

**MINUTES
SPECIAL JOINT STUDY SESSION MEETING
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
FARMINGTON HILLS PLANNING COMMISSION
SEPTEMBER 16, 2024 – 6:00 P.M.
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY HALL – COUNCIL CHAMBER**

CALL MEETING TO ORDER

The Special Joint Study Session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Rich at 6:00pm.

ROLL CALL/INTRODUCTIONS

Council Members Present: Aldred, Boleware, Bridges, Bruce, Dwyer, Knol, and Rich
Council Members Absent: None

Planning Commissioners Present: Aspinall, Brickner, Countegan, Mantey, Stimson, Varga, Ware, and Trafelet

Planning Commissioners Absent: Grant

Others Present: City Manager Mekjian, City Clerk Lindahl, City Planner Perdonik, Planning Consultant Bahm (Giffels Webster), City Attorney Joppich

MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

- a. **Background**
- b. **Priorities/Goals**
- c. **Next Steps**

Background/Introduction

City Manager Mekjian explained that the objective of this meeting was to have a shared discussion with City Council and Planning Commission regarding implementation of the newly adopted Master Plan, including prioritizing zoning text amendments that will be necessary to implement the plan.

City Planner Perdonik led an opening discussion of the relationship between the Master Plan and the Zoning Ordinance.

- Without corresponding zoning regulations, the Master Plan remains largely unactionable.
- The current Zoning Ordinance is outdated and does not reflect the modern vision established in the Master Plan. Updating the zoning ordinance will bring the Master Plan to life.
- Tonight everyone will be asked to help define the highest priorities in terms of moving the Master Plan’s vision forward, and to envision the regulatory framework that will accomplish this.

Draft amendments regarding five land uses

As a starting point, draft amendments have been provided regarding five specific land uses in the B-3 District, the City’s prime commercial district. These uses impact the overall character of the City. They include:

1. Automobile repair
2. Drive-thru restaurants

3. Gasoline service stations
4. New and used vehicle sales
5. Vehicle washes

The draft amendments move these uses into the special land use category, allowing the City to have more control over dimensional and architectural standards, locations, and impact mitigation. All projects – including these uses, need to be quality projects.

Discussion: Flexibility vs. Restriction

While there appeared to be general agreement that the City was experiencing over-saturation of these automobile-based uses, concerns were raised about changing the ordinance to be too restrictive relative to market-driven business uses. Perhaps the focus should be on creating opportunities rather than limiting specific businesses.

It came out in discussion that major retailer Shell had announced it was closing 1,000 gas stations, shifting its focus and resources to expand services for EVs.

It was pointed out that gas stations were not actually mentioned in the Master Plan. Planning Consultant Bahm explained that addressing auto-related uses is consistent with the goals of the Master Plan, which emphasizes walkability as a key priority. By reviewing and adjusting the regulations around these uses, the City can ensure that the growth of such businesses does not conflict with the long-term vision for a walkable, pedestrian-friendly environment.

Consensus

After discussion, Mayor Rich summarized that there appeared to be majority – though not unanimous – support that the City did have enough of these uses, and in the case of gas stations, unless property already had a gas station on it at some point, the City should consider an ordinance that limited new authorizations. City Attorney Joppich pointed out that a developer could always request a PUD. The draft amendments were not creating a prohibition or a moratorium, but a different classification.

Focus on what the community desires

A common complaint among residents is the lack of full-service restaurants and gathering spaces in the City. Suggestions included:

- Grand River Corridor: Incorporate murals and public art to make the area more vibrant and walkable.
- Orchard Lake and 14 Mile Area: Pursue the creation of a social district. Provide walkable areas, especially as upscale apartments are being developed in the area.
- 12 Mile Corridor: Focus on reducing the amount of unused parking lots and consider mixed-use development. Potentially reduce the parking requirement for office use.
- The Zoning Ordinance can help drive market demand by creating an attractive environment for businesses, rather than simply reacting to market trends.
- Take advantage of place-making opportunities in conjunction with the County-sponsored Nine Mile Road walkability project.
- Create special business districts at intersections, focusing on landscaping and quality architectural design and materials.

Mixed-use zoning

Mixed-use zoning promotes the ideas just discussed, especially including walkability and placemaking. The Master Plan recommends mixed-use zoning in several locations, but the City does not have a mixed-use ordinance. Such an ordinance needs to be constructed in order to implement the vision of the Master Plan, especially along the 12-Mile Road corridor, where there is an opportunity to convert existing office space into residential units or mixed-use developments.

City Planner Perdonik agreed that the 12 Mile Corridor is well-positioned for mixed-use development, including multifamily developments along with the flexibility to permit restaurants and other uses to increase diversity in land use. Noting that there is a broader corridor study in process, an incremental step of allowing more uses in the OS-4 district via a text amendment, such as permitting higher density residential uses, would allow multifamily housing conversions from office spaces as “by right” without needing an immediate zoning change. Developers may also want to add more density to sites by building additional structures in addition to converting existing ones.

Architectural standards

It was important to maintain high-quality architectural standards for any new developments or conversions. Conversions from office to residential must look intentional and not appear like a cheaply done project.

Affordable and workforce housing

The need for affordable and workforce housing was acknowledged, with a need to encourage middle-housing types (duplex/triplex/quadplex/cottage courts) as part of mixed-use development.

Year Round Walkability

Year-round walkability requires that snow be cleared in the winter, and sidewalks be cleared of overgrowth during the rest of the year. City Attorney Joppich will provide information as to City liability and the best way to achieve clear sidewalks year-round.

Summary of consensus items:

- There was broad consensus that mixed-use zoning is a top priority, and Council directed the Planning Commission to work with the City Attorney to begin to draft a mixed-use ordinance, with special attention paid to its applicability on the 12 Mile Corridor and within the Orchard Lake/14 Mile area.
- There also appeared to be support for an ordinance amendment to permit uses by right in the OS-4 District such as multifamily, higher density development.
- While there was not complete unanimity, with Planning Commissioners Brickner and Countegan cautioning against adopting too restrictive ordinances, most participants appeared to agree that the City has reached saturation with gas stations and car washes, and certain other uses, and continued work on draft amendments to address this issue was supported.
- There was general agreement on the importance of requiring high-quality architectural standards for new developments and redevelopments, especially when converting office spaces to residential.

Prioritization Exercise:

Planning Consultant Bahm led participants in an interactive exercise where participants prioritized the areas within the 9 building blocks called out in the Master Plan that they believed were most important. These priorities will help guide future efforts and strategies for the City's development.

The suggestion was made to annually review progress, similar to the Council's goal-setting meetings. This would help ensure alignment between the Planning Commission and the City Council and allow them to assess whether resources and attention were being effectively allocated.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Pamela Gerard made comments regarding the importance of the Master Plan.

ADJOURNMENT

The study session meeting adjourned at 7:23pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk