

MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
STUDY SESSION
CITY HALL – COUNCIL CHAMBERS
JANUARY 26, 2026 – 5:30PM

The study session of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Rich at 5:30pm.

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

Councilmembers Absent: Bridges

Others Present: Acting City Manager Mondora, City Clerk Lindahl, Directors Aranowski, Rushlow, Skrobola and Sullen-Winn, Fire Chief Unruh and City Attorney Joppich

The closed session started at 5:31pm.

CLOSED SESSION ITEM:

CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL TO ENTER INTO A CLOSED SESSION TO DISCUSS AN EMPLOYEE REQUESTED REVIEW FOR CARLY LINDAHL, CITY CLERK. (NOTE: COUNCIL WILL RETURN TO OPEN SESSION IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE CLOSED SESSION).

MOTION by Boleware, support by Starkman, that the City Council of Farmington Hills hereby approves entering into a closed session to discuss an employee requested review for Carly Lindahl, City Clerk allowed under Section 8(1)(a) of the Open Meetings Act.

MOTION CARRIED 6-0.

The open session resumed at 6:11pm.

STUDY SESSION ITEMS:

PRESENTATION ON RESPONSIBLE CONTRACTING

Acting City Manager Mondora noted that responsible contracting was initially discussed at the September 8, 2025 City Council Study Session. At the conclusion of that meeting, Council reached consensus to direct staff to conduct a side-by-side review of the City's current contracting practices compared to the City of Royal Oak's Responsible Contracting Ordinance (RCO), and return with recommendations for potential improvements. Director of Central Services Aranowski and her purchasing team were present to deliver the requested analysis.

Director Aranowski explained that outreach was conducted with six benchmark municipalities. Of those communities, only Royal Oak has implemented a responsible contracting ordinance. The remaining municipalities cited concerns regarding potential impacts on small businesses and the lack of municipal staffing resources needed to support a comprehensive prequalification program. As a result, those municipalities continue to rely on their existing procurement standards.

Director Aranowski explained that Royal Oak's Responsible Contracting Ordinance is implemented through a request for proposal process rather than an invitation to bid. This approach is more labor

intensive for both vendors and staff and requires contractors and subcontractors to verify compliance with performance, capacity, safety, financial, and legal criteria prior to award. The ordinance places emphasis on past performance, present capabilities, personnel, equipment, financial capacity, safety and quality programs, and compliance with applicable laws.

Royal Oak's ordinance applies to construction contracts exceeding \$250,000 and subcontracts over \$50,000. Royal Oak assigns a staff engineer to oversee the program. In contrast, Farmington Hills' purchasing policy requires award to the lowest, most responsible and responsive bidder submitting the most advantageous bid.

Director Aranowski pointed out that Farmington Hills' current contracting practices are already largely consistent with Royal Oak's ordinance. The provided detailed side-by-side spreadsheet highlighted areas of alignment and also potential enhancements that could be made to Farmington Hills policies. Recommended changes were listed in a separate column in the review; the changes focused on documentation clarity, enhanced disclosure forms, and consolidation of existing requirements. No major policy changes were recommended.

Director Aranowski outlined the anticipated impacts of implementing a full-scale Responsible Contracting Ordinance. Such an ordinance would affect not only purchasing but also engineering and finance operations, requiring additional administrative oversight, expanded staff expertise, and increased time devoted to the request for proposal process, potentially resulting in increased administrative costs, more restrictive competition, and higher contract costs. A review of recent construction activity showed that many projects over the past three years would have been subject to the ordinance if adopted.

From a vendor perspective, expanded administrative and documentation requirements could discourage participation by small, local, minority, and disadvantaged businesses.

Instead of developing a full RCO, the Purchasing Division recommends enhancing current procurement practices through targeted revisions to existing forms and by requiring contractors to verify specific documents and acknowledge applicable regulations. Recommendations included:

- Update the bidder forms to collect more comprehensive contractor background information.
- Require submission of licenses and certifications.
- Update forms to request additional details regarding worker's journeyperson status.
- Update forms to require disclosure of recent litigation or violations of safety laws (e.g., OHSA/MIOSHA) or other applicable contracting regulations.
- Revision of bid terms and conditions to protect the City from change orders due to errors & omissions in bid specifications.

Council discussion:

Mayor Pro Tem Boleware asked whether benchmark municipalities' standard templates contained similar verification language. Director Aranowski confirmed that those municipalities reported their templates already include similar provisions.

Councilmember Aldred commended staff for the thorough analysis and supported the approach of refining and improving existing practices rather than adopting a full ordinance.

Councilmember Knol expressed agreement with maintaining the current process, citing concerns that a prequalification program would require additional staffing, reduce competition, disadvantage small and minority businesses, and increase costs to taxpayers.

Councilmember Starkman asked about anticipated staffing needs if a full ordinance were adopted. Director Aranowski indicated that at least one additional engineering staff member and one finance staff member would likely be required.

Mayor Rich shared concerns related to subcontractor oversight, including workforce training, legal employment verification, background checks, and protection of children during the potential construction of the new activity center on the Hawk grounds. She emphasized the importance of ensuring compliance beyond self-certification and questioned how oversight and enforcement would be verified.

Director Aranowski pointed out that there were practical limitations to prequalification, noting that even if contractors and subcontractors are vetted at the time of bid, there is no guarantee that the same crews will be assigned to a project months later.

Mayor Rich emphasized that her primary concern was ensuring that individuals working on City job sites are qualified, legally authorized to work, and do not pose safety or criminal risks. She further raised concerns regarding labor trafficking, particularly in the construction industry, and stressed the importance of ensuring that City projects do not inadvertently contribute to such practices.

Senior Buyer Nikki Lumpkin explained that for large-scale projects, such as the proposed activity center, the City typically retains an independent owner's representative. This role reports directly to the City, and provides daily on-site oversight, including review of workforce compliance, verification of background checks, and monitoring of site access.

Director of Public Services Rushlow further explained that projects utilizing a construction manager delivery method include multiple layers of oversight and accountability. Such sites are highly controlled environments, with restricted access, fencing, and safety screening. Contractors and subcontractors operating under a construction manager are subject to background checks, safety protocols, and compliance requirements, with documentation available for City review as needed.

Mayor Rich asked whether day laborers would be present on a project of this scale. Director Rushlow responded that day laborers are not typical on large construction projects managed through a construction manager. He explained that construction managers hold contracts with trade contractors and are accountable to the City for ensuring that all workers are properly vetted, logged, and compliant with contract requirements. Additionally, contract provisions can be further strengthened to require detailed sign-in and sign-out procedures and enhanced monitoring, particularly for projects located near areas with children and public activity.

Mayor Rich noted that Councilmember Bridges was interested in this issue, and he may have further follow up questions to ask.

PROGRESS UPDATE ON BRANDING GUIDELINES

Acting City Manager Mondora noted that at the March 3 City Council meeting, Council awarded a contract to Destination by Design to assist the Communications Department in developing the City's first

formal branding guidelines. Director of Communications Sullen-Winn and members of her team were present to provide an update on the work completed to date.

Director Sullen-Winn explained that this was the City's first comprehensive branding effort. The branding guidelines will serve as an internal and external communications framework. This project aligns with the City's mission and vision work and is intended to ensure consistency in how the City communicates its identity, values, and services. She thanked Council for its support of the initiative and highlighted the success of the "Farmington Hills I Do Still" event at Longacre House as an example of strategic communications efforts tied to the department's broader goals.

Director Sullen-Winn recognized Marketing Manager Chris Blunden for coordinating the branding initiative and leading implementation planning. Mr. Blunden outlined his role in supporting the project and introduced Destination by Design representatives Erin Welsh, Senior Brand Strategist, and Matt Wagoner, Senior Art Director, who are leading the strategy and visual development work.

Utilizing a PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Welsh provided an overview of the branding strategy process, emphasizing that the project is not a rebrand but rather an effort to add clarity, alignment, and depth to the City's existing identity. She described the four phases of the project: discovery and community engagement, brand strategy and positioning, visual brand development, and implementation and evaluation planning.

Ms. Welsh outlined key project goals, including helping distinguish Farmington Hills from Farmington, clearly communicating the City's strengths, and providing the Communications Department with practical tools to ensure internal alignment and consistent external messaging. She described extensive engagement efforts, including collaboration with the interdepartmental project committee, a community drop-in session held alongside the Mission and Vision workshops that generated nearly 400 comments, and targeted focus groups with City leadership, community partners, and business representatives.

Ms. Welsh summarized recurring themes identified through engagement, including the City's welcoming and neighborly character, a strong sense of belonging, access to nature and open space, proximity to regional amenities, and a high quality of life. Participants also emphasized the City's openness and opportunities for civic engagement, while communicating a desire for clearer and more unified storytelling about City services and assets.

Based on these insights, Ms. Welsh reported that the project committee selected a new city tagline: "Farmington Hills, a place for every path." She explained that the tagline reflects the City's five identified brand attributes—welcoming, connected, evolving, leading, and colorful—and is intended to communicate the city's values and diversity, and that various personal, professional, and cultural paths are supported and valued in Farmington Hills.

Mr. Wagoner reviewed the visual brand development work. He emphasized that the effort is not a full redesign, but rather a refinement of the City's existing brand assets. The City's current logo has strong brand equity and that the goal is to preserve its core elements while providing additional tools and flexibility for communications and marketing use. Minor refinements were made to the primary logo to improve clarity and consistency without altering its recognizable appearance. He presented a set of complementary secondary and tertiary logo marks, including variations without the hills graphic, a

simplified logotype, and an updated “FH” abbreviation mark. These additional assets are intended to increase versatility and allow the City to adapt branding to different applications and formats.

Additional creative options were shown, including stacked and circular badge-style marks that could be used on apparel, signage, or promotional materials. Mr. Wagoner discussed refinements to the City’s color palette, noting that the existing green and white scheme would be retained while introducing a lighter green and neutral tones to provide greater flexibility across vehicles, apparel, and printed materials. Examples of how the brand could be applied over time included mock-ups for city vehicles, staff apparel, letterhead, business cards, envelopes, and a City flag. Existing materials would not need to be replaced immediately, and new brand assets could be phased in as items are updated or replaced.

Ms. Welsh outlined the remaining steps in the project. A comprehensive brand guide will be developed to provide clear standards for visual and language use, including guidance on appropriate and inappropriate applications. Implementation and evaluation planning is underway to ensure the branding effort is practical, budget-conscious, and actively used.

Council discussion:

Councilmembers asked whether the tagline was intended to be final. Staff explained that the tagline was developed through community engagement and reflects themes of diversity and inclusiveness without explicitly using those terms. It was noted that taglines are flexible tools that may evolve over time and can be used selectively in marketing materials, speeches, or other communications. The tagline also acknowledges the contributions of community members who participated in its development.

Councilmembers expressed general support for the branding direction. Favorable comments were made regarding the lighter color palette, including the use of lighter green and gray tones, as well as the stylized typography. Several members noted appreciation for the continued use of the arches, recognizing them as a symbolic and memorable representation of the City’s hills and a long-standing visual element.

Councilmember Knol emphasized the importance of maintaining continuity with existing branding investments, particularly gateway signage. She expressed appreciation that the updated branding incorporates new colors and refinements while remaining compatible with existing assets.

The Mayor shared her initial reservations about branding changes, citing her professional experience with costly rebranding efforts. She indicated that, upon further review, the changes appeared subtle and value conscious. The revised typography removed a dated appearance while allowing existing signage to remain in use through normal replacement cycles.

Mr. Wagoner presented a side-by-side comparison of the original and updated logo and explained that the revisions focused on technical refinements, including improved letter spacing, adjusted proportions, reduced awkward negative space, and smoother typography. The intent was to enhance balance, cohesiveness, and visual quality without creating a noticeably different logo at first glance, thus preserving the City’s unique and recognizable identity.

Acting City Manager Mondora advised that staff had begun discussions with the City Attorney regarding potential next steps to protect the City’s logo, including registering it as a trademark and considering the adoption of an ordinance to prevent misuse.

City Attorney Joppich explained that while public entities are more limited than private corporations in enforcing trademark protections, municipalities are still able to protect their logos on a limited basis. The primary purpose would be to prevent unauthorized or commercial use by third parties. He noted that similar actions have been taken by other communities and that staff would provide Council with further information as implementation moves forward. The process would likely include an ordinance and potential registration with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

The updated branding will be launched at the upcoming State of the City address.

FIRE AND EMS STRATEGIC PLAN FOLLOW-UP

Acting City Manager Mondora explained this item was follow-up from the January 12, 2026 study session. Additional information prepared by the Chief Operating Team was included in the Council packet, along with a supplemental question-and-answer document distributed by email and in hard copy prior to the meeting.

Mayor Rich opened the floor for Council questions and clarification.

Councilmember Aldred noted that the report cited approximately \$900,000 in annual overtime costs and asked how the requested additional staffing might reduce overtime expenditures.

Fire Chief Unruh explained that the Fire Department currently operates with a very lean staffing model, resulting in overtime whenever employees are absent due to illness, injury, or leave. The Department routinely begins shifts understaffed due to multiple employees on leave, which drives overtime usage. While additional staffing would reduce overtime, the projected addition of eight positions would be phased in over several years following attainment of the baseline staffing goal of 24 per shift. As a result, overtime savings would be noticeable but not substantial in the near term.

Councilmember Aldred stated that, based on comparisons with other cities, police staffing ratios, and current overtime costs, there is justification for additional staffing. He emphasized that the timing and pacing of staff increases would be an important consideration.

Councilmember Knol asked questions regarding the benchmarking data included in the packet, specifically noting that Troy did not list employee headcounts. Chief Unruh explained that Troy operates with a volunteer fire department and contracts out EMS services. Acting City Manager Mondora added that Troy has experienced challenges modernizing its fire services and that recent funding proposals related to staffing were unsuccessful.

Councilmember Knol further questioned the impact of hiring additional firefighters for Stations 3 and 4, seeking clarification on whether those hires resulted in measurable improvements such as reduced response times. Chief Unruh explained that those stations were previously staffed at night by paid-on-call firefighters and lacked advanced life support coverage. The addition of full-time firefighters converted those stations to 24-hour advanced life support, improving service quality and reliability.

Chief Unruh further clarified that the addition of 14 full-time firefighters largely replaced paid-on-call staffing on a one-for-one basis, noting that the overall paid-on-call workforce has continued to decline through attrition. Paid-on-call staffing has decreased from 50 in 2020 to 31 currently, while total incident volume increased from approximately 10,000 to 14,000 calls during the same period.

Staffing levels, overtime impacts, and service quality considerations will continue to be evaluated as part of the upcoming budget process.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Rich closed discussion and adjourned the meeting at 7:25pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk