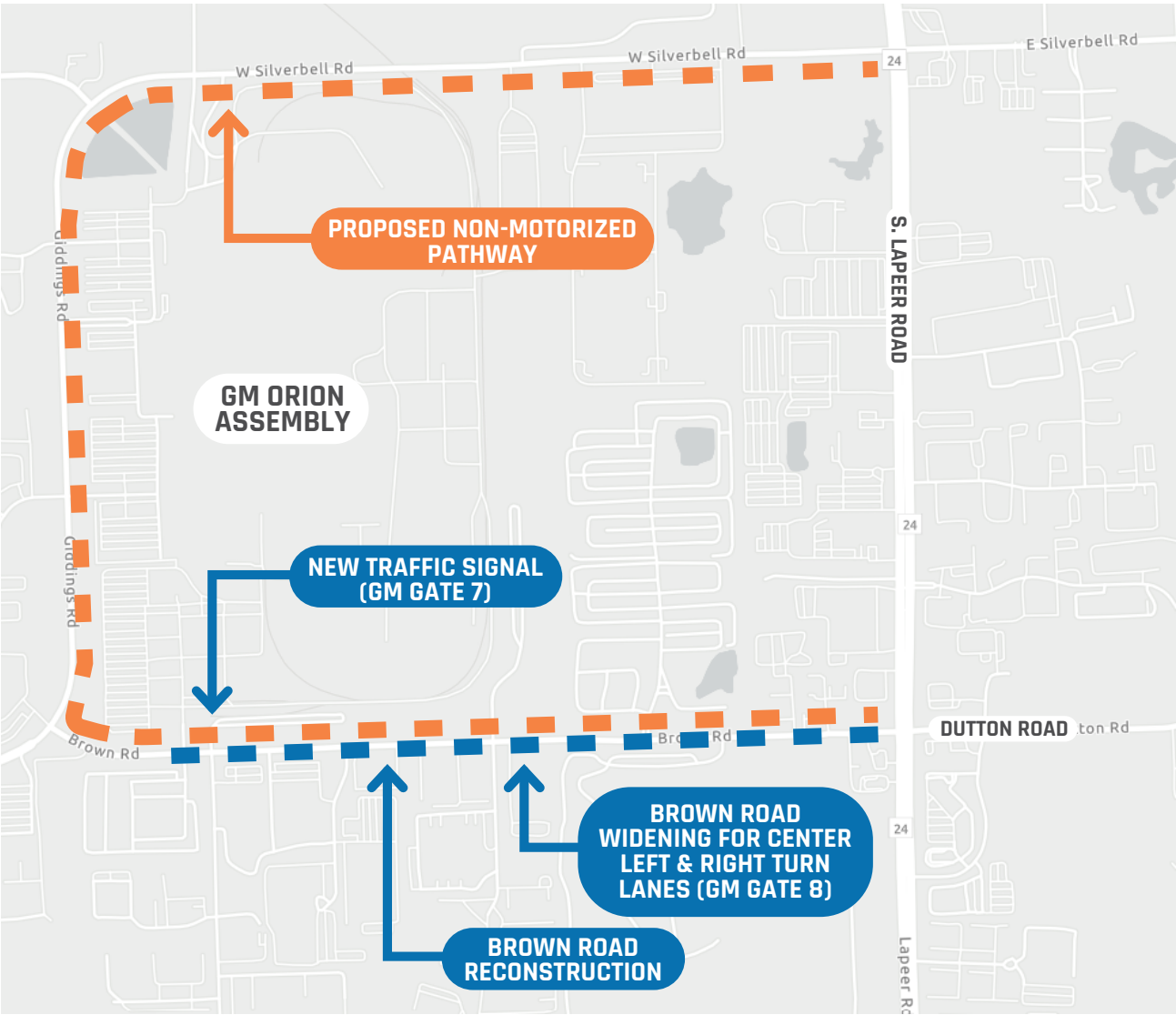
What Made this Work From a Municipal Perspective?

A Low-Conflict Process

The public hearing shows a straightforward presentation, no public comments, and no letters received, showing the benefits of expanding within existing industrial areas.

A Project Narrative Grounded In Specifics

Gates, truck flow, parking, utilities, stormwater are all plain-language elements that residents and decision-makers can actually evaluate.



What lessons can others take from GM Orion Assembly?

Industrial retention strategy should align planning and economic development.

Plans, zoning, and permit review standards should be designed with existing user retention in mind. Orion Township's master plan, adopted in 2022, specifically mentions the GM Orion Assembly expansion in its section on workforce.

Keep approvals tied to standards.

A clear Special Land Use framework helps local officials stay in their lane and keeps a streamlined approval track.

Utilities and roads are part of the industrial product.

If the corridor can't carry trucks safely or there isn't enough utility capacity, a project is still at the conceptual level. These are often some of the very first considerations raised by staff and local residents.

Public benefits matter even in retention projects.

As part of the incentives negotiations, corridor upgrades and site amenities can become a tangible community-facing upside.

Assume scope will evolve.

Build flexibility into how you sequence approvals, infrastructure, and communications, so changes don't make the process longer or more cumbersome than necessary.