

**MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
STUDY SESSION
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM
FEBRUARY 23, 2026 – 6:00PM**

The study session of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Rich at 6:02pm.

Councilmembers Present: Aldred, Boleware, Dwyer, Knol, Rich and Starkman

Councilmembers Absent: Bridges

Others Present: Acting City Manager Mondora, City Clerk Lindahl, Directors Aranowski and Brockway and City Attorney Saarela

The closed session started at 6:04pm

CLOSED SESSION ITEMS:

CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL TO ENTER INTO A CLOSED SESSION UNDER SECTION 8(1)(A) OF THE OPEN MEETINGS ACT FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSING PERSONNEL/EMPLOYMENT MATTERS RELATING TO THE ACTING CITY MANAGER POSITION, UPON THE ACTING CITY MANAGER’S REQUEST FOR SAME.

MOTION by Aldred, support by Starkman, that the City Council of Farmington Hills hereby enters into a closed session under Section 8(1)(a) of the Open Meetings Act for the purpose of discussing personnel/employment matters relating to the Acting City Manager position, upon the Acting City Manager’s request for same.

Roll Call Vote:

Yeas: ALDRED, BOLEWARE, DWYER, KNOL, RICH, AND STARKMAN

Nays: NONE

Absent: BRIDGES

Abstentions: NONE

MOTION CARRIED 6-0.

The open session resumed at 6:15pm

STUDY SESSION ITEMS:

EXECUTIVE SEARCH FOR CITY MANAGER

Mayor Rich led the discussion on the City Manager executive search, working through a series of key questions outlined in City Attorney Joppich’s memo regarding the scope, process, and management of the search.

Scope of Search. Consensus of the Council was to conduct a national search. Councilmember Knol expressed a preference for a regional or Midwest-focused search, citing concerns that candidates from western states may lack familiarity with Michigan's tax structure, governance model, and professional contacts. Despite this reservation, Councilmember Knol indicated she would support the majority position. Councilmember Dwyer, Boleware, and Starkman each expressed support for a national search on the grounds that it would yield a more diverse and objective pool of candidates and allow the Council to narrow the field as the process progressed.

Use of a Search Consulting Firm. Council agreed to engage a public executive search consulting firm rather than pursue an in-house process. Mayor Rich noted that Director of Central Services Aranowski had identified three firms with which the City holds existing HR contracts; however, Mayor Rich expressed reservations, as only one listed recruiting among its services online and only that firm had experience with city manager placements. Councilmember Boleware stated she did not wish to use the Michigan Municipal League (MML) to lead the search, citing her dissatisfaction with MML's prior search effort, including what she characterized as a pool that was not sufficiently broad and reference letters that she felt were subpar. Councilmember Dwyer echoed similar reservations about MML. Council agreed that an RFP would be drafted.

RFP Process. Director Aranowski would prepare the RFP, coordinating with the City Attorney's as appropriate. Mayor Rich noted that Council members would be attending the National League of Cities (NLC) and the MML conference in the coming weeks, providing an opportunity to identify potential vendors and alert them that an RFP would be forthcoming. The draft RFP would be distributed to Council members via email for review and comment prior to finalization.

Management of the Process and Review Committee. It was determined that City Attorney's Saarela and Joppich would play a key coordinating role in guiding the overall process, including working with the selected consultant. Director Aranowski would vet and summarize the RFP responses before presenting them to the Council for decision-making. For the consultant selection interviews, a committee of three Council members was formed: Mayor Rich, Councilmember Dwyer, and Councilmember Boleware.

Candidate Brochure. It was agreed that the brochure used during the 2020 search requires updating to reflect the City's current position, vision, and community profile. It was suggested that the Community Engagement Department work with Economic Development Director Brockway, given her role in actively promoting the City, on updating the brochure.

Master's Degree Requirement. Mayor Rich raised the matter of the educational requirement which designated a master's degree as required. Council discussed alternatives, including moving the master's degree from a required qualification to a preferred one, or adding language permitting equivalent experience to satisfy the requirement and reached general agreement to adjust the language accordingly.

UPDATE ON THE 12 MILE ROAD AND ORCHARD LAKE ROAD CORRIDORS STUDY

Economic Development Director Brockway presented a summary of the findings and recommendations from the market studies conducted for the 12 Mile Rd and Orchard Lake Rd corridors.

Background and Purpose. Director Brockway explained that the studies were commissioned to serve as a tactical guide for achieving the vision established in the City's Master Plan for the two corridors. She noted that the study area for 12 Mile Rd was intentionally extended to Haggerty Rd and along Hills Tech Drive to capture the shared workforce, employer types, and business character across that broader district. She also noted that any zoning code changes in these corridors could potentially affect other high-traffic corridors such as Grand River.

Orchard Lake Road — Key Findings. The Orchard Lake Rd corridor trade area encompasses over 650,000 people, with 6.5 million retail consumers and an annual consumer spending potential of \$13.7 billion. Office space availability exceeds 100,000 square feet, representing 30–35% of uses, while retail and restaurant availability totals only 32,000 square feet. Average dwell time for restaurant and shopping visits is 30–41 minutes, and 99% of workers within the corridor district live within 25 miles. The corridor has experienced a 10% visitor increase since 2022 within the International District (between 12.5 and 13.5 Mile). A survey of approximately 1,000 respondents—including employers, visitors, property

owners, and business owners—indicated strong demand for additional green space, improved traffic flow, day and night pedestrian opportunities, mixed-use development, and experiential dining.

12 Mile Road — Key Findings. The 12 Mile Rd corridor serves a more affluent trade area of approximately 740,000 people, with an annual consumer spending potential of \$20.4 billion. The corridor is dominated by office, OS4, and IRO uses at approximately 70%, with office availability exceeding 800,000 square feet. Retail and restaurant availability similarly totals 32,000 square feet. Average dwell time is 30–40 minutes, and 93% of employees live within 25 miles. Director Brockway noted that six sites within the corridor are already internally preparing for mixed-use office, residential, and retail development or redevelopment, either through internal feasibility studies or preliminary discussions with the City.

Overall Assessment. Director Brockway emphasized that, taken together, the two corridors have nearly one million square feet of vacant office space but only 64,000 square feet of retail space, meaning there is consumer demand sufficient to fill six times the existing retail space. She confirmed that the primary obstacle to activating this demand is zoning, which currently restricts many uses such as cafes in OS2 office districts.

Orchard Lake Road Recommendations. Director Brockway outlined recommendations in approximate order of feasibility. The most immediate actions include planting and replacing trees and initiating zoning reviews for OS2, OS3, and B2 districts to permit café and flexible retail uses that are currently prohibited. Additional recommendations include exploring a pedestrian crossing between 12.5 and 13.5 Mile Rd to serve the growing International District, adding street lighting to encourage pedestrian activity after dark, and maintaining ongoing engagement with property owners to encourage investment in their parcels. Longer-term recommendations include evaluating the formation of a Business Improvement District or a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district as a Downtown Development Authority or similar second-quarter improvement authority.

Councilmember Aldred proposed, and Director Brockway agreed, that rather than amending individual zoning districts piecemeal, the most effective approach would be to treat the entire Orchard Lake Rd area as the special planning area already identified in the Master Plan and rezone the whole area comprehensively. Acting City Manager Mondora cautioned the Council that any rezoning of commercial areas must be approached carefully to avoid inadvertently creating non-conformities that could negatively affect property owners' financing arrangements. She indicated that the City would research approaches to grandfathering existing uses to avoid creating undue burdens.

Councilmember Boleware inquired about the timing of road work on Orchard Lake Rd between 12 and 13 Mile. Acting City Manager Mondora confirmed that Oakland County had completed work on that segment in the current year and the 13-to-14-Mile segment a few years prior. Director Brockway confirmed that the pedestrian crossing recommendation is not an immediate project and would require extensive study and coordination with Oakland County.

12 Mile Road Recommendations. Director Brockway outlined recommendations for 12 Mile Rd, again in order of ease of implementation. These include maintaining focus on pedestrian values, green space, lighting, and connectivity; developing a sub-area plan along 12 Mile Rd and Farmington Rd to create a well-connected district for businesses, residents, and students—noting that Oakland Community College is actively exploring the area for student housing and related development; exploring floor area ratio incentives to reward property owners who incorporate outdoor green space and pedestrian-friendly amenities by permitting greater density; pursuing light amendments to the IRO district to permit synergistic uses such as AI and EV-specialized warehousing, cold chain logistics, and controlled

environment logistics; and formally branding the corridor for headquarters and research and development.

Councilmember Aldred questioned whether the OS4 amendments previously adopted went far enough, referencing a finding in the market study that existing parking minimums in OS4 may still impede repurposing of underutilized lots. Director Brockway acknowledged this concern and indicated that parking regulations would require a separate, more in-depth discussion.

Green Space and Traffic Flow Concerns. Councilmember Knol expressed support for tree canopy improvements and noted that many residents cite green space as a primary reason for choosing Farmington Hills. She urged the Council and staff to preserve the existing significant green space and building setbacks along 12 Mile Rd between Drake and Halsted. She further cautioned against any measures that would reduce traffic flow on 12 Mile Rd, noting that it serves as a critical alternative route when I-696 is congested. Director Brockway confirmed that no traffic calming measures are recommended for 12 Mile Rd and that any pedestrian crossing improvements would be within interparcel connections rather than on the road itself.

Broader Economic Development Context. Councilmember Boleware shared concerns that Michigan was reported to rank 43rd among all states in economic growth, noting that the strong economic performance nationally was attributed to cities embracing AI and technologies such as closed-loop data centers. Councilmember Boleware questioned whether the City's current trajectory was sufficiently aligned with these emerging trends. Councilmember Starkman expressed enthusiasm for the food trucks and infill concepts presented and acknowledged that years of inaction had contributed to Michigan's economic challenges. Director Brockway noted that certain markets—research and development, health care, logistics—are clustering with like uses and that the corridors' existing R&D concentration positions the City well within those sectors.

Implementation Timeline and Reporting. Director Brockway acknowledged that achieving full vision for both corridors could take approximately 12 years, drawing a comparison to the transformation of Troy's Big Beaver corridor. She noted that work is already underway with the City's new planning consultant to assess current zoning and determine necessary amendments. Councilmember Dwyer requested that Director Brockway provide Council with progress updates every four to six months on both corridors. Director Brockway agreed, noting that a monthly update is already distributed in the weekly memo and that a more formal deliverable could be incorporated.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Rich closed discussion and adjourned the meeting at 7:25pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk