

**MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
STUDY SESSION
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM
OCTOBER 12, 2026 – 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, Dwyer, Knol, Rich and Starkman

Councilmembers Absent: None

Others Present: Acting City Manager Mondora, City Clerk Lindahl, Directors Brown, Kettler-Schmult and Skrobola, Planning Consultant Carlisle and City Attorneys Joppich and Romer

The closed session started at 6:01pm

CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL TO ENTER INTO A CLOSED SESSION TO DISCUSS COLLECTIVE BARGAINING NEGOTIATIONS WITH INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIREFIGHTERS UNDER SECTION 8(1)(C) OF THE MICHIGAN OPEN MEETINGS ACT. (NOTE: COUNCIL WILL RETURN TO OPEN SESSION IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE CLOSED SESSION).

MOTION by Aldred, support by Bridges, that the City Council of Farmington Hills hereby approves entering into a closed session to discuss collective bargaining negotiations with International Association of Firefighters under Section 8(1)(c) of the Michigan Open Meetings Act. (Note: Council will return to open session immediately following the closed session).

Roll Call Vote:

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

Nays: NONE

Absent: NONE

Abstentions: NONE

MOTION CARRIED 7-0.

The open session resumed at 6:22pm

DISCUSSION REGARDING THE SITE PLAN REVIEW PROCESS FOR ZONING TEXT AMENDMENTS AND CITY CODE AMENDMENTS

Mayor Rich explained that the site plan review standards were among the first items identified as "low hanging fruit" to optimize and modernize. The goals were to consolidate the standards in one place in the zoning ordinance and to give the development community a path to submit more complete plans to the review bodies. She said this would require more work at the front end but would make the process "fast, fair, and predictable."

Director Kettler-Schmult noted that a companion City Code amendment would accompany the zoning text amendment when it goes before Council. It would remove confusing site plan

language from the City Code so that the zoning ordinance becomes the single location for all information. She said the update clearly defines which projects qualify for administrative approval. Past practice had relied on judgment calls by the City Planner about where the line falls between administrative and Planning Commission review, particularly for redevelopment in an established community. The update also clarifies approval terms and renewals, and it adds a table of submittal requirements for each stage of review.

Planning Consultant Carlisle said the city's earlier ordinance audit found that the ordinance lacked a defined site plan review process. The current requirements are scattered across the zoning code, general code, and engineering sections. He said this leads to incomplete submittals that consume staff, Planning Commission, and Council time. The proposed amendments would do the following:

- Completely replace Section 34-6.1 and remove the related City Code section.
- Establish two separate paths. Administrative review would cover minor alterations, less intense use changes, and accessory buildings. It would not require preliminary and final review but would allow staff to waive unnecessary submittal items. It would also let the zoning administrator send a project to the Planning Commission at their discretion. Full site plan review would cover major site improvements, major tenant buildouts, and new redevelopment through a two-step preliminary and final process. It would go to the Planning Commission and, in some cases, City Council.
- Codify submittal requirements for each stage, including a list for full site plan review, along with clear review standards for staff and the Planning Commission.
- Add life-cycle provisions, including sunset clauses requiring reapproval if approved site plans expire, so projects keep moving.

He acknowledged a learning curve, particularly for smaller developers who work only in Farmington Hills, and said upfront submittal requirements may be somewhat greater than before. He noted that of the eight developer groups who participated earlier at the listening session, he had worked with about six in other communities. Director Kettler-Schmult added that the code already provides for pre-application meetings.

Councilmember Bridges asked whether staff could handle increased administrative review. Director Kettler-Schmult responded that administrative approvals have been increasing over the past two years and closely match what the proposed code calls for. She said staff, together with the consultant, are already handling a significant volume.

City Planner Mulville-Friel noted that the city will revise its development manual, update the application forms and submittal checklist.

Mayor Rich asked about next steps for the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process, based on feedback from the listening sessions. Director Kettler-Schmult stated that PUD updates are scheduled for review with the Planning Commission beginning in March 2027. Staff already have a list of concerns drawn from the development community and from internal staff.

Mayor Rich relayed developers' concerns that they spend six figures on engineering drawings before reaching Council, and that Council may then take a different position than the Planning Commission. She said developers would like earlier feedback from Council on matters such as renderings, street layout, density, and public benefits, rather than on topographic and drainage details handled by engineering.

Planning Consultant Carlisle described a model used in other communities involving a concept plan and concept development agreement approved by the Council after Planning Commission review, followed by preliminary and final site plan approvals. Applicants could bundle the concept and preliminary stages at their own risk.

City Attorney Joppich explained that the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act allows wide flexibility, including administrative approval of PUDs, and requires only one public hearing, which must be held at the Planning Commission. The city currently holds two, one at the Planning Commission and one at Council. He noted that some communities have removed the legislative body from PUD approval or have allowed the zoning administrator to approve most amendments. He said he was not recommending any of these approaches, only noting that they exist. He also said the PUD ordinance's treatment of minor versus major amendments needs work, and that this was a recurring theme in the day's sessions.

Councilmember Bridges stated that Farmington Hills is a "99 percent built community," so projects will often be controversial because of irregular parcels and wetlands. He said he was cautious about relaxing public involvement standards.

Mayor Rich said she was comfortable with administrative-level decisions because of the close connection to Council but was less comfortable with the Planning Commission having the final say. She cited several recent cases in which the Planning Commission approved projects 7-0 and Council rejected them.

Mayor Rich raised the question of community benefit for PUDs. She noted that developers feel held hostage, and that some argue housing itself is a benefit.

City Attorney Joppich said the current ordinance does not use the term "public benefit," although some qualifying criteria amount to one. He said the language is legal but could be clearer and welcomed further review.

Planning Consultant Carlisle said some communities list recognized benefits, while others require that relief requested be commensurate with the benefit offered. He noted that this should be worked through during the update.

Mayor Rich said she was not comfortable listing specific benefits because priorities change over time and vary by area of the city. She preferred that benefits be negotiated.

Councilmember Bridges asked whether the BS&A online portal and dashboard were hindering developers. Director Kettler-Schmult explained that BS&A is the online platform for construction plan and building permit submission, review, and issuance. She said the city adopted it about a year ago, is still working through glitches. She said the system itself is working correctly and that the city is also implementing ePlanSoft for electronic plan review. She stated the dashboard can be updated.

Mayor Rich asked staff to explain the tree ordinance in response to developers' comments. Director Kettler-Schmult stated that the tree preservation ordinance regulates removal of trees six inches in diameter or larger that are in good health. Single-family residential development is exempt from replacement requirements. Instead, trees are evaluated through individual permits at the home site level, while replacement applies to general infrastructure areas such as roads, stormwater detention, and utilities. She explained that mass grading by developers who then go bankrupt or withdraw has resulted in cleared land with no construction. She said staff could consider allowing mass grading, but it would trigger upfront replacement requirements, and that she had not heard single-family developers ask for that.

Planning Consultant Carlisle clarified that administrative review of accessory buildings covers structures such as sheds and detached garages, not accessory dwelling units. Regarding potential state legislation allowing accessory dwelling units by right, Planning Consultant Carlisle said the outcome would depend on the legislation's language, but the preference would be full site plan review if still permitted.

Planning Consultant Carlisle recommended pre-development meetings with all relevant departments. He said that in other communities, he does not accept a site plan application until the applicant has attended one. Director Kettler-Schmult said staff encourage such meetings.

Councilmember Bridges asked that these meetings remain informational only, with no negotiation or commitments on matters within the purview of departments or Council. Mayor Rich clarified that the meetings concern site plans, which are staff decisions, and technical matters such as drainage that Council does not review. She added that the meetings also help clarify ambiguous zoning text for developers.

Councilmember Aldred asked whether the city has measures for how long various development types take, and how improvements would be tracked. Director Kettler-Schmult confirmed that metrics would be tracked. She noted that developers will also readily share feedback on timelines. Mayor Rich asked that successes, such as reduced permit times, be shared with Council so that members can speak to them in community meetings.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Rich adjourned the meeting at 7:20pm

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk