

**MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
STUDY SESSION
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM
AUGUST 10, 2026 – 6:00PM**

The study session of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Rich at 5:45pm.

Councilmembers Present: Aldred, Boleware, Dwyer, Knol, Rich and Starkman

Councilmembers Absent: Bridges

Others Present: Acting City Manager Mondora, City Clerk Lindahl, Directors Brown and Rushlow, Fire Chief Unruh and City Attorney Joppich

CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL TO ENTER INTO A CLOSED SESSION TO DISCUSS COLLECTIVE BARGAINING NEGOTIATIONS WITH FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION OF MICHIGAN 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 Starkman, that the City of Farmington Hills City Council approves entering into a closed session to discuss collective bargaining negotiations with Firefighters Association of Michigan under Section 8(1)(c) of the Michigan Open Meetings Act.

MOTION CARRIED 6-0.

Council returned to open session immediately following the closed session.

UPDATE FROM GREAT LAKES WATER AUTHORITY ON THE 14 MILE RD TRANSMISSION MAIN PROJECT

Mayor Rich introduced Sue Coffey, CEO of the Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA), who presented alongside her engineering and project management team, including Pete Saum (Director of Water Transmission), Sean Grant (Project Manager), and Mike Dunn (Director of Engineering).

Background and Project Overview

CEO Coffey provided an overview of the ongoing failures of the 48-inch Interpace pre-stressed concrete cylinder pipe (PCCP) along 14 Mile Road, attributing the repeated breaks to premature deterioration likely caused by manufacturing anomalies. She noted that a section of pipe inspected five years prior with no defects had since failed catastrophically, describing this rate of deterioration as "absolutely unprecedented." The failures have caused significant disruptions to public safety, traffic flow, and water service, including boil water advisories and water outages affecting six communities: Farmington Hills, Novi, Walled Lake, West Bloomfield, Commerce Township, and Wixom.

CEO Coffey confirmed that GLWA's Board of Directors granted emergency authorization to expedite the \$81 million comprehensive replacement project, which was not part of the original budget cycle. GLWA has already acquired the raw steel material for the new pipe to address long lead times and has commenced design and above-ground survey work, with construction targeted to begin in mid-November.

Phase 1: Full Pipe Replacement

The project's first phase entails replacing the full 3-mile stretch of deteriorating pipe running from just west of Hagerty Road to Farmington Road along 14 Mile Road. A new 54-inch steel pipe will be installed

parallel to the existing pipe, which must remain in service until the new pipe is commissioned. CEO Coffey mentioned the ongoing risk, stating that until the pipe is replaced, "it could unexpectedly fail again," and that "moving rapidly" is the most important mitigation strategy available. Two construction crews will work concurrently, starting from both the Farmington Road end and the Halsted Road area, both progressing westward to accelerate the timeline. Final paving and substantial completion is targeted for August 2028.

Construction Sequencing: Full Closure vs. Incremental Segments

CEO Coffey explained that GLWA evaluated two construction sequencing options in close coordination with city administration before selecting the full 3-mile road closure approach. Full closure was chosen because it is 15 months shorter in duration than an incremental segment approach, carries a higher confidence in the construction schedule, minimizes repeated disruptions to adjacent properties and businesses, and allows for full roadway restoration across the entire corridor at once. The incremental approach, while offering smaller detour zones, would roughly double the construction timeline and introduce variable, unpredictable traffic patterns that are a known source of public frustration.

Under the selected plan, the portion of 14 Mile Road from Hagerty Road to Farmington Road will be closed to through traffic for the duration of pipe installation, with one lane (eastbound) maintained open for local traffic only to ensure residents in the many adjacent subdivisions and emergency vehicles retain access.

Traffic Management

Director of Public Services Jacob Rushlow clarified that traffic control would be managed primarily through signage, barrels, and message boards maintained by the construction contractor—similar to how the city's current Halsted Road project is managed—rather than through dedicated police details.

Councilmember Dwyer raised concern about the potential burden on the Farmington Hills Police Department and the risk of traffic incidents. CEO Coffey and Director Rushlow confirmed that the police department would not be required to staff the project routinely, though officers would respond as needed to incidents or instances of motorists disregarding traffic control devices, as has occurred on other active projects.

The most congested area near Hagerty Road, with its adjacent businesses, will be addressed last in the construction sequence. CEO Coffey noted that north-south cross streets, including Halsted, Drake, and Farmington Roads, would be kept open to the extent possible, with each crossing anticipated to require approximately a one-month closure when pipe work passes through that intersection.

Coordination with Other City Projects

Councilmember Knol raised the importance of coordinating with other planned roadway projects to avoid compounding disruptions. Acting City Manager Mondora and City Engineer Saksewski confirmed that federal funds have already been secured for a 14 Mile Road reconstruction between Halsted and Drake Roads in 2028, and staff is actively working with the state to explore releasing those federal LAP funds flexibly so the road reconstruction can be incorporated into the GLWA project rather than requiring a separate future disruption. City Engineer Saksewski also noted a separate Farmington Road project from 13 to 14 Mile Road programmed for 2027, which overlaps with one of the primary detour routes and will require careful coordination.

Councilmember Dwyer asked for clarity on the source of the \$81 million in project funding. CEO Coffey explained that the project is funded through a combination of GLWA's bond program—including an expanded bond sale executed in May—and available pay-as-you-go capital, with no rate increase imposed on member communities to fund this project. She acknowledged that while no other communities' capital projects were deferred to fund this work, the GLWA's overall financial position did not improve as much as had been hoped from the May bond refunding.

Community Outreach and Communications

CEO Coffey outlined a multi-channel communications plan, emphasizing the importance of transparency and consistent messaging. Key elements include:

- **GLWA participation in the City's October open house**, where a project table will be staffed.
- **Two community town hall meetings planned in October**, timed to align with the November construction start.
- **A dedicated project webpage** on the GLWA website to be launched this month, featuring FAQs, construction updates, and detour information.
- **Regular social media updates** at a frequency reflective of public expectations—weekly or biweekly at minimum.
- **Coordinated communications** with the city's public affairs team, Oakland), and other impacted communities including the City of Novi, to ensure consistent public messaging.

Councilmember Boleware emphasized the need for ongoing and honest communication.

GLWA's Chief of Public Affairs Michelle Skroboski confirmed that an inter-jurisdictional communicators task force has already been assembled and will issue coordinated releases, hold news conferences when warranted, and maintain a regular cadence of updates even when there is no new news to report. Director Saum noted the importance of communicating to residents that work may be occurring inside the pipe—such as welding by interior crews—even when no activity is visible from the road.

Councilmember Aldred commended GLWA for selecting the full closure approach, calling it the right decision despite the disruption it will cause.

DISCUSSION REGARDING ROSE AND CITY PROPERTY RIGHTS

City Attorney Joppich presented a memorandum summarizing the various legal documents governing the city's relationship with Rose, stemming from the complex detachment of the Sisters of Mercy facilities during the Rose PUD approval process. He noted that the relationship involves shared infrastructure, drives, lease agreements, and a number of property rights documents that prompted questions about Rose's rights with respect to the Costick Center property.

Right of First Refusal — Costick Property

City Attorney Joppich explained that a Right of First Refusal (RFR) agreement exists in favor of Rose with respect to the city's Costick Center property. This agreement grants Rose the right to step into the shoes of any third-party buyer should the city choose to sell the Costick property, and to either purchase it on those same terms or decline. He noted that this is not an option agreement—the city must first decide to sell—and that there is currently no intention to sell the property. The RFR also has expiration triggers: it terminates if the city ceases using the Costick Center as a senior facility, or upon 30 days' written notice terminating the associated lease with Rose.

Mayor Rich clarified for the public record that nothing discussed should be interpreted as an indication that the Costick Center would be closing prior to a new facility being open.

City's Option to Purchase — 3.91-Acre Parcel (West of Costick Center)

City Attorney Joppich directed the Council's attention to a separate option agreement granting the city the right to purchase approximately 3.91 acres of vacant land west of the Costick Center, fronting on 11 Mile Road. This is the former site of the Provincial Building. The purchase price, established by appraisal at the time of the agreement, is \$360,000. The option expires in early December of this year, requiring Council to provide direction soon if it wishes to exercise the right.

Director of Special Services Ted Davis stated that acquiring this parcel would provide significantly greater flexibility in siting a new senior activity center, allowing the city to choose the optimal placement. Acting City Manager Mondora noted that acquiring the parcel would not preclude future exploration of public-private partnership or other creative uses for any remaining land.

Councilmember Knol raised questions about the environmental and engineering conditions of adjacent land near the creek running alongside Mercy High School. Acting City Manager Mondora confirmed that the floodway, floodplain, and the culvert in question are located on the Mercy property, not on the 3.91-acre parcel, and that there are no wetlands shown on the subject parcel. The parcel has a natural grade change of approximately 12 feet from north to south, which is considered favorable for construction purposes.

Councilmember Knol also raised concerns about the value and marketability of the parcel if the city ultimately does not use it for the activity center, given its relatively small size for development. Councilmember Aldred countered that the parcel adds flexibility to a larger potential land assemblage and that, given current zoning that could accommodate approximately 9 to 10 single-family homes, the purchase price is reasonable. He also noted that regardless of where the new activity center is ultimately sited, the land behind the Costick Center could eventually be considered for redevelopment, with this parcel potentially adding value or access to that effort.

City Attorney Joppich noted that the option agreement includes a restriction on future use: the city may not sell the parcel to a party intending to construct a big-box retail use or an assisted living/memory care facility.

Council discussed the timeline, noting that the architect's conceptual plans for the new activity center are not expected until mid-November—leaving only weeks before the option expires. Acting City Manager Mondora confirmed that Acting Finance Director Tom indicated that the purchase could be funded through adjustment to the current budget, without the need for bonding.

Council reached a general consensus in favor of exercising the option. City Attorney Joppich noted that a formal resolution authorizing the exercise of the option will be brought back to Council for adoption at a regular meeting.

DISCUSSION REGARDING FARMINGTON HILLS FIRE DEPARTMENT FIRE CODE UPDATES

Fire Chief Jon Unruh introduced the item, explaining that the trigger for reviewing a new fire code edition is typically a provision that offers meaningful operational benefit to the department. He noted that the last code update, adopted in 2015, was driven by in-building public safety radio coverage requirements—a provision that Fire Marshal Jason Baloga has since leveraged extensively to ensure

radio coverage in all major buildings in Farmington Hills. The primary driver of the proposed 2021 update is the expanded provisions governing lithium-ion battery technology.

Fire Marshal Baloga presented the recommendation to adopt the 2021 International Fire Code (IFC) with local amendments. He explained that the IFC is updated approximately every three years and is developed in parallel with the International Building Code (IBC). Michigan has already adopted the 2021 Michigan Building Code (based on the 2021 IBC), and adopting the corresponding 2021 IFC would bring the city's fire prevention regulations into alignment with the building standards already applied in the community. Fire Marshal Baloga noted that the lack of alignment creates confusion for contractors, engineers, architects, and business owners who are subject to two different code generations simultaneously.

The 2021 IFC addresses emerging hazards from lithium-ion batteries found in electric vehicles, e-bikes, scooters, power tools, and battery energy storage systems—technologies that were not widely recognized when the previous code was written.

Councilmember Knol raised a concern that even the 2021 IFC may already be outdated in certain respects, citing as an example that the code requires flame detectors while camera-based detection technology, already in use as an internal standard in the automotive industry, is more advanced and not yet reflected in the code. She asked whether businesses would be required to install both flame detectors and cameras, and whether the fire marshal would offer flexibility in such cases. Fire Marshal Baloga acknowledged that technology consistently outpaces code development and that flexibility is available within the code to manage specific hazards on a site-specific basis. He noted that in his eight years as fire marshal, he has never needed to take a matter to the Board of Appeal, as issues are typically resolved through early communication and project meetings during the planning commission phase.

Mayor Rich asked why the city is adopting the 2021 edition rather than the more recent 2024 IFC. Fire Marshal Baloga explained that aligning with the state's currently adopted building code—the 2021 edition—is the standard best practice, even if a newer IFC edition exists nationally.

Councilmember Knol also indicated she has additional questions regarding the city's use of third-party plan review and how it compares to practices in other jurisdictions, which she agreed to discuss with Fire Marshal Baloga outside of the meeting.

Councilmember Boleware asked what the practical risks are of remaining out of alignment with the state building code, and Fire Marshal Baloga confirmed it creates inconsistency and confusion for all parties engaged in the construction and inspection process.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Rich adjourned the meeting at 7:24pm

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk