

**MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM
NOVEMBER 11, 2024 – 6:00PM**

The study session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Rich at 6:00pm.

Council Members Present: Aldred, Boleware, Bridges, Bruce, Dwyer, Knol and Rich

Council Members Absent: None

Others Present: City Manager Mekjian, Assistant City Manager Mondora, City Clerk Lindahl, Director Harvey, and City Attorney Joppich

DISCUSSION ON THE REPLACEMENT OF THE FARMINGTON/FARMINGTON HILLS MULTI-CULTURAL MULTI-RACIAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL (MCMR)

Background

Referencing his November 4, 2024 memorandum, City Manager Mekjian explained that this topic was assigned a priority “B” during the goal-setting session in January. Initial discussion occurred at the June 10, 2024 study session, when Council directed the City Manager to invite Karen Bolson and Tom Shurtliff to a meeting to provide historical context. Unfortunately, neither individual could attend tonight’s meeting.

Additionally, City Council requested the City Manager to research what other communities are doing in this space, and a list of a few comparables are included in the memo, along with links to those resources.

The draft Mission, Vision and Objectives statement from the June 10, 2024 memorandum was also included.

Mayor Rich said Council was looking at two broad questions this evening:

- 1) Does Council want to have another board or commission?
- 2) If the answer is affirmative, does Council want to have partnering?

If a consensus is reached, staff will begin to develop a governance framework and bylaws.

Initial Discussion

- The MCMR was originally formed in the 1990s to address racial tensions and was highly effective in its early years.
- The MCMR had encountered challenges in recent years, leading to concerns about its use of public funding and lack of oversight. Issues included a lack of defined goals, inconsistent parliamentary procedures, and members walking away if they disagreed with decisions. Currently MCMR received no funding from Farmington Hills.

- Council expressed interest in supporting a commission (or board/committee) but emphasized the importance of establishing clear goals and objectives before proceeding. Clarity regarding the mission and purpose of the group is essential.
- Discussion focused on whether such an entity should be limited to Farmington Hills only or include other partners:
 - Limiting the commission to Farmington Hills would allow the City to exercise greater control, ensuring its mission is clearly defined, consistently applied over time, and directly aligned with City priorities.
 - Support was voiced for including the City of Farmington, as there is a history of shared boards, commissions, schools, and a library system, which makes a joint effort logical.
 - On the other hand, the school district and the library already have their own specific initiatives and responsibilities in this area.
 - MLK Day activities are already managed effectively by the MCMR and the library.
 - The school district's correct focus on students could complicate the commission's broader objectives.
 - FAIA's (Farmington Area Interfaith Association) focus on faith-based issues complements, rather than overlaps with, the proposed commission's mission.
- The discussion addressed who the commission should report to within the City:
 - The Assistant City Manager was suggested, as someone who is well-acquainted with all City departments and knows how to direct people when issues arise.
 - The DEI Director was also suggested, although there was concern that integrating DEI efforts into the commission might dilute the commission's original purpose of addressing racial and cultural concerns separate from hiring issues (see further discussion below).
 - The question of who staff liaison should be remains open. Whoever it turns out to be will report to the City Manager.

Role and function of DEI

Director Harvey explained that DEI principles encompass diverse aspects of the community, including race, religion, gender, socioeconomic status, disabilities, etc., aligning with the goals of both MCMR and FAIA (Farmington Area Interfaith Association). There is a direct line with what the Director does in her job in the City and what she would potentially do with a community group. Part of the position description focused first on the City's workforce, and then also continuing that work in the community.

Mission and scope

- The challenge is how to formulate a commission that effectively addresses the goals and mission of such a group, which is why clarity regarding goals and guard-rails regarding duties remain critical:
 - For instance, the draft vision and objectives included in the packet include providing *"a forum for discussion, fact-finding and develop recommendations regarding issues of concern to the various ethnic, religious, and racial communities within Farmington and Farmington Hills and to aid in their interaction."*
 - The goals and objectives include: *"The goal of the (TBD) Community Committee is to enhance and facilitate a better understanding and awareness of those cultural differences that make the city's ethnic, religious and racial communities different and unique, while developing a foundation for improved understanding and cooperative*

living. The objectives of the committee will be to provide activities, recommendations or reports that will aid the city council in establishing public policies toward specific issues affecting all ethnic, religious, and racial groups.”

- Again, the challenge is implementation. Farmington Hills is recognized for its diversity, and such a commission will need to address issues affecting a wide range of ethnic, cultural, and marginalized groups, including those with disabilities.

Comments from MCMR Participants

Director of Farmington Community Library and MCMR participant Kelley Siegrist, MCMR participant Sue Ross, and Farmington School Board Member and MCMR participant Angie Smith, provided the following comments, with added discussion by Council:

- MCMR has a rich history, with its origins as a community-driven initiative to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day, fostering collaboration among local schools, city officials, and community members. Other past events such as parades, Heritage Festival, and “Taste of Farmington” featured food, dance, and crafts to celebrate community diversity.
- MCMR’s decline was partly due to disruptions caused by others in community leadership.
- MCMR’s primary focus has been MLK Day programming, which the library has managed effectively, and which could continue to go forward without MCMR involvement.
- MCMR did struggle to define its mission and purpose, and lacked administrative structure.
- MCMR continued to create relationships across diverse communities.
- MCMR flexibility is essential for fostering trust and open dialogue.

Final discussion and next steps

- Farmington Hills’ diversity necessitates an inclusive commission that reflects the City’s values and priorities
- The City Attorney reminded Council of the ordinance guiding boards and commissions, which ensures structured leadership, including term limits for chairpersons and annual voting on leadership roles.
- Collaboration with Farmington was favored due to shared services and community overlap.
- Council members supported making the proposed commission an educational and celebratory body focused on fostering understanding of different cultures and emphasizing the importance of community engagement without political overtones. A strong consensus emerged to prioritize educational goals, listening to community voices, and celebrating the City’s multicultural identity.
- Events such as a “Taste of Farmington and Farmington Hills” that celebrate the community’s diversity and encourage participation could be reinvigorated, potentially in cooperation with the Farmer’s Market.
- The commission should avoid political activism or competing with other community organizations, focusing instead on fostering understanding and inclusivity.
- Mayor Rich directed City Manager Mekjian to work with staff to develop a detailed proposal for the new commission based on tonight’s discussion.
- The City Manager will work with the City Attorney’s office to create a detailed framework for the commission, including clear goals, a defined mission, and a framework for governance and activities.

ADJOURNMENT

APPROVED 11/25/2024

The Study Session meeting was adjourned at 7:17pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk