

**MINUTES  
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS  
PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING  
31555 W ELEVEN MILE ROAD  
FARMINGTON HILLS, MICHIGAN  
September 21, 2023, 6:30 P.M.  
Planned Unit Development (PUD) 1, 2033 Study**

**CALL MEETING TO ORDER**

The Planning Commission Special Meeting was called to order by Chair Countegan at 6:30 p.m.

**ROLL CALL**

Commissioners present: Countegan, Grant, Trafelet, Stimson, Varga, Ware

Commissioners Absent: Aspinall, Brickner, Mantey

Others Present: City Planner Perdonik, Staff Planner Canty, City Attorney Schultz,  
Planning Consultant Tangari

**APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

**MOTION by Trafelet, support by Stimson, to approve the agenda as submitted.**

**Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.**

**PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT (PUD) 1, 2023 STUDY**

For the benefit of residents present, Chair Countegan made general comments regarding the role of the citizen planners who serve on the Planning Commission, and overviewed process and background regarding Planned Unit Developments. Tonight's meeting was to provide an opportunity for Commissioners to ask questions regarding process, and learn more about proposed Planned Unit Development 1, 2023. The applicants were here and would make brief comments as well. As at all public meetings, the public would be given the opportunity to make comments, in this case toward the end of the meeting. If public comment went longer than the scheduled time for this meeting (approximately 7:25pm), time would be given during the regular 7:30 meeting for public comment to continue.

PUD 1, 2023 was not on tonight's 7:30 regular meeting agenda. It would be heard again by the Planning Commission at the October 26, 2023 meeting.

City Planner Perdonik explained that the Planning Commission's charge during PUD review was to ensure the proposal met the City's policies and ordinances, and to make sure the project was consistent with the City's current Master Plan. In the present instance, the Master Plan showed the parcels in question as being zoned RA-1, single family residential. The area was also called out in the Master Plan as part of Special Planning Area #1, which also envisioned the area as single family residential. The Special Planning Area narrative in the Master Plan included a conceptual layout for the entire area.

- One of the questions the ordinance asks of PUD proposals is whether the project is in accordance with the goals and objectives of the Master Plan (Section 34-3.20.1.A). Fundamentally, the Planning Commission was making decisions within the context of the Master Plan.

- Six criteria for approval were listed in the ordinance; all the criteria must be met in order for a PUD project to be approved.
- The Planning Commission was a recommending body for PUD proposals; final approval or denial is under the authority of City Council.

Tom Haji, Chaldean Community Foundation (CCF), briefly reviewed the background and plan that had been presented to the Planning Commission at prior meetings, and to the neighbors during community meetings. Mr. Haji made the following points:

- The proposal was for five 3-story buildings, with 100 attainable housing units, on 6 acres. The \$25M project was partially funded through grants and donor partners, and was supported by MSHDA (Michigan State Housing Development Authority). The timeline for the project was dependent on approvals being granted in a timely way and grants being received per the granting agency's timetable.
- CCF has the property under contract, and since last November studies and surveys had been done on site relative to this development.
- Attainable workplace housing was a great need throughout the state. About 2/3 of the state's residents qualify for attainable housing. There were zero existing attainable housing units in Farmington Hills.
- Other lots on the 13 Mile Corridor are being marketed as residential income lots.
- Current average rental rates are ~\$1600 - \$1700/month. People who are making less than \$25 per hour cannot afford to live in such apartment homes. The rental rates for this project are more in line with what working residents can pay, or ~\$800 - \$1100/month.
- It is unlikely that any residential builder will seek to construct residential homes on these lots.
- The developers were open to dialoguing with their residential neighbors regarding amenities and desired buffering.

Chair Countegan opened the meeting to Commission questions and discussion, which included:

- In response to questions, Planning Consultant Tangari said the vision for the area in the current Master Plan is for a pocket neighborhood/small single family development with a couple of cul-de-sacs. That vision and the concept development in the Master Plan applied to about 8-9 existing lots, more than the 3 lots being discussed this evening.
- The question before the Planning Commission was one of density. Was there justification to allow greater density than that shown in the current Master Plan? Is the proposal a reasonable alternative to the Master Plan, and if so, why is it a reasonable alternative?
- The project should show consistency with the Master Plan and compatibility with surrounding areas. This proposal dealt only with a portion of Special Planning Area #1, leaving the remaining pieces of Special Planning Area isolated in terms of RA-1 zoning.
- Commissioner Stimson thought that the proposal was actually an RC-3 project, with two minor deviations – for height and parking – which could be resolved through the variance process. The PUD ordinance states that: *The PUD shall not be utilized in situations where the same land use objectives can be accomplished by the application of conventional zoning provisions or standards.* In this case, it seemed like the applicants were using the PUD process to “get around” the zoning ordinance. If this was allowed, what was the purpose of the zoning ordinance? This PUD project would allow spot zoning to exist at this location. Underlying zoning changes should not be made through a PUD project. It was likely no one on the Commission had previously looked at this site and thought it should be changed to RC-3 zoning. This project represented too significant a change from RA-1 zoning.
- General discussion focused on how the City could shift its vision and welcome change. Changing the City's vision, or accommodating a changed vision, was the purpose of reviewing and revising the

Master Plan. In the meantime, people who purchased homes in the subdivision behind this parcel had an expectation, based on the existing Master Plan, that single family housing would be encouraged and constructed on these lots.

- Chair Countegan suggested that part of the underlying question is how the Commission views what has been happening with these parcels, and whether the existing Master Plan vision still makes sense there. On the other hand, perhaps the proposed PUD did not make sense in this location. Either way, it was appropriate for the Commission to have a discussion about the proposal. Could the PUD address everyone's concerns via the negotiation process? One of the challenges when making a recommendation to City Council was addressing the question: how does the Planning Commission see the future? In the same way as 5 years ago? Or was the vision now somewhat different?
- Commissioner Stimson said the proposal did not address everyone's concerns. There were many neighbors who did not feel their concerns were being addressed. This development was too close to the residential neighborhood and was too dense.
- Chair Countegan pointed out that Commissioners were also residents and neighbors in the City. The Commission did not control what proposals came before them, but the Commission was responsible for reviewing proposals and acting on them.
- Commissioner Ware said that this was not an easy conversation to have. There was the danger of missing an important opportunity for the City.

Applicant Architect Abanatha explained some of the process the development team went through as they brought this plan to the City and worked through the best way to present it. This is a special project, being brought to the City during a time of Master Plan review. This PUD project was based on bringing something special and unique to the City.

After speaking to the deliberative, transparent nature of the PUD process, Chair Countegan opened the meeting to public comment.

Emilio Ramiriz, President of Holly Hills HOA, said that the 6 criteria for granting a PUD development under the ordinance had not been met. He felt the PUD was being used to avoid zoning restrictions in order to increase density. The proposed development was not compatible with the surrounding neighborhood, and did not provide a transition buffer between uses, but became a separate use in a residential neighborhood.

Kristi Kelly said she did not think this project qualified for a PUD project. The land was designed in the Master Plan for single family infill for a single family project, not a high density PUD. While it was true that attainable housing projects were needed and were being proposed throughout the state, most of those proposed locations were in higher density, more commercial locations, not a quiet residential area such as this one.

Mark Sanders, Westgate, said that this high density apartment project goes against the guidelines in the Master Plan. The project was not a transition buffer. The proposed PUD was inappropriate for this area and was not compatible with the surrounding neighborhood. The proposal did not meet PUD ordinances, and was clearly being used to avoid zoning standards. He asked the Planning Commission to recommend denial of this request.

Cathy Leik, Westgate, was opposed to the height of the proposed buildings, which per her calculations were higher than the height claimed by the applicants. She was also opposed to the increased density in this neighborhood. There were other, larger parcels in the City that could accommodate this development.

Seeking to place this development on 6 acres in the center of residential development was not appropriate, and would set precedent for density along the rest of 13 Mile Road. This proposal should be denied.

Chair Countegan noted that the time had come to close this Special Meeting, in order to open the Regular Planning Commission meeting on time. In order to accommodate residents who still wished to speak, Chair Countegan suggested that public comment be allowed to continue after opening the Regular Meeting.

#### **COMMISSIONER COMMENTS**

None.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion by Trafelet, support by Grant, to adjourn the Special Meeting at 7:28pm.**

**Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.**

Respectfully Submitted,  
Marisa Varga  
Planning Commission Secretary  
/cem