

**MINUTES  
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS  
PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING  
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM  
APRIL 12, 2018, 7:30 P.M.**

Vice Chair Schwartz called the Planning Commission meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. on April 12, 2018.

Commissioners Present: Brickner, Countegan, McRae, Mantey, Orr, Schwartz, Stimson, Turner

Commissioners Absent: Rae-O'Donnell

Others Present: Mayor Massey, City Manager Boyer, Staff Planner Stec, City Attorney Schultz, Planning Consultant Arroyo

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

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

**Motion carried unanimously.**

**REGULAR MEETING:**

**A. Update from Mayor and City Manager regarding public facilities**

Vice Chair Schwartz introduced Mayor Massey and City Manager Boyer, who were here this evening to update the Planning Commission on upcoming public facility projects.

Utilizing overhead slides, Mayor Massey and City Manager Boyer gave the background on the City's offer to purchase Harrison High School when it closed in 2019.

Mayor Massey explained that a purchase agreement had been reached between City Council and the Farmington Public Schools (FPS) School Board. This agreement gave the City an opportunity to repurpose the High School into a state of the art activities center while also protecting Harrison's legacy. The Costick Center would also be renovated.

City Manager Boyer explained that this process had begun about four years ago, when he was part of the School Board's site utilization committee. After thorough study, that committee had recommended closing Harrison High School in 2019.

Every time a school was demolished the City also lost an asset. School buildings provided gymnasiums for after school programs, playgrounds, open fields and ball fields. Oakland Community College had also closed their gym and swim pool.

The 2008 Parks and Recreation millage had called out the need for a theater and an expansion of water facilities, but 2008 was also the year of the housing crisis, and not enough funds were collected to accomplish those goals. Therefore, when it became apparent that Harrison High School would close, the City began to evaluate the building to see if it could be put to community use, especially because of all it offered: a gym, pool, 700-seat theater, classrooms, etc. If the building could be repurposed, as the City used the space for its programs Harrison's legacy could be preserved as well by displaying memorabilia and keeping certain aspects of the original building design.

Originally, FPS wanted to renovate and continue to use the 3<sup>rd</sup> story, but that plan had been discarded as too expensive. This made it easier for the City, since it would now be possible to own the entire building.

The City hired Cunningham-Limp as consultants, who with the cooperation of the School, analyzed the existing building and studied opportunities for renovation.

City Manager Boyer showed schematics and illustrations of possible renovations of the 250,000 square foot building. Plans were to open up the building on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors, add windows, include a lobby/gallery, reception area, etc. Youth theater was very strong in the community and the City was seeking to expand those opportunities. Concerts that now were held in other community facilities (Players Barn, Mercy High School theater) would be held in this theater. Conceptual drawings showed the family-friendly pool with a zero depth entry for people with wheelchairs and young children.

On the exterior, any major changes to the site would come before the Planning Commission. The athletic fields would remain. Exterior curbing would be softened.

Commissioner Mantey hoped racquetball would be included. City Manager Boyer said pickleball was also very popular.

City Manager Boyer said the Costick Center would continue as a dedicated senior facility, and expansions would also be completed there. Preliminary talks had taken place with the Sisters of Mercy, and there was potential to create a senior complex. If those plans moved forward, the City would be before the Planning Commission for use and site plan approval.

The following discussion included:

- The Stables at Heritage would remain; the Stables were a unique place that could also be enhanced.
- Recreation facilities were permitted in residential districts; no rezoning should be necessary for the Harrison site.
- The cost of the Harrison renovation would be \$20 million for the first and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors and grounds. The agreement was for the City to purchase the site, including the building and athletic fields, for \$500,000. The money would come from the general fund, with portions from Parks and Recreation funding.
- The project would result in two facilities: one north of I-696 and one south of that freeway.
- The Costick Center had been very well built and included 12-18" solid concrete floors; renovations there were very expensive.
- The City was purchasing the building at \$2.00/square foot. New construction would be \$250.00/square foot.
- FPS had estimated a renovation cost of \$7 million for the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. The City hoped to come in under that figure. Also, the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor could potentially be utilized by private users for sports training programs, business incubator facilities, etc., and therefore could generate some income.
- Business uses on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor would need to meet zoning requirements.
- The facility would be available for Farmington/Farmington Hills residents. Farmington did contribute to Parks and Recreation costs, though when they didn't contribute – such as the ice arena and the golf course – their residents were charged the non-resident rate.
- The building's renovations would include energy efficient upgrades. One suggestion was to build to LEED standards, but don't actually go to the expense of LEED certification.
- One possibility to explore was to partner with DTE in terms of site utilization, in order to keep costs

down.

- The City's traffic engineer had looked at traffic patterns, though no in-depth analysis had been done. In general, the traffic pattern would be an improvement over school use, since City use would be spread throughout the day.
- The Costick Center pool would remain as a "lesson" pool. The pool at Harrison was planned to be family-friendly, and would include rooms for birthday parties and other functions.
- City Manager Boyer pointed out that Harrison had been built in 1971 with tax dollars, and philosophically and economically this was a good use of that original tax investment.
- The timeline going forward was: Harrison would close in June 2019. Sale closing would be October 1, 2019. In the meantime, the City would continue with items requiring due diligence, planning, etc. The building would take a minimum of a year to renovate.

Regarding funding, City Manager Boyer said the Parks and Recreation millage would be put on the ballot in August, for a renewal of the existing millage only. In terms of the costs of this project, besides utilizing the general fund, the City would seek private sponsorships and the potential development of other properties to offset the costs, along with a 20-year bond. The City was AAA bond rated.

In response to questions from Commissioner Orr, City Manager Boyer said the project would add 4-6 full time employees, with additional part time staff. Part time lifeguards generated revenue.

In response to questions from Commissioner Countegan, City Manager Boyer said the School's demographic studies had gone beyond 10 years. Communities everywhere were closing high schools, except those who were adding new housing developments. Planning Consultant Arroyo said that birth rates were historically low, and the trend of smaller families would probably continue into the foreseeable future.

In response to another question, City Manager Boyer said the City now owned the dog park.

Vice Chair Schwartz noted that when the Commission had requested tonight's meeting, there had been further discussion about requesting a joint meeting between Council and Planning Commission. The Commission spent significant time discussing land use in the City, but often didn't know about plans already in place or moving forward at the Council level.

Both Mayor Massey and City Manager Boyer agreed that a joint meeting would be beneficial to all parties. Possible options regarding OCC property, Sister of Mercy property at the Costick Center, and Wayne State property might all be on the table in the future.

In response to questions from Commissioner Countegan, City Manager Boyer said the City did not have a first option agreement for the Sisters of Mercy property.

Commissioner Mantey and Vice Chair Schwartz addressed an earlier comment made about not wanting more apartments in the City. Recent changes in the tax law and changes in attitudes of Millennials appeared to create more demand for high-level rental properties. Commissioner McRae pointed out that a proposed PUD development on Northwestern Highway was exactly that – high-level rental properties.

Commissioner Brickner suggested the Commission and Council look at regulating residential properties being used as Air BNBS, etc. Mayor Massey said that question had come up at recent town hall meetings.

In response to a question from Commissioner McRae regarding the future direction of paying for

subdivision road improvements, Mayor Massey and City Manager Boyer explained that the Special Assessment District (SAD) process was no longer working, roads were deteriorating, and a city-wide program needed to be instituted. The plan was for those who were currently paying on an active SAD to be exempted from new taxes for road repair until the SAD was paid down, but there were legal hurdles at the state level that needed to be resolved before that could happen.

Seeing that discussion had ended, Vice Chair Schwartz thanked Mayor Massey and City Manager Boyer for attending tonight's meeting.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** None

**COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS:**

The Commission welcomed new member Bob Turner.

Commissioner Orr noted that he would be spending more time in Florida as he had purchased a home there; while he was happy to be part of the Commission while he was in Farmington Hills he did not want to short-change the Commission.

Commissioner Stimson asked about the trees being removed along 12 Mile Road in front of the Retreat Apartments. City Planner Stec explained that most of the many trees that were being removed at that property were sick or dead. Because the site was developed prior to current zoning law, there was no mechanism to require the Retreat to replant all those trees. They were planning on adding new trees along 12 Mile Road, however.

Commissioner Turner spoke to his enthusiasm to serve on the Commission, summarized his extensive background, and spoke to his philosophy regarding planning in general. He also mentioned that when he sat in the audience sometimes it was hard to hear the Commissioners speak. Vice Chair Schwartz acknowledged this as a long-time problem. Commissioners needed to speak up and into their microphones.

Vice Chair Schwartz also expressed appreciation for the historic practice of respectful behavior on City Commissions, including respect for fellow members and for the residents.

Commissioner Orr noted that the temporary storage at the corner of M-5 and Grand River did not seem to have the required protections. Nothing was fenced or chained down, etc. City Planner Stec said he would follow up on this situation.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

Seeing that there was no further discussion, Vice Chair Schwartz adjourned the meeting at 8:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Steven J. Stimson  
Planning Commission Secretary

/cem