APPROVED 11/10/2025

MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
STUDY SESSION
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM
OCTOBER 27, 2025 – 6:00PM

The study session of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Rich at 6:01pm.

Councilmembers Present:	Aldred, Boleware, Bridges, Bruce, Dwyer, Knol and Rich
Councilmembers Absent:	None
Others Present:	City Manager Mekjian, Assistant City Manager Mondora, City Clerk Lindahl, Directors Brockway and Kettler-Schmult and City Attorney Joppich

UPDATE ON HEART SAFE INITIATIVE PROGRAM

Utilizing a PowerPoint presentation, Lieutenant Brian Parkow provided an update on the City's progress toward earning a HeartSafe Community designation through the Citizen CPR Foundation, a national non-profit organization promoting public CPR readiness. The HeartSafe Initiative is designed to empower citizens to perform hands-only CPR and to expand the use and awareness of automated external defibrillators (AEDs). Citizen CPR has designated approximately 400 cities nationwide as HeartSafe communities.

Farmington Hills joined the initiative last year and is progressing faster than average. For most cities, meeting the HeartSafe criteria typically requires 16 to 18 months; Farmington Hills is approaching completion in about 10–11 months. Nearby examples include Detroit, which is the largest participating city in the region.

The program's mission is to increase survival rates from sudden cardiac arrest by training the public in CPR techniques that can be performed before first responders arrive. Each minute without CPR reduces survival chances by approximately 10%, underscoring the importance of bystander intervention. The City had been proactive in CPR education prior to formally joining the initiative, with programs targeting city employees, schools, and local organizations.

All Farmington Public Schools (middle and high schools) are now designated as HeartSafe, with training extended to teachers and students. The Fire Department conducts fall assemblies at elementary schools introducing hands-only CPR.

The Department hosts monthly CPR training classes, incorporates demonstrations during the annual Fire Department Open House, and conducts media outreach. Partnerships include Corewell Health, Henry Ford Health, local businesses, and faith-based organizations.

The City adopted the Pulse Point app, which maintains an AED location database accessible to emergency dispatchers as well as the general public. During a cardiac emergency, dispatch can direct bystanders to the nearest AED, improving response time. All police and fire vehicles, as well as special services and city staff vehicles, are equipped with AEDs.

The HeartSafe application has been submitted and received favorable preliminary feedback. The Citizen CPR Foundation requested an Emergency Operations and Action Plan for review before final approval. The estimated designation timeline is late November 2025. Upon designation, the City plans to implement a continuity plan to maintain program leadership as personnel change and ensure ongoing training.

Council discussion
In response to questions, Lieutenant Parkow provided the following additional information:

- The initiative strengthens community readiness, increases bystander confidence, and aligns with national best practices in emergency response.
- Ongoing annual training of 15% of residents is required to maintain designation status. Events such as the Fire Department Open House, media engagement, and collaboration with hospitals, schools, businesses, and local CPR providers strengthens program sustainability.
- The Pulse Point AED App expands access to AED locations, also offers CPR and first aid tutorials, and identifies Stop the Bleed and Narcan kit sites.

Council thanked Lieutenant Parkow for the presentation and commended the progress made toward Farmington Hills being a HeartSafe Community.

PRESENTATION OF VILLAS AT PEBBLE CREEK BROWNFIELD PLAN
Director of Economic Development Brockway opened the discussion with an overview of the Villas at Pebble Creek project, also known as the Sarah Fisher property, located off 12 Mile Road. The Robertson Brothers PUD project, which has already received approvals from the Planning Commission and City Council, is pursuing Brownfield qualification in order to fund redevelopment on this contaminated site. The Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (BRA) also granted approvals in June and October 2025 for the Brownfield Plan and Reimbursement Agreement. City Council approved the PUD agreement in September.

Jenn Gelletley, AKT Peerless, provided an overview of Brownfield Tax Increment Financing (TIF). Under Act 381, the BRA oversees reimbursement and compliance. Under a brownfield plan, the base taxable value is set, and any incremental revenue from redevelopment is used to reimburse the developer for approved eligible costs. Reimbursements only occur if property taxes are paid on time. The BRA may also collect administrative and local brownfield revolving fund (LBRF) fees, which must be used according to Act 381 guidelines.

Plans using state education taxes must receive both local and state approvals, except for certain exempt activities. Reimbursement estimates are based on reasonable assumptions, and total reimbursements cannot exceed approved costs. AKT Peerless reviewed the Villas at Pebble Creek Brownfield Plan and found all proposed activities and costs eligible under Act 381 and city policies.

Several council members commented on the complexity of the process and their need for supporting materials to aid understanding. A copy of Act 381 and other documents should be provided.

Mayor Pro Tem Dwyer inquired about the duration and benefit of the brownfield plan. Ms. Gelletley explained that the plan remains active until all developer costs are reimbursed, after which the BRA may capture up to five years of revenue for the LBRF before the plan is dissolved. At that point, incremental tax revenue is released back to the taxing jurisdictions.

Regarding the benefits to the City, Ms. Gelletley noted that the City continues to receive base tax revenue during the reimbursement period and ultimately benefits from the increased taxable value after redevelopment. The project also addresses environmental concerns, such as contamination and asbestos removal. This is the first time the Villas at Pebble Creek project has been formally considered under a brownfield development plan.

James Clarke, Robertson Brothers Homes, provided an overview of the Villas at Pebble Creek project. He reiterated that the site presents significant redevelopment challenges due to contamination and age, necessitating brownfield assistance. Without such incentives, the project would not be financially feasible, given that environmental remediation costs exceed $3 million.

Mr. Clarke described the $47 million redevelopment plan, which includes 76 detached ranch condominiums and four single-story homes. The project will convert a long vacant and contaminated property into a residential community featuring a preserved historic chapel for community use, substantial open space, and landscaped areas. Additional features include art installations and pathways for walkability.

Environmental cleanup efforts include demolition, asbestos abatement, soil removal, groundwater management, and utility gasketing coordinated with the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE). The project will create temporary construction jobs and provide much-needed housing options for residents seeking to downsize while remaining in Farmington Hills. The design retains one main entrance off Inkster Road, an emergency exit, and incorporates a new city lift station off 12 Mile Road.

Mr. Clarke noted that this type of housing frees up existing single-family homes, supporting population renewal and local schools. The reuse of historic materials for signage and the preservation of the chapel will maintain the heritage of the Sarah Fisher property.

Environmental Consultant Madalyn Dessy, Pinchin, outlined the environmental history of the site. She noted that the Sarah Fisher Center had been in use since 1929 with expansions through the 1990s before closing in 2005. The property has remained largely vacant since 2010. Environmental issues include petroleum contamination from two underground storage tanks removed in 1991, with regulatory closure obtained in 2009 through a restrictive covenant that limits certain land uses and prohibits groundwater use.

Ms. Dessy reported other sources of contamination, including historical laundry operations, widespread asbestos, and pesticide residues from former orchard operations in the 1930s and 1940s. The site meets Brownfield criteria under Act 381 due to the presence of volatile organic compounds (VOCs), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PNAs), and lead in both soil and groundwater exceeding state cleanup thresholds.

Ms. Dessy presented maps showing contamination boundaries concentrated near the kitchen and administration buildings. She reviewed eligible Brownfield Tax Increment Financing (TIF) activities, including site assessments, due care planning, soil and groundwater treatment, utility gasketing, demolition, and environmental oversight. Approximately 115,000 square feet of buildings and underground tunnels will be demolished, with asbestos abatement comprising a major cost component.

Eligible costs under the plan total $3.9 million, including a 15% contingency and 5% interest allowance. These costs encompass environmental remediation, demolition, abatement, monitoring, and brownfield plan implementation.

Mr. Clarke clarified that reimbursement to the developer is limited strictly to eligible expenses actually incurred under the approved brownfield plan. Any unspent funds remain unclaimed by the developer.

Ms. Dessy presented a financial projection illustrating the tax and revenue impact of the redevelopment. As of 2025, the property's taxable value is $625,000, with an estimated post-development value of $23.3 million based on an incremental buildout of 20 homes per year over five years, with home prices ranging between $500,000 and $600,000 and a projected 2% annual increase.

Two revenue capture points were identified: 10% of local increment revenue for administrative fees (about $400,000) and 50% of the state education tax for the State Brownfield Revolving Fund (about $50,000). The property had previously been tax-exempt for religious and charitable use. In 2025, property taxes are projected at $34,000, with an eight-year developer reimbursement period totaling $3.9 million. Following reimbursement, the BRA may capture up to five additional years of revenue ($3.6 million) before full tax reversion to local jurisdictions. After project completion, the site is projected to generate about $1.1 million annually in tax revenue.

Councilmember Knol expressed strong support for the project, citing her familiarity with the property from her membership on the Historic District Commission. She noted the extensive contamination, demolition challenges, and complex geography of the site as major impediments to prior redevelopment attempts. The brownfield program is the only feasible way to redevelop the site.

Councilmember Bridges asked the developer about changes made since the prior Optalis proposal. Mr. Clarke explained that Robertson Brothers purchased Optalis's contract, consolidating two separate projects into a unified development plan. The revised project eliminates the Community Redevelopment District (PA 210) component, which would have redirected additional tax revenue. The current plan is cohesive and fully deliverable.

Finance Director Skrobola confirmed that the city will continue to receive its existing tax revenue during the reimbursement period. Incremental tax revenue will fund developer reimbursement and BRA fees, after which the city and other jurisdictions will benefit from the full tax base. The city bears no financial loss liability, and no funding contribution is required.

City Manager Mekjian reviewed the financial timeline: the city retains its base taxes through 2034 while increment revenue reimburses the developer; from 2034 to 2039, the BRA captures funds for its revolving fund; afterward, the property returns fully to the tax roll.

City Manager Mekjian asked about groundwater contamination. Environmental Consultant Dessy explained that contamination is contained within a perched aquifer, is not migrating, and is managed through soil and groundwater treatment, gasketing, and the prohibition of wells on the property.

Councilmember Aldred expressed support, noting that such projects encourage sustainable redevelopment.

Mayor Rich asked about the project timeline. Mr. Clarke replied that final engineering is underway, with approval expected in three to four months. He anticipated closing on the property by late November or early December, beginning demolition over the winter, and starting construction in the spring. He projected paving and site preparation by late next year, followed by home construction.

Mayor Rich inquired about the progress of the lift station required for the Villas at Pebble Creek project. Assistant City Manager Mondora responded that the lift station is currently in the permitting phase with state agencies, and this regulatory review has been the primary delay. Construction is expected to begin approximately three months after the permit is issued, allowing time for procurement and pre-construction preparations.

Council was supportive of the proposed brownfield plan for the project, and consensus was reached to move the plan forward, with formal consideration and approval to occur at an upcoming City Council meeting, probably November 10.

DISCUSSION ON CITY CODE AMENDMENT TO PROVIDE FOR REGISTRATION AND INSPECTION OF RESIDENTIAL RENTAL DWELLINGS

Director of Planning and Community Development Charmaine Kettler-Schmult introduced this agenda item and noted that the discussion was intended as an initial review, with several items requiring council input before a final ordinance draft could be completed.

Building Official Lenhart explained that the city's existing ordinance provides for registration and exterior inspection of single-family rental dwellings but does not include apartment buildings or interior inspections. The city currently maintains registrations for approximately 800 single-family rental homes and 60 apartment complexes containing about 10,317 rental units.

Building Official Lenhart emphasized both the challenges and benefits of inspections, noting that without inspections, improperly maintained rental properties can negatively affect public health, safety, and welfare, as well as neighborhood aesthetics. With inspections, the city can ensure minimum housing standards for safety, fire prevention, ventilation, sanitation, and maintenance, while addressing blight and promoting community welfare.

Director Kettler-Schmult presented a comparison of inspection programs in nearby communities, noting that Farmington Hills currently performs exterior inspections for single-family rentals only. Southfield inspects both single- and two-family units, while Livonia, Troy, and Royal Oak conduct inspections for all one-family and multi-family rental dwellings.

Director Kettler-Schmult reviewed key elements from prior council discussions in 2022 and 2023, including inspection focus areas such as dryer venting, smoke alarms, GFCI outlets, and furnace (HVAC) systems; registration exemptions for properties inspected by other agencies; a three- to four-year inspection cycle; and potential use of third-party inspectors.

Councilmember Knol asked whether under the draft ordinance furnace inspections included full HVAC systems. Building Official Lenhart confirmed that the intent covers both heating and cooling systems, with greater emphasis on heating equipment due to carbon monoxide safety risks.

Mayor Rich asked whether inspections of large apartment complexes would include every unit or a sample of units. Building Official Lenhart said that inspections would be required for each unit, provided access is granted by tenants.

Mayor Pro Tem Dwyer reiterated that the city has over 10,000 apartment units, likely among the highest in Michigan, and expressed concern about the feasibility and cost of conducting inspections through a third-party service. He supported the program conceptually but cautioned about resource implications. Director Kettler-Schmult acknowledged these concerns and stated that fee structures and contracting costs had not yet been analyzed. She noted that some administrative work would still need to be performed in-house, even if a third-party provider is utilized.

City Manager Mekjian clarified that this discussion was focused primarily on ordinance language and that implementation details—including fee resolutions and administrative models—would return to council for future approval. Several models are under consideration, such as requiring apartment owners to self-certify inspections conducted by licensed contractors or implementing a staggered inspection schedule. Inspections could start with older facilities or by targeting high-risk systems. Ventilation systems, including bathroom vents, would also be included in inspections due to their connection to past fire incidents.

Building Official Lenhart added that new apartment buildings would be automatically covered by initial building inspections, with the resulting certificate of occupancy valid for three years before a separate rental inspection would be required.

Councilmember Boleware recalled that in prior discussions, the city considered a complaint-driven model for certain properties rather than universal inspections.

Councilmember Bridges expressed reservations about a comprehensive inspection requirement for all apartment buildings. He preferred a complaint-driven inspection model, arguing that the city should not impose inspections across all units without data showing a pattern of deficiencies. Inspections should target properties with documented issues or older complexes known to have maintenance problems. Implementing a broad inspection program without sufficient justification could create unnecessary administrative and financial burdens for both the city and property owners.

Councilmember Aldred supported the proposed program, citing research from comparable cities such as Troy, where routine inspections every two to three years are standard practice. Farmington Hills would not be an outlier by adopting a similar approach and regular inspections would improve safety and housing quality. He acknowledged that the city would need to design a sustainable cost structure and phased implementation to avoid overwhelming staff and property owners. He also raised specific questions about the draft ordinance language, including procedures for obtaining a warrant if entry to a rental unit is refused, whether inspection certificates are issued per unit or per complex, and how noncompliance in one unit affects others. He asked whether appeal fees should be refunded to property owners who successfully overturn inspection findings.

Councilmember Bridges inquired how due process protections would apply to apartment dwellings versus single-family rental properties. He raised questions about the legal framework for gaining entry to multi-unit residences and ensuring tenant rights are protected during inspections.

Councilmember Bruce expressed strong support for implementing a comprehensive apartment inspection program. He referenced his prior advocacy for the city's home inspection program, noting that initial opposition gave way to widespread approval once the program's benefits became evident. Farmington Hills' large and aging apartment stock—over 10,000 units—necessitates regular inspections for fire safety, maintenance, and public health. He warned against relying solely on complaint-based inspections, citing concerns about landlord retaliation. Tenants who report unsafe conditions could face eviction or non-renewal of leases, undermining the program's intent.

Councilmember Bruce recommended that new apartment buildings be exempt from inspection for at least 10 years. Older properties should be inspected on a three-year cycle, this could be potentially cost-neutral through permit and inspection fees. He emphasized the importance of checking critical safety systems, including smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, wiring, and plumbing. Proper maintenance benefits not only tenants but also neighboring homeowners, as neglected complexes contribute to blight and declining property values.

Attorney comments
City Attorney Joppich provided a detailed overview of the draft ordinance and relevant legal considerations related to the registration and inspection of residential rental dwellings. His office would distribute a prior legal memorandum previously presented to Council, which offers a comprehensive review of case law and statutory authority under the Housing Law of Michigan, Act 167.

Under Act 167, a tenant's consent is required for an inspection. If access is denied, the city may pursue a search warrant, though issuance is not guaranteed. The city must provide a factual basis demonstrating probable cause—such as exterior conditions, prior code issues, or information from the property owner—to justify the warrant request. Judges may or may not approve such requests, depending on the evidence provided.

Attorney Joppich noted that while the draft ordinance does not explicitly state that search warrants may be sought, the city's legal authority to obtain them is already established under existing law. He offered to include explicit language to that effect if Council preferred.

Addressing discussion points raised earlier in the meeting, Attorney Joppich responded to suggestions that inspections be complaint-driven only. He explained that under current state law, the city is already obligated to perform inspections on a complaint basis and therefore does not need a new ordinance to do so. If Council opted to adopt a complaint-only inspection policy, the city could operate under existing legal authority rather than creating a new regulatory framework. The ordinance as drafted is designed to go beyond complaint response, creating a proactive, cyclical inspection system for multi-family and rental properties.

Attorney Joppich reiterated that single-family exterior inspections already occur under separate local provisions, since Act 167 does not cover single-family or two-family dwellings.

Attorney Joppich reviewed procedural elements within the draft ordinance requiring further Council input:

- Council must decide whether to issue one license per complex (covering multiple units) or individual licenses per unit. Both models are legally permissible, but the chosen structure will affect administrative implementation and fee collection.

- Attorney Joppich discussed the need to establish an appeals process, noting that the ordinance currently leaves the appeal board designation blank, pending Council direction. Establishing this body is essential to ensure due process for property owners. Appeals would allow landlords to contest actions such as license suspension, revocation, or denial of a certificate of occupancy. Local appeals are intended to provide administrative remedy prior to any judicial review in circuit court, similar to how the Building Board of Appeals functions.
- Regarding inspection frequency, Act 167 requires that rental inspections occur at least once every four years. Cities may not exceed that time limit for cyclical inspection programs.
- Regarding whether newer apartment complexes might be exempted or delayed from initial inspections, Attorney Joppich cautioned that while the idea could be legally permissible, defining the appropriate age threshold for exemption would require further research. While building age can be determined, the deterioration rate of buildings varies by construction quality and maintenance history, making it difficult to set a one-size-fits-all standard. He recommended seeking industry expertise to determine best practices for age-based inspection exemptions, if Council wished to pursue that option.

Joppich concluded by reiterating key points: tenant consent is required for inspections; the Housing Law of Michigan already allows complaint-based inspections; Council must determine whether to establish a proactive four-year inspection cycle; and the city must decide how rental licensing and appeals will be structured. He also noted that further analysis would be required if building age-based exemptions are pursued.

Councilmember Boleware addressed concerns regarding the potential cost burden that an inspection program might place on apartment owners and tenants. Any new regulatory fees associated with inspections would likely be passed on to renters, further increasing rental housing costs. To mitigate this impact, Boleware proposed that the city explore percentage-based inspections, where a statistically representative sample of apartment units within each complex would be inspected. This approach is commonly used in other industries to ensure quality control without creating excessive costs, suggesting that inspecting approximately 15% of units per complex could be sufficient to gauge overall property conditions.

Mayor Rich recognized Phil Neuman, Chair of the Legislative Committee of the Detroit Metropolitan Apartment Association (DMAA).

Mr. Neuman explained that the DMAA represents between 90,000 and 120,000 rental units across the metropolitan Detroit region. Mr. Neuman is also a resident of Farmington Hills.

Mr. Neuman stated that the Association supports efforts to ensure safe and well-maintained housing but expressed concern that the proposed inspection and registration program could create a bureaucratic burden for both property owners and the city. He made the following points:

- The process of registering 10,000 local units simultaneously was potentially overwhelming for administrative staff.
- Inspections for every apartment unit would be costly and intrusive to tenants, many of whom may object to city inspectors entering their homes.
- Michigan Housing Law allows municipalities flexibility in designing inspection programs, including area-based, complaint-based, recurrent violation, compliance, or percentage-based inspections. He endorsed either a complaint-driven system or a percentage-based system, explaining that inspecting a subset of units could provide an accurate reflection of property conditions while limiting costs and

tenant disruptions. State law prohibits landlords from retaliating against tenants who file complaints with local authorities, which should help safeguard tenant rights.

Councilmember Bruce raised concerns about landlord retaliation despite legal protections.

Councilmember Bridges asked whether a percentage-based inspection model would still achieve the city's goal of ensuring safe, well-maintained apartment housing. Mr. Neuman replied that a complaint-based approach would be most effective, but a percentage-based model could also provide meaningful oversight. He suggested that if issues are discovered during a sample inspection, the city could then expand inspections to additional units within that complex.

Councilmember Bruce asked how large cities such as Southfield and Livonia manage similar inspection programs without significant administrative challenges.

Councilmember Knol referenced a staff-prepared chart showing that Royal Oak operates a rental inspection program, noting that the city should gather additional information on how Royal Oak conducts its inspections—specifically whether they occur on a percentage basis or apply to every unit. Understanding these models could help the city determine best practices for its own implementation.

Mr. Neuman pointed out that under state law, cities may extend the inspection interval to six years for apartment properties with no complaints during the previous six-year period. He would verify this provision and share the exact statutory reference.

Mayor Rich acknowledged that many questions remained and suggested that councilmembers channel follow-up questions through the City Manager's office, to prepare for continued discussion at a future meeting.

ADJOURNMENT
Mayor Rich closed discussion and adjourned the meeting at 7:26pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk