

**MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM
31555 W. ELEVEN MILE ROAD
FARMINGTON HILLS MI 48336
DECEMBER 15, 2022, 6:00 P.M.**

CALL MEETING TO ORDER

The Planning Commission Special Meeting was called to order by Chair Countegan at 6:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Commissioners present: Aspinall, Countegan, Grant, Mantey, Stimson, Trafelet, Varga, Ware

Commissioners Absent: Brickner

Others Present: Staff Planner Perdonik, Planning Consultants Boehm and Tangari, City Attorney Schultz

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOTION by Stimson, support by Trafelet, to approve the agenda as published.

Motion passed by voice vote.

NEW MASTER PLAN STUDY

Tonight's discussion was guided by elements presented in the December 8, 2002 Giffels Webster memorandum, as well as the most recent reading assignments:

- *The Decline of Walking and Bicycling*, SRTS Guide: saferoutes.org;
http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/introduction/the_decline_of_walking_and_bicycling.cfm
Discusses the decline of walking and biking for kids going to school.
- *Walkable Isn't Just for Millennials*, August 21, 2017 Rachel Quenau, Strong Towns;
<https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2017/8/18/seniors-walkability>
We've built places to live in that make it difficult to walk and bike safely. We are an automobile dependent culture.

Discussion

- Farmington Hills traditionally believed that providing sidewalks to schools was the school's responsibility (not the City's). Farmington Hills does not provide sidewalks to schools.
- The City's policy was that for any development, it was the responsibility of the developer to provide sufficient infrastructure in front of the property – whether commercial or residential – and this would eventually result in sidewalk connections to schools, commercial areas, and so on. This was a budget issue and how the City funded infrastructure improvements.
- Farmington Hills wanted a park-like setting, with grass to the curb, open spaces, and less impervious surfaces. However, schools were built inside subdivisions with no sidewalks; kids had to use the streets to walk or ride bikes to school. Families who lived one block away from school would not let their children walk to school.

- Non-motorized transportation study is part of the current Master Plan update. *Complete Streets* is now required by the Planning Enabling Act.
- Many people do not own cars or do not drive for a variety of reasons. One Commissioner related that their spouse doesn't drive because of a health condition, yet biking is not always safe. During a parent-child bike ride in September 2022, their child was knocked off a bike when crossing 12 Mile at Farmington Road. Other recent bicycle/car accidents were discussed.
- On average, 20% of people in a community will not own a car; the lack of public transportation is critical. A Commissioner spoke regarding an aunt in Chicago who can get anywhere in that city, and who has never owned a car or had a driver's license.
- Uber and Lyft are options, if you can afford them.
- People should not be pushed out of the community because they can't get where they need to go or get there safely.
- Often the international community in Farmington Hills has family units with only one driver, and the people come from areas with sophisticated public transportation. Transportation options and walkable sidewalks would make the City more attractive to this demographic.
- Are there case studies of communities like Farmington Hills that have successfully and retroactively integrated walkability into their community?
- Access streets from subdivisions to main thoroughfares (12 Mile, Farmington Road, etc.) are often unsafe, with hard to navigate sight distances, due to brush, trees, and signs.
- Drivers in Farmington Hills do not expect walkers and do not always watch out for them.
- The viability of expanding sidewalks needs to have buy-in from those people who have grass to the curb.
- Sidewalks need to be wide enough to accommodate multiple walkers and bicyclists. State/federal funding requires that sidewalks open up for bicyclists at set intervals.
- The bicycle lane on Power Road is not safe due to the speeding traffic, but plenty of walkers use the bike lane there.
- Learn from other communities who have successful bike lanes – how are these designed and promoted?
- There is more to walkability than sidewalks. What amenities encourage people to walk? How is walking made more pleasant?
- Many roundabouts are not pedestrian friendly, even with hawk signals and pedestrian safety islands.
- A successful community will help give kids a sense of independence and freedom of movement – they can go places by themselves.
- The lack of sidewalks will deter some families from moving to Farmington Hills.
- Changing a community's mindset and expectations can be done and needs to be done in order to create a more walkable city.
- Commissioners with institutional memory remembered neighborhood meetings regarding sidewalks where residents came out in opposition. Now there was more a push toward human connectivity.
- It is difficult to see early morning walkers in the winter.

Commissioner Mantey read from the book *Strong Towns: A bottom-up revolution to rebuild American prosperity.* (Charles Marohn Jr.). In the book, Detroit was offered as a case study of a city that created automobile suburbs in what would become the American development pattern. Because Detroit was the first, it was the first to age out of sustainability.

Outreach occurring right now

- Online public input forums will be open through January.
- 15 neighborhood toolkits are out

- Draft report on special study areas in the packets
- Special study area map is being updated.

Redevelopment-ready sites

- MEDC (Michigan Economic Development Corporation) has a Redevelopment-ready Communities program. Being part of this program unlocks funding and puts the City in relationship with State agencies. Redevelopment ready programs requires communities to identify at least 3 priority sites for redevelopment, where MEDC can offer assistance for future marketing. Commissioners should be prepared to bring ideas and talk about this concept.
- Recent realtor and developer forum held at City Hall on December 1. Turnout was decent – 2 sessions with 40 people – and discussion was good. A summary of questions asked was in tonight’s memo.
- However, those who came to the forum did not represent Farmington Hill’s diverse business community – they were no Black or female participants. This was an ongoing equity issue.
- Discussion ensued as to how to reach out to these populations. Commissioners suggested reaching out to READ – Real Estate Association of Developers at ReadDetroit@gmail.com, Greater Detroit Realist (Nareb), CREW – Commercial Real Estate for Women, ULI – Urban Land Institute’s women’s forum, OCREBA – African American Chapter of Oakland County Real Estate Brokers Association, Greater Metropolitan Association of Realtors (located at 12/Farmington).
- Inflation Reduction Act incentivizes more dense developments. Was there a market for 2-3 story apartment buildings on the mile roads?
- Farmington Hills Youth Council were being encouraged to participate in the planning process. Other students could be engaged in a round-table discussion, perhaps using ZOOM.
- Boehm related successful interactions with students in Commerce Township.
- Members of the targeted student age group do not always go to Farmington Public Schools. This age group also attends parochial schools, West Bloomfield Schools, Clarenceville Schools, Walled Lake Schools, and so on. FPS should not be the only outreach center. The public library could be a central contact and meeting source. The Farmington Community Library was engrained in community life.
- Farmington Hills YMCA was also a great resource, in terms of meeting space and outreach.

Next steps

A new survey has been launched, focusing on different subject matter from the market survey administered last year: <https://bit.ly/FarmingtonHillsMPSurvey> Commissioners were encouraged to post this survey wherever they could.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

COMMISSIONERS’ COMMENTS

None

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Stimson, support by Mantey, to adjourn the meeting at 7:20 p.m.

MOTION passed by voice vote.

Respectfully Submitted,
Marisa Varga
Planning Commission Secretary
/cem