

MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
SPECIAL BUDGET STUDY SESSION
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM
MAY 5, 2026 – 4:00PM

The special budget study session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Rich at 4:02pm.

Council Members Present: Aldred, Boleware, Bridges, Bruce, Dwyer, Knol and Rich

Council Members Absent: None

Others Present: Acting City Manager Mondora, City Clerk Lindahl, Directors Aranowski, Brockway, Kettler-Schmult, Rushlow, Skrobola and Sullen-Winn

CENTRAL SERVICES/SUPPORT SERVICES

Director Aranowski began by expressing gratitude to the Council for their approval of the prior year's budget, which she credited with enabling the completion of numerous significant projects during FY25–26. She provided a comprehensive overview of those accomplishments:

- Completed the Windows 11 upgrade across more than 700 devices citywide.
- Implementation of the UKG time and attendance system continued, with the Police Department's dispatch division currently utilizing the system and patrol onboarding soon. She acknowledged that Phase 2 presented scheduling complexities for the Fire Department, which will continue using its existing LaTeX system, while Special Services Wave 3 is now live.
- Annual penetration testing of IT infrastructure continued, and the IT department was awarded \$150,000 through a FY24 State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program, with \$50,000 allocated annually over three years to support those efforts.
- Implementation of online plan review software (BlueBeam for Engineering; ePlanSoft for Planning and Community Development)
- Upgrades to conference rooms throughout City Hall with the latest technology; the completion of more than 25 server upgrades including updated licensing
- Hiring of IT Systems Analyst Nooron Ahmad and additional buyer Art Walker
- Rollout of enhanced password security measures and a self-service portal
- Launch of Help Desk 365 for improved service request tracking; new on-premise backup storage for file servers, virtual machines, and Microsoft 365
- Implementation of a new communications and video system for the Emergency Operations Center at Fire Department headquarters
- Update and relocation of the network switch at the parks maintenance building

Director Aranowski then outlined upcoming projects for FY26–27, including:

- Replacement of the outdated electronic sign at DPW
- Addition of wayfinding signage across the Hawk campus
- Launch of the FHgov website redesign
- Transition of remaining analog POTS lines and alarm systems to updated technology
- Upgrade of Laserfiche software for improved document management
- Implementation of a paging system for emergency alerts and general communications in appropriate city buildings
- Upgrade of the storage server for improved performance and capacity

Senior IT Analyst Chris Barth identified the two most impactful accomplishments as the Windows 11 upgrade and the self-service password portal as they work in tandem to significantly strengthen the city's security.

Discussion on Website Redesign and AI Capabilities

Councilmember Boleware inquired about the planned website redesign, asking specifically about the current platform's limitations and whether AI capabilities would be incorporated. Director Aranowski confirmed that the city's current platform, MuniWeb, has been in service for approximately 10 to 15 years and that service quality has declined. She stated the city intends to issue an RFP for a new platform.

Councilmember Aldred expressed strong support for AI integration on the new website, specifically citing the ability for residents to query information in any language and to more easily access planning-related documents without manually searching through individual meeting minutes. Director Aranowski confirmed that AI capability, multilingual support, and ADA compliance would be key criteria in the RFP evaluation. She noted that after consulting with Rochester Hills, which recently issued a similar RFP, full ADA compliance solutions from top vendors are running well over \$100,000, and the city intends to fold that requirement into the new platform procurement rather than pursue a separate solution now.

Councilmember Aldred described the difficulty of accessing planning information on the current website as a significant shortcoming, stating that tracking a development project through individual planning commission meeting minutes is "almost impossible." He expressed optimism that AI could help residents find information intuitively.

Related Capital

Councilmember Knol raised a question regarding the line item for "Financial Software Core ERP," asking for clarification. Finance Director Skrobola confirmed this refers to the city's BSA/BSE software—the enterprise resource planning system used for financial operations, including treasury, building, and assessing functions, now consolidated into a single platform. He described the BSA Payments module as "a big upgrade on the old Point and Pay system" that has been well received.

Director Skrobola outlined the intended purpose of the \$200,000 items within the technology and innovations section: enhanced business intelligence reporting, analytics, potential KPI tracking, and an advanced budget module to replace the current spreadsheet-based budgeting process. He noted that previously allocated funds for older enhancements are now covered elsewhere, and that exploring a dedicated budget module is a priority.

Councilmember Knol raised the concept of a single sign-on experience for residents, where a single username could be used to access all city services. Director Aranowski confirmed this is aspirational and connected to the website redesign effort, noting that different payment systems across departments currently complicate the ability to fully unify the experience.

Director Skrobola elaborated that BSA Payments has been a major step forward for city hall-based transactions and expressed a desire to eventually see the platform expand into parks and recreation, which currently uses the aging RecTrac system along with standalone software for the Hawk (OurPeople, NettyHaddy) and the driving range (Pineapple).

PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Director of Planning and Community Development Charmaine Ketter-Schmult opened with a summary of the department's mission: to monitor and guide the city's development, redevelopment, and property maintenance through review and enforcement of applicable codes and ordinances. She noted the department has four divisions—Planning, Community Development, Building, and Zoning (Code Enforcement)—with a total staff of 22.

Director Ketter-Schmult described a period of significant staff turnover and rebuilding, noting that the city planner, staff planner, secretary to the director, and a part-time building official had all been replaced or filled. Three new employees in the Zoning Division—a supervisor, an inspector, and a clerk—were hired within the prior two months, bringing the department to full staff. Two vacancies remain in the Building Department (mechanical and plumbing inspectors), with third-party contracted services being used to fulfill plan review and on-site inspections in the interim.

Accomplishments highlighted included optimization of the BSA system to accept online permitting; coordination of building construction projects through the PZE module to improve interdepartmental cooperation with Engineering; automation of citywide enforcement follow-up inspections; transition to BSA Cloud; and implementation of ePlanSoft for electronic review and processing of building permits. The department is in the process of converting the plan review room from paper-based to fully electronic reviews.

Councilmember Boleware noted that the efficiency goal of inspections performed within 48 hours had dropped to 85% and asked whether there was a formal standard. Director Ketter-Schmult confirmed the goal is 90%, attributing the shortfall to staffing vacancies and the transitional challenges of moving to electronic workflows. A similar question was raised about

site plans reviewed within 15 business days, which had dropped from approximately 95% to 70%. Director Ketter-Schmult attributed this also to staffing and the learning curve of the new electronic system.

Councilmember Bridges asked whether the philosophy of the Zoning Division would change under new staffing. Director Ketter-Schmult confirmed that the immediate priority is getting the three new staff members trained and operationally grounded for the current enforcement season, which is heavily focused on tall grass and nuisance complaints. She noted the new supervisor has expressed interest in pursuing additional enforcement topics once a solid foundation is established.

Councilmember Bridges also raised concerns about the condition of the right-of-way areas along Orchard Lake Road, including displaced concrete parking bumpers and debris, and asked for enforcement attention in that area as the department reaches full capacity.

Discussion on Information Accessibility

Councilmember Boleware raised the question of how residents and council members learn about new commercial developments—specifically citing the announcement of a Restoration Hardware Outlet locating in the city—noting that they had seen it first on social media rather than through any city communication. Acting City Manager Karen Mondora confirmed this was a recent public announcement.

Councilmember Dwyer raised concern about the condition of the former Ginopolis site, describing visible exterior deterioration including overwhelming overgrowth, and suggested someone should inspect the building's interior to assess whether it has reached a level of disrepair warranting action. Director Ketter-Schmult explained that such assessments are generally triggered by visible exterior conditions; the building could still be structurally viable.

CDBG Fund

Acting City Manager Mondora noted that questions had arisen the prior day regarding playground equipment in Old Town Park and the condition of tennis courts in that area. Director Ketter-Schmult explained that this area has consistently qualified as a low-to-moderate income area under HUD regulations, making it eligible for CDBG funding on an area basis. She indicated that the department intends to engage Special Services to identify what specific needs and improvements could be implemented at that location within CDBG eligibility requirements.

Councilmember Knol noted the park has a relatively newer play structure but expressed concern about the condition of the tennis courts, suggesting they could be repaved and striped to serve dual use as both tennis and pickleball courts. Director Ketter-Schmult confirmed there is also a paved area adjacent to the tennis courts previously used for basketball that has not

been in active use, and that consultation with Special Services about the park's master plan would be necessary before any decisions are made.

Councilmember Aldred suggested the paved area could potentially be repurposed for parking or another community use and asked for an update in the weekly staff report.

CITY CLERK

Clerk Lindahl noted that new election equipment will need to be purchased in 2027 as the current contract will expire. The state has cautioned municipalities that funding may not be available and they should budget accordingly.

Clerk Lindahl acknowledged that FOIA processing demand is increasing significantly, particularly as requestors increasingly use AI-generated requests that submit broad "any and all" language, requiring staff to review and redact extensive documentation for a single request. She noted that her secretary, the primary FOIA processor, can spend an entire day on a single request. Clerk Lindahl acknowledged the department may need to consider a full-time dedicated FOIA processor in the upcoming years.

Councilmember Boleware noted from their experience with other municipalities that AI tools are now being used to assist with FOIA, automatically flagging and redacting personal information such as dates of birth and phone numbers based on formatting rules and that several cities are reporting early success with these tools, though human review remains necessary. Clerk Lindahl confirmed awareness of such tools and expressed hope that as AI tools mature and document management systems like Laserfiche integrate AI search capabilities, the processing burden could be reduced.

Councilmember Knol noted that AI is on one hand encouraging more FOIA requests, but on the other hand offering the potential to process them more quickly. Clerk Lindahl agreed, expressing optimism that if more records are made searchable online, residents may self-serve rather than submit formal requests.

Election Workers

Councilmember Knol asked about election workers, noting that the prior year's actual was \$85,000 (reflecting only a city election), while the projected figures of \$214,000 were consistent across three years. Clerk Lindahl confirmed this reflects the alternating election cycle: FY26–27 will include both August and November state elections; FY27–28 will include local and presidential primary elections; and FY28–29 will again include August and November elections.

Councilmember Knol asked whether precinct consolidation and the growth in early voting and permanent absentee ballots could allow for a reduction in election inspector counts and associated costs. Clerk Lindahl replied that any savings would be minor in the near term, and that the city needs real data over a longer period of early voting and absentee ballot utilization

before confidently reducing inspector counts in lower-turnout precincts. She noted that for some smaller precincts with high absentee rates, a reduction may eventually become feasible.

COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Director of Communications and Community Engagement Vickie Sullen-Winn opened by thanking the Council for three years of continued support and outlined a series of measurable improvements in community outreach. She reported that more residents are opening city emails, visiting the website, and following the city on social media than the prior year. Social media engagement has more than doubled. YouTube views nearly doubled. Digital brochure views increased by approximately one million. The city received more than 13,000 media mentions, which Director Sullen-Winn characterized as a strong presence despite a slight year-over-year dip.

Influencer Strategy

Director Sullen-Winn highlighted the department's launch of its first external ambassador strategy, which included a partnership with a well-known Michigan influencer to help expand the reach of the annual Hawk golf outing. She announced that in June, the department will launch a second influencer campaign focused on "A Day in the Life of Farmington Hills," featuring three influencers who will visit restaurants and city amenities beyond the Hawk. She noted that \$2,000 in support from the city's PR firm partnership will fund this initiative at no additional city expense.

New Staff and Internal Influencer Program

Director Sullen-Winn announced the addition of Communications Manager Lester Booker who has been tasked with leading a new internal influencer program using staff-driven storytelling to highlight city services and organizational culture on platforms such as LinkedIn and the internal newsletter.

Upcoming Initiatives

Director Sullen-Winn outlined several forthcoming launches: the city's new mission, vision, and values to be incorporated throughout the organization; the city's first official branding guidelines; a new resident welcome guide to replace the current disjointed printed materials; a series of voter education videos in partnership with the City Clerk's Office; dedicated deer and wildlife communication content; and a new short-form video podcast series titled "5 Q's with Council" to give residents a personal look at elected officials through a brief Q&A format, to be featured in *Farmington Hills in Focus* and across digital platforms.

Councilmember Dwyer asked about the significant increase in the professional and contractual budget line from \$74,000 to \$250,000. Director Sullen-Winn explained that the \$74,000 figure represented only an initial advertising commitment when she first joined the city; with Council's support, the budget was subsequently expanded to encompass media strategy, crisis

communications, social media monitoring services, and other contractual services that supplement the in-house team.

Councilmember Dwyer also asked about the marketing manager salary increase from \$88,000 to \$94,000 and was informed this resulted from a citywide market-based salary study.

Councilmember Aldred noted that personnel costs are up approximately 12%, which is somewhat larger than other departments. Director Sullen-Winn explained that two of her longest-standing employees had been "woefully underpaid" and that the market adjustment was necessary and welcome.

Councilmember Bridges asked whether the department could tie marketing expenditures to revenue outcomes for Special Services. Director Sullen-Winn acknowledged a direct 1:1 ratio is not possible but cited increases in Hawk venue rental reservations since the "Farmington Hills I Do" event marketing strategy was launched as a concrete example of measurable impact.

Councilmember Dwyer raised the question of whether press releases—particularly for serious incidents such as homicides—are shared with Council and the Mayor at the time of release. Director Sullen-Winn acknowledged this was not always the practice, explaining that police press releases are often limited in detail by design during active investigations, but affirmed that a consensus was reached.

A brief discussion ensued regarding a planned promotional video partnership with SEMCOG for the International Mile corridor between 12 and 13 Mile Road on Orchard Lake, to be filmed in June or July. Director Sullen-Winn confirmed this is a no-cost partnership, with SEMCOG producing the video and the city providing drone footage and legacy imagery. Council members were invited to participate in the background filming.

Director Sullen-Winn also noted that PeachJar, the platform used to communicate with school families, has become a pay-to-play service, and that the department is working through how to maintain access to that audience, particularly for youth programming. She stated this may require a future budget allocation.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICES

Director Rushlow opened by characterizing the department's budget as relatively stable, noting an average increase of approximately 4% over the last three-year average. He identified the most notable change as an increase in the Refuse Fund, driven by a contractual change in tipping fees for curbside recycling now being paid through the waste services contractor that manages the recycling facility.

Project Overview

Director Rushlow described the department's approach as a complete asset management strategy, coordinating drainage improvements and water main work ahead of road reconstruction. He noted this year's water main project remains focused in the area around Farmington Road and 12 Mile, covering the Westbrook Manor and Kendallwood subdivisions, with the Westbrook Manor Phase 4 (estimated at \$7–8 million) planned for FY27.

Major Roads

Director Rushlow noted a couple of projects planned for 2027, both FAC (Federal Aid Committee) funded on Farmington Road: the 10 to 12 Mile segment and the 13 to 14 Mile segment. The FAC funding formula typically provides 80% federal and 20% local match, though the split varies by project.

Local Roads

Major projects planned for 2027 include the Greencastle subdivision, Richland Gardens Phase 2, and a gravel road conversion in the Woodlands subdivision.

Food Waste Recycling

Mayor Rich raised a question about food waste composting programs in Southfield and Farmington, asking why those communities appear to have implemented programs at minimal cost while a proposal to Farmington Hills came with a \$2 million price tag. Director Rushlow explained that Farmington's program uses paper yard waste bags accepted at their regular pickup, directed to the SPRT facility in Wixom. However, he noted that Farmington Hills, as a large community, would overwhelm SPRT's current capacity.

He confirmed SPRT is expanding, and that any programmatic advancement in Farmington Hills would be dependent on the Make Food Not Waste team securing grants for the city's program—not a \$2 million general fund expenditure.

Rain Gardens and Green Stormwater Infrastructure

Mayor Rich raised a question about the potential to promote rain gardens and green stormwater management as a way to address frequent large storm events. Director Rushlow acknowledged that in-road reconstruction projects, the constrained right-of-way makes it difficult to add features such as rain gardens or retention ponds. He noted, however, that the city updated its stormwater management standards which now require infiltration basins as part of development site reviews—a shift from simply digging large detention ponds toward returning water to the groundwater table.

Councilmember Aldred mentioned a RainSmart Rebates program offered by Oakland County that he had learned about at an Earth Day event.

Facility Maintenance

Councilmember Boleware raised concerns about the appearance of the Jon Grant Community Center, noting water-stained ceiling tiles consistent with prior roof leaks, and noting that the building gives the appearance of potential closure, particularly in a neighborhood that already feels underserved. Director Rushlow confirmed the roof was recently replaced. Assistant Director Gushard clarified that several leaks discovered during the roof replacement have been corrected, and one additional drainage issue is being addressed in coordination with the contractor. She confirmed that stained ceiling tiles are a maintenance item that building staff can address.

Councilmember Bridges raised concern about the condition of the county-maintained right-of-way on Orchard Lake Road near the 696 interchange, noting debris accumulation near the city's welcome signage. He asked whether a chargeback arrangement with Oakland County could allow the city to take on maintenance of those areas. DPW Superintendent Schueller confirmed that the department already performs roadside cleanup on some county-maintained problematic locations and will look at this specific location.

Councilmember Boleware also raised a pothole issue at the Middlebelt and Morningview entrance apron, which the HOA president has reported to Oakland County without response. Superintendent Schueller agreed to reach out to the county.

Councilmember Dwyer raised concerns about the extended timeline and periods of apparent inactivity on the Halsted Road 8-to-9 Mile project. Director Rushlow and City Engineer Saksewski explained that concrete road projects require a mandatory 10-day cure time between pours, during which no visible work can occur.

Also noted was the contractor was unable to reach their striping subcontractor to complete pavement markings before reopening the road. Acting City Manager Mondora noted that PK Contracting is effectively the only road striping contractor operating in Southeast Michigan due to consolidation of competition.

Councilmember Aldred raised a concern that pavement markings from the prior season have faded prematurely. City Engineer Saksewski confirmed this is a recognized issue and described new quality control measures being adopted from the county, including testing material application rates per mile and using test plates to verify paint thickness. He noted the use of thermoplastic paint, which is a high-quality, melted-plastic material. Superintendent Schueller noted that aggressive winter plowing also contributes to wear.

Additional Fleet Mechanic

Councilmember Aldred asked about the addition of a new mechanic position in the DPW Maintenance field budget. Superintendent Schueller explained that the fleet has grown significantly, and overtime for mechanics has been extensive—not unusual for mechanics to

work 10 to 11 hour days during the week. He noted the fleet includes approximately 400 pieces of equipment across all departments, with Police and Fire servicing needs being a constant priority.

Councilmember Aldred asked whether a smaller fleet or fleet leasing could be explored as an alternative. Finance Director Skrobola responded that the city had previously conducted a thorough evaluation with Enterprise fleet partners and found the savings to be extremely marginal, with the city's well-maintained fleet and cash purchasing approach proving cost-effective. He contrasted this with a prior experience at another municipality where fleet disinvestment had been extremely costly.

Councilmember Knol asked Superintendent Schueller to elaborate on his comment about being unable to hire 18-year-olds for mechanic positions. He explained that HR policy has restricted hiring in the garage to those 18 and older due to it being a safety-sensitive environment, but this leaves the city at a competitive disadvantage because private employers can recruit mechanical talent before the city can bring candidates in. He noted the issue is an ongoing conversation with HR.

Mayor Rich highlighted that both Farmington Hills Schools and Oakland Schools' Wixom campus have robust CTE mechanic programs serving juniors and seniors, and suggested the city explore partnerships for internships, co-op placements, or apprenticeships.

Municipal Street Fund

Finance Director Skrobola provided a brief overview of the Municipal Street Fund, characterizing it as a cash-handling mechanism rather than an operational budget. He explained it receives road property tax revenues—reflecting updated road millages, the effort to offset historical Headley Amendment losses, and citywide property value growth—and distributes them to the major and local street funds on a 70/30 split. He noted a deliberate spend-down of fund balance of approximately \$900,000 in the out-years, designed to direct funds into the street funds for use without destabilizing the funding stream.

Councilmembers asked for clarification on a small revenue line item labeled "Bill of Michigan." Finance Director Skrobola acknowledged he was uncertain of the specific detail and committed to providing an explanation in the weekly staff report.

Major Road Fund

No additional questions were raised beyond those addressed in the Department of Public Services overview.

Local Road Fund

City Engineer Sakewski provided a summary of current year and upcoming fiscal year road projects as detailed in the Department of Public Services section above.

City Engineer Saksewski noted that the city's overall road condition has improved significantly. Major roads are in considerably better shape than they were when local road investment was scaled up, and all roads rated under a 3 on the pavement condition index are addressed in the five-year plan.

Acting City Manager Mondora noted that as pavement conditions improve, more funding can be directed toward cost-effective preventive treatments—a concept known as "save the fives," reflecting the most cost-effective point on the pavement deterioration curve at which to intervene.

City Engineer Saksewski acknowledged the political difficulty of spending money on roads that appear in acceptable condition but emphasized the long-term cost savings.

Related Capital

Councilmember Knol raised a question regarding the \$75,000 line item for electric vehicle charging stations on page 297. She questioned the need for charging infrastructure given that the city does not currently have electric vehicles in its fleet and noted that there are already underutilized public charging stations at various locations around town. Acting City Manager Mondora confirmed that she had previously recommended placing this item on hold pending greater clarity on the industry. She noted that a prior evaluation found this campus was not particularly attractive to charging station manufacturers due to the short-duration nature of visits.

Councilmember Knol suggested that the \$75,000 currently allocated for EV charging stations be redirected to parks and recreation needs, particularly given the Council's discussions over the prior two nights about the need for additional parks funding. She specifically noted those funds could potentially serve as matching dollars for a \$500,000 county grant for new playground equipment.

Acting City Manager Mondora noted that if the county grant is pursued, the total project (including parking lot improvements and playground equipment) could reach approximately \$1.2 million, with a 10% city match required. She acknowledged the possibility of scoping just the playground component if needed.

Finance Director Skrobola confirmed that the \$75,000 EV charging allocation could be repurposed to parks and recreation.

BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

District Court

Finance Director Skrobola noted that the approximately \$300,000 increase in the district court budget over the prior two years is attributable entirely to personnel costs and not to capital or operational purchases. He clarified that while the city approves the lump-sum allocation to the

court, it does not approve line-item budgets for the court; that review is conducted by city staff in collaboration with the court administrator and deputy administrator.

Councilmember Bridges suggested that the court administrator Matt Friedrich be invited to a future study session to discuss the court's budget in more detail, noting this was done in prior years.

Multiracial/Multicultural Commission

Councilmember Dwyer raised the status of the multiracial and multicultural commission, noting it had been discussed a year prior without resolution.

Councilmember Boleware recalled that at a prior study session, it was determined the commission was not originally a chartered commission and that the prior city manager had been tasked with reviewing its status, after which Council intended to reconfigure it in some manner. However, no follow-up action was taken.

Mayor's Youth Council

Mayor Rich noted that the Mayor's Youth Council has been active, with four students sent to MML. She raised the question of whether a more robust conference experience—such as an overnight or out-of-state conference—should be considered.

Councilmember Knol noted that past chaperoning challenges have been a limiting factor for out-of-town events. Acting City Manager Mondora noted that MML's programming structure is shifting, with one day of programming and one day focused on a legislative visit to the state capital.

Beautification Commission

Councilmember Knol provided a status update on the Beautification Commission, noting declining attendance at its annual awards ceremony and declining participation from subdivisions in the award program. She reported that the commission is internally divided between maintaining the traditional ceremony format and adopting a more casual event with vendors and networking. She noted that subdivisions wishing to receive a second award sign are able to do so, resolving the prior year's concern on that topic.

Community Health Commission

Councilmember Charlie Starkman highlighted the Community Health Commission's high level of activity, contrasting it with what he described as stagnation on the Parks and Recreation Commission due to frequent no-shows. Mayor Rich confirmed that letters had been sent to non-attending Parks and Recreation Commission members advising that non-response by May 15th would be treated as a resignation.

Emergency Preparedness Commission

Councilmember Aldred noted ongoing confusion about the proper process for the Emergency Preparedness Commission (EPC) to spend its budget allocation. City Clerk Lindahl clarified that the staff liaison must be the one to process all expenditures using the proper purchasing policy procedure and documentation; the commission may request expenditures but cannot process them independently. Finance Director Skrobola offered to assist in standardizing the process.

Arts Commission

A Councilmember noted that the Arts Commission had spent its \$5,000 budget allocation on benches and landscaping outside the theater entrance, but that the invoice may have been misrouted to the City Manager's budget rather than the Arts Commission's budget line.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic Development Director Cristia Brockway opened her presentation by noting that economic development has significantly accelerated in the city, not only in new retail and restaurant activity but also in health care and R&D business space. She highlighted two major city initiatives currently advancing:

Grand River Corridor Streetscape

Director Brockway described a streetscape plan along the Grand River corridor developed in partnership with consulting firm Grisham Metz. She noted that MDOT has been extremely receptive to the concept of linear parks—small pocket parks along the sidewalk—and described the vision as including musical instrument installations and visual traffic calming elements, similar to installations on 9 Mile Road in Eastpointe. A market study has been completed, with data being actively shared with potential investors and developers. The Detroit News featured the city in relation to this initiative the prior month.

Director Brockway also confirmed that a \$775,000 federal grant request has been submitted through Senator Peters' office to help fund streetscape improvements, and that the city is still on the shortlist for consideration.

Mural Program

Director Brockway introduced a planned city-initiated mural program, to be piloted along the Grand River Corridor between Orchard Lake Road and Angster Road. The program will involve leasing building walls from businesses (at a nominal rate of \$1 for 5 years) and commissioning artists to paint and maintain murals. The city will issue an RFP for artist selection, with the Arts Commission assisting in mural selection. The goal is at least 5 murals per year within the corridor, funded from the \$100,000 portion of the \$300,000 corridor improvement budget line. The remaining \$200,000 is designated for linear park landscape improvements, with the intention of completing one location per year within the Grand River corridor. A detailed presentation is scheduled for the June 8 study session.

Part-Time Staff Request

Director Brockway requested the addition of a part-time staff position to help with business retention outreach—visiting existing businesses in the city and ensuring they have access to resources—thereby freeing Director Brockway to focus on attraction and ongoing projects. The Council received the request favorably.

Consultant Budget

Councilmember Aldred asked about the \$35,000 consultant line item. Director Brockway explained it covers AKT Peerless (Brownfield and incentive assistance), a placemaking consultant (approximately \$10,000), and an allocation of approximately \$40,000 for work with Ben Carlyle on economic development and planning adjustments within the community.

Financing the New Activity Center

Mayor Rich stated that it is time to schedule a dedicated Council work session to develop a financing plan before she is asked by the press to explain how the project will be funded. Finance Director Skrobola noted that Brownfield Authority funds—approximately \$3 million in undesignated fund balance—could potentially be applicable, citing the precedent of \$1.6 million in Brownfield funds used toward the Hawk project. He also referenced potential use of the Brownfield Housing TIF for projects that include an affordable housing component. Councilmember Aldred asked whether Brownfield tools could be used to encourage redevelopment of the site adjacent to the hospital.

Director Brockway noted the interaction between Brownfield TIF and the Grand River Corridor TIF district would require careful analysis.

Mayor Rich called for the meeting to schedule a dedicated financing session as soon as possible, noting that both Council members Aldred and Knol have scheduling constraints in late May.

There was consensus of council to schedule a special Council study session tentatively set for Wednesday, May 13, 2026, at 5:45 PM—to develop a financing plan for the new activity center, exploring all options including Brownfield funds, Brownfield Housing TIF, and other creative financing mechanisms.

Brownfield Redevelopment Authority

Director Brockway presented the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority budget (pages 312–315). She highlighted the \$200,000 line item for "eligible projects / BRA grants for redevelopment," which was established in the 2024–2025 budget cycle. This Brownfield Revolving Loan Fund grant is intended to assist property owners and small businesses with demolition (including partial façade improvements), asbestos/lead/mold mitigation, and other qualifying brownfield-eligible expenses, without requiring a full brownfield plan. The goal is to address obsolete properties and encourage improvement throughout the city.

Director Brockway confirmed that recently approved projects such as the Sarah Fisher redevelopment and the Emerson 2 project on Northwestern will not appear as budget line items until tax increment revenue begins to be generated from those sites.

She noted that the Emerson 2 project has escalated from an \$85 million to a \$105 million development cost, and that the developer is seeking to use the Brownfield Housing TIF to help close the gap. Director Brockway explained that under recent changes to Michigan law, housing projects with even one unit at or below 120% of area median income (AMI) can qualify for the Brownfield Housing TIF. She clarified that Farmington Hills is not a "core community" under state designation, which limits the scope of transformational brownfield financing available compared to communities like Southfield with the Northland project.

Councilmember Boleware expressed skepticism that rental rates of \$2,400–\$2,600 per month truly constitute "affordable housing," though Director Brockway acknowledged this is determined by state and county AMI calculations that include high-income communities like West Bloomfield and Birmingham, inflating the AMI threshold.

Finance Director Skrobola confirmed that the entire city was designated as a Brownfield District approximately 13–14 years ago, meaning any eligible expense under the Brownfield Act, anywhere in the city, can theoretically be brought to the Brownfield Board and City Council for approval.

Corridor Improvement Authority

Director Brockway presented the Corridor Improvement Authority budget, noting that the CIA fund has grown from \$0 at its inception to over \$1.3 million—a figure Councilmember Bridges credited to significant growth in property values along the Grand River corridor.

The two major expenditure line items are:

- \$100,000 for the city-initiated mural program
- \$200,000 for linear park and corridor landscape improvements, to be implemented via a forthcoming RFP for landscape design and construction, completing one location per year

Director Brockway confirmed that operational and maintenance costs for the linear parks would be funded through the CIA going forward. She estimated a 5 to 10 year timeline to complete improvements along the entire corridor, with the first improvements anticipated to begin in fiscal year 2027.

Councilmember Starkman asked when the first park would be complete. Director Brockway stated she hopes to see visible improvements beginning next year, and that the timeline could accelerate with additional grant funding.

FINANCE DEPARTMENT

Finance Director Skrobola presented the Finance Department. On the consultant line item of \$50,000 on page 91, he noted this is intended for investment research to explore options for

improving the city's investment return, referencing a 31% benchmark discussed the prior evening.

Post-Employment Benefits

Finance Director Skrobola noted the post-employment benefits reflect a five-year actuarial study baked into the current projections, with subsequent years expected to see incremental increases of \$500,000 to \$700,000 annually reflecting normal benefit accretion. He also reported that the city expects a fourth consecutive year of nominal investment performance above investment grade—not outstanding, but sufficient to sustain the current funding approach.

Inter-fund Transfers

Finance Director Skrobola briefly noted that the inter-fund transfers reflect one-time savings from bond refinancing and ongoing savings from the drain project, as discussed during the prior evening's session.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

ADJOURNMENT

The special budget study session adjourned at 7:32pm

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk