

MEETING MINUTES  
SPECIAL MEETING  
SEPTEMBER 8, 2025  
GRAND RIVER CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENT AUTHORITY  
JON GRANT - COMMUNITY CENTER  
29260 GRAND RIVER AVENUE, FARMINGTON HILLS, MI 48336

**CALLED TO ORDER BY:** MARY NEWLIN AT 1:35 PM

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** RICH, SMITH, PATROS, NEWLIN, PRICE

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** MANN, ALKHAFAJI

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Gary Mekjian, City Manager; Karen Mondora, Assistant City Manager; Cristia Brockway, Economic Development Director; John Trafelet, Planning Commission Chair; Bob Gibbs and Jeff Higgins from Gibbs Planning Group

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

Motion by Rich, supported by Price to approve the agenda as submitted.  
Unanimously approved.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Motion by Patros, supported by Rich to approve the June 5, 2025, meeting minutes as submitted.  
Unanimously approved.

**BUSINESS:**

Bob Gibbs, from Gibbs Planning Group and Jeff Higgins, from Indigo, presented an update on the Grand River Improvement Authority. The market study, which is a living document, covers a 2-mile area from Orchard Lake Road to Eight Mile, with demographics extending to I-96 and Eleven Mile Road. The area features diverse housing, anchored by Corewell Health, which has 57,000 patient nights and 1,400 staff members. Corewell staff expressed a need for more housing, restaurants, and a hotel to reduce commuting distances. The study indicates the area can support 90,000 square feet of retail space, equating to 20 new stores and \$30 million in sales. There is demand for a hotel, and Corewell is interested in establishing a boutique hotel with 60-70 rooms. West River was identified as a great retail area that statistically requires only about 2 percent of its space for parking.

Higgins identified a need for approximately 75,000 square feet of office space, ideal for a walkable town center. Specifically, a 25,000 square foot, 2-story building with on-site parking would be suitable for professional office/medical space, engineering companies, and similar uses. There is a strong demand for residential units, estimated to be between 300 and 500. A

mixed-use walkable center could support 120,000 to 130,000 square feet of retail space. The Grand River Corridor trade area, within 5 miles, amounts to a quarter of a million people, with 50-60 percent of sales generated by residents. There is also a demand for a 30,000 square foot grocery store. Although a peer review disagreed with the retail demand, Gibbs strongly disagreed with this finding. Spending comparisons between south Farmington Hills and north Farmington Hills were similar due to southern density. Newlin questioned southern spending habits, to which Gibbs responded that they spend more on groceries, home dining, children's items, and car repairs. Higgins noted that density always wins. Nationally, major office building demand is low unless in high-growth areas. Corewell and smaller entrepreneurial niches are the primary office drivers in the area. Gibbs emphasized a significant demand for new construction over old. Larger office spaces are found in Southfield, Detroit, Bingham Farms, and Birmingham. Single-user demands, like Mercedes, are more successful in large office buildings than multi-tenant ones. Mekjian inquired if their data accounted for Mercedes vacating, and Higgins confirmed it did not. There is a demand for walkable communities and proximity to home.

Higgins highlighted the significant demand for residential units in Farmington Hills, which faces housing shortages, high interest rates, and high construction costs, like the rest of the country. The current demand is for 50 townhome units, the most popular type of development. A MSHDA housing study from five years ago found that 60 percent of the population, including retirees and first-time home buyers, prefer townhomes, which are the least expensive to build per square foot.

Gibbs noted that Farmington Hills has available land, such as the West River parking area, which alone could accommodate over 100 units. Brockway mentioned that aging buildings could also be repurposed for townhomes if ownership changes. When asked about a land acquisition program to incentivize such developments by Patros, Brockway confirmed that options exist if the right investors are found.

Gibbs explained that increased zoning can complicate land acquisition, but the high demand for housing persists. A small group of young, risk-taking individuals with capital are interested in building. Local builders report a high demand for garden-style, 3-story micro-apartments. The key to success is developing the West River parking lot as a core area for the corridor.

Rich mentioned that Nick Shango supports the development of these units. For success, 30-40 units per acre are needed, and Gibbs would need to collaborate with the zoning division. The units are expected to sell for \$190,000 to \$240,000. One quarter of the housing would cater to single-person households and small rental garden apartments by Corewell. The second half of Gibbs' study focuses on the economics of affordable housing, suggesting that a public-private partnership may be necessary to bridge the gap.

Rich questioned whether Brockway has the necessary information to perform her job effectively. Brockway believes that adjustments to zoning regulations would provide the flexibility needed. Currently, there is a significant opportunity in the area, and understanding

consumer and market demand, as well as informing long-time property owners of potential developments, would be beneficial. Many individuals are not interested in continuing family businesses. Traftlet noted that timely council approvals would expedite the process. Brockway suggested that a new restaurant could stimulate progress. Gibbs believes that while Farmington Hills has the market for the corridor, the challenge lies in the technicalities of construction.

Newlin introduced the next business item: the Grand River Corridor streetscape design and landscaping plan. Brockway explained that the study will assess the corridor, focusing on sidewalk areas, street furniture, bus stops, medians, public rights-of-way, and crosswalks. The goal is to evaluate current conditions and identify needed improvements. The designs will incorporate art and involve public entities like DTE, ITC, Oakland County Water Commission, and MDOT, culminating in a final recommendation for future actions. This will serve as a living document guiding the corridor's development.

Currently, three consulting firms are being interviewed: Fleis and Vanderbrink, OHM, and Grissim Metz Andriese Associates, out of seven proposals received. After reviewing the plans and scopes submitted, a consultant will be selected by the end of the month. The plans will then be presented to the committee for questions and subsequently to City Council.

Brockway mentioned that Gibbs suggested presenting architectural drawings or site plans for the facade improvement grant criteria in the future. This would help with design and align with the long-term TIF plan for the corridor. There is \$30,000 available for up to three applicants to make facade improvements. Brockway proposed using some of this money for architectural design renderings or site plans. Mekjian recommended consulting with legal to specify prequalified architectural engineering firms eligible for grant funds. Brockway has already received legal support on this matter.

Brockway also announced the Bagels & Business Guided Grow conference, which will cover how to become vendors with the city and state, obtain small business loans through the SBA, create business entities with the Michigan State Treasury Department, and explore opportunities to grow business presence in the city. The event will be held at the Hawk in Harrison Hall from 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on October 22.

#### **BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS:**

Price commented on the opportunities the city should share to incentivize small businesses and entrepreneurs to invest in the corridor

#### **PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

None.

#### **ADJOURNMENT:**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:47 PM  
Unanimously approved.

Minutes drafted by: Cristia Brockway