

**MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
PLANNING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING/REGULAR MEETING
31555 W ELEVEN MILE ROAD
FARMINGTON HILLS, MICHIGAN
JULY 15, 2021, 7:30 P.M.**

CALL MEETING TO ORDER

The Planning Commission Regular Meeting was called to order by Chair Stimson at 7:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present: Brickner, Countegan, Orr, Mantey, Schwartz, Stimson, Trafelet, Turner, Varga

Commissioners Absent: None

Others Present: City Planner Stec, City Attorney Schultz, Planning Consultant Arroyo, Staff engineers Dawkins, Crimmins, and Sonck

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

MOTION carried unanimously by voice vote.

PUBLIC HEARING

A. PUD PLAN 3, 2021

LOCATION:	32680 Northwestern Hwy.
PARCEL I.D.:	23-02-126-130
PROPOSAL:	PUD Plan for a five story, 202 unit multiple family development in a B-2 Community Business District, and B-3 General Business District
ACTION REQUESTED:	Recommendation to City Council
APPLICANT:	NWH Holdings, LLC, Robert Asmar
OWNER:	NWH Holdings, LLC

Keith Phillips, The Think Shop Architects, 1420 Washington Blvd, Suite 430, Detroit, was present on behalf of this application for a recommendation to City Council for PUD Plan 3, 2021, a five story, 202 unit multiple family development at 32680 Northwestern Highway. Jim Butler, PEA Group, 2430 Rochester Ct Suite 100, Troy, was also present, as was the owner, Robert Asmar.

Mr. Phillips said that at this location at 14 Mile Road and Orchard Lake Road, the proposed development – “Stonefield” – would provide a gateway feature to Farmington Hills. The 202 unit building was an extension to the walkability within the local area, that allowed for transition for multiple zoning platforms. The increase in population should promote growth in the use of local businesses, contribute to the tax base, while minimally impacting traffic.

Mr. Phillips overviewed the design of the building, which provided traditional components of residential architecture with amenities required by modern residents. The project included a mix of hip and flat roof styles, a covered main entry at the northwestern corner, and allowed for natural light in the central courtyard. Each façade of the building was broken up into smaller elements to reflect the human scale of the residential community.

Stonefield would incorporate dynamic landscape design, including a greenspace buffer area utilizing deciduous and evergreen plantings along the eastern portion adjacent to the Country Glens development. The commons courtyards on the second level will present a high-density approach to landscape design, utilizing multi-tiered landscape features. Multiple formats of renewable technology would be used, including green roof design techniques and solar approaches at both the courtyard level and the rooftop structures. Electric vehicle charging stations would be placed around the garage level structure with built-in flexibility that will provide for future EV charging expansion, up to 100% capacity.

The building's exterior masonry and fiber cement façade will consist of durable, low-maintenance materials that complement the buildings in the surrounding area. The building's units will consist of one, two, and three-bedroom units varying from 850-1,500 square feet as follows:

- One-bedroom, 48%, 98 units
- Two-bedroom, 46%, 98 units
- Three-bedroom, 6%, 6 units

This combination of units is tailored toward the empty nester / young professional. The pet-friendly project includes a high level of amenities in the units themselves, as well as community amenities such as clubhouse, pool, central courtyard, fitness center, bike storage, ride share accommodations, and concierge services.

Parking is concealed under the building. Building height is approximately 64' tall, which is reduced from the original 75' request. The building was a 4-story building atop a parking deck.

Development schedule was as follows:

- Planning, June 2021
- Construction kick-off, beginning underground, October 2021
- Occupancy, May 2024

Mr. Phillips emphasized that a project of this scope and amenities required the density as presented. The impact on parking was much less than, for instance, a 50,000 square foot commercial building development.

In response to questions from the Commission, the applicants gave the following information:

- The main access was from a single driveway, shared with the Northpoint PUD, which occupies the land to the west and north. The gated access was for emergency access only.
- A material board would be provided during site plan approval.
- The building had been redesigned to reduce the height by 11', by lowering floor heights and shortening the underground parking structure height. The height was measured per the City's ordinance standards.
- The parking was at grade, with the building on top of that.
- The submitted traffic study had been completed during an earlier approval process for the adjacent PUD. A new traffic study would be completed as the current project moved forward.

- The requested density was needed in order to provide this amenity-based housing development. Removing the 4th floor, for instance, would require removing the parking structure, eliminating the ability to implement such things as green roof design, and the building itself would be much more stripped down in appearance and use.
- The target population was both young professionals, including those with a smaller family, and empty nesters.
- The percentage of smaller units was necessary to achieve required density. They had originally started with a proposal for 6 stories, which would have allowed more 2- and 3-bedroom units.
- First floor commercial uses would have a big impact on traffic and parking; retail was parked at a higher rate than residential.
- The development would provide an active, viable, vibrant space. Neighboring communities such as West Bloomfield were also trying to achieve this type of development.
- The residential homes on the north side of Northwestern (in West Bloomfield) will not be able to see much of this development – perhaps a residential roofline, but not much more.
- The new retirement facility just to the north of this one was 40' tall.

Commissioner Orr thought it possible the project simply needed more land. The City was also encouraging active, vibrant spaces, but this project seemed to him to be too dense.

Referencing his July 6, 2021 written comments, Planning Consultant Arroyo gave the background and review for this request for PUD recommendation to City Council.

- The 5.53 acre site is currently zoned a mix of B-2 and B-3, and is currently mostly vacant.
- Adjacent property uses included senior housing to the north, commercial/multi-family to the east, and commercial to the south and west.
- The site is proposed to be accessed from a single driveway, shared with the Northpoint PUD.
- Regarding PUD qualification, on February 18, 2021, the Planning Commission granted preliminary PUD qualification approval, citing compliance with objective viii of Section 34-3.20.2.E. At the time, several Commissioners expressed reservations about the scale of the use, in particular its density and height. Also, the application had originally been proposed as an amendment to the previously approved Northpoint PUD. However, the application has since been separated into a distinct PUD, with access across the other PUD. The applicant is seeking final PUD qualification, but is not seeking site plan approval concurrent with final qualification.
- The proposed multi-family residential use is not permitted in the B-2 and B-3 districts, though the portion of the site zoned B-2 is planned for multiple-family residential on the Future Land Use Map.
- The proposed density is significantly denser than is permitted in any of the three RC multiple-family districts, being nearly twice the permitted density than the City's densest multiple family district, the RC-3 district. The applicant makes the case that the proposed development serves as a step-down to the RC-2 district to the east from the commercial uses and regional thoroughfare to the south and west.
- As mentioned by Mr. Butler, an updated traffic study would be needed for this project.
- There was no vehicular connection from the apartments to 14 Mile or the senior housing parking lot.
- The PUD must meet one of 8 criteria as listed in Section 34-3.20.2.E. All criteria were listed in the review letter. Previously the Commission found that viii was met: *To bring about redevelopment of sites where an orderly change of use is determined to be desirable.* The applicant's original narrative addressed objectives i, ii, and vi.-viii.

Regarding the conceptual site plan and use:

- The applicant is proposing to construct a 202-unit apartment building around a large courtyard common area. Again, access to the site would be from Northwestern Highway, via the same driveway that serves Northpoint Storage to the west.
- The applicant proposes 202 units as stated: 98 one-bedrooms, 98 two-bedrooms, 6 three-bedrooms. This totaled 514 rooms under the standard listed in Section 34-3.5.2.F. 230 rooms would be permitted in the RC-3 district.
- The Master Plan's Future Land Use Map designates the portion of the site zoned B-2 as multiple-family residential, and the portion zoned B-3 as non-center-type business. The property is not addressed on the residential density map, though it is adjacent to a high-density area, which is described as consistent with the RC districts. The site is not part of any special planning area. Generally speaking, non-center-type business uses would include stand-alone uses.
- The applicant would be seeking relief from the maximum height of 50 feet, and east side setback standards of 75 feet.
- Parking standards were met; more than half of the proposed parking is proposed to be within the building.
- Trees and preliminary landscaping correctly account for replacement requirements.

Relief from ordinance standards summary

Per the submitted materials, the applicant is seeking relief from the following ordinance standards:

1. **Height:** Proposed maximum height revised from 75.25 feet to approximately 64 feet, where 50 feet is permitted in the underlying district.
2. **East side setback (to residential):** 39.24 feet is proposed where the underlying district requires 75 feet.
3. **Density.** The plan does not specify a base district for density standards. 514 rooms are proposed; the maximum number of rooms permitted in the RC-3 district is 230.

The applicant was also seeking for a deviation from ordinance standards regarding use, as the proposed multi-family residential use is not permitted in the B-2 and B-3 districts.

Planning Consultant Arroyo concluded his review, and gave the following information in response to questions from the Commission:

- This proposal was considered part of the redevelopment of a greater site that had been mostly vacant with some obsolete uses.
- At the time of the approval of the PUD to the west, connectivity had been discussed in terms of utilizing a single driveway from Northwestern to all resulting developments: self-storage facility, senior living facility, and tonight's proposal. The Commission had not supported multiple curb cuts on Northwestern, and tonight's proposed access was consistent with that.
- The artistic renderings did not clearly show that this building would be surrounded by parking.

Chair Stimson opened the public hearing.

Randy Bruce, 28730 Lake Park, strongly supported this development, which was consistent with current trends, would help to make Farmington Hills a destination point, which in turn would help address the loss of population the City was experiencing, and which would support the small businesses in this area. The development was far superior to a big box store coming to this property, for instance; a big box store could go dark at any time.

Mike Schuster, Country Glen condominiums, opposed the proposed development, which was too dense, too high at 5 stories, and too close to Country Glen, and would dwarf the closest Country Glen building.

Mary Jo Schuster, Nova Valley, said that she and her husband owned property at Country Glen. She shared her husband's concerns regarding density, height, and setback from the Country Glen property. Additionally, during peak hours traffic backed up on Northwestern Highway from east of 14 Mile Road to Orchard Lake Road. Greater density would only make that situation worse.

Chair Stimson noted that speakers Mike Schuster and Randy Bruce had each sent a letter regarding this proposed development.

Planning Consultant Arroyo noted that while the building was 5 stories, the first level was primarily parking.

Chair Stimson closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Orr suggested moving the building to the west and placing the parking on the east side, thereby increasing the distance from the building to the eastern property line. This change would also allow enhanced landscaping between the building and ~~14 Mile Road~~ the access road.

Commissioner Orr asked if moving the building as just described would eliminate the need for a deviation on the east side. Planning Consultant Arroyo said he did not know if this change would completely eliminate the deviation, but there was no reason why this could not be explored – this change could potentially increase the separation on the east.

Commissioner Schwartz addressed traffic flow on Northwestern Highway, in particular how residents of the proposed development would access Northwestern Highway. He agreed that the traffic impact needed to be considered.

Commissioner Schwartz did not think there were any other 5 story buildings on Northwestern Highway in Farmington Hills. The City needed to consider whether it wanted this density and height at this location, which might encourage other developers to request the same thing, which would ultimately change the character of the Northwestern corridor.

Commissioner Brickner pointed out that two nearby hotels in West Bloomfield were 5 stories high.

In response to a question from Commissioner Countegan, Planning Consultant Arroyo said the new self-storage center and senior living facility did not generate sufficient traffic to be a problem; these were low-traffic uses.

Commissioner Countegan pointed out that 2/3 of the greater site had low-impact traffic uses. This had been a blighted property for many years. He felt that the need to cover the cost of constructing a highly amenitized apartment community presented a compelling argument for this project to at least move to the next step. The issue of height was real, and had been discussed regarding various other PUD projects in the City. He was in favor of continuing the process to the City Council level. This proposal offered redevelopment in a problem area, and was consistent with rise in activity in the area. There would be opportunities to have further discussion regarding issues of final location, density etc. This was an opportunity for reinvestment in a long-time blighted area of the City.

The Commission discussed process. Several commissioners spoke in favor of redevelopment of the area and moving this project forward, but were still concerned regarding the location of the building so close to the eastern property line, and the overall density and height of the project. Some Commissioners were concerned that the project did not offer enough green buffer from the highway.

It came out in discussion that any recommendation of approval to City Council included the concepts presented in the conceptual site plan, including density, height, location, and materials, and if the City Council approved the PUD, the resulting contract would have the concept plan as presented attached to it. If the Commission had reservations, now was the time to speak to those and ask for further revisions from the applicant.

Mr. Butler said he thought they could revise the plan to shift the building to the west, as suggested.

MOTION by Countegan, support by Orr, to postpone action on PUD Plan 3, 2021, submitted by NWH Holdings, LLC, Robert Asmar, to the August 19, 2021 Planning Commission meeting, to allow time for the applicant to revise the plans to increase the eastern side yard setback.

Several Commissioners commented regarding their hesitation to approve the building height and density associated with this PUD. While not required by tonight's motion, the applicant could make further changes to the plan based on the concerns they heard this evening from the Commission and the public.

MOTION CARRIED by unanimous voice vote.

REGULAR MEETING

A. REVISED LANDSCAPE PLAN 61-5-2019 (PUD 5, 1993)

LOCATION:	South side of Twelve Mile, west of Drake Rd.
PARCEL I.D.:	23-17-201-013
PROPOSAL:	Construction staging area for new office buildings in OS-4, Office Research District
ACTION REQUESTED:	Approval of revised landscape plans
APPLICANT:	JST Corporation
OWNER:	Perimo USA Corporation

Referencing his July 6, 2021 written comments, Planning Consultant Arroyo gave the background and review for this application to review landscape plans in order to construct a staging area for the new office buildings approved for this location. The primary impact of this proposal was on land off the JST site, where the property owner has agreed to permit construction staging for the JST project. The staging use is temporary, but will require tree removal and grading. Tree removal has also been increased in a few areas around the regional detention pond.

The site is subject to a planned unit development agreement, and per this agreement, trees are required to be replaced at one third of the typical rate. Originally 672 regulated trees and 34 landmark trees with a total dbh of 406.5 inches were proposed to be removed. Typically, this would require 672 replacements for regulated trees and 34 replacements for landmark trees (706 total). In this case, per the PUD agreement, 235 total replacement trees had been required.

However, with the new plan a total of 904 regulated trees and 205 landmark trees, for a total of 1109 trees, were proposed to be removed, with a 1/3 replacement requirement, or 366 trees to be replaced. As with the initial approval, the applicant is requesting to pay into the tree fund for these trees.

Plan corrections needed to be made as called out in the review letter.

The Commission should discuss whether they wanted to allow the number of trees to be removed as were being requested for this project. The trees were being removed off site, but on PUD property, and the cleared area would be in effect ready for a future development. However, virtually all the trees in the staging area were being removed.

Commissioner Mantey asked if the staging area could be placed the property to the east, where such extreme tree removal would not be required.

In response to questions from the Commission, City Planner Stec gave the following information:

- There were no catch basins in the tree removal area.
- The Tree Fund was well funded at present. No major projects were scheduled that would use those funds. Annual tree planting projects did use the funds, but the Fund was getting funded at a higher rate than the City was spending it.

Sam Ashley, Cunning-Limp Development Company, said they were the construction manager for this project. They were requesting the area shown on the submission documents to be a temporary staging area for the JST development on the south side of Twelve Mile, west of Drake Road (Parcel ID 23-17-201-013).

Mr. Ashley explained that the lumber from the removed trees would be kiln dried in Chicago, transported to Denver to be milled, and then used in the JST construction project. Also, over the last 3 years JST had collected seeds from the hardwoods on site, and those seeds were currently being grown in a nursery in Flint. When appropriate, the seeds would be replanted on site.

Since the ordinance did not speak to this type of activity, the only way forward was for JST to pay into the tree fund.

Mr. Ashley added that the adjacent parcel to the east was not affiliated with the PUD. The proposed staging area was affiliated with the Farmington Hills Investment Group that owned the PUD area.

Commissioner Orr spoke to the slow growth of hardwoods such as Hickory and Oak – after 5 years the trees would only be knee high. Yet the applicants were proposing to remove all the mature growth in this area. It would be 40 years before the newly planted trees would be viable growth.

Commissioner Orr said he walked the property today. The property to the east had much closer access to the construction area, had easy access, and did not require any tree removal. The JST project wanted to preserve as many trees as possible on their own parcel, and Commissioner Orr wanted to preserve as many trees as possible on any property. He asked the applicant to move the staging area to the east.

Mr. Ashley said the property owner to the east was not interested in providing access for a construction staging area. Additionally, the trees that were being removed were in a pathway that was proposed to be a public drive as the PUD area developed further.

Commissioner Schwartz noted that the approved JST project was environmentally sensitive and extraordinarily creative. If the trees were in an area proposed for a public drive, the trees would eventually be removed in any event. The plan to use the wood as described and the forethought given to planting seeds from the trees were compelling arguments in favor of this project.

MOTION by Schwartz, support by Trafelet, that the revised Landscape Plan for Site Plan 61-4-2019 (PUD 5, 1993), dated June 16, 2021, submitted by JST Corporation, be approved because it appears to meet all applicable requirements of the Zoning Chapter, subject to the following conditions:

1. A revised plan be submitted addressing the following items for administrative review:
 - a. Corrections as identified in the July 6 Giffels Webster review regarding the tree inventory and removal list be made.
 - b. An updated tree protection plan be provided.
2. Payment into the city tree fund in lieu of planting replacement trees is acceptable.

In response to a question from Commissioner Varga, Mr. Ashley said plans were in to the Building Department for the first building, and after approvals the duration of the project will be approximately 3 years.

MOTION carried 8-1 (Orr opposed).

APPROVAL OF MINUTES June 17, 2021

MOTION by Orr, support by Turner, to approve the minutes of the June 17, 2021 meeting as published.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

- City hall bicycle racks are overgrown, and are unusable.
- Request for discussion regarding use of federal relief funds for items in the Capital Improvements Plan.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Brickner, support by Countegan, to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 p.m.

MOTION carried unanimously by voice vote.

Respectfully Submitted,
John Trafelet
Planning Commission Secretary

/cem

