

**MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM
DECEMBER 9, 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 Rushlow, and City Attorney Joppich

DISCUSSION ON THE USE OF CITY FACILITIES POLICY

City Hall Meeting Rooms

Referencing her December 9, 2024 memorandum, City Clerk Lindahl highlighted challenges related to community groups using the meeting rooms in City Hall, especially after recent changes in election law:

- Election law changes in recent years have required significant changes to the way that the City Clerk's office has utilized City Hall.
- The Council Chambers, City Hall corridors, City Clerk's Office, as well as other areas at City Hall may be utilized for election activities 160-200 days/year, depending on the number of elections, including 40 days prior to each election and potentially weeks after each election.
- City Hall is a polling place for absent voter ballots, and also a place for voters to register 365 days a year.
- Currently Council Chambers and City Hall meeting rooms are allowed to be used for meetings, events, and gatherings by political parties, which can lead to misperceptions of bias.
- Currently groups may be relocated so spaces can be used to follow legal election deadlines which also can lead to misconceptions of bias.
- Currently groups sometimes have unmonitored access to programming, electronics and physical equipment, including election equipment.

Clerk Lindahl asked Council to consider limiting the use of City Hall rooms to City usage and official City Boards and Commissions meetings and activities.

Assistant City Manager Mondora added that untrained users damage or alter equipment in Council Chambers and other spaces. Repairs have been required for outlets, TVs, and council chamber settings due to improper use.

Council discussion

- City group meetings include boards and commissions with staff liaisons and City sponsored meetings such as community informational meetings for infrastructure projects.
- The City Clerk attends COHA meetings representing the Committee to Increase Voter Participation and acts as city staff at those meetings.

- The Hawk and other city facilities offer rooms but often require a rental fee. City Hall does not charge a fee.
- Facilities with meeting rooms include Costick Center, The Hawk, Spicer House, Jon Grant Community Center at Fire Station 3, Fire Station 5, and also the Central Library. Free options like Spicer House and the John Grant Community Center are available but may not meet standards due to poor conditions or limited space. Library rooms are also free but are often booked a year in advance.
- Discussion focused on:
 - Concern about leaving City Hall open after hours for non-city groups who do not have city staff present, citing security and safety risks.
 - Concern that booking rooms elsewhere would not meet the needs of all community groups.
 - Taxpayer funded buildings should remain accessible for appropriate public use. Community nonprofits should have free welcoming meeting spaces to meet. If City Hall was not going to be available, alternative options should be put forward.

After discussion, there appeared to be consensus – though not unanimous in every respect – to support the Clerk’s request to reasonably limit the use of rooms at City Hall.

Signage

City Attorney Joppich explained that *The Use of City Facilities Policy* should be adjusted to read consistently with recently amended Council Meeting Rules regarding signs in and around City Hall and other facilities.

There was consensus support for the request, and the City Attorney will draft language to clarify signage rules for all city facilities.

Petitions to gather signatures

Mayor Rich raised concerns about the consistency of policies regarding petition circulation, particularly near entryways to public facilities such as The Hawk.

City Attorney Joppich provided an overview of the current policy, which aligns with First Amendment guidelines. He proposed amendments to provide clear language to establish designated areas in parks for petition circulators to ensure public safety and free speech rights.

Petition circulators in parks

- Open areas of parks are considered traditional public forums, where free speech activities are protected.
- Challenges arise during city-sponsored events at public parks, where petition circulators must be allowed nearby but not within the event itself.

Need for consistent policy application

- Policy regulations applicable to The Hawk do not mirror the provisions applicable to other City facilities. Adjustments to this part of the Policy will avoid confusion and make the Policy read more consistently.

Council discussion

Discussion focused on the importance of signature gathering for various petitions, and what restrictions are appropriate while respecting free speech protections. It was pointed out that signatures were collected at Art on the Grand and the Farmers Market, where the activity has been proactively managed. Councilmembers supported signature gathering and did not want to make the activity so difficult it became a de facto ban.

The questions were asked: What are we protecting people from? Have there been issues in the past?

After discussion, City Attorney Joppich said that the city's existing policy is comprehensive and legally sound. He agreed to research how similar issues are handled in other municipalities, particularly regarding public parks and city events. He will also prepare a legal memorandum regarding the issues involved.

INNOVATION, ENERGY, AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY (IEES) AD-HOC SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

Background on the IEES Ad Hoc Subcommittee

Referencing her December 9, 2024 memorandum, Assistant City Manager Mondora highlighted the following points:

- At the January 2024 Goals Session, City Council discussed the reinstatement of a permanent committee related to innovation, energy and/or environmental sustainability.
- In March 2024 Council voted to establish an ad-hoc subcommittee for these purposes and appointed Mayor Rich and Councilmember Aldred to serve on the committee.
- The committee met four times. Assistant City Manager Mondora, City Attorney Joppich, and City Clerk Lindahl attended most of the meetings.
- Discussion and agenda topics included past efforts of City commissions and committees tasked with a similar focus, community needs in the areas of IEES, opportunities for collaboration, and potential engagement opportunities.
- The ad hoc committee recommended that City Council establish a permanent IEES commission, and a draft ordinance had been prepared by the City Attorney.
- Councilmember Bruce asked that language be included ensuring the commission will include a majority of City residents.
- Council supported establishing the Innovation, Energy, and Environmental Sustainability Commission, based on the subcommittee's recommendation.

PRESENTATION BY SIFI NETWORKS

Director of Public Works Rushlow introduced this agenda item.

Members of the SiFi team present this evening included:

- Jean Miller, Area Manager
- Rich Adams, Chief Operating Officer (UK)

Timeline and Investment

- Construction began in October 2023 as part of a \$70 million private investment.
- Approximately \$40 million has been spent to date, covering 1.1 million feet of construction (221 miles of the total 2.3 million feet).

- Completion is scheduled for 2026, with most mainline construction set to finish by the end of 2024.
- 12 out of 50 cabinets have been physically landed on the ground and are going through various stages of integration to be able to provide services to residents. 23 additional cabinets will be landed in 2025.
- The project is on schedule to be completed in 2026, with the bulk of the mainline construction to be finished in 2025.

Service Providers

- T-Fiber will be the residential internet service provider
- Two additional ISPs are being negotiated to serve businesses, larger multi-dwelling units, and private HOAs.
- Future plans include expanding ISP options to create an open-access network.

Challenges

- SiFi aims for 90-day completion timeline for each installation, but there have been delays due to permitting issues with the Road Commission of Oakland County and power connections through Detroit Edison.

Council discussion regarding communication issues and resident frustration

- While Council looked forward to the completion of this project and the benefits it will bring, Council has also been dealing from the beginning with very angry residents – by letter, phone call, and at formal and informal city meetings – regarding inadequate communication from SiFi, including lack of notice before construction and unclear timelines for resolving issues like exposed pipes and utility flags. Communication has been horrible from the beginning and has never improved.
- Some residents, including councilmembers, have unresolved issues more than a year after construction in their yards and neighborhoods, impacting aesthetics and maintenance of their properties. This includes flags left in the ground and pipes sticking above the ground.
- Residents reported that the contractors were rude and unprofessional. It was difficult to communicate with the contractors, as only the crew supervisor was required to speak English, and that person was often difficult to locate.
- There was a lack of communication from SiFi to residents in terms of notifying residents regarding what and when work would take place. Door hangers have not been used. HOAs have not been contacted.
- Council urged SiFi to improve communication with residents, address unresolved issues promptly, and align outcomes with community expectations for promised choice and quality service.
- Location of the cabinets has been the focus of many complaints, and again, communication has been very bad.
- There was a lack of coordination between installation phases.
- In response, the project team noted that the project website had been updated with more details around installation. Other communication efforts included signs at the entrances to subdivisions, community relations outreach at 90 events, and social media posts. Update mailers were being discussed internally.
- 1,135 complaints had been received out of 11,880 addresses passed in the City. This is unacceptable. Council reiterated the litany of complaints they had heard continually since the project started, yet there had been little response from SiFi. SiFi should be proactive in its communications.

- Council urged SiFi to track metrics on the project timelines to evaluate performance, improve transparency, and provide more positive updates to residents. SiFi needed to rebuild trust with the community.
- The City Manager raised concerns about damage to private property caused by contractors, including in one instance damaging subdivision signs and lighting. SiFi should address these concerns immediately. If they break something, they must fix it.

Expectation for ISP choice

- Councilmembers stressed the importance of having a choice of internet providers for residents. Choice was one of the important promises of this project. Having only one residential service provider raised concerns regarding the project reaching promised outcomes.

When asked how SiFi planned on addressing issues discussed this evening, Mr. Adams said he was meeting with the installation contractor tomorrow.

Council requested regular updates on project progress and further improvements to resident engagement and contractor oversight.

ADJOURNMENT

The Study Session meeting was adjourned at 7:27pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk