

FARMINGTON CITY COUNCIL  
SPECIAL MEETING  
March 17, 2008

A special meeting of the Farmington City Council was held on Monday, March 17, 2008, in Council Chambers, 23600 Liberty Street, Farmington, Michigan. Notice of the meeting was posted in compliance with Public Act 267-1976.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Mayor Knol.

**COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:** Buck, Knol, McShane, Wiggins, Wright.

**COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:** None.

**CITY ADMINISTRATION:** City Clerk Halberstadt, City Manager Pastue.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

**03-08-041** MOTION by McShane, seconded by Wiggins, to approve the agenda as presented. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

**PLANNING COMMISSION AND ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS**

Present: David Gronbach, Planning Commission Chairman, Paul Buyers, Zoning Board of Appeals Chairman.

Chairman Gronbach updated the Council on Planning Commission activities including a review of the Master Plan. He stated the Master Plan should be resolved and adopted later this year. He outlined future plans of the Commission including a review of land use and potential zoning changes that would emphasize flexibility & potential mixed use in commercial areas. He suggested integration of the Downtown and City Master Plans by referencing each other to establish a more uniform City.

Chairman Gronbach emphasized the Commission's hope to encourage and motivate landlords of the World Wide and Uptown Centers to re-develop and improve their centers in order to cater to their neighborhoods. He stated commercial corridor zones could provide tax incentives or create funding that would encourage businesses to update and make improvements.

Chairman Byers addressed the Council stating the Zoning Board of Appeals has had a quiet six months with minimal requests for variances. He reviewed the Board's most recent requests (1) Mr. Soave's trash compacting request was approved under the condition compacted trash be removed; and (2) the denial of Farmington Healthcare Facility's request to expand in order to house a large scale 15 ft. oxygenation tank. Chairman Byers stated the Board tries to remain fair to each proponent while requiring ordinance standards are fully met.

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Chairman Byers stated City Ordinance as it applies to zoning is effective and accommodates the needs of the City.

Councilmember McShane asked Chairman Gronbach if the Planning Commission intended to review the Farmington Hills Master Plan for the commonality and cohesiveness of the two Cities. He responded the Commission will review their plan once it has been approved.

Councilmember McShane commented regarding the increased application of green requirements relative to land use. Commissioner Gronbach agreed and shared past Board discussions regarding this issue.

McShane asked about the application of overlays to shopping centers and land redevelopment as mixed use with an urban feel. Chairperson Gronbach agreed with the benefits of applying overlays, stating the Commission discussed this concept and plans to incorporate it in the Master Plan. He then shared his frustration with poorly motivated shopping center owners and his hope to find a way to show them the benefits of a more viable center.

Councilmember McShane agreed and stated when the Master Plan is in place the City can lead by example by putting money into these changes reinforcing the thought that financial benefits are seen after applying mixed land use.

Councilmember Buck complimented the Planning Commission on their combined member expertise. He then questioned Chairman Gronbach regarding raising the expectations for shopping centers.

Chairman Gronbach responded there is no fail safe plan to motivate property owners to take action. He then suggested tax incentives might prompt them to invest in their property in order to attract a higher caliber tenant which in turn would help them realize their full potential and give them more revenue.

City Manager Pastue commented on his past meetings with individual property owners and felt that future meetings might be improved upon by broadening their scope.

Mayor Knol concurred and then emphasized code enforcement is a critical part in the process. She expressed concern regarding absentee land owners and their inability to regularly attend meetings. She felt the City needed to meet regularly with land owners in order to share the new Master Plan, discuss potential for mixed land use, and explain the City's offer of a commercial rehabilitation district that will cap their property taxes.

Councilmember McShane agreed with Mayor Knol and commented that everyone wants to save money and make money. She stated a practical approach is needed in order to change and move forward.

Mayor Knol spoke about the City of Livonia's struggle to improve the Livonia Mall. She explained how the Mall being one property owner wants to tear down & rebuild, but

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Sears as the other property owner wants nothing to do with that plan. So Livonia in conjunction with the Mayor's office and Chamber of Commerce has requested residents write letters to Sears encouraging them to participate in the redevelopment of the two properties.

Councilmember Wright questioned hypothetically "if you owned any of these properties what would you do differently" suggesting investment judgments may have been made by average investors. He suggested an adjustment in the City's approach may be needed in order to motivate owners to change. He also felt some owners may be older and well established and not highly motivated to invest.

City Manager Pastue noted he had heard that very comment while meeting with a couple of well established property owners who weren't motivated to invest additional money into their property. City Manager Pastue stated the owner of the Uptown Center has 95% occupancy and believes his minimal maintenance is acceptable.

Councilmember Wright commented that Uptown Center's parking lot is three times larger than customers need. He felt incentive is needed to motivate the owner to take a risk.

Councilmember McShane responded the City needed to approach companies such as Border's regarding relocation to sites such as the K-Mart property and provide owners with suggestions of ways to make that happen.

Councilmember Wright suggested developing financial models to provide incentives to property owners.

Councilmember Buck noted that new developers already have the financial formulas needed.

Mayor Knol stated current and new property owners need to know the City is willing to work with them using the Commercial Rehabilitation Act.

Councilmember Buck noted the need to spread the word to developers that "the City of Farmington is business friendly."

Councilmember McShane felt developing a professional plan to present to developers at the time of sale could attract new land owners to the City.

Buck suggested this type of function could be contracted out.

Councilmember Wright suggested contacting local stakeholders with thoughts of a venture capital fund. He then commented "why invest in a venture capital fund in California when you can invest in your own community."

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City Manager Pastue asked the Board and Commission Chairs if either Soave's dumpster enclosure or the Farmington Healthcare Facility issue were appropriate items to bring to either the Zoning Board of Appeals or Planning Commission. Mr. Buyers responded the Commission had enough on its plate and these requests are appropriate for the ZBA.

City Manager Pastue continued by asking if both Chairs were satisfied with the support provided by City staff, consultants and legal counsel.

Commissioner Gronbach answered he felt the support had significantly improved. He noted the consultants provide Commissioners with objectivity and technical clarification. Chairman Buyers concurred commenting city staff provides the Board with excellent support.

Mayor Knol asked City Manager Pastue when Soave would come before the Planning Commission. He stated they will attend the April 14<sup>th</sup> meeting. Pastue noted after resolving the variance issue with DEQ, Soave will present the site plan formerly presented to the Planning Commission in December.

Discussion followed regarding conditions under which the Soave Office Building site plan would be approved by MDOT.

Councilmember Wright questioned why a meeting between the Farmington and Farmington Hills City Planning Commissions concerning their Master Plan did not happen.

City Manager Pastue stated he wasn't sure where the breakdown occurred but felt the meeting was necessary and would occur once the Planning Commission received their Master Plan for review.

City Mayor Knol echoed Councilmember Wright's concern stating issues such as the Grand River Corridor needed to be addressed by both cities.

Responding to concerns, City Manager Pastue stated a meeting would be arranged between the two City Planning Commissions.

Councilmember Wiggins stated the City's focus has been to attract outside area residents to Farmington. He noted, however, there should be more emphasis on attracting businesses to Farmington that provide a service to residents that live here. He then proposed the City review the Master Plan with business tenants such as Big Lot or ACO Hardware suggesting they may be able to apply pressure to the business property owners to make changes.

City Manager Pastue stated property maintenance is one area the City can address.

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Mayor Knol thanked Chairman Gronbach and Chairman Buyers for their updates and complimented both the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals on their professionalism and expertise.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

None heard.

**COUNCIL COMMENT**

City Manager Pastue agreed to find a date agreeable to everyone for a joint meeting with Farmington Hills.

City Mayor Knol reminded everyone of the date for the joint meeting with the schools scheduled for April 15, 2008.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**03-08-042** MOTION by Wiggins, seconded by City Manager Knol, to adjourn the meeting. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

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Valerie S. Knol, Mayor

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Susan K. Halberstadt, City Clerk

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Susan Pohto, Recording Secretary

APPROVED: April 21, 2008

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