

**MINUTES  
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS  
PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING  
MASTER PLAN STUDY  
31555 W ELEVEN MILE ROAD  
FARMINGTON HILLS, MICHIGAN  
JULY 25, 2024, 6:00 P.M.**

**CALL MEETING TO ORDER**

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

**ROLL CALL**

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

Commissioners Absent:           Aspinall

Others Present:                    Director of Planning and Community Development Kettler-Schmult, City Planner Perdonik, Staff Planner Canty, City Attorney Schultz, Planning Consultant Tangari

**APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

**MOTION by Ware, support by Stimson, to approve the agenda as published.**

**Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.**

**MASTER PLAN STUDY IMPLEMENTATION STUDY SESSION**

**A. Discuss Draft Zoning Text Amendment 2, 2024, to Revise Various Provisions of Sections 34-3.1.25, 34-4.28, 34-4.31, 34-4.35, 34-4.36, and 34-4.40**

Referencing his July 18, 2024 memorandum *Draft Zoning Text Amendment (“ZTA”) 2, 2024*, City Planner Perdonik explained that tonight’s discussion would focus on the B-3 District, specifically changes to reclassify several uses within the District. Uses that were formerly principal permitted uses, such as drive-in/drive-through restaurants and gasoline service stations, would require special approval. Conversely, uses that were previously special uses, like coin-operated amusements, billiard halls, and indoor recreational activities, will become principal permitted uses. City Council has shown interest in creating new categories for uses like cigar bars and lounges.

**Rationale for reclassifying certain uses**

The rationale for reclassifying certain uses, such as automobile repair, vehicle washes, drive-throughs, and gas stations, into the special approval use category is to grant the Planning Commission more discretion, allowing the Commission to impose conditions that ensure compatibility with surrounding properties. Other nearby communities follow the same practice, where similar uses are treated as special uses due to their potential negative impact on neighboring properties. This approach is widely accepted and helps manage externalities that could lower the marketability of neighboring properties.

**Encouraging the highest and best commercial uses/Limiting certain new developments (gas stations, car washes) to existing sites**

The City wants to encourage the best commercial uses and create a strong distinction between what a commercial and a light industrial use is.

There is significant market pressure for new car washes and gas stations, yet the City has more than 20 existing gas stations and several car washes already. Does the City play the long game and wait for higher and better uses?

**A philosophical question: How best to balance current market demands with long-term community planning goals?**

Discussion underscored the importance of evaluating whether these types of businesses align with the community's vision, particularly regarding their placement and impact.

- By limiting new development/redevelopment regarding gas stations and car washes to sites that already have that use, the proposed draft includes the possibility of not allowing any new gas stations or car washes in the B-3 district, except as part of a PUD. The consideration under a PUD involves evaluating the use under different standards than permitted or special uses.
- At present, no applications for gas stations are being processed under permitted or special use, but there is one PUD application being reviewed.
- Car washes would be a permitted use in the ES district and the LI-1 district. The goal is to place noisy and potentially disruptive businesses in appropriate locations in order to maintain the community's character and marketability.
- The Commission addressed the importance of aligning zoning regulations with the community's master plan and long-term vision. This involves making strategic decisions now to ensure future development aligns with the desired character of the City. Master plan discussions have consistently focused on the type of community Farmington Hills aspires to be, and current zoning doesn't always reflect this vision.
- Alternatively, Commissioners cautioned that only a small portion of the City is subject to these changes, given that 65% is residential and a significant part of the remaining 35% is dedicated to office use. It was suggested that market demand should drive decisions and attractive, well-designed gas stations could add to the tax base.
- It was important to look at the big picture when making zoning changes. On the other hand, staff felt it was critical to “stop the bleeding,” in that the developable areas left in the city were being sought by less than highest, best uses.
- Discussion touched briefly on the need to provide Electric Vehicle charging stations throughout the City.

**Architectural and Landscape Standards**

City Planner Perdonik described a recent redevelopment of a gas station. Currently there were no standards for construction or facades in the zoning ordinance. The draft ordinance establishes architectural standards for gas stations.

Commission discussion included:

- General support for architectural and landscape standards.
- The Commission discussed whether providing more flexibility of use while putting some standards in place would resolve the issue of proliferation of gas stations and car washes. To some Commissioners, this made sense, and it also made sense to keep thinking about the redevelopment of the City in a larger sense.

- It came out in conversation that other communities have worked to limit these types of uses through their special use ordinances, and through zoning ordinance standards.

After considerable debate, the Commission directed staff to provide a map highlighting the B-3 zones. This will help contextualize the discussions and will help in understanding where different uses are permitted and the rationale behind these decisions, particularly concerning the placement of car washes and gas stations.

It appeared there was consensus to have some architectural standards on gas stations. There was less consensus with respect to trying to limit the number of gas stations in the City.

#### **Drive-throughs and lot adjacency requirements**

##### **Conflicting ordinance goals and community needs**

The draft zoning text amendment would amend the regulations associated with drive-through/drive-in restaurants, specifically regarding the requirement that a drive-through restaurant cannot be located on a zoning lot that is adjacent to an RA district. Sometimes strict adherence to this zoning requirement can lead to impractical results. Recently the Starbucks drive-through – prohibited by ordinance – at the West River Shopping Center was approved through a consent judgment.

Another ordinance mandates a 60' building setback from the road right-of-way, while also requiring vehicle stacking to be in the rear yard. These goals conflict.

Changing certain by-right uses to special approval uses allows the Commission to look at these issues on a case-by-case basis and has the advantage that the process calls for a noticed public hearing.

#### **Next steps**

The Commission discussed the future schedule for looking at zoning ordinance amendments. Tonight's discussion underscored the complexity of land use planning, balancing environmental concerns, market demands, and the community's long-term vision. Discussion also emphasized making careful, incremental changes to achieve the community's goals without drastically altering its character. Each decision comes with opportunity costs, and the Commission must weigh the benefits of any new development against potential alternatives. The Commission will continue to work through these issues during this implementation phase of the Master Plan.

#### **MOTION by Stimson, support by Varga, to adjourn.**

**Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:20pm.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Kristen Aspinall  
Planning Commission Secretary

/cem