

**MINUTES  
PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING  
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS  
COMMUNITY ROOM  
June 19, 2025, 6:00 P.M.**

**CALL MEETING TO ORDER**

The Planning Commission Special Meeting was called to order by Chair Trafelet at 6:10pm.

**ROLL CALL**

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

Commissioners Absent: Aspinall, Grant

Others Present: Staff Planner II Mulville-Friel, City Attorney Schultz, Planning Consultants Bahm, and Upfal

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

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

**Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.**

**SPECIAL MEETING**

**A. CONTINUED DISCUSSION OF DRAFT ZONING TEXT AMENDMENT 6, 2024, TO ADD PROVISIONS REGARDING PUBLIC ART**

**Background**

Planning Consultant Bahm led this continued discussion of draft Zoning Text Amendment 6, 2024, based on her April 9, 2025 memorandum *Draft Arts Ordinance*, the revised draft of the Zoning Text Amendment distributed this evening, and referencing the May session where initial comments and questions were raised about the draft amendment.

Consultant Bahm identified several key revisions and considerations in the revised draft:

- Clarified how the site plan review process intersects with public art requirements, and emphasizing that the process not slow down the overall approval process.
- Added examples of acceptable artistic elements including environmental artworks, functional items (bike racks, benches, light fixtures).
- Edited portions of the ordinance for clarity and consistency.
- Explained that applicants may proceed through site plan review before finalizing art selection, but must show proposed art placement on the plan to ensure it meets location requirements.
- Final placement and installation details are to be reviewed by the City Planner and Building Official.
- Updated procedures will require applicants to submit an updated project construction budget when applying for building permits, which will then determine the public art contribution.

Planning Consultant Bahm also suggested a potential exemption for fully residential projects that are non-subsidized and priced affordably for residents earning less than 120% of the area median income. Commissioner Mantey questioned whether such projects currently exist and what their market value would be. Bahm estimated the average income to be around \$100,000, equating to an approximate home price of \$300,000–\$360,000. However, both Commissioners Mantey and

Stimson noted that most recent residential developments were priced above \$500,000 and would thus not qualify for exemption.

**Commission discussion**

Planning Commission discussion focused on geographic targeting, practical implementation, and proportionality based on parcel size and redevelopment scale.

Commissioner Stimson pointed out that Section 3.C. mentions review by the Arts Commission prior to site plan approval, but this conflicts with Section 3.B.'s timeline, which places the budget update after approval. Bahm clarified that Arts Commission review should occur after site plan approval; this would be corrected.

Commissioner Mantey compared the proposed arts ordinance to the tree ordinance, where developers either replace trees or contribute to a fund. He asked if exemptions should be eliminated in favor of always requiring a payment into an art fund.

It was pointed out that unlike the tree fund, the art requirement is not tied to replacing a removed asset, making the justification for the fund different.

Commissioner Ware raised concerns about the affordability and feasibility of requiring public art in residential projects, especially those initiated by individual property owners rather than large-scale developers. She emphasized the financial burden this might place on smaller building or renovating projects, especially in less affluent contexts.

Planning Consultant Bahm responded that the threshold in the current draft targets projects over \$2 million, and whether undertaken by a resident or developer, the financial investment would be equivalent. Ware said that the source of funding—personal versus corporate—matters significantly for individual developers. Also, art in subdivisions would ultimately become the responsibility of the homeowners association, and HOAs currently struggled with accumulating enough funding to deal with basic maintenance projects.

Commissioner Mantey estimated the added cost of compliance might be relatively minor in large projects, but emphasized the importance of fairness in who bears the cost. Commissioner Stimson clarified that the ordinance applies to developments with four or more residential units, not single-family homes.

Commissioner Brickner was opposed to applying the public art requirement in residential areas, including both small and large subdivisions. Subdivisions often have limited space for public art and such requirements could reduce housing density. He supported limiting requirements to commercial, office, or large-scale multi-family projects where placement of art in public or visible spaces is more appropriate.

Consultant Upfal asked whether subdivision recreation areas could host art installations, but Commissioners Brickner and Ware emphasized that not all subdivisions have such areas or the financial capacity to maintain them. Imposing art requirements adds costs that may not align with community priorities.

Commissioner Countegan said that any new ordinance that imposes additional costs will ultimately affect future residents and developers. He urged the Commission to consider whether these costs translate into real community value. He favored incentivizing public art—via density bonuses or landscaping trade-offs—rather than mandates, and emphasized the importance of maintaining essential services to attract desirable development.

Commissioner Countegan pointed out that the Planning Commission's role was to establish a thorough record of deliberation and provide a well-considered recommendation to City Council.

Commissioner Varga summarized two unresolved issues: the treatment of residential projects and the broader question of exemptions. She suggested tailoring the ordinance to distinguish between large-scale residential developers and smaller residential builders, possibly using density or size as the determining metric rather than a flat \$2 million threshold.

Commissioner Countegan was concerned that requiring art in residential areas could conflict with residents' desire for privacy, and again advocated for incentivizing rather than mandating public art in these contexts. Public art could be tied to other ordinance provisions, such as landscaping trade-offs, or offered as a negotiated benefit in Planned Unit Developments (PUDs). Commissioner Countegan emphasized that the art requirement should apply only in areas where public interaction was likely.

Commissioner Ware emphasized that the original intent behind public art provisions during the master planning process was to place art in public areas, such as major roads or parks, not in residential neighborhoods. She supported having developers contribute to a city-managed public art fund instead of installing art within subdivisions, thereby allowing the City to determine appropriate, high-impact locations for public art. When part of a PUD, public art could be negotiated as part of the public benefit package.

Discussion focused on exemptions (Section 6). Should projects that fall under exemptions be required to contribute a lesser amount rather than nothing at all? Planning Consultant Bahm noted that the proposed structure mirrors Southfield's ordinance, which also uses a four-unit threshold and a half-percent requirement.

Commissioner Countegan supported promoting public art through flexibility and options, such as trading density for landscaping requirements, to avoid discouraging development. He cautioned against rigid financial demands that could prompt developers to seek alternative locations outside of Farmington Hills. Planning Consultant Bahm responded that Farmington Hills is a desirable community and should consider adopting public art as part of its identity, especially in prominent commercial corridors. She pointed to PUDs such as Hunter Square as examples where the city could consider public art installations alongside other amenities like bus shelters and high-quality design features.

Commissioner Varga supported requiring contributions to an art fund when developers receive increased density through PUDs. Public art requirements should be viewed as a way for developers to invest in the community when receiving extra allowances or being allowed to deviate from

ordinance requirements.

City Attorney Schultz suggested including public art contributions as one of several potential public benefits in PUDs, rather than as a mandatory provision.

Commissioner Stimson asked how often Southfield's ordinance results in contributions to a fund versus onsite installations.

Commissioner Countegan emphasized aligning the ordinance with the Master Plan by identifying specific areas—rather than entire zoning districts—as appropriate for public art. He supported focusing investment and installations along corridors such as 12 Mile Road, Orchard Lake Road, and within redevelopment zones designated in the Master Plan, including right-of-way areas where visibility is high and traffic counts are significant. He reiterated that incentivizing art, rather than mandating it universally, would be more effective. Mandated payments might burden small business owners with limited budgets. He encouraged the Commission to consider flexibility and fairness.

Planning Consultant Bahm summarized that multiple commissioners supported focusing installations along high-profile corridors such as Orchard Lake Road, 12 Mile Road, Northwestern Highway, and possibly Grand River and 8 Mile Road. Commissioner Brickner suggested starting with these target corridors before considering broader implementation. Commissioner Stimson expressed support for extending the art requirement beyond the main corridors.

Planning Consultant Bahm noted that some of these areas, particularly Grand River and 8 Mile, are made up of smaller parcels, making it more difficult for individual owners to meet public art requirements. She suggested these areas should be prioritized for fund expenditure rather than required to host art directly. Commissioner Countegan advocated for creating thematic installations based on corridor characteristics (e.g., automotive themes on 8 Mile).

The Commission discussed adjusting the threshold or contribution rate based on location and investment size, suggesting a lower rate for smaller-scale developments on Grand River and 8 Mile, or a higher threshold, before triggering the requirement. Discussion reinforced the need for a flexible approach, including developing policies that reflects where art makes sense within the city's broader vision.

Commissioner Mantey pointed out the reference to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). He recommended that the ordinance specify the "CPI for All Urban Consumers" and suggested use of an annual CPI from a known base year (e.g., 2004) to avoid ambiguity in future calculations.

Planning Consultant Bahm clarified that the request for the ordinance originated with City Council, which supports the public art provision and initially focused on PUDs before broadening the scope.

There appeared to be consensus to retain flexibility to approve exemptions on a case-by-case basis.

Commissioner Countegan supported a centralized approach to placing public art, emphasizing strategic investment in focal points accessible to the public. He expressed concern that scattered installations could become maintenance burdens and fail to create meaningful impact.

Commissioner Stimson responded that where on-site installation was impractical, payments into the art fund would allow the City to place artwork in appropriate public spaces. He also noted that if contributions were limited to major corridors, the art fund would remain underfunded. Including areas like Middlebelt would increase fund revenue, enabling placement of public art in preferred locations.

Planning Consultant Bahm said she would revise the draft ordinance based on tonight's discussion, and the Planning Commission would have another study session on this issue.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

**COMMISSIONER COMMENTS**

Commissioner Mantey shared that he had attended a strategic branding session and appreciated the inter-commission collaboration it provided. He recommended future cross-commission exchanges to promote city-wide coordination.

Commissioner Brickner spoke to the ongoing work on Orchard Lake Road between 12 Mile and 13 Mile Roads.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION by Mantey, support by Ware, to adjourn.**

**Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:20pm.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Kristen Aspinall  
Planning Commission Secretary

/cem