

**MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
STUDY SESSION
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM
SEPTEMBER 28, 2026 – 6:00PM**

The study session of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Rich at 6:01pm.

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

Councilmembers Absent: None

Others Present: Acting City Manager Mondora, City Clerk Lindahl, Director Kettler-Schmult and City Attorney Joppich

REVIEW OF THE PUBLIC ART REQUIREMENT GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

Acting City Manager Mondora reported that staff had successfully completed the public art guidelines and procedures within the target timeline established at the ordinance's adoption. The guidelines implement the previously adopted zoning ordinance requiring public art in special planning areas and PUDs for construction projects valued at \$2,000,000 or more.

Director of Planning and Community Development Charmaine Kettler-Schmult presented the guidelines, noting that staff planner Kirsten Mellum served as the primary point of contact throughout the process. The guidelines address design, application, approval, installation, maintenance, and enforcement, and are accompanied by a flowchart and a numerical evaluation criteria matrix to assist the Arts Commission in its reviews. The evaluation matrix covers artistic merit, site and place-making appropriateness, public visibility, materials and durability, maintenance, safety, and community value.

Councilmember Aldred inquired about prohibited content provisions, noting that the city's mural policy contains explicit restrictions. City Attorney Joppich clarified that, unlike city-commissioned murals, the public art covered by these guidelines is installed on private property by private developers, creating a First Amendment intersection that limits the city's ability to restrict content. The guidelines therefore establish positive, place-making-oriented criteria rather than prohibitions. Council concurred with this approach and expressed confidence in the Arts Commission's judgment.

Councilmember Boleware raised the question of what process would apply if a property owner declined to select an artist. Director Kettler-Schmult confirmed that the ordinance requires the property owner to make the selection, but that staff and the Arts Commission can provide resources and referrals. Council directed that language be added to the policy to reflect this.

Arts Commission Co-Chair Lesa Ferencz and Commissioner Ted Hadfield were present and provided context on the commission's background and expertise. It was noted that the Arts Commission, a joint body of Farmington and Farmington Hills with eleven members, has not previously held formal review authority; this program represents a new and expanded role.

City Attorney Joppich outlined the path forward. The guidelines will be placed on a regular City Council agenda for formal approval, with one modification: an asterisk will be added to the Stage 1 bullet point regarding engagement of a qualified artist or art consultant to note that applicants may request the assistance of city staff in identifying possible artists or art consultants.

DISCUSSION REGARDING WILDLIFE-RELATED MATTERS

Acting City Manager Mondora presented two sub-items under this agenda item.

Public Act 86 — Wildlife Feeding Ordinance

Acting City Manager Mondora reported that the Michigan Legislature had amended Public Act 86 earlier in the year, which now permits residents to feed wildlife within certain parameters — specifically, within 300 feet of a residence and with no more than two gallons of feed at a time. As a result, the city's existing wildlife feeding prohibition ordinance requires attention. Three options were presented to Council: (1) take no action, which was not recommended; (2) advocate at the state level for legislative changes; or (3) amend the city's existing ordinance to incorporate the parameters of Public Act 86. City Attorney Joppich further noted a fourth option: rescind the city's existing ordinance entirely, which may be the most practical course given the enforceability challenges.

Director Kettler-Schmult provided context, noting that over the past six years, the city has received approximately 14 wildlife feeding complaints that were formally investigated. Since Public Act 86 took effect at the end of July, approximately eight additional calls have been received — a mix of complaints about neighbors feeding wildlife and inquiries about what the new law permits.

Council debated the merits of rescission versus ordinance amendment and ultimately reached consensus in favor of rescission.

The question was raised whether HOA restrictions on wildlife feeding might still be enforceable against state law, City Attorney Joppich agreed to research and issue a memo to Council on the question.

Proposed Wildlife Commission

Acting City Manager Mondora presented a follow-up to the February 2026 City Council goal session, at which interest was expressed in potentially establishing a wildlife commission. She summarized research conducted on comparable commissions in other communities, including Southfield, Rochester Hills, Warren, and Ann Arbor.

Acting City Manager Mondora further noted that since February, the city had expanded its public education and outreach efforts and had contracted with the USDA to share a joint wildlife biologist with the City of Southfield and the City of Farmington which is to begin work in October. She recommended that Council consider waiting to evaluate the effectiveness of the wildlife biologist before deciding whether to establish a commission and stressed the importance of defining a clear mission for any such body before moving forward.

Councilmember Bridges expressed support for the concept of a wildlife commission, citing Farmington Hills' unique combination of natural features particularly conducive to wildlife. He noted that a properly structured commission could serve as a vehicle for raising awareness of the city's ecological character, advising Council on wildlife-adjacent development impacts, and providing institutional support for the city's deer management program and other wildlife-related matters. He agreed with the recommendation to wait for the wildlife biologist to come on board before proceeding.

Councilmember Starkman agreed with the recommendation to wait, while expressing enthusiasm for the eventual concept. He emphasized the importance of balancing commission membership between community members and individuals with scientific or veterinary backgrounds, echoing a point

previously made by Acting City Manager Mondora, who cautioned that an overly emotional commission without a defined mission risked devolving into recurring debates rather than productive advisory work.

Councilmember Dwyer recommended tabling the matter for approximately one year, allowing time for the wildlife biologist to become established, for additional benchmarking of existing commissions, and for the development of a proper structure and clear mission before any commission is formally created.

Councilmember Aldred concurred, noting that the commissions reviewed had largely been established to address the question of whether to conduct a deer cull — a decision the city has already made — and that a compelling new mission would need to be identified before formation.

Former City Naturalist and Farmington Hills resident Joe Dereck addressed the Council. Mr. Dereck, who served as the city's naturalist for 15 years and has lectured, broadcast, and written about nature and wildlife since 1977, spoke to the breadth of wildlife present in Farmington Hills, including bobcats, coyotes, red fox, mink, diverse snake species, rare bird species such as the pileated woodpecker, an endangered fish species found in city waterways, and a self-sustaining butterfly population at the northernmost edge of its range. He emphasized the importance of public education regarding wildlife and expressed support for the formation of a wildlife commission, noting that knowledgeable, well-rounded members could serve as a valuable resource for residents and city leadership alike, preventing the commission from becoming mired in contentious debates.

The Council expressed appreciation for Mr. Dereck's expertise and agreed that the incoming wildlife biologist should be introduced to Mr. Dereck's extensive institutional knowledge of the city's natural history.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Rich adjourned the meeting at 7:20pm

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk