

MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MEETING
COMMUNITY ROOM
JANUARY 24, 2022 – 6:00PM

The study session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Barnett at 6:07pm.

Council Members Present: Barnett, Boleware, Bridges, Bruce, Knol (arrived at 6:15pm), Massey, and Newlin

Council Members Absent: None

Others Present: City Manager Mekjian, City Clerk Smith, Assistant City Manager Valentine, Directors Brockway and Gardiner, Fire Chief Unruh and City Attorney Joppich

It was noted that the discussion on permanent outdoor seating would be held first.

PERMANENT OUTDOOR SEATING FOR RESTAURANTS

Ed Gardiner, Director of Planning and Community Development, explained that during COVID, Council approved temporary outdoor seating for restaurants and at a subsequent study session that temporary use was extended until the end of 2021. At that same study session, Council suggested reviewing permanent outdoor seating for restaurants. He explained that the zoning ordinance already allows for permanent outdoor seating and he reviewed those provisions of the ordinance. He added that one of the restaurants that was utilizing the temporary outdoor seating provisions has already been approved for permanent outdoor seating, but they expanded and covered the area under the temporary ordinance has now expired. He stated that his question to Council is whether or not they want to expand on the current ordinance provisions.

Discussion was held on those restaurants utilizing the temporary provisions and other restaurants that already have permanent outdoor seating. Mr. Gardiner stated that the restaurants utilizing the temporary ordinance have been notified to remove their outdoor seating and any temporary structures by the end of the month.

Council consensus was that they wanted to expand upon the current zoning ordinance to allow for covered structures including igloos and to include provisions that address the appearance of any temporary or permanent structures, safety features such as heaters, etc.

A suggestion to review the possibility of an entertainment district to attract new restaurants that could include outdoor dining, firepits, etc., and Orchard Lake Road was identified as a potential area.

Director Gardiner suggested that such an area might be good for food trucks, which has become more popular to allow for various food truck vendors in a central area with central seating.

Further discussion was held on a potential entertainment district for restaurants and if that would be on private property how the city could incentivize property owners.

Attorney Joppich stated the foundation would be for the city to have regulations in place allowing for this type of use through a special exception or special use permit. He also suggested requesting feedback from the industry to determine if there is an interest.

City Manager Mekjian summarized that the reason for bringing this to Council was to let them know that the temporary use ordinance had expired and to determine if Council wanted to suggest changes to the current zoning ordinance for permanent outdoor seating. He added that there seems to be a consensus to allow for permanent outdoor covered seating and questioned if this would require an ordinance amendment.

Attorney Joppich stated that the Planning Commission would need to review the ordinance and consider changes that would allow for covered areas and include aesthetic controls.

City Manager Mekjian stated that the suggestion for an entertainment district could be discussed as part of the master plan update.

It was suggested that the city review cooperative efforts with private businesses to utilize parking areas for such an entertainment district and that perhaps the city focus initially on an area for food trucks.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISCUSSION REGARDING PUBLIC ACT 210 AND PUBLIC ACT 255

Tia Brockway, Economic Development Director, explained that the discussion tonight focuses on opportunities for the city to expand its economic development tools. She reviewed with Council the current goals and tools the city utilizes and new opportunities under Public Act 210 and Public Act 255. She stated that staff would like to focus on Public Act 210, the Commercial Rehabilitation Act as the eligibility for Public Act 255, the Redevelopment Act, is more restrictive. She explained that next steps would include developing a policy to bring back to City Council for consideration. Requests under either would require public hearings before Council.

In response to questions of Council, it was noted that the city had not utilized these tools before partially due to lack of familiarity but also the city has been strict as far as approving tax abatements previously as there was not necessarily as great of a need as there is today. With changing times, staff felt it was a good time for this discussion. It was also stated that while the city's main focus was on PA 210 it did not mean that the city could not utilize PA 255 to assist with projects that may be eligible.

Assistant City Manager Valentine explained that these tools are designed for those projects that would not happen "but for" these tools to assist with the rehabilitation or redevelopment.

The consensus of Council was to have staff develop policies for both PA 210 and PA 255 to bring back before Council for consideration and to identify target areas as part of the master plan efforts.

ADJOURNMENT

The study session meeting adjourned at 7:17pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Pamela B. Smith, City Clerk