

MINUTES  
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS  
CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL GOALS STUDY SESSION MEETING  
JANUARY 16, 2021 – 9:00AM

The special goals study session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was held electronically and called to order by Mayor Barnett at 9:08AM.

During roll call, Council Members were asked to state their location from where they are attending the meeting remotely.

Council Members Present: Vicki Barnett, Farmington Hills, Michigan  
Jackie Boleware, Farmington Hills, Michigan  
Michael Bridges, Farmington Hills, Michigan  
Valerie Knol, Farmington Hills, Michigan  
Ken Massey, Farmington Hills, Michigan  
Mary Newlin, Farmington Hills, Michigan

Council Members Absent: None (one vacancy)

Others Present: Acting City Manager Mekjian, City Clerk Smith and Director Randle

**MAYOR'S OPENING COMMENTS**

Mayor Barnett explained that the purpose of the goals session was to provide input to staff on items Council would like to further discuss. No official action will be taken at the study session; just a consensus on whether to bring an item back for further discussion.

Mayor and City Council reviewed the following topics from 2020 that would be brought back this coming year to a study session for further review:

- Consolidation of signs and height of freestanding signs
- Deer population
- Autonomous vehicles/smart city
- Updating the 2020 vision plan

Mayor and City Council addressed the following new topics:

**CITY-WIDE TECHNOLOGY (WEBSITE, ON-LINE PAYMENTS, ETC.)**

City Council members expressed the desire to update the city website. They felt it was difficult to navigate and search for items and that it could be better utilized to promote events happening in the city.

Acting City Manager Mekjian stated that staff is currently working on a planned website refresh that will better highlight timely topics and those improvements will be shared with City Council. He noted that he will review the issue of Boards and Commissions and including any current openings on the website for residents.

Council expressed interest in also review other platforms for the website.

It was determined that this issue would be brought back to a future study session for further review.

### **STREAMLINING PLANNING SITE PLAN APPROVAL PROCESS**

Council discussed trying to make it easier for developers to obtain approval for projects if they come in with a plan that meets all code requirements and rather than having them go through several meetings to gain approval, that could be done administratively should they meet all code requirements.

It was also suggested that while this is being reviewed that staff include outdoor eating and outdoor special events and what can be done so that those requests could also be approved administratively if they meet all code requirements.

Mayor Barnett mentioned that there may be legal requirements where a development must go before the Planning Commission or Council for certain approvals and she suggested obtaining current guidelines for the process and having Attorney Joppich on the legal side and how City Council could handle fast-tracking certain approvals for projects that meet all current code requirements. She added that this topic is related to the next topic to review zoning ordinance changes and she also commented on developments such as the hotels that were currently built that due to COVID may need to be repurposed.

### **REVIEW OF ZONING ORDINANCE TO ALLOW FOR FLEXIBILITY**

Council agreed this related to the previous topic but included discussion on how COVID may change the way people do business and there could be an influx of empty office space. They expressed the need to be more flexible with their zoning ordinances and the need to look at mixed uses and overlay districts for neighborhoods.

It was agreed that there was a need for major changes in the zoning ordinance and other ordinances that affect development and to review current setback requirements.

A joint study session meeting with the Planning Commission was suggested.

Acting City Manager Mekjian stated that this topic will also likely play a big part in updating the 2020 Vision Plan.

### **HIRING OF A DIVERSITY/INCLUSION STAFF MEMBER**

Considerable discussion was held on hiring a diversity/inclusion staff member. Some members felt that the current staff was not representative of the city that is one of the most diverse communities in Oakland County.

Barriers identified by Council included longevity of current employees as community demographics have changed more rapidly than career paths and not getting a diverse pool of applicants for the positions.

Suggestions included strengthening the current Multi-Cultural/Multi-Racial Commission that advocates for more diversity, utilizing current positions and develop programs that would encourage diverse candidates to apply for positions in the city.

Mayor Barnett suggested taking a broader view and not only look at hiring practices but work with departments to make sure all residents are benefitting through expanded services that address language barriers, infrastructure for the disabled community, etc.

Councilmember Bridges appreciated the broader representation suggested but also wanted to include bias-training for staff. He felt the need for a diversity/inclusion staff member was evident and that the city has the funding.

Discussion ensued on the need to hire a full-time staff member and Human Resources Director Randle commented on current hiring practices.

Some Council members did not feel it was necessary to hire a full-time staff person and expressed concern about future funding but Council, as a whole, supported further discussion.

Mayor Barnett stated that she would attempt to put in writing her ideas to broaden the scope as suggested earlier and bring that back to City Council as there seemed to be a consensus to further discuss the topic.

**HIRING OF A SOCIAL WORKER AND 24-HOUR AFTER-HOURS HOTLINE**

Discussion was held on hiring a social worker for the city and having a 24-hour after-hours hotline for residents in need to reach out to someone who is qualified to help them.

Some concerns expressed were with regard to hiring a full-time staff person and future funding and it was mentioned that there are also many resources for residents in the community and perhaps the issue is connecting residents with those resources that already exist.

The consensus was to bring the topic back to a study session outlining current resources that are available and potentially working through the Community Health Commission and also researching other cities that may have a social worker.

Director Randle pointed out that the city also has a program dedicated to employees and their families.

**PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS:**

Kristi Kelly, resident, commented on marijuana use in residential areas and concerns with potentially moving that to Light Industrial Districts. She applauded the discussion on diversity and inclusion and agreed looking at what other communities are doing may be helpful. She commented on economic issues for small businesses.

Marina Kashat, resident, agreed with the idea of a social worker and getting resource information out to the community. She suggested for non-technical people holding workshops on how use the platforms may be helpful.

Erik Lindquist, resident and Zoning Board of Appeals member, suggested that if City Council holds a joint study session with the Planning Commission on ordinances changes to also include the Zoning Board of Appeals.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

MOTION by Massey, support by Bridges, to adjourn the special goals study session meeting at 11:50am.

Roll Call Vote:

Yeas: BARNETT, BOLEWARE, BRIDGES, KNOL, MASSEY AND NEWLIN

Nays: NONE

Absent: NONE

Abstentions: NONE

MOTION CARRIED 6-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Pamela B. Smith, MiPMC/MMC  
City Clerk