

**MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
STUDY SESSION
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM
JULY 14, 2025 – 6:00PM**

The study session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Rich at 6:00pm.

Councilmembers Present: Aldred, Boleware, Bruce, Dwyer, Knol (arrived at 6:03pm) and Rich

Councilmembers Absent: Bridges

Others Present: City Manager Mekjian, Assistant City Manager Mondora, City Clerk Lindahl, Directors Kettler-Schmult and Skrobola, and City Attorney Joppich

CLOSED SESSION ITEMS:

CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL TO ENTER INTO A CLOSED SESSION TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS ATTORNEY CLIENT WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CITY ATTORNEY UNDER SECTION 8(1)(H) OF THE OPEN MEETINGS ACT AND SETTLEMENT STRATEGY IN CONNECTION WITH PENDING LITIGATION UNDER SECTION 8(1)(E) OF THE OPEN MEETINGS ACT AND RELATING TO THE CASE OF SKILKEN GOLD REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT, LLC, ET AL. V FARMINGTON HILLS (OAKLAND COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT, CASE NO. 2025-213392-AA); AND TO DISCUSS COLLECTIVE BARGAINING NEGOTIATIONS WITH COMMAND OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF MICHIGAN (COAM). (NOTE: COUNCIL WILL RETURN TO OPEN SESSION IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE CLOSED SESSION).

MOTION by Dwyer, support by Boleware to enter into a closed session to consider and discuss attorney client written communications from the City Attorney under Section 8(1)(h) of the Open Meetings Act and settlement strategy in connection with pending litigation under Section 8(1)(e) of the Open Meetings Act and relating to the case of Skilken Gold Real Estate Development, LLC, et al. v Farmington Hills (Oakland County Circuit Court, Case No. 2025-213392-AA); and to discuss collective bargaining negotiations with Command Officers Association of Michigan (COAM).

Roll Call Vote:

Yeas: ALDRED, BOLEWARE, BRUCE, DWYER, AND RICH

Nays: NONE

Absent: BRIDGES AND KNOL

Abstentions: NONE

MOTION CARRIED 5-0

City Council entered closed session at 6:00pm and returned to open session at 6:49pm.

STUDY SESSION ITEMS:

DISCUSSION ON PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT 2, 2024, INCLUDING SITE PLAN 56-8-2024, MULBERRY PARK AND THE TABERNACLE MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING, LOCATED ON 13 MILE ROAD, WEST OF MIDDLEBELT ROAD.

Director of Planning and Community Development Charmaine Kettler-Schmult explained that the applicants were presenting revisions for Planned Unit Development (PUD) Plan No. 2, 2024, which includes the site plan for both the Mulberry Park and Tabernacle multifamily properties on 13 Mile Road. The proposal had previously been reviewed by Council, and the present revisions were in response to feedback at those meetings (January, February study session, March and May, 2025).

Members of the development team present this evening included Aaron Schafer and Steve Schafer, as well as a representative from the Pulte Group.

Revisions included:

- Change in Homebuilder Partnership for the Mulberry Park component: Schafer Development will now work with Pulte Group rather than M/I Homes, as Pulte Group can provide duplexes, but M/I Homes did not have duplexes in their portfolio.
- Transition to Ranch Units: All units along the southern property line of the Mulberry Park property will now be one-story ranch-style duplexes, replacing the originally proposed two-story townhouses there. There will be townhomes on the east side of Mulberry Park, and on the west side will be the Tabernacle development.
- Revised Layout and Density:
 - The total unit count has been reduced from 63 units proposed in May 2025 to 61 units.
 - The layout now includes four ranch-style buildings (eight units) on Mulberry Park's southeastern edge. Previously there had been 12 units across three buildings.
 - Density was reduced to 4.9 units per acre, aligning with feedback suggesting a target of 5 units per acre was acceptable.
- Setback Adjustments:
 - The one-story ranches are slightly deeper and wider than what the townhouse product would be, which will change the rear yard setback from the southern property line to the back of the covered patios, reducing the rear yard setbacks from the southern property line from 76 feet to 66 feet.
 - A uniform 25-foot separation between buildings is now maintained along the southern edge (increased from 20 feet).
- Property Line Clarification: Building 4 straddles the Mulberry Park and Tabernacle sites. A revised legal description will clarify the boundaries.
- Updated Renderings and Heights:
 - Tabernacle units remain as previously presented in January 2025, at a height of approximately 17 feet measured to the roof midpoint per ordinance.
 - Pulte ranch units will be slightly taller at 19 feet.
 - Pulte's townhouse designs feature varied facades to prevent visual monotony. Similar successful Pulte developments can be viewed in Commerce Township (Townes at Merrill Park) and Northville Township (Northville Glades).
 - The ranch duplexes will feature zero barrier entry.
 - The Mulberry Park and Tabernacle developments will have a similar color palette.

Schafer Development had completed the revisions, with final engineering plans, and they were ready to submit in time for the August meeting deadline.

Council comments

Councilmember Bruce raised ongoing concerns about the appropriateness of the proposed density for this RA-1A zoned area. He referenced prior community comments suggesting the existing single-family properties on the site could have been marketed and sold as RA-1 lots. He asked the applicant to provide historical sales data for the subject properties, including listing dates, duration on the market, any price reductions offered, and marketing efforts undertaken.

Steve Schafer responded that the site had long been posted for sale by NAI Farbman, with some signs dating back 30 years. He explained that the large lot sizes and deteriorated conditions of existing homes made redevelopment more practical than preservation. He offered to provide the marketing history and comparative valuations.

Councilmember Bruce expressed skepticism about the properties' management history, suggesting the homes were allowed to deteriorate to justify a more lucrative redevelopment. He reiterated his opposition to high-density development in this location and emphasized the need for Council to have marketing data before considering support for this application.

The Schafers clarified that Schafer Development is the project developer, not the landowner. The current owners had owned the properties for 3-4 years, with individual homeowners listed as owners before that. The Schafers noted that the longstanding lack of redevelopment likely indicates the site's limitations under RA-1 zoning. More recently, Schafer Development has been maintaining the properties by mowing as well as boarding up the deteriorated single family structures.

Councilmember Bruce asked Director Kettler-Schmult to provide historical ownership and sales data. Schafer Development also offered to provide title work and relevant sales data.

Councilmember Bruce reiterated his objection to rewarding the current property owner for allowing the properties to deteriorate over time in order to justify redevelopment. His position on the inappropriateness of the dense development remained unchanged.

Councilmember Knol sought clarification regarding which entities would be constructing different sections of the development. The Schafers explained that the east side (Mulberry Park) will now be developed by Pulte instead of M/I Homes, who were unable to provide the desired duplex product. The Tabernacle portion remains under Baptist Manor ownership and will feature one-story rental units for seniors, which differ from the for-sale three-bedroom condos on the east side. A general contractor will construct the Tabernacle rental units.

Councilmember Knol supported the change to one-story ranches at the rear of the site, pointing out improved sightlines and compatibility with adjacent neighborhoods. She questioned the reduced setback distance due to the change in building type. The Schafers confirmed the change was necessary to accommodate the deeper three-bedroom units, which replaced two-bedroom rentals.

Councilmember Aldred echoed appreciation for the shift to one-story units but also expressed concern about the 10 to 13-foot reduction in the rear setback. He suggested the benefit of lowering building height was somewhat offset by the reduced distance from neighboring properties. While he acknowledged the revised plan decreased overall density from 63 to 61 units, he encouraged exploring opportunities to further reduce unit count or increase rear setbacks.

The Schafers responded that significant concessions had been made in response to public input. They emphasized that the project aligns with the Flex Residential designation approved by Council and balances market demands, neighborhood compatibility, and planning goals.

Councilmember Boleware expressed appreciation for the developers' responsiveness and the revisions presented this evening. Mayor Pro Tem Dwyer also commended the team for addressing council concerns.

Councilmember Knol raised the idea of advancing the new ranch units closer to the street to gain additional southern setback space. The Schafers pointed out that eliminating the sidewalk on the south side of the internal street could reclaim up to five feet, allowing increased southern setbacks without reducing building footprints. There would still be a sidewalk on the north side of the street, and additional crosswalks could be added, allowing residents to utilize the interior sidewalks to get to 13 Mile Road and from there to shopping on Orchard Lake Road. They could also put in 10'-12' trees, rather than 8' evergreens, to increase visual buffering.

Mayor Rich inquired about the two proposed pocket parks. The Schafers responded that the southern park would feature passive landscaping and seating areas near existing woodlands, while the central park would offer more social space, native landscaping, butterfly gardens, and public art. Mayor Rich suggested incorporating a small play structure to serve children in the nearby townhomes.

In response to comments regarding the renderings, the development team acknowledged the renderings were preliminary; future versions would better illustrate landscaping details. The interior design is generally fixed, and is based on internal market research and design standards.

Mayor Rich acknowledged that the development team had addressed numerous council concerns, including density, building height, access, stormwater, trees and buffering, parks, and art.

ADJOURNMENT

The Study Session meeting was adjourned at 7:22pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk