

**MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM
SEPTEMBER 9, 2024 – 6:00PM**

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

Council Members Present: Aldred, Boleware, Bridges, Bruce, Dwyer, Knol, and Rich

Council Members Absent: None

Others Present: City Manager Mekjian, City Clerk Lindahl, Directors Aranowski, Harvey, Rushlow and Schnackel, Senior Engineer Gushard, and City Attorney Morita

DISCUSSION ON THE ORCHARD LAKE ROAD AND 696 GATEWAY RENDERINGS

This agenda item was a continuation of the August 12, 2024 study session discussion on this topic, when Council had requested visual materials to better understand the project’s cope, including aerial photos and details about landscaping and signage.

OHM Consultant Ben Weaver presented updated visuals, including aerials, of the 696/Orchard Lake Road intersections.

Discussion included conversation about font selection, the potential inclusion of the arches, and concerns about long-term brand consistency:

- Renderings now showed only the text FARMINGTON HILLS, without the arches. The wall serving as a backdrop to the signage is now straight.
- The sign will be identical at both the entrance and exit ramps and will offer aesthetic appeal year-round using diverse landscaping, and internally lit letters.
- Four different font choices were offered. There was no overwhelming enthusiasm for any of the four fonts presented this evening, although a preference emerged for a font that was bold, clean, and easy to read. The words “Farmington” and “Hills” should have more space between them. Of the choices presented this evening, Sweet Sans Pro font worked best with the arches.
- After seeing these latest renderings, Council revisited the idea of including the arches in the design. Even if the logo should change, the arches are a simple design that works well with several fonts and provides visual interest.
- Of the choices presented this evening, Sweet Sans Pro font worked best with the arches.
- There was shared hesitation about making a long-term investment only to find the design irrelevant or in need of change shortly thereafter. Council discussed the possibility of adding the arches later if deemed appropriate, after the initial installation of the letters and landscaping.
- Timing is critical. MDOT permits can take up to 8 months, but in this case initial conversations have begun, and the goal is to submit 70% complete design plans to MDOT within the next few weeks. The target is to have the project ready for bidding by December, with hopes of starting construction in the spring. MDOT will be putting their landscaping in at that time.

- Council requested mock-ups of the letters.
- Regarding landscaping, MDOT has a pre-existing landscape plan, and is unwilling swap certain tree species, but they are open to moving trees to more strategic locations. The goal is to ensure that the landscaping complement the signage rather than obstructs it. Since tree species cannot be swapped, this plan will require some changes to maintain uniformity in the landscaping.
- MDOT's contractor is willing to handle some rough grading to prepare the area before completing their work, which helps ensure minimal disruption to the site. However, the contractor will not be responsible for planting; that will need to be outsourced to a third party.
- The budget for the project will need to include future maintenance costs. Maintenance plans and permits will be integrated into the final approval process.

Mayor Rich summarized that there is consensus to move ahead with this project, keep the arches in the design, use the Sweet Sans Pro font, and put more space between "Farmington" and "Hills."

Council noted that this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and the design needs to be right.

DISCUSSION ON PAYMENT FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION CONSULTING TO LIFE'S JOURNEY

This agenda item was a continuation of the August 12, 2024 study session discussion on this topic, when Council had requested qualitative and quantitative data points. Secondly, the City Attorney had provided a confidential memo, as mentioned at the August 12 meeting.

Director of DEI Harvey led the discussion regarding qualitative and quantitative data.

- Quantitative data collection has been limited, as the city's Human Resources (HR) system, NEOGOV, is not yet fully set up to track important demographic factors such as race, veteran status, and disability. These data points will become available once NEOGOV is fully operational. The system will allow for voluntary disclosure of this information, similar to processes used in universities.
- Qualitative data includes surveys regarding new hire orientations, which have received 97% positive feedback.
- Lunch and Learn sessions provide education on various topics, such as financial literacy and mental health awareness, in addition to cultural themes like Hispanic Heritage Month. These sessions have received positive feedback from staff.
- The NEOGOV system will be fully operational by early next year.
- While quantitative data is currently limited, the city is also focusing on gathering qualitative feedback. Part of the strategic plan includes setting up mechanisms for ongoing staff feedback, instead of relying solely on three-year assessments.
- Council was concerned that the problem being addressed by the contract was undefined, and that measurable results were not being reported. There was a lack of clear pre-and post-data to justify the expense involved, especially when some of the work could be done in-house.
- Director Harvey explained that pre-data referred to feedback from focus groups and staff surveys conducted before her arrival. The main issues identified included a lack of trust in leadership, a feeling of exclusion among staff of color, and outdated policies, such as the six-month leave policy. The strategic plan was developed based on these insights, and while some solutions are being implemented, it is still too early to gather post-data to assess the results. Reassessment will occur once more of the strategic plan has been executed, at which point further steps can be taken to identify areas needing improvement.

Discussion on payment for DEI consulting to Life's Journey

- Council expressed a desire to review and reconsider the remaining items on the table. After discussion, the consensus of Council appeared to be to move forward with payment for \$109,600, as this was a contractual agreement for work that had taken place. There was no consensus to pay other outstanding items where the work had not yet been completed and where some of the work could take place in-house. Council also expressed dissatisfaction with the billing detail.
- After discussion, consensus appeared to support negotiation with Life's Journey relative to the payments being requested, with the City Manager and legal team handling the negotiation. A motion will be offered during regular meeting to reflect this direction.
- Council Member Dwyer said he would support paying the \$109,600, but he would not support paying anything else. In general, he believed there was a lack of oversight over outside contracts, and suggested the Mayor appoint a 3-member board to review consulting contracts

DISCUSSION ON ORDINANCE ALLOWING DOGS IN PARKS

Special Services Director Schnackel led this discussion, which was a continuation of the April 22, 2024 study session discussion on this topic, and when Council had reached consensus to allow dogs at Pioneer Park, provided they are on leashes, similar to the rules at Founders Sports Park.

Three key changes were proposed to the ordinance, as reflected in the draft ordinance amendment provided to Council: defining what constitutes a service animal (to distinguish it from emotional support animals), formalizing the rules for the William Grace Dog Park, and officially allowing dogs in Pioneer Park.

The ordinance amendment will be brought to the next regular Council meeting (after tonight) for approval, along with an amended Facility Use Policy

ADJOURNMENT

The study session meeting adjourned at 7:23pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk