

**MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
STUDY SESSION
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM
OCTOBER 13, 2025 – 5:30PM**

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

Councilmembers Present: Aldred, Boleware, Bruce, Dwyer, Knol and Rich (arrived 5:33pm)

Councilmembers Absent: None

Others Present: Assistant City Manager Mondora, City Clerk Lindahl, Directors Kettler-Schmult and Skrobola, Police Chief Piggott, and City Attorney Joppich

CLOSED SESSION ITEMS:

CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL TO ENTER INTO A CLOSED SESSION TO DISCUSS COLLECTIVE BARGAINING NEGOTIATIONS WITH MICHIGAN FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE LABOR COUNCIL UNDER SECTION 8(1)(C) OF THE MICHIGAN OPEN MEETINGS ACT, AND TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS ATTORNEY CLIENT WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CITY ATTORNEY UNDER SECTION 8(1)(H) OF THE OPEN MEETINGS ACT AND SETTLEMENT STRATEGY IN CONNECTION WITH PENDING LITIGATION UNDER SECTION 8(1)(E) OF THE OPEN MEETINGS ACT AND RELATING TO THE CASES OF SKILKEN GOLD REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT, LLC, ET AL. V FARMINGTON HILLS (OAKLAND COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT, CASE NO. 2025-213392-AA); AND ROBERT SCHMIER V. CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS (OAKLAND COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT, CASE NO. 80-210751-CE). (NOTE: COUNCIL WILL RETURN TO OPEN SESSION IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE CLOSED SESSION).

MOTION by Boleware, support by Bridges, that the City Council of Farmington Hills hereby approves a motion to enter into a closed session to discuss collective bargaining negotiations with Michigan Fraternal Order of Police Labor Council under Section 8(1)(c) of the Michigan Open Meetings Act, and to consider and discuss attorney client written communications from the City Attorney under Section 8(1)(h) of the Open Meetings Act and settlement strategy in connection with pending litigation under Section 8(1)(e) of the Open Meetings Act and relating to the cases of Skilken Gold Real Estate Development, LLC, et al. v Farmington Hills (Oakland County Circuit Court, Case No. 2025-213392-AA); and Robert Schmier v. City of Farmington Hills (Oakland County Circuit Court, Case No. 80-210751-CE).

Roll Call Vote:

Yeas: ALDRED, BOLEWARE, BRIDGES, BRUCE, DWYER, AND KNOL

Nays: NONE

Absent: RICH

Abstentions: NONE

MOTION CARRIED 6-0.

Council re-entered open session at 6:08pm.

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE FROM RAFTELIS FINANCIAL CONSULTANTS, INC.

Assistant City Manager Mondora explained that the purpose of tonight's presentation by Raftelis Financial Consultants was to review with Council the final draft of the City's Strategic Plan framework. Staff was seeking Council consensus on the proposed deliverable, which would return to City Council for formal adoption at the October 27 meeting.

Raftelis provided an overview of the strategic planning process and summarized refinements made since the August workshop. Prior community engagement yielded consistent themes across all focus groups and stakeholders, which were reflected throughout the framework.

The mission statement had been shortened to read:

To deliver best-in-class services that sustain a high quality of life in Farmington Hills.

The vision statement underwent the most significant revision following the August workshop. Based on community and Council feedback, the vision was designed to be bold and aspirational, highlighting both preservation of existing community strengths and the pursuit of new opportunities. The final Vision Statement reads:

Farmington Hills strives to be a vibrant destination, preserving a welcoming and safe community where innovation, culture, and green spaces inspire people and businesses to flourish.

The five goal areas remained largely unchanged from the August draft, with two key updates:

- The "Uphold Community Safety and Well-Being" success statement was rewritten for better alignment: *Ensuring a safe and resilient community where residents, businesses, and visitors thrive.*
- The "Foster a Welcoming Community" goal was broadened to encompass multiple dimensions of inclusivity, beyond its earlier intergenerational focus, allowing for a wider range of initiatives to advance community engagement and belonging. The statement now read: *Promoting active engagement and meaningful connections that strengthen community life, where all people feel valued and supported.*

A key change in the "Values" section was the choice of the term "customer focused" rather than "customer service."

Raftelis has begun discussions with staff to integrate the Strategic Plan into Council goal setting, policy development, and resource planning in early 2026. The plan is designed to serve as a roadmap guiding the City's strategic and operational priorities over the coming years.

Council discussion

Councilmember Boleware discussed the phrasing of the vision statement, specifically the use of the word "destination" in the phrase "Farmington Hills strives to be a vibrant destination." "Destination" implies a place one visits rather than resides in. "Vibrant community" or "vibrant city" might better convey the intent of creating a desirable place to live and work.

Discussion focused on the interpretation of the word "destination" – representing both a place others aspire to visit and as a community where current residents already have all they need to live, work, and play. There appeared to be general consensus to retain the vision statement as presented, with the understanding that the term "destination" is meant to convey both community pride and aspirational growth.

Mayor Rich noted that under the goal area “Uphold Community Safety and Well-Being,” the heading might benefit from including the phrase “for all” to emphasize inclusivity. Discussion focused on maintaining consistency across goal statements. The word “all” could be added within the success statement to read: “Ensuring a safe and resilient community where all residents, businesses, and visitors thrive.”

Mayor Rich closed discussion on this item.

PRESENTATION OF 12 MILE ROAD, ORCHARD LAKE ROAD AND GRAND RIVER CORRIDOR MARKET STUDIES UPDATE

Economic Development Director Brockway presented updates on the ongoing market studies for the 12 Mile Road, Orchard Lake Road, and Grand River Avenue corridors. The purpose of the studies is to build on the City’s Master Plan by identifying current market conditions and trends prior to making future zoning changes. The data will guide land use and economic development strategies, serve as a marketing tool for attracting investment, and function as a living document for ongoing policy and development decisions.

The provided presentation covered:

- Top industries in each corridor and consumer traffic.
- Annual consumer demand compared to market trends.
- Market potential and investment potential: how big and how good investment is in these major corridors.
- Trade area demographics; including top spending categories.
- Recommendations based on both studies. This encompasses zoning/flexibility, improvement districts, multijurisdictional partnerships, and more.
- Current status and investment response.
- Next steps/low hanging fruit.

As the market studies are finalizing, City Staff have already begun to review and address the suggestions for the three major corridors. News on the market studies and their data is being shared throughout the investment community, small business realm, franchise, and corporate entities.

Grand River Corridor Market Findings

The Grand River Corridor has a significant regional trade area extending from Redford through Southfield to nearly I-275, with substantial consumer and business activity. Key findings include:

- \$30 million in new customer spending capture, representing untapped retail potential in the corridor;
- 90,000 square feet of potential new retail space that could be supported by market demand;
- \$100 million in total household retail spending within the corridor’s trade area; and
- The highest consumer demand categories include retail, restaurant, and grocery sectors, indicating opportunities for commercial growth.

The 10-minute trade area includes 80,000 workers, creating strong demand for mixed-use and retail development. The City’s marketing strategy will include direct outreach to local businesses, regional media promotion including Crane’s, and presentations to business and investment organizations. The first major public presentation of the study will occur at the October 22 Bagels & Business event.

Councilmember Bridges asked how the findings of the Grand River Corridor Market Study align with the Corridor Improvement Authority (CIA) and ongoing streetscape improvements being proposed for that area.

Director Brockway explained that the Grand River Corridor has historically maintained an industrial appearance and has faced challenges in attracting funding and redevelopment. However, nearly \$1 million is now available in the CIA budget, which will be strategically used to revitalize the corridor's physical appearance.

Self-investment by the City through beautification efforts—such as landscaping, improved crosswalks, and public art—will encourage private sector investment. Creating an inviting and identifiable streetscape signals to potential investors that the area is worth investing in, fostering placemaking and enhancing the corridor's image.

Councilmember Aldred referenced a previous discussion noting that some property owners along Grand River are holding onto vacant or underutilized properties without taking action to redevelop them. He asked whether the City could introduce incentives with time limits to encourage redevelopment or sale, such as benefits that expire by a certain date.

Director Brockway responded that the City already offers a \$30,000 Facade Improvement Grant, which provides funding for façade, landscaping, and hardscape upgrades, as well as future inclusion of architectural renderings and design services to assist property owners who lack resources or design expertise.

Some property owners live out of state and have held properties for decades, while others are long-term investors pricing their properties between \$1 million and \$2 million for 50,000 square feet of space. In these cases, City staff continue to engage directly with owners, encouraging them to market their properties to active buyers and developers.

Mayor Pro Tem Dwyer asked if there is a timeline or long-term vision for redevelopment within the Grand River Corridor, particularly through 2035.

Director Brockway stated that the City currently has a five-year plan for streetscape and landscape improvements. The short-term goal is to leverage the market data to attract investment and create a more walkable, visually appealing, and functional corridor. Several businesses have already invested in the area, including Corewell Health, Benjamin Moore, and Domino's Pizza, all of which have recently purchased properties along the corridor. These investments demonstrate growing private-sector confidence and serve as early successes of the City's redevelopment strategy.

Director Brockway confirmed that she regularly meets with brokers individually, conducts site tours, and shares information about available redevelopment incentives, including brownfield and rehabilitation programs.

Mayor Pro Tem Dwyer asked if lighting improvements are included in the corridor design. Director Brockway confirmed that lighting and street enhancements are part of the five-year plan, including the addition of decorative historical streetlamps, banners, and hanging flower baskets, which will complement the new landscape design and contribute to a unified corridor aesthetic.

12 Mile Road Corridor Market Study

Director Brockway noted that the 12 Mile Road Corridor presents distinct characteristics and opportunities compared to the Grand River and Orchard Lake corridors. The 12 Mile Road corridor functions as a research and development hub and is experiencing growing demand for mixed-use redevelopment, particularly the repurposing of commercial and office spaces into more pedestrian-friendly environments that include green spaces and areas for public art.

Key findings include:

- Strong demand for mixed-use and infill development, with particular interest in converting office spaces into residential or hybrid office-residential uses;
- Market analysis supports at least one higher end dining establishment, responding to interest in after-hours networking venues from corporate employees and business visitors;
- Potential for townhomes and multifamily residential development, especially conversions of underused office properties to higher-density housing;
- High-income demographic driven by major employers such as ZF, Nissan, Bosch, and JST;
- Growing need for employee wellness amenities, including fitness centers, on-site clinics, daycare services, and cafés to support work-life balance.

12 Mile Road and Hills Tech Drive share a common workforce and economic ecosystem and are being considered as a unified study area for future planning and redevelopment efforts. The trade area for 12 Mile Road is expansive, extending from Auburn Hills to Taylor and encompassing approximately 740,000 people. The trade area generates \$20.4 billion in annual consumer demand, with 5.1 million retail customers annually, driven by an affluent and professional customer base. Most employees working in the corridor live within 5 to 25 miles, providing a strong local consumer base for services, dining, and entertainment.

Director Brockway identified several groups the City should target for investment outreach:

- Mixed-use developers focused on office-to-residential conversions;
- Developers seeking infill opportunities and higher-end dining establishments;
- Entertainment and leisure businesses such as Topgolf, LA Fitness, or Planet Fitness, which support both corporate employees and nearby residents.

The corridor's affluent workforce is creating sustained demand for after-work entertainment and social gathering spaces, which could be supported by new restaurant and recreation development.

Councilmember Aldred asked whether the study's industry percentages were based on revenue or business count. Director Brockway clarified they were based on industry type classifications (NACE codes) rather than revenue.

Councilmember Bridges asked about recent changes in state law that might make it more financially feasible to convert office buildings into residential units, saying he had heard of new legislation related to amortization or financing structures for such projects. Director Brockway will research this question. Director Brockway said that four property owners have already expressed interest in pursuing adaptive reuse projects, primarily for office buildings with high vacancy rates (70% or more). These conversions would not be traditional mixed-use developments, but rather hybrid projects featuring residential units with ground-floor commercial amenities, such as cafés, golf simulators, or small retail spaces. Developers are also seeking opportunities to include green and open space, creating walkable and connected environments for residents and workers.

Mayor Pro Tem Dwyer asked about the amount of undeveloped or underused land along the 12 Mile Road corridor. Director estimated there are approximately 35 to 40 acres of unused parking areas and green space, including the Kojaian property. However, the most immediately developable parcels are infill sites with existing utilities.

Orchard Lake Road Corridor Market Study

Councilmember Boleware asked why more restaurants and entertainment venues have not chosen to locate in Farmington Hills, given the City's strong demographics and high disposable income.

Director Brockway identified three primary barriers: zoning restrictions, long-standing single-use zoning patterns, and complex zoning along Orchard Lake Road. The OS-4 district previously allowed only office uses, excluding restaurants and retail. The recent text amendment allowing mixed-use and retail by right within that zoning district has already generated new interest and listings from developers.

Director Brockway further explained that multiple zoning districts along Orchard Lake Road have complicated redevelopment efforts. City regulatory changes are now opening the door for new investment, and several restaurant proposals are currently in progress.

Councilmember Bruce added that one major barrier to new restaurants is the limited availability and high cost of liquor licenses. He explained that the Michigan Liquor Control Commission severely restricts the number of Class C licenses, forcing restaurateurs to purchase them on the private market for over \$100,000, which discourages small independent operators.

Director Brockway summarized market findings showing a strong demand for food and dining establishments across the corridors. The studies revealed that average time spent at local destinations is less than 40 minutes, primarily around 7:00 p.m., with little activity afterward. This data highlights a lack of evening and nightlife venues, which the Hunter Square development is expected to help address.

Director Brockway noted that while the City is currently receiving interest from drive-thru restaurant developers, those uses are not reflective of resident desires for more full-service, sit-down dining options.

Director Brockway provided a summary of the current investment status and ongoing development activity across the three corridors:

- 12 Mile Road Corridor: Following recent zoning text amendments, three to four properties have expressed interest in office-to-residential redevelopment projects. Two commercial outlots are currently on the market, indicating increased investor confidence post-amendment.
- Orchard Lake Road Corridor: Property owners are seeking greater flexibility for growth on narrow lots. Six new restaurants—a mix of family dining, fast casual, and drive-thru formats—are exploring development opportunities.
- Grand River Corridor: The area continues to see new investment, with recent property transitions including new office and artisan moving into the former Peninsular Machinery Building; Benjamin Moore Paint Supply purchased the former Habitat for Humanity site; the former Walgreens has been purchased for medical office use; and Domino's Pizza is opening a new location.

Next steps

Director Brockway outlined key next steps and strategic priorities emerging from the studies:

- Grand River Corridor: Review and potentially amend the Grand River Corridor Overlay District to expand flexibility and creativity in redevelopment; consider expanding the overlay to the full corridor; and advance community beautification initiatives to create an investable destination and encourage private reinvestment.
- Orchard Lake Road Corridor: Explore the creation of an overlay zoning district to target density and market interest; consider establishing a Corridor Improvement Authority to fund public, façade, landscaping, and pedestrian enhancements along the marginal access drives. Introduce food-focused uses in non-restaurant zones.
- 12 Mile Road Corridor: Examine policy adjustments to allow Hills Tech Drive properties similar flexibility as OS-4 zoned areas; explore walkable linkages and activated outdoor spaces, leverage natural amenities like existing ponds and wooded areas for placemaking.
- Citywide Initiatives: Develop ordinances to regulate outdoor retail and food trucks; enhance walkability and green space; strengthen corridor branding, particularly in the International District, which has seen a 9% traffic increase; and implement creative lighting solutions compatible with dark-sky standards to enhance visibility and ambiance for evening activity.

Council discussion

Councilmember Knol reaffirmed the importance of prioritizing sit-down dining along 12 Mile Road, cautioning that once fast-food developments are constructed, they permanently alter the character and future potential of the corridor.

Councilmember Aldred agreed that the 12 Mile Corridor presents a major opportunity for business networking and after-work dining, especially given the area's affluent employee base. He asked if any feedback indicated further zoning changes were needed following the OS-4 amendments.

Director Brockway stated that the existing text amendments have been effective, and future adjustments will likely be minor refinements based on experience. She emphasized the City's balanced approach to supporting a diversity of restaurant types.

Councilmember Bridges supported the exploration of a district improvement program for Orchard Lake Road, noting that its aging public access areas and infrastructure need targeted City investment to improve aesthetics and attract redevelopment.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Rich closed discussion and adjourned the meeting at 7:21pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk