

**CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING
31555 W ELEVEN MILE ROAD
FARMINGTON HILLS, MICHIGAN
JUNE 18, 2026 6:00 P.M.**

CALL MEETING TO ORDER

The Planning Commission Special Meeting was called to order by Chair Lindquist at 6:22 pm

ROLL CALL

Commissioners present: Brickner, Countegan, Grant, Lindquist, Stimson, Trafelet, Ware

Commissioners Absent: Mantey

Others Present: City Planner Mulville-Friel, City Attorney Schultz, Planning Consultant
Auerbach (Carlisle Wortman)

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOTION by Trafelet, supported by Stimson, to approve the agenda as published.

Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

SPECIAL MEETING

A. ZONING AUDIT

City Planner Mulville-Friel explained that the 2024 Master Plan identified a need to review the current Zoning Ordinance, which is several decades old, as an initial step toward reorganizing and restructuring the Ordinance to align with current State planning laws and zoning requirements, and to implement the 2024 Master Plan.

Carlisle Wortman had completed an initial review of the Zoning Ordinance and prepared a memo outlining a proposed organizational template. The proposed template would reorganize the Ordinance into 20 articles, compared with the current seven chapters.

City Council was introduced to the zoning audit at its February 11, 2026 goal-setting meeting, when Carlisle Wortman presented three prioritization options, and City Council identified Option 2 as the preferred approach. Option 2 would comprehensively reorganize the Ordinance without undertaking extensive substantive text amendments. Individual priority text amendments would be addressed separately as they are identified.

City Attorney Schultz explained that individual zoning text amendments begin with the Planning Commission, which reviews the amendment, conducts a public hearing, and makes a recommendation to City Council. He characterized the proposed Ordinance reorganization as a large-scale text amendment affecting the entire Zoning Ordinance.

City Planner Mulville-Friel explained that the broader Ordinance restructuring is one project, while clarifying and consolidating the site plan review process is a separate, immediate priority. Site plan review requirements are currently distributed among the Zoning Ordinance, General Code, and Development Review Manual. Staff is working with Carlisle Wortman to create a clear site plan review section, so applicants submit more complete plans for Planning Commission review.

Commissioners Brickner and Grant noted the applicant costs associated with repeated plan revisions. Commissioners agreed that clearer instructions and more complete initial applications would reduce the number of later revisions.

Planning Consultant Auerbach stated that feedback from developers, staff, City Council, and the Planning Commission indicates frustration with the complexity of current requirements, the length of review, and the number of revisions required. The comprehensive zoning audit was initiated in response, in part, to identify improvements that could address those concerns.

Planning Consultant Auerbach presented guiding principles for the Ordinance audit, beginning with simple formatting and ease of navigation in both print and digital formats. He summarized audit findings under seven evaluative principles: formatting, graphics, organization, readability, avoiding conflicting language, efficiency and reduction of redundancy, and alignment with current law and best practices.

Planning Consultant Auerbach cited the B-3 district front yard setbacks as an example, noting that requirements are currently located in at least three separate Ordinance sections. The reorganization would place related regulations in a single, intuitive location while retaining useful graphics, particularly for dimensional and landscaping requirements.

It was noted that the current two-column format can be difficult to navigate.

Commissioner Brickner asked whether the project would also address Master Plan implementation, including creation of mixed-use regulations for areas such as 12 Mile Road. Planning Consultant Auerbach reiterated that City Council selected Option 2, which focuses primarily on structural reorganization and includes only limited substantive changes. The process is expected to address objectives for Grand River Avenue and the 12 Mile/Orchard Lake Corridor, and may involve mixed-use regulations, but it will not be a complete substantive rewrite. However, consolidation of the City's approximately 30 zoning districts and four overlay districts could lead to the creation of mixed-use districts. The Ordinance update will provide opportunities to address where mixed-use should be permitted and how it should be regulated.

Commissioner Ware emphasized the need for zoning mechanisms that allow the Planning Commission to implement the policies in the new Master Plan. Planning Consultant Auerbach agreed that Master Plan objectives and related policy changes will be addressed, while reiterating that Option 2 emphasizes revising the Ordinance structure.

Commissioner Countegan supported the organizational work but noted that the Planning Commission should focus its review on significant policy changes needed to implement the Master Plan rather than on detailed formatting decisions, which could largely be left to the Consultant and staff. Planning Consultant Auerbach stated that policy changes will be unavoidable, including changes to permitted uses and review procedures, while also noting that the scope of new implementation measures will be limited by available time and budget.

Commissioner Ware asked whether the review of zoning districts would include consideration of why each district exists, its relationship to the Master Plan, and the community vision for future development.

Planning Consultant Auerbach confirmed that this analysis will be part of the process. Most of the proposed work will involve reorganizing and consolidating requirements by topic. For instance, landscape, lighting, and site plan review provisions should be located in single, self-contained articles so users do not need to search multiple sections for applicable requirements. Consolidating Ordinance tables could improve usability, including a unified permitted use table organized by zoning district, and consistent dimensional standards tables covering setbacks, heights, and related standards. The update will also review substantive policy items and Master Plan implementation priorities identified by City Council, including sign regulations, conditional rezonings, missing middle housing, duplexes and three- to five-unit dwellings, and regulations for high-impact uses.

Regarding data centers, Planning Consultant Auerbach stated that even though none are presently proposed in the City, regulations could address high-impact uses more broadly. Potential standards could apply to facilities with significant water, sewer, or electricity demands, including uses not specifically defined in the Ordinance. Chair Lindquist suggested that the review also consider other newer uses and their potential sanitary sewer impacts, such as uses that propose to warehouse ICE detainees.

Planning Consultant Auerbach reiterated that Option 2 will primarily focus on reorganization. The process is expected to take approximately six to 12 months. Substantive policy changes will likely arise during the work.

Commissioner Ware asked whether possible state legislation concerning residential lot sizes and housing would be addressed. Planning Consultant Auerbach stated that pending legislation could affect local regulation of residential lot size and housing; the City would need to respond if enacted, but he did not recommend proactively adopting requirements before the legislation is passed.

B. SITE PLAN REVIEW PROCESS

Planning Consultant Auerbach introduced the proposed Article: Chapter 21, Planning, Article II, Site Plan Regulations. He described the Article as an initial opportunity to address concerns expressed by the Planning Commission, staff, developers, and City Council.

Site plan review requirements are currently located in the General Code and multiple sections of the Zoning Ordinance. The current provisions do not always clearly identify the reviewing body, whether Planning Commission review or administrative review is required, or the required application materials. The proposed Article is intended to make the process fairer, more predictable, and more efficient, resulting in more complete applications that should reduce post-approval revisions, improve transparency and customer service, and eventually free staff capacity, although there will be a learning period for everyone.

Full site plan review

Under the draft Ordinance, larger or more impactful development projects would proceed through a full site plan review process with preliminary and final stages. Smaller projects, limited site plan changes, and other specified categories could be processed administratively in a single review. The full process would generally begin with a preapplication meeting with staff, unless the Planner determines that a meeting is unnecessary. The applicant would submit a preliminary site plan to the Planner, who would circulate it to City departments and evaluate it for completeness. Complete applications would proceed to Planning Commission review.

The Planning Commission would review applicable standards and requested waivers, and could grant preliminary approval with or without conditions. The applicant would then prepare a final site plan for staff review. Once staff determines that the final plan complies with the approved preliminary plan and applicable requirements, the applicant could proceed with construction permit applications.

The draft Ordinance utilizes a table to identify information required for preliminary and final site plans. The Planner could waive items that are not relevant to a particular proposal.

Site plan expiration

Commissioner Grant asked about the proposed site plan expiration periods. City Planner Mulville-Friel explained that applicants would have two years after preliminary Planning Commission approval to obtain final site plan approval and an additional two years after final approval to obtain construction and building permits. Applicants could request one-year extensions up to three times at each stage.

Commissioner Ware asked whether the time limits should be shortened in light of previously approved projects that have not been built. Planning Consultant Auerbach acknowledged that the proposed time periods are more generous than those in some communities, but they do allow developers time to assemble financing and move forward. City Attorney Schultz noted the cost of obtaining site plan approval, and City Planner Mulville-Friel stated that developers often market property after preliminary approval.

Commissioner Brickner stated that applicants may experience delays in obtaining financing or may be affected by increased construction costs. Commissioner Stimson stated that holding undeveloped property is costly and that shorter approval periods would not address economic barriers to construction. Allowing approvals to remain in place may enable projects to proceed when market conditions improve.

Commissioner Grant noted that a March 17, 2026 site plan process memorandum in the meeting packet described different expiration periods; City Planner Mulville-Friel will correct this inconsistency.

Commissioner Ware was concerned that the proposed approval period, including possible extensions, could allow a project to remain unbuilt for an extended period of time. She asked how the City could balance developer flexibility with benefits to the City and residents, citing the former bowling alley site at 14 Mile Road and Orchard Lake Road as an example of a site with an approved plan which remains undeveloped, affecting the appearance of the area.

Commissioner Stimson stated that a longer approval period may be appropriate where redevelopment is delayed by extraordinary costs, such as the site mentioned by Commissioner Ware. It was discovered that the building on that site requires extensive asbestos abatement, and the property owner is pursuing grant assistance for the costs. Expiration of the approval would not resolve the underlying demolition costs. City Attorney Schultz stated that expiration provisions are generally intended to prevent outdated site plan approvals from remaining in effect after Ordinance changes, rather than to force development or favor the City by terminating an approval.

City Planner Mulville-Friel stated that Zoning Board of Appeals approvals are valid for only one year, which may provide an additional point of control when a project requires a variance between preliminary and final site plan approval. She offered to compare site plan approval time frames used by other communities and report back.

Commissioner Lindquist asked how extension requests would be decided. Planning Consultant Auerbach stated that extensions would be approved administratively. An applicant denied an extension could appeal the decision to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Draft Site Plan Review Article

Planning Consultant Auerbach summarized key elements of the draft Site Plan Review Article. All submittal requirements would be listed in a single table, and the City Planner could waive requirements that are not necessary for a specific project. The Planning Commission would have discretion to require traffic, environmental, noise, or other studies as appropriate. The draft includes 11 approval standards that would apply to both full site plan review and administrative review. The standards are intended to ensure that a site is designed, arranged, and operated safely and is compatible with adjacent uses. As already discussed, the Article also includes expiration, extension, and possible revocation provisions for site plan approvals.

Planning Consultant Auerbach stated that staff had received feedback from the Engineering Department and legal counsel and would make further revisions before the draft returns to the Planning Commission.

Administrative site plan review

Planning Consultant Auerbach presented examples of proposed administrative eligibility criteria. One example is that staff could administratively review an increase in parking of up to 25 percent of existing parking or 6,000 square feet, whichever is less.

Commissioners asked whether the proposed administrative review threshold for a parking increase could also apply to a parking reduction. Reducing excess parking may be a policy issue tied to the Master Plan.

Planning Consultant Auerbach stated that a parking reduction could be approved administratively if the site continued to meet the minimum required number of spaces and did not create other significant site impacts. Broader parking requirements, including the authority to grant waivers from required parking, would be addressed later in the parking chapter.

Priorities for Ordinance Update

Commissioner Countegan stated that the Planning Commission should focus its time on substantive policy changes that implement the Master Plan, including issues such as parking and mixed use, rather than detailed formatting and table consolidation. He supported staff and the Consultant completing the organizational work, and bringing significant policy changes to the Commission for discussion, public hearing, and action. He noted that the Planning Commission had already spent a significant amount of time and many special meetings on the Master Plan update, and he did not feel the Commission needed to spend more time on Zoning Ordinance organization. The work of the Commission involved policy, not formatting.

City Attorney Schultz clarified that the estimated six to 12 month timeframe for this project largely reflects the Consultant and staff work required to physically reorganize the Ordinance, with some substantive edits occurring at the same time.

Commissioner Brickner expressed concern that consolidating zoning districts could create issues for existing district regulations and property rights. Attorney Schultz and Planning Consultant Auerbach clarified that the initial reorganization would retain the City's existing 30 zoning districts; district consolidation would be addressed later, if pursued.

City Planner Mulville-Friel clarified that the presentation was intended to distinguish site plan changes that staff could review administratively from those requiring Planning Commission review. The City Code does not clearly establish staff authority for administrative site plan review, even though the practice has historically occurred.

City Attorney Schultz further explained that applicants would submit the same plans and supporting documents regardless of whether staff or the Planning Commission is the reviewing body.

Planning Consultant Auerbach directed the Commission to the administrative review list on page 4 of the draft Ordinance; the Commission may recommend stricter or more flexible criteria. The list reflects common administrative review categories used in other communities.

Commissioners discussed individual categories included on the list.

Next steps and developer outreach

City Attorney Schultz explained that the draft Site Plan Review Article will return to the Planning Commission for further review before a public hearing is scheduled. City Planner Mulville-Friel stated that the next meeting is anticipated to be a joint study session with City Council on July 20. Staff hopes to have the draft in final form before that meeting.

City Planner Mulville-Friel said that developer engagement will primarily be an email to the City's developer contact list explaining that the City is reviewing the site plan review process. The draft Ordinance may not be available when the initial outreach is sent.

MOTION by Trafelet, supported by Brickner, to approve the May 21, 2026 regular meeting minutes as submitted.

Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Terry Sever, 1883 Teakwood, White Lake, addressed the Commission regarding sidewalk requirements associated with lot splits. He raised concerns about sidewalk construction costs, tree removal and replacement requirements, and the dedication of right-of-way for sidewalks. He requested that the City review the tree Ordinance and sidewalk policies in light of affordability, maintenance, safety, and site conditions.

City Attorney Schultz pointed out that lot splits are governed by the Subdivision of Land Ordinance rather than the Zoning Ordinance, and both the Planning Commission and City Engineer have roles under that Ordinance. Broader sidewalk requirements in the Zoning Ordinance could be discussed separately.

COMMISSIONER/STAFF COMMENTS

Commissioner Brickner announced that the City fireworks event in recognition of the 250th anniversary of the United States would be held June 25 at Founders Sports Park.

Commissioner Ware suggested that the City evaluate whether existing Ordinances remain necessary and consistent with the community vision established in the Master Plan. She cited tree preservation, property maintenance, business visibility, and traffic safety as issues requiring a clearer and more intentional policy approach.

In response to comments, City Planner Mulville-Friel reported that the tree fund balance is approximately \$400,000. The fund supports the City tree planting program, including trees planted on private property through an application process and trees planted in public rights of way. She added that single-family residential construction is treated differently from commercial development, as commercial projects are subject to tree replacement requirements. She will follow up on how tree planting activities are reported, including how information is included in the Capital Improvements Program and budget.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Grant, supported by Ware, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

The meeting ended at 8:24 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Tanji Grant
Planning Commission Secretary

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