

**MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING
MASTER PLAN STUDY
31555 W ELEVEN MILE ROAD
FARMINGTON HILLS, MICHIGAN
OCTOBER 26, 2023, 6:00 P.M.**

CALL MEETING TO ORDER

The Planning Commission Special Meeting was called to order by Chair Countegan at 6:00pm.

ROLL CALL

Commissioners present: Aspinall, Brickner, Countegan, Mantey, Trafelet, Stimson, Varga, Ware

Commissioners Absent: Grant

Others Present: Planning and Community Development Director Kettler-Schmult, City Planner Perdonik, Staff Planner Canty, City Attorney Schultz, Planning Consultant Bahm, Assistant City Manager Valentine

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

MOTION by Trafelet, support by Brickner, to approve the agenda as published.

Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

NEW MASTER PLAN STUDY

- A. Summary of Public Input**
- B. Nonmotorized Transportation Plan**
- C. Sustainability Planning**

Utilizing a PowerPoint presentation entitled *Farmington Hills Master Plan Study Session October 26, 2023*, Planning Consultant Bahm led tonight's discussion relative to the new Master Plan Update. Main topics included:

- Public Input Summary
 - Strength in diversity
 - Traffic concerns
 - Need for restaurants/entertainment/things to do
 - Wide variety of opinions on the goal of development/redevelopment – some want little change, others open to new ideas
 - General support for preserving open spaces; if new development occurs, try to direct it to built-up areas
 - Public Input events included:
 - Fall 2022 Open House
 - Winter Survey, 460 responses. Top 4 items:
 1. Improving parks, preserving open space
 2. Making it safer to walk and bike
 3. Creating more areas of interest/entertainment/destinations

- 4. Preservation of trees
 - Developer Forum; Real Estate Forum (December 1, 2022)
 - Business Forum (February 8, 2023)
 - Centric Place Forum (July 2023)
 - Online Platform: Non-motorized survey, Summer 2023 – 55 responses
 - Online Platform: Study areas
 - Upcoming: November 16, 2023 Open House at The Hawk
- Transportation Plan Quick update
Transportation Plan is in progress.
- Sustainability and Resiliency Plan
 - Defining Sustainability and Resiliency
 - Sustainability: Allows individuals and communities to meet their current material, financial, and social needs without compromising the ability of future residents to meet their needs
 - Resiliency: Being able to meet the basic needs of all residents even in the face of short and long-term threats, difficulties, and stressors, and to quickly recover from disruptions.
 - Vulnerable Populations, in terms of exposure and sensitivity (young, elderly, immunocompromised or with disabilities, poverty)
 - Environmental threats and city-level actions
 - Climate change/impacts
 - Impervious surfaces
 - Air pollution
 - Lack of tree canopy (areas where more than 52% of the population are people of color have lower coverage)
 - Invasive species and nonnatives
 - Land contamination
 - Building design and materials
 - Waste creation and management
 - Economic concerns
 - Educational Attainment (some areas of the City have more than 40% population without a high school education)
 - Unemployment (some areas of the City have more than 40% unemployment)
 - Poverty
 - Lack of “Things to Do”
 - Social concerns
 - Importance of Social Connectivity
 - Linguistic Isolation (living in a household in which all members 14 years and older speak a non-English language and also speak English less than “very well.”)
 - Crime and safety (citation by race, 2022, in a pie-chart)
 - Lack of Third Spaces (not home, not work, allows people to meet others and connect)
 - Other ways to help people connect
 - Activities/programs
 - Parks and recreation
 - Senior-specific programming
 - City communication

Commission comments throughout the PowerPoint presentation included:

- At the Real Estate Forum, participants were looking for smaller, more affordable units for younger and older residents. Options included a building that looks like a single family home, but is actually divided into two or three units, and cottage court type developments, where smaller units are organized around a common green or garden space.
- A variety of people attended the Business Forum, including office, service, and retail space users. The inability to walk to small businesses was called out. “Whatcha Wanna Eat?” in Detroit (<https://www.whatchawannaeatfoodhall.com/>) is an example of innovative place-making, similar to the old Tally Hall in Farmington Hills.
- Do city ordinances impede or encourage creative development? Directed development can be intentional, specific, and pro-active.
- Drive up restaurants are not gathering places.
- Discussion at Centric Place brought up issues of helping new businesses get through city processes; processes should be simple, straightforward, clear.
- Regarding non-motorized plans being implemented, the main question is why this has not happened in the past, and what can be done to encourage success now.
 - Grand River is an obvious location to construct bike lanes, both for amount of use and because funding is likely available.
 - Non-motorized travel includes wheel-chair access, and access for people who do not or cannot drive.
 - *Complete Streets* doesn’t necessarily require provision for all users on every street, but does have a network of travel options so that all people can get where they need to go.
- Survey responses sometimes suggested that vacant land be preserved as parkland. However, vacant land that is privately owned will appropriately be developed by the owner.
- The parks and recreation bond issue listed one purpose as purchasing additional parks properties, but there is no money left for that after funds have been directed toward the Hawk.
- Subdivisions were built with the idea of interior, private parks. Oldest developments do not always have welcoming parkland nearby.
- Feedback from the Open House on November 16th will be presented at the December study session. Following that, the focus will be on presenting a draft Master Plan Update for review. Commissioners are encouraged to attend the Open House and also encouraged to continue to contribute thoughts and ideas via email.
- The importance of trees cannot be discounted in terms of shade, heat mitigation, climate protection, and creation of oxygen. Even though Farmington Hills has a high percentage of tree canopy, there needs to be awareness of where those trees are located. In neighborhoods where people of color form a higher percentage, the tree canopy is less.
- Among other climate change impacts, mosquitoes are migrating north, and bringing with them disease.
- Sustainability strategies for long-range planning should be included in the Master Plan, including EV charging infrastructure, electrifying City fleets, requiring recycling, eliminating food waste, and in all things having the City lead by example. Zoning standards should encourage sustainability strategies. HOAs should also be encouraged to change their governing documents to include such strategies.
- New apartment developments that do not include bike racks, EV charging stations, and electric appliances will lose marketability and value in the coming decades. Again, the Zoning Ordinance and PUD negotiations should include such components. All new development should use green strategies relative to stormwater management.
- The southeastern corner of the City should be prioritized in terms of sustainability.
- Non-motorized pathways will increase the attractiveness of the City as a place to live.

- Bus service needs to be improved in terms of locations served, and frequency of bus runs. A bus that runs every hour has only limited benefit. Commissioners and their families who had experience trying to use the bus service, including the new flex door-to-door service, found bus use frustrating as they often could not get to where they needed to go when they needed to be there.
- From the audience, County Commissioner Gwen Markham spoke to the need for mass transit. The new Oakland County transit millage will provide \$66M a year for transit improvement and expansion; significant improvements will be made.
- Supporting local businesses creates a multiplier effect in terms of enhancing the quality of life in the City. Supporting “local first” must be an intentional decision on a micro and macro level.
- There is significant linguistic isolation in Farmington Hills. While Farmington Hills does offer connecting spaces and networks such as the library, the Hawk, the YMCA, and other networks, those who experience linguistic isolation do not often participate.
- Something not mentioned in the PowerPoint was *cultural isolation*, including the cultural isolation of the Black community. Black community members will often say, “We sleep here, but we don’t hang out here.” Farmington Hills needs restaurants and a vibrant night life, but the Black community, and other culturally diverse communities, need to feel safe and welcomed in order to hang out in a place they call home. Without feeling that welcoming safety, they will not frequent entertainment in the city. The slide pointing to linguistic isolation should be expanded to include cultural isolation.
- The pie chart on enforcement activities reinforces the idea that Black residents are not safe in their own community.
- The YMCA offers important services that cannot be found elsewhere in the community, such as the swim pool. Competitive swimmers cannot use the Hawk or the Costick Center pools, which are not constructed for that use.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Tom Haji, Chaldean Community Foundation, distributed a hard copy of a PowerPoint presentation entitled *Farmington Hills Housing, Mission-Driven Attainable Housing*, and addressed how the proposed CCF housing project on 13 Mile Road fit within Master Plan special study area goals. The multi-family development made sense as a logical extension of current multifamily developments on 13 Mile. The development would provide affordable, livable homes for the high percentage of millennials who want to move to the area. The land has been undeveloped for 27 years because it is not attractive for single family development. The traffic study explained why 13 Mile had seen heavier than usual traffic in the last few years, due to nearby construction on the Interstate and other main roads. The proposed location is an ideal location that scores very high under MSHDA (Michigan State Housing Development Authority) standards and is the perfect location for this type of development. Also, the developers are willing to reduce the height of the buildings to two stories, bringing the height down 7’, and reduce the number of units to 88.

Brian Rich, 34067 Heritage Hills, said that while he was present as an interested member of the Zoning Board, he also was on the YMCA Board. The YMCA had 1400 regular members and 1700 insurance-based members, for a total of over 3000 members. The YMCA wants to work the City, but was basically shut out when the Hawk was built. On another subject, restaurants were not allowed in any office-zoned district, yet the definition of a Class A office building was that the building had a restaurant or some sort of eating establishment. The zoning ordinance therefore prevents Farmington Hills from having Class A office buildings.

In response, Chair Countegan suggested the City Manager's office discuss cooperation with the YMCA, and the City Attorney should look at the language in the zoning ordinance referred to by Mr. Rich relative to requirements for a Class A office building.

Chair Countegan thanked those who offered public comments.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Stimson, support by Trafelet, to adjourn the Special Meeting at 7:22pm.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

Respectfully Submitted,
Marisa Varga
Planning Commission Secretary
/cem