

**MINUTES**  
**CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS**  
**FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL**  
**STUDY SESSION**  
**CITY HALL – COUNCIL CHAMBERS**  
**JANUARY 12, 2026 – 5:30PM**

The study session of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Rich at 6:00pm.

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

Councilmembers Absent: None

Others Present: Acting City Manager Mondora, City Clerk Lindahl, Directors Brown, Rushlow and Skrobola, 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 COLLECTIVE BARGAINING NEGOTIATIONS WITH MICHIGAN FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE LABOR COUNCIL – DISPATCH AND INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIREFIGHTERS UNDER SECTION 8(1)(C) OF THE MICHIGAN OPEN MEETINGS ACT. (NOTE: COUNCIL WILL RETURN TO OPEN SESSION IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE CLOSED SESSION).**

MOTION by Boleware, support by Aldred, that the City Council of Farmington Hills hereby enters into a closed session to discuss collective bargaining negotiations with Michigan Fraternal Order of Police Labor Council – Dispatch and International Association of Firefighters under Section 8(1)(c) of the Michigan Open Meetings Act.

MOTION CARRIED 7-0.

*The open session resumed at 6:06pm.*

**PRESENTATION OF FIRE AND EMS STRATEGIC PLAN**

Acting City Manager Mondora provided background for the Fire and EMS Strategic Plan. She explained that over the past five fiscal years, the City added fourteen career firefighters to address immediate staffing needs and to ensure all fire stations maintained some level of 24-hour staffing coverage. These additions included two firefighters in fiscal year 2022, eight in fiscal year 2023, and four in the current fiscal year.

During recent budget discussions, City Council and staff agreed on the need for a comprehensive strategic plan and needs analysis to better understand long-term operational requirements and to move away from reactive staffing decisions. The draft Fire and EMS Strategic Plan was completed with a focus on comparable communities, industry best practices, and national fire service standards.

Fire Chief Unruh described the consultant selection process. Seven firms responded to the City's request for proposals. All seven firms were interviewed, and the Center for Public Safety Management was

selected based on its exclusive focus on public safety consulting. The firm specializes in fire, EMS, and related public safety studies and demonstrated strong qualifications during the interview process.

The City contacted a recent Michigan client, the City of Sterling Heights, and received highly positive feedback regarding the firm's work and professionalism. The City entered into a consulting agreement during April and May 2025, and since that time the firm has conducted an extensive review of the Fire Department, resulting in a comprehensive report of approximately 180 pages.

Chief Unruh introduced the consulting team members participating in the presentation, including Joe Pozo, project lead with the Center for Public Safety Management, Matt Gustafson, who conducted on-site work during the summer, and Corey Parker, a long-time fire service professional who served as the on-the-ground lead for the study. Mr. Pozo and Mr. Gustafson were attending remotely.

Mr. Pozo provided an overview of the Center for Public Safety Management and its role as the exclusive provider of public safety technical assistance to the International City-County Management Association (ICMA). He summarized his professional background and the firm's experience conducting fire, EMS, law enforcement, and emergency communications studies nationwide.

Mr. Pozo explained that the Fire and EMS Strategic Plan was intentionally comprehensive in order to support recommendations with data, benchmarking, and national standards. The plan includes strategic initiatives with clear goals and objectives, supported by a detailed gap analysis. The planning process incorporated extensive stakeholder engagement, including meetings with City management, department heads, and planning staff, as well as virtual and in-person discussions with Fire Department personnel.

The plan includes updated mission, vision, and values statements for the Fire Department and is designed as a five-year strategic plan. Mr. Pozo encouraged continued evaluation and planning as the City approaches the latter years of the plan period.

Mr. Pozo described the community risk assessment methodology, explaining that staffing and deployment recommendations are based on population characteristics, environmental and building risks, and overall service demand.

Gap analysis key findings included:

- Fire and EMS call volume increased by approximately 31 percent over the five-year study period from 2020-2025, reaching nearly 13,500 calls annually. Of those calls, approximately 68 percent were EMS-related, 28 percent were fire-related, and the remaining calls involved mutual aid or cancellations.
- Demand analysis findings showed that call concentrations generally align with population density and development patterns within the City, including higher demand in the central, northwest, and southeast areas. The City's fire station locations are consistent with common deployment models used in similarly sized Michigan communities.
- Regarding EMS demand associated with the City of Farmington, in the May 1, 2024 to April 30, 2025 workload analysis year, the Fire Department responded to 880 EMS calls in the City of Farmington, averaging roughly 2.5 EMS transport calls per day. This external demand is an important factor when evaluating overall system demand, unit availability, and resiliency of Fire and EMS operations.
- The City's evolving risk profile, driven by demographics and social determinants of health, requires ongoing adaptation. Overall community risk was assessed as low to moderate, with elements

leaning toward the lower end of the moderate range. However, specific vulnerable populations contribute to elevated service needs, including older adults aged 65 and over, young children, individuals with disabilities, and residents experiencing socioeconomic barriers. Individuals who are uninsured or underinsured often use emergency departments as their primary source of medical care, increasing EMS utilization. These conditions support the need for targeted outreach, proactive EMS planning, and focused fire prevention efforts. Mr. Pozo commended the Fire Department's Community Risk Reduction and fire prevention efforts, noting proactive outreach to vulnerable populations. He specifically acknowledged the work of the Fire Marshal's office and community risk reduction staff, stating that they provide strong engagement and education throughout the community.

- From a building risk perspective, the City is predominantly characterized by low-hazard occupancies, particularly single-family residential structures. He noted that while such buildings are considered low hazard from a construction standpoint, national statistics show that most structure fires, injuries, and fatalities occur in residential settings. As a result, residential properties continue to present significant life safety risks. He further noted the presence of higher-risk occupancies within the City, including assisted living facilities, nursing homes, multifamily residential developments, educational institutions, daycare facilities, and mixed-use buildings. Newer development trends, such as multi-story residential and mixed-use buildings, introduce additional operational challenges related to access, vertical firefighting, and occupant safety. Identifying the location of vulnerable populations and incorporating that information into fire response planning is emphasized as a best practice.
- FHFD's Community Risk Reduction Program is effective, but inspection demands often require staff to operate in a reactive manner due to mandatory inspection schedules and complaint-driven responses. Fire inspections are critical for ensuring that life safety systems function properly and that egress paths remain accessible. One of the strategic initiatives in the plan focuses on balancing inspection workload with staffing levels to allow for more proactive prevention efforts over time.
- The Fire Department maintains a high level of training, completing approximately 22,000 hours of training in 2024. Training is essential due to the unpredictable nature of emergency incidents, and to ensure that the department employs dedicated officers who comply with state and national standards.
- Lack of a dedicated fire department training facility is a limitation, particularly for hands-on and live fire training. While the department utilizes training opportunities in neighboring jurisdictions, this often requires temporarily placing units out of service.
- Training performance is evaluated through the Insurance Services Office Public Protection Classification process, and the Fire Department currently holds a rating of Class 2, placing it among the highest-rated departments in the state and nationally. Class 1 is the highest rating possible.
- Regarding Fire and EMS call demand and system resiliency, as already stated the Fire Department responds to approximately 13,000 to 13,500 calls annually. 68% of calls occur while another incident is already in progress, and 72% of the time there is at least one active call within any given hour.
- Stations 3 and 4 experience the greatest resiliency challenges due to single-unit staffing. Stations 1, 2, and 5 are staffed to operate both a fire suppression unit and an EMS ambulance simultaneously, while Stations 3 and 4 have two personnel assigned to a single unit. As a result, when an EMS call is dispatched from Stations 3 or 4, the station is left without coverage until the unit returns. EMS calls average approximately 57 minutes in duration, and consecutive or overlapping calls can result in Stations 3 and 4 being unstaffed for extended periods. When additional calls occur during that time, response coverage must come from other districts, resulting in increased travel time and delayed response.

- Stations 1, 2, and 5 retain limited response capability during EMS calls because remaining personnel can deploy a fire suppression unit to initiate patient care and stabilization until an ambulance arrives. This capability is not available when Stations 3 and 4 are committed to EMS responses.
- The Fire Department averages approximately 25 EMS calls per day, with an average of two to three of those calls involving transport to the City of Farmington. Of those EMS calls, approximately 19.5 result in patient transport. Extended unit times are influenced by hospital turnaround and emergency department capacity issues. Two ambulances, Squad 2 and Squad 3, currently meet or exceed a utilization rate of 0.30, reflecting heavy demand within those response districts.
- As part of the strategic plan, Mr. Pozo presented a potential initiative to improve resiliency by deploying a peak-time ambulance during high-demand periods. A peak-time unit would operate during the busiest hours rather than on a 24-hour basis, reducing utilization pressure on existing ambulances and improving overall system resilience. Analysis indicates a peak-time ambulance could be staffed with two full-duty employees without requiring full additional shift staffing.
- The Fire Department relies on a combination of career firefighters and paid on-call personnel, who function similarly to compensated volunteers and provide staffing for fire suppression units, ladder trucks, and ambulances as available. Reliance on paid on-call staffing has become increasingly challenging due to a national decline in volunteer participation that accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic and has not rebounded. Work-life balance pressures, employment patterns, and extensive fire and EMS training requirements have made recruitment and retention more difficult, particularly as many paid on-call personnel work outside the community. The significant time commitment required for evening and weekend training, combined with employment and family obligations, has reduced the sustainability of this staffing model, a challenge shared by many combination fire departments nationwide.
- Staffing and deployment in fire service are based on the concept of an effective response force. National fire service standards identify the number of firefighters required to safely and effectively perform critical tasks at emergency incidents. For a low-risk single-family residential fire, the effective response force is identified as sixteen firefighters, including a command officer, with each two-person team assigned a specific operational function such as fire attack, search and rescue, backup line deployment, ventilation, and pump operations. While national standards allow the use of automatic aid from neighboring jurisdictions to help achieve an effective response force, communities should not rely on outside agencies to meet baseline staffing needs. Effective response requirements increase for higher-risk occupancies, including multifamily buildings, commercial structures, and facilities housing vulnerable populations.
- The Fire Department's current staffing model presents challenges in consistently achieving an effective response force, even for single-family residential incidents. Fire Department personnel are professional and committed, and are fully aware of staffing limitations; they continue to respond effectively despite these challenges.
- The declining reliability of paid on-call staffing suggests a need to evaluate a gradual transition toward a fully career Fire and EMS department, and the strategic plan includes initiatives designed to guide this transition over the planning period.
- Current station staffing configurations are as follows: Station 1 can staff an ambulance and a fire suppression unit with a combination of career and paid on-call personnel. Station 2 staffs both suppression and EMS units, while Stations 3 and 4 operate with two personnel who alternate between engine and ambulance assignments. Station 5 staffs a fire suppression unit, an ambulance, and a career battalion chief who serves as the incident commander.
- Also, stations 1 and 2 house aerial ladder apparatus. Fire crews at those stations must determine which apparatus to deploy based on call type and location, adding complexity to daily deployment

decisions. The combination of declining paid on-call staffing and existing deployment complexity reinforces the need for long-term staffing adjustments outlined in the strategic plan.

- Staffing Stations 1, 3, and 4 with four on-duty personnel at all times—two assigned to fire suppression and two to EMS—would require approximately 20 additional full-time equivalent positions. Such changes are not intended to occur immediately but rather be phased in over the strategic planning period through deliberate budgetary and operational planning. The strategic plan envisions a gradual transition toward a more fully career Fire and EMS Department, while continuing to utilize paid on-call personnel in a supplemental and surge capacity role. Paid on-call firefighters could continue to serve as additional staffing on engines, fill in on ambulances when available, or provide support during high-demand periods. However, declining volunteer availability requires the City to begin planning for long-term staffing stability.
- Farmington Hills is an urbanized community with significant service demand, as demonstrated by call volumes exceeding 13,500 incidents annually. Based on community risk factors and social determinants of health identified in the report, EMS demand is expected to remain high and continue increasing over time.

Mr. Pozo addressed infrastructure considerations, noting that the City has invested in a modern fire apparatus fleet and well-maintained facilities. He recommended formalizing fleet replacement and facility maintenance planning within the City's capital improvement program. Fire stations experience constant wear due to 24-hour occupancy, and should be proactively maintained.

Mr. Pozo reviewed the strategic initiatives outlined in the plan, beginning with community resiliency. He discussed the importance of continued community education, preparedness, and prevention efforts, ongoing coordination with planning staff to monitor growth and development, and sustaining the Fire Department's Insurance Services Office Public Protection Classification rating of Class 2. He also emphasized the importance of monitoring EMS service demand related to the City of Farmington contract to ensure that service delivery does not adversely impact Farmington Hills and that appropriate cost recovery is maintained.

Mr. Pozo addressed organizational resiliency initiatives, including maintaining strong training programs, supporting professional development, promoting workforce health and safety, and evaluating options for optimizing paid on-call staffing. Mr. Pozo noted that part-time staffing models could be explored as an alternative, but reiterated that the overarching objective is to ensure adequate coverage, operational efficiency, and long-term sustainability through a gradual transition to a fully career department.

Mr. Pozo concluded his presentation by reiterating recommendations to enhance staffing at Stations 3 and 4 to eliminate the need for personnel to alternate between fire and EMS units, and to add staffing at Station 1 to improve coverage. He reviewed the concept of peak-time EMS units as a scalable approach to meeting growing demand. He also discussed opportunities to strengthen mutual aid and automatic aid agreements with neighboring communities, noting that reciprocity and staffing balance are important considerations in those partnerships.

Fire Chief Unruh clarified that call volumes continue to increase. The department responded to 14,121 calls in 2025.

Councilmember Aldred acknowledged the importance of Fire and EMS services provided to the community, and asked clarifying questions regarding call volume trends, funding considerations, and the inclusion of Farmington service demand in call data. When looking at the reported five-year increase in

call volume, he noted that when EMS calls associated with the City of Farmington contract were excluded, the growth rate appeared closer to nine percent over four years, or approximately three percent annually. A headline figure of a 31 percent increase could be misleading without separating Farmington-related calls.

Fire Chief Unruh responded that in 2025 the department handled 14,121 total calls, representing an approximate 9.6 percent increase over the prior year, and this figure already includes a full year of Farmington calls. Call volume growth was not limited to a single anomalous year.

Councilmember Aldred asked how the addition of four full-time firefighters in late 2025 had affected unit hour utilization and system performance. Chief Unruh stated that the additional staffing allowed Station 4 to be staffed with two personnel full time, improving coverage in the north end of the City. However, the overall increase in call volume offset those gains, resulting in little to no measurable improvement in utilization rates.

Chief Unruh explained that removing the City of Farmington contract would not resolve the department's workload challenges. The Farmington contract generated approximately \$275,000 annually, with EMS transport fees totaling approximately \$354,000, resulting in roughly \$600 per call. He contrasted that with Farmington Hills EMS transport revenue of approximately \$3.05 million annually, averaging \$394 per call. Approximately \$3.3 million in EMS revenue is returned to the City's general fund each year, and the City benefits from the Farmington contract, primarily because the insurance for the City of Farmington pays a higher rate.

Councilmember Bridges asked whether current staffing limitations have resulted in service deficiencies for Farmington Hills residents. Chief Unruh identified reduced fire protection coverage in the northwest and southeast areas of the City, citing a recent condominium fire  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile from Station 4. However, the station was unavailable due to an EMS call, resulting in emergency personnel being sent from Station #5 on City Hall Campus, with an 8-9 minute response time.

Councilmember Bridges also raised concerns regarding the City's large number of multifamily and high-risk residential buildings. Chief Unruh acknowledged these risks and stated that the department relies heavily on mutual aid from neighboring communities on a daily basis, particularly for EMS calls. He cautioned that mutual aid is becoming imbalanced, as Farmington Hills requests assistance more frequently than it provides it.

Councilmember Knol requested further analysis separating Farmington call data from Farmington Hills data to better understand long-term trends. She also expressed concern that the addition of 14 firefighters over several years has not produced a noticeable improvement in service delivery and requested additional analysis of this result. She further inquired about the feasibility of hiring personnel trained exclusively for EMS.

Chief Unruh responded that recruiting EMS-only personnel is extremely difficult due to wage disparities between EMS-only private providers and those EMS staff who are also trained firefighters. He also stated that union restrictions limit the ability of personnel from other jurisdictions to work elsewhere, so they could not work part-time in Farmington Hills and part-time elsewhere.

As the conversation remained robust, Mayor Rich proposed that the Fire and EMS Strategic Plan be brought back at a future study session to allow time for continued discussion. She asked council

members to read the report in the meantime, and formulate and submit their questions in advance through the City Manager's office.

### **PUBLIC SERVICES 2025/2026 CONSTRUCTION UPDATE**

Utilizing a PowerPoint presentation, Director of Public Services Rushlow and Traffic Engineer Saksewski provided a 2025/2026 construction update.

2025:

- Major road improvements in 2025 (\$8.6M), included paving Halsted Road from Eight Mile to Nine Mile Road, North Industrial Drive, and Senecola Court. There has been significant progress in improving industrial road conditions over the past decade, with the average pavement condition rating increasing from 3.8 to 7.4, resulting in no industrial roads currently rated as poor.
- Numerous local road reconstruction (\$15.5M) and preventative maintenance projects (\$2.6M) were also completed in 2025. Maintenance programs included asphalt and concrete replacement, over-banding, Flex Seal applications, and major road sidewalk replacements
- Infrastructure projects (\$11.9M) were completed at various locations, including water main replacements in Kendallwood Subdivisions 2 and 4, sanitary sewer lining and lift station improvements in collaboration with the Water Resources Commission, and early work on projects scheduled for 2026, including Biddestone Woods culvert replacement and the I-696 Gateway signing and landscaping project.

2026:

- Approximately \$23 million in local road projects is planned for the 2026 construction season.
  - Major reconstruction is planned for Halsted Road with partial federal funding.
  - Several projects will be completed in coordination with county, state, and regional agencies.
  - Ongoing investment in roads, water mains, and sanitary sewer infrastructure remains a priority.
- Approximately \$9 million in major road projects is planned for 2026, consistent with budget recommendations:
  - Halsted Road (12 Mile Road to South of 14 Mile Road), \$3.8M Total ( $\pm \$2M$  Federal Grant)
  - Folsom Road (9 Mile Road to Orchard Lake Road), \$4.5M
  - Major Road Capital Preventive Maintenance, \$1M (Hills Tech Drive, Independence Street)
- Planned 2026 Infrastructure Projects include:
  - Kendallwood Subdivision #3 – Water main replacement, \$4.4M
  - Sifi Networks, Year 3
  - Grand River Storm Sewer Relief Project (Cora to Tuck and south), \$1.7M
  - Sanitary Sewer Lining/Renewal Program, \$2M (WRC project)
  - Sanitary Sewer Lift Station Improvements, \$500,000 (WRC project)
  - Sarah Fisher and Danvers Sanitary Sewer Pump Stations and Force Main Sewer Replacements, \$3M

### **ADJOURNMENT**

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

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk