

MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM
APRIL 22, 2024 – 5:30PM

The study session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Rich at 5:32pm.

Council Members Present: Aldred, Bridges, Bruce, Dwyer, Knol, and Rich

Council Members Absent: Boleware

Others Present: City Manager Mekjian, City Clerk Lindahl, Assistant City Manager Mondora, Directors Brown, Harvey, Schnackel and Skrobola, Fire Chief Unruh, Police Chief King, and City Attorney Joppich

CLOSED SESSION

CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL TO ENTER INTO A CLOSED SESSION TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS ATTORNEY CLIENT WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CITY ATTORNEY UNDER SECTION 8(1)(H) OF THE OPEN MEETINGS ACT AND SETTLEMENT STRATEGY IN CONNECTION WITH PENDING LITIGATION UNDER SECTION 8(1)(E) OF THE OPEN MEETINGS ACT AND RELATING TO THE CASE OF REID V CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS, ET AL. (U.S. DISTRICT COURT E. D. CASE NO. 2:23-CV-10164). (NOTE: COUNCIL WILL RETURN TO OPEN SESSION IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE CLOSED SESSION).

MOTION by Bridges, support by Aldred, that the City Council of Farmington Hills hereby approves entering into a closed session to consider and discuss attorney client written communications from the City Attorney under Section 8(1)(h) of the Open Meetings Act and settlement strategy in connection with pending litigation under Section 8(1)(e) of the Open Meetings Act and relating to the case of *Reid v City of Farmington Hills, et al.* (U.S. District Court E. D. Case No. 2:23-cv-10164).

Roll Call Vote:

Yeas: ALDRED, BRIDGES, BRUCE, DWYER, KNOL AND RICH

Nays: NONE

Absent: BOLEWARE

Abstentions: NONE

MOTION CARRIED 6-0.

Council entered into open session immediately following the closed session at 6:04pm.

STUDY SESSION

DEI UPDATE AND STRATEGIC PLAN

Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Employee Development Harvey led tonight's discussion on DEI Update and Strategic Plan. Darlene King-Turner, Life's Journey Training and Consulting, was also present.

Director Harvey provided the following background:

- Director Harvey started working with City Council February 2023. Since then the DEI Council Charter was established, which formalizes guidelines for how the Council functions.
- In October 2023, the DEI Council participated in a 3-day strategic planning session with Darlene King-Turner and her team from Life's Journey, along with her partners from Essence Learning. The City has been under contract with Ms. King-Turner's team since 2021.
- The overarching sentiment from the 3-day session was that staff felt like they needed to have more trust in leadership, staff feeling that there might be retaliation for expressing their ideas/feelings, staff feeling like they just wanted to feel more belonging at the workplace.
- Tonight's presentation reflected the DEI Council structure, and pulled from focus groups and surveys that were completed prior to Director Harvey being brought into the City, and from the 3-day planning session which identified 3 main components: workplace, workforce, community. Each component was the focus of a separate committee that operated under the DEI Council Advisory Board. A 4th component – Diversity Management – was the implementation piece, and was served by Directors Harvey, Brown, and Sullen-Winn.

Utilizing a PowerPoint presentation, Director Harvey walked the Council through the three-year strategic plan relative to the 3 components. The Plan presented an overall strategy for each of the components, then outlined goals for each, with each goal having its own milestone markers, action items, risk/barriers, and resources/collaborators. Only the overall strategies and goals will be listed here. For further explanation, see the Strategic Plan.

Goals and strategies for each of the 3 components included:

1. Engaged, skilled and diverse workforce
 - Strategy: Invest in continuous training and development programs that create awareness and generate personal growth for all employees.
 - Goals:
 - a. Implement programs and practices to increase employee's trust in the organization and executive leadership.
 - b. Implement internal programs to captures the voices, opinions, and ideas of all employees.
 - c. Implement learning plans that increase Cultural Awareness and DEI Competency for all levels of employees.
 - d. Invest in educational assistance program to enhance skills, development, and employee satisfaction.
 - e. Implement job shadowing program to bridge the gap between different departments within the City.
 - f. Identify process for incorporating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in adaptation, amendment, and revisions to the city bylaws.
2. Collaborative, trusting and innovative workplace
 - Strategy: Retain and transfer critical knowledge across the organization
 - Goals:
 - a. 2024/25: Implement programs to retain critical knowledge and skills across departments.
 - b. 2024/25: Implement internal retention strategy that is focused on developing, retaining, and promoting qualified staff across all departments within the City of Farmington Hills.
 - c. 2024/25/26/27 (different implementations in each year, as listed in the Strategic Plan): Adopt an annual review process and policy review team to frequently and consistently evaluate and address systemic and systematic biases, exclusion, and unfair treatment in company policies, practices, and guidelines.
3. Community and Social Engagement

- Strategy: Grow and enhance the quality of life of life for all residents, corporate citizens, and diverse communities.
 - a. 2024/25: Increase employee representation to reflect the residents, corporate citizens, and diverse communities within the City of Farmington Hills.
 - b. 2025/26: Invest funds, time and resources in response to the needs and growth of the communities that feed into the organization.
 - c. 2026/2027: Build engagement programs with diverse communities to foster inclusivity and create an environment that is welcoming for all residents, corporate citizens and diverse communities.
 - d. Communicate commitment to partnerships and community investments.

Implementation was also laid out in the three-year time frame, and focused on being clear and realistic. However, the Strategic Plan remains fluid, as it will now go back to Ms. King-Turner and her group, who will massage the timeline, with multiple strategies from each component occurring continuously and simultaneously throughout the three years.

Some goals are already being implemented. For instance, under the first component (workforce) the Lunch 'n Learn series focused on Black History Month in February, and on Indian Festivals in March. In April, the City Manager will present on Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day.

Regarding implementation under the second component (workplace), in order to retain institutional knowledge as people retire, there needs to be an internal retention strategy, including moving people up who have been working under senior staff, and also retaining new hires. For instance, the 6-month probationary period not including sick leave came up often during the 3-day strategic planning session. This particular rule negatively impacts new hires. Can the policy be changed?

Regarding the third component (community and social engagement), the City is looking at its presentation through its literature and social media, to make sure that literature and images are inclusive and attractive to as many people as possible. Community engagement programs should foster an environment of inclusivity through clear methodologies and tracking. Retain diverse vendors and suppliers. (Central Services staff are scheduled to attend a training toward the end of the year regarding this topic.)

Responding to a question regarding division of her time between DEI and Employee Development, Director Harvey said that there was no clear division; the two responsibilities interact holistically. All employee development related to DEI efforts, and it was important for employees to be equipped to interact and engage with staff and the public from different cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, etc.

In response to a question, City Manager Mekjian explained that he and Director Harvey were working together to develop an employee evaluation program that evaluated DEI competencies. ICMA (International City/County Management Association) has an evaluation framework that reflects 10 core competencies. Department heads have already been engaged in training and evaluation regarding those competencies. The challenge is to have evaluations that are effective, helpful, and measurable, but also are not onerous in terms of time spent – evaluations that take too much time and are too complex will tend not to be used.

City Manager Mekjian continued that the evaluations, when finalized, will be put into NEOGOV or possibly Guardian (used by the PD), which are online human resource management systems.

Further discussion included:

- Competencies are individualized for different levels – director/supervisor; supervisor/management; frontline staff. Three competencies apply to all levels: customer service, continuous learning, and cultural inclusion.
- Director Harvey will be requesting funds in the upcoming budget review.
- Implicit bias in hiring, including interview questions, is also being evaluated. Implicit bias can affect other attributes beside ethnicity and race – for instance, how are people with neurodiverse backgrounds interviewed?
- Council looks forward to further conversation and presentation of data, specifically around risks and barriers, and the idea of offering a 50% tuition break for employee’s children to utilize summer programming.
- Council thanked Director Harvey and Consultant King-Turner for the presentation and their work. The Strategic Plan provided the City with a roadmap going forward.

DISCUSSION ON ALLOWING DOGS IN CITY PARKS

Utilizing a PowerPoint presentation, Special Services Director Schnackel reviewed current rules regarding dogs in City Parks, per *Farmington Hills Facility Use Policy*:

Animals. No animals or pets are allowed in or at City facilities except the following: (a) police dogs; (b) service animals, as defined by Title II and Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act; (c) other animals that have been allowed as part of an approved or City sponsored program or event; (d) dogs in the City’s dog park; and (e) dogs in Founders Sports Park, provided they are on a leash and maintained in compliance with all applicable ordinances and park rules.

Director Schnackel explained that dogs were restricted for the following reasons:

- Protecting wildlife
- Preserving plant life
- Ensuring visitor safety and comfort
- Maintaining park cleanliness

These restrictions are crucial for maintaining a healthy balance between allowing people to enjoy the outdoors and protecting the park’s natural environment, thereby ensuring a safe and enjoyable experience for all residents and guests.

Dog-friendly parks in the community include Shiawassee Park, Founders Sports Park, and William Grace Dog Park. Also, many neighborhoods have common greenspace areas that are dog-friendly.

At their April 9 meeting, the Parks and Recreation Commission affirmed support of current rules with regards to dogs in parks, although the Commission was open to exploring allowing dogs on leash at Pioneer, Olde Town and/or Memorial Parks, provided inclusion is consistent with the recently completed 5-year Parks and Recreation Plan.

Director Schnackel made the following further points:

- Even the most docile dogs are predatory dogs, and are therefore a threat to sensitive flora and fauna in the parks.
- Native animals are vulnerable to diseases that dogs carry. Barking and scents left by dogs can scare wildlife and attract predatory animals. Dogs trample plants and damage sensitive terrain and trails.

- Dogs can bother other park visitors. Not everyone is comfortable around dogs. Even when properly leashed, dogs can often be loud, energetic, and unpredictable, which makes them a source of stress for many people.
- Neighboring communities of Livonia, Redford, Novi, and Southfield allow leashed dogs in some parks. West Bloomfield allows dogs on a leash no longer than 6'. Dearborn allows leashed dogs in 7 of its 40 parks. Oakland Township is similar. Metroparks restricts dogs from most nature trail areas. Most communities do not allow dogs on sports fields or courts or sledding hills, and all require dogs be kept under control by their owner.

Council discussion included:

CON:

- Several Councilmembers shared their affection and loyalty to their family dogs. This did not always translate into supporting allowing dogs in public parks, however. Dog owners had different levels of ownership behavior, did not always pick up after their dogs, and were sometimes cavalier about keeping their dogs leashed.
- As Councilmember Boleware could not attend this evening she had shared in advance that her experience with unleashed dogs in Heritage Park has not been positive, including a dog in the splash park scaring children, and another unleashed dog in the park on the same day. When she tried to call the city number, no one was on duty. She and her family had to leave because it was a scary situation for her grandson.
- Dogs are not a good fit in public parks, resulting in negative outcomes.
- Residents fought for years to get a dog park, which did finally happen. If dogs are allowed in other park spaces, what is the point of a dog park?
- City experience in Founders Park is that often dogs are allowed to run off leash. Park rangers are not authorized to enforce with anything more than notification that the dog owners are not following the rules. Anything more than that requires a call to the police.
- Experience with dogs at Art on the Grand is that dogs are allowed to defecate inside the tents, and sometimes dog owners do not pick that up.

PRO:

- Councilmembers had heard complaints about dogs being kept out of parks. Dogs are part of the family, and go everywhere with their owners.
- All the City parks where dogs are allowed are south of 9 Mile Road. There is nothing for people who live north of that, except neighborhood common spaces (which are plentiful).
- Experience in the City of Farmington (Farmers' Market, Shiawassee Park, Riley Park Friday night concerts) indicated no problems when people brought their leashed dogs. Per Rochester Hills Mayor Barnett, Rochester Hills allows dogs in all but one of their parks (a beachfront park), with no apparent issues.

POTENTIAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Survey the community regarding this issue.
- Non-motorized walking pathways throughout the community might allow dogs under certain circumstances.
- Consider allowing leashed dogs at the Thursday night Heritage Park concerts, or in certain limited locations in Heritage Park, such as by the pond. Make sure signage is clear.
- Recommendation is to start with Pioneer Park, which is located in the northern part of the City. There are sports fields there, and people like to bring their dogs when they bring chairs to watch their kids' games. (The baseball fields in Pioneer Park will potentially be converted to a cricket pitch, per the 5-year P&R Master Plan).

REGARDING LIABILITY:

City Attorney Joppich said that the ordinance has very specific requirements regarding dogs in public parks, specifically Founders Park, and because of the specificity of the requirements, the onus is on the owner to keep the dog from attacking or hurting another animal or person. The City has very little liability. The issue of enforcement is another matter. The City needs to make sure it is capable of enforcing park rules.

In response to comments, Director Schnackel emphasized that while she could support allowing dogs at Pioneer Park, she strongly opposed bringing any other animals into Heritage Park or Woodland Hills. The Department had worked very hard on creating and protecting the ecosystem in those parks, and it would be a mistake to allow dogs or other animals there.

Councilmember Knol advocated for allowing leashed dogs in Heritage Park for the Thursday night concerts only.

It appeared to be the consensus of Council to explore allowing leashed dogs in Pioneer Park as a one-season pilot program, with evaluation of how it went in the fall.

City Attorney Joppich will bring a draft ordinance amendment, to allow leashed dogs in Pioneer Park, with basically the same language as that in place for Founders Park.

PRECINCT RELOCATIONS AND TEMPORARY CHANGES FOR THE AUGUST STATE PRIMARY ELECTION

City Clerk Lindahl explained that Farmington Public Schools had requested that the polling location at Warner Middle School be permanently relocated, so that FPS can use that location to accommodate Professional Development days when schools are closed on election day.

Additionally, Kenbrook Elementary School and Farmington Central High School will be undergoing major renovations during the summer and will be unavailable for use in the August 6, 2024 Primary Election.

Clerk Lindahl is recommending Precinct #11 that usually locates at Farmington Central High School be moved temporarily to Woodcreek Elementary School, which is already used as a polling location for Precinct #12. Precinct #10 that usually locates at Kenbrook Elementary School will be moved temporarily to Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, 28000 New Market Road.

Woodcreek Elementary can be difficult to find for people unfamiliar with its location. Therefore instead of just sending a postcard notifying voters of the temporary change, the Clerk's office will be sending out a letter with a map, showing the school location.

Woodside Bible Church, 28301 Middlebelt Road, just north of Fire Station #2, has offered their location as a permanent polling place, replacing Warner Middle School.

Before taking these new locations to the Election Commission, Clerk Lindahl wanted to get feedback from City Council.

Council suggested the Jain Temple, 29278 W. 12 Mile, might be a potential polling location.

By consensus, City Council supported the temporary polling locations for the August primary, and the new permanent location at Woodside Bible Church.

ADJOURNMENT

The study session meeting adjourned at 7:20pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk