

MINUTES  
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS  
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MEETING  
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM  
OCTOBER 27, 2014 – 6:00PM

The Study Session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Brickner at 6:00pm.

Council Members Present: Brickner, Bridges, Bruce, Knol, Lerner, Massey and Steckloff

Council Members Absent: None

Others Present: City Manager Brock, City Clerk Smith, Assistant City Manager Boyer, Assistant to the City Manager Geinzer, Director Gardiner and Attorney Joppich

**UPDATE ON GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY ENERGY PRIZE:**

Nate Geinzer, Assistant to the City Manager, explained that Farmington Hills is still in the running for the Georgetown University Energy Prize and the City has two weeks to submit their plan. He stated that an all-day meeting was held with representatives of the organizations that are supporting the project and they spent that time discussing focus areas of the plan.

Mr. Geinzer discussed the competition scoring and reviewed the 3 key focus areas that included Education and Energy, Communication and Incentives.

Councilmember Massey inquired about the potential for replication of the program or ideas. He stated that he feels the incentives are jump starters but will not last forever. Mr. Geinzer replied that the plan would include new models for programs that could be replicated by others. He agreed that the incentives were only tools to get others involved.

Councilmember Bridges inquired about partnering with utility companies to promote energy efficiency programs. Mr. Geinzer pointed out that the utility companies have been involved from the beginning as they are providing the data and have been working with the City on programs including DTE Insight. He added that there may be other programs in which the City could partner with these companies as well.

In answer to Councilmember Massey, Mr. Geinzer also noted that they will be reaching out to a variety of contractors that focus on energy efficiency.

Mr. Geinzer further explained the focus areas of the plan and the ideas for reaching out to various organizations such as congregations, schools, businesses as well as the residential neighborhoods within the community to promote energy efficiency.

Mayor Pro-Tem Bruce inquired if staff was tracking the man hours spent on this program. Mr. Geinzer stated that initially staff was just tracking the energy savings; however, there is a final report required as part of this process and they will be looking at the strategies used to save energy. He stated that the group will re-evaluate the plan as needed if some of the strategies they are using are not working. He added that the program has been funded through sponsorships or grant funding to date.

Mayor Pro-Tem Bruce stated that he would like an estimate of the costs involved, whether sponsorship or not, to determine if the efforts were worth the energy savings in the end.

Assistant City Manager Boyer commented that some of the efforts are linked to existing programs so that also helps to limit some of the costs involved.

City Manager Brock added that alternative energy is expensive up front in order to realize savings going forward so he cautioned how that is presented as part of this program.

Mr. Geinzer further discussed the proposed public relations for the plan, which includes a monthly column in the local paper and possibly targeting certain areas for direct mailings; and further discussed incentives for the program

Councilmember Massey suggested contacting Quicken Loans, one of the Employers mentioned as sponsoring the program efforts, to see if they could develop a program to provide for affordable loans that could be rolled out to Farmington/Farmington Hills residents.

Councilmember Bridges commented that there is clearly a need to focus on promoting energy efficiency in residential areas and that the residents should be able to realize an immediate benefit by doing so.

Mayor Brickner commented that the Farmington Free Press had printed an article that included a lot of information on ways to save energy.

Mr. Geinzer commented that he had no further information at this time, but would keep the Council updated on the progression of the plan.

**DISCUSSION ON ABANDONED, BLIGHTED AND VACANT PROPERTIES:**

Ed Gardiner, Planning and Community Development Director, highlighted activity that was taking place with regard to abandoned and vacant properties within the City. He stated that amending the Zoning Ordinance to lighten parking restrictions and allowing for different uses in Industrial areas as well as the economy getting stronger has helped to fill some of the vacant buildings in the City.

It was mentioned that Vladimirs Banquet Facility has turned into a church.

Mayor Pro-Tem Bruce expressed concern that since this parcel has been reverted to a church the property would then come off of the tax rolls. He inquired if there was a way to limit the number of churches allowed in the community.

City Attorney Joppich stated that there are zoning restrictions in place now, but he would not suggest attempting to further restrict churches outside of the Zoning Ordinance requirements. He said he would review this issue and other options.

Councilmember Massey expressed concern that the City is trying to revitalize that area of Grand River where the church is now located, which would include adding restaurants in the area was part of the revitalization plan. He stated if the restaurant were to want to obtain a liquor license, they may have a difficult time due to their proximity to the existing church.

Attorney Joppich clarified that proximity to churches is taken into consideration, but does not necessarily mean that a restaurant would not be granted a license by the Michigan Liquor Control Commission.

Councilmember Massey suggested reviewing the possibility of a redevelopment district for this area in order for restaurants to be able to apply for a Redevelopment Liquor License.

Councilmember Knol stated that she asked for this item to be placed on the agenda and while she appreciates the update on various properties in the community, her main concern was with regard to abandoned buildings or homes that had burned down and the time frame involved in getting the damaged building torn down and area cleared. She was concerned with the restaurant (formerly SIPS) that had burned down along Grand River and how long it took to clear that building, especially since this area is an entranceway to the City. Mrs. Knol realized that the issue has been with waiting for a decision from the insurance companies, but suggested an ordinance amendment to address this issue and possibly require funds to be placed in escrow from the insurance companies.

Mr. Gardiner stated that the City could initiate the project by deeming it a dangerous building and go through that process; however, the City would then have to pay up front for tearing down the building.

Councilmember Knol stated that is why she is suggesting an ordinance amendment to require insurance companies to set aside escrow funds. Councilmember Bridges supported that idea.

Attorney Joppich indicated that he would review what options the city had for such an ordinance amendment and also outline for the Council the process for initiating dangerous building procedures. He added that the City has costs recovery built in to their ordinances now.

Mr. Gardiner stated that funds are only released when the investigation on the fire is complete.

Councilmember Lerner suggested that perhaps there are ways to expedite the due process. He felt this was a good topic for a study session and also asked that Attorney Joppich further explore how the City might be able to limit the loss of tax dollars to tax exempt organizations.

City Manager Brock assured Council that from an administrative standpoint, the City is acting as quickly as possible with regard to the buildings or homes damaged by fire and he feels that expediting this process could require some changes at the state level.

The consensus was for Attorney Joppich to research options for expediting the clean up of abandoned buildings or homes that were damaged and how the City could limit the loss of tax dollars to non-profit organizations. The issue of abandoned, blighted or vacant properties will come back to Council at a future study session.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 7:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Pamela B. Smith, City Clerk