

MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MEETING
MARCH 22, 2021 – 6:00PM

The Study Session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was held electronically and called to order by Mayor Barnett at 6:06pm. Members were asked to state their name and location (city and state) as to where they were attending the electronic meeting.

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
Matt Strickfaden, Farmington Hills, Michigan

Council Members Absent: None

Others Present: City Manager Mekjian, City Clerk Smith, Director Gardiner, Police Chief King, Planning Consultant Arroyo and City Attorney Joppich

CONSOLIDATION OF SIGNS/FREESTANDING SIGNS

City Manager Mekjian stated that this topic was brought up at the January 2020 goals session and due to COVID staff was bringing back some of the items asked to be addressed at that time.

Director Gardiner explained that in 2014 City Council raised the issue of too many temporary signs, particularly “For Lease” or “For Sale” signs throughout the city but determined to take no action at that time. Several years later the Supreme Court determined that government could not regulate sign content so the city pursued a major overhaul to its sign ordinance. Through that ordinance amendment, temporary “For Sale” and “For Lease” signs were allowed on permanent freestanding signs and allows for both temporary signs and a freestanding sign on property.

Councilmember Knol explained that her proposal at the time was to offer an incentive to consolidate the temporary signs onto one larger freestanding sign (larger than permitted currently by ordinance) to decrease the number of temporary signs throughout the city and that this would not be mandated but just another option.

Director Gardiner stated that he believed that discussion was held when the ordinance was amended but because the city could not regulate content he felt that was a potential issue and that direction was not taken.

Attorney Joppich added that when the city discussed the comprehensive amendment to the sign ordinance, it had two directions it could take and that was to either eradicate content regulation, which the city chose to do at the time or to maintain some content regulation based on the type of signage.

Rod Arroyo, Planning Consultant from Giffels-Webster, further explained the reasoning behind the ordinance amendments adopted and how the city chose to regulate the maximum area of single-family sign permitted rather than the number of signs to address all temporary signage, including political signs.

Council inquired what other communities were doing and if commercial establishments were requesting a change and the benefit to the city.

Attorney Joppich responded that he has seen an array of sign ordinances and regulations from other communities. Mr. Arroyo added that most ordinances he has seen are moving towards content neutral.

Director Gardiner stated that he has not had any requests for ordinance changes regarding this type of signage.

Councilmember Knol appreciated the discussion this evening but agreed it would be more complicated to amend the ordinance at this time.

Mr. Gardiner, in response to Council, confirmed that the current ordinance addresses the condition of temporary signs by only permitting them for a 90-day period at which time there would be a re-application process and review.

The consensus was to maintain the current ordinance at this time.

DISCUSSION ON SIGNS AND PUBLIC ART

Mayor Pro-Tem Boleware stated that she is the Council liaison to the Arts Commission and recently there has been discussion regarding murals in the city. A business had attempted to get a variance for a mural on their wall and it was denied by the Zoning Board of Appeals. She commented that the Arts Commission asked that I bring this issue forward to inquire about allowing murals as public art. She added that if allowed what would be the city's criteria and she also inquired what other cities are doing regarding allowing public art.

Attorney Joppich explained that anything on the wall of a business that draws attention to the business could be considered a sign under the city's current ordinance. He added that the mural mentioned did include a reference to the business but if it didn't and the content was neutral would be something else to consider.

Director Gardiner stated that the business with the mural had applied for a sign variance for the mural and was denied by the Zoning Board of Appeals based on the size. The ordinance contains a broad definition of what is considered a sign but he felt that if there was to be some debate on what is art versus a sign, he feels that needs to be the decision of the Arts Commission to determine what constitutes art. He added that current ordinances allow for sculptures in front yards.

Bryan Farmer, Special Services, stated that the Arts Commission along with staff could research what other communities are doing and already has a lot of information on public art and could develop a policy and proposal to discuss with City Council at a future study session.

Mayor Barnett agreed with that suggestion.

City Manager Mekjian thanked Mr. Farmer for that suggestion and felt that the city would benefit greatly from having more public art and looks forward to that discussion with City Council.

Cindy Carleton, Arts Commission member, stated that they have spoken with other communities and the DIA and would appreciate the opportunity to research the issue further and present something to City Council.

ADJOURNMENT

The study session meeting adjourned at 7:15pm.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Smith', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Pamela B. Smith, City Clerk