

MINUTES  
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS  
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MEETING  
COMMUNITY ROOM  
OCTOBER 25, 2021 – 6:00PM

The study session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Barnett at 6:04pm.

Council Members Present: Barnett, Boleware, Bridges, Knol, Massey, Newlin and Strickfaden

Council Members Absent: None

Others Present: City Manager Mekjian, City Clerk Smith, Assistant City Manager Valentine, and City Attorney Joppich

**DTE POWER PLANNING FOR FARMINGTON HILLS**

Jennifer Whitteaker, DTE Regional Manager for Oakland County, introduced her team present this evening to discuss power outages in Farmington Hills.

Joe Musallam, DTE Representative, discussed with Council what DTE is doing globally as well as what they are doing in Farmington Hills to improve service. He reviewed weather patterns and spoke of the recent storms, frequency of the storms and how that has impacted electrical service in the area and their ability to get power back up for residents in a timely matter.

Mr. Musallam discussed various projects including tree-trimming and infrastructure upgrades within the community and a timeline for completion of those projects.

Comments/suggestions of Council included the following:

- The area has the highest rates with the worst service
- Need to maintain a tree-trimming plan and to keep on schedule as that has been a reason used by DTE for frequent power outages yet there has been no improvement over the years
- Prioritize reliable service over renewables. Not that Council is opposed to renewables but priority should be reliable service
- Questioned if the utility poles structurally sound and is there a replacement program in place for utility poles
- More attention to infrastructure needs and not just relying on tree-trimming
- Plans for underground cabling and/or cable replacement
- Concern with neglecting existing infrastructure needs to build out
- Improvements to reimbursement program for residents who have lost power and assistance for low-income residents. Residents should not have to ask for reimbursement with the Smart Meter system in place
- Council will continue to push DTE for action, particularly as they move forward with Smart City initiatives
- A commitment and plan for improvements Farmington Hills will see now and not 5 years from now

Mr. Musallam spoke to new technologies for use of pressure treated or steel poles. He stated that DTE is making infrastructure improvements in Farmington Hills. He added that poles are tested for quality and safety every 5-10 years. DTE has an underground cable replacement program. It takes longer to locate the cables and it is more disruptive when they have to replace underground cables but he could follow up with Council on any specific plans if Council wished.

Mayor Barnett stated that she spoke to DTE about coordinating underground cable efforts with the city's future road improvements so that it could be done at the time the roads are being repaired. This would result in lower costs for DTE.

In response to Council comments, Mr. Musallam reported that DTE is aligned with wanting to assist low-income residents. He added that they will be 70% complete with the tree-trimming program by the end of the year towards the 5 -year cycle and that work should be good for that 5-year cycle.

Shannen Hartwick, DTE Director for Tree Trim, explained the tree-trimming program and funding, including the increase in employees. She stated that their biggest challenges at this time are resources and funding. DTE has started an academy and are trying to be creative in order to continue to grow their work force to meet the needs of the communities.

Mr. Musallam spoke to underground cabling and mentioned that some difficulties with that include finding a location for the transformer box that is required, older homes could require the homeowner to make some upgrades and other utilities that may be on the poles that DTE has no authority over.

Further discussion was held on accountability and seeing action and not just promises. Council questioned how DTE knows what areas require tree-trimming.

Mr. Musallam commented that the projects and timelines discussed tonight are not promises but work that is taking place now.

Ms. Hartwick explained that they first survey areas and have a system that can detect trees in lines to prioritize tree-trimming.

It was noted that DTE has been more aggressive with tree removals where needed and has a system that shows growth cycles so they know what areas may need attention more often and provides baseline data.

Mr. Musallam is confident that the CEO of DTE is committed to make improvements now and that they can fix the current issues.

It was suggested that the project timelines are shared with residents as well as future projects and timelines as every time DTE completes a project and hits that milestone, that develops trust.

Ms. Whitteaker stated that she will circle back with City management on the project timelines and milestones reached so that can be shared with staff and residents.

City Manager Mekjian stated that he would also like a contact at DTE to further discuss infrastructure needs as it relates to city-wide broadband and Smart City initiatives going forward.

**SARAH FISHER DISCUSSION**

Councilmember Knol stated that the developer for the Sarah Fisher property was trying to get on the agenda for the next Historic District Commission meeting on November 10, 2021 to request more flexibility with the requirements for maintaining the historical buildings on the site. She stated that the cost involved in maintaining and rehabilitating all of the historical buildings when they have no use for all of them is severely impacting their ability to develop the property and the city may lose this opportunity for having the site developed. She stated that Council has been clear they want a reduction in density for the site but that the city needs to consider other options that may be available such as a commercial rehabilitation district. She stated that the developer would like to come to the HDC meeting with some revised proposals that include a reduction in density but would like prior Council input so that he doesn't come to Council at a later date with a new proposal only to be denied again.

Discussion was held on the role of HDC and Council as it relates to the designation of historical sites.

It was suggested that a work group is formed to include a couple members of City Council and the HDC to meet with the developer prior to the Historic District Commission meeting to discuss development concepts for the site. It was noted that no decisions would be made and there would not be quorum present of either group.

Attorney Joppich suggested that the ad hoc work group meet in an open public meeting to be posted and that the establishment of the ad hoc work group is added to tonight's regular agenda for consideration to be as transparent as possible.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The study session meeting adjourned at 7:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Pamela B. Smith, City Clerk