

**MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING
MASTER PLAN STUDY
31555 W ELEVEN MILE ROAD
FARMINGTON HILLS, MICHIGAN
JANUARY 18, 2024 6:00 P.M.**

CALL MEETING TO ORDER

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

ROLL CALL

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

Commissioners Absent: None

Others Present: City Planner Perdonik, Staff Planner Canty, City Attorney Schultz, Planning Consultants Tangari and Upfal, City Council Members Bruce and Knol

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

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

Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

MASTER PLAN DRAFT OUTLINE AND OPEN HOUSE INPUT SUMMARY

Planning Consultant Tangari distributed the January 18, 2024 memorandum *Master Plan Special Study Areas – Non-Residential Planning Areas: First Set* and the May 11, 2023 memorandum *Master Plan Special Study Areas – Residential Planning Areas*.

Tonight’s discussion focused on *Special Study Area 1. 13 Mile Road near Middlebelt*.

Regarding Special Study Area 1:

In summer 2023 the Planning Commission had decided to carry forward the language and recommendations in the 2009 Master Plan regarding this Special Planning Area, which called for conventional/clustered site condo development with t-shaped cul-de-sac streets, establishing a single point of access for all units. 2009 goals were:

- Maintain the one-family residential use character of the road frontage on large lots
- Encourage assembly of parcels and development of one-family lots based on the concept plan
- Protect the natural features of the area

In light of recent activity and discussion, and acknowledging that a proposal that came forward in 2023 has been withdrawn, Planning Consultant Tangari thought discussion should be re-opened regarding Special Study Area 1.

Planning Consultant Tangari pointed out that the 2009 Master Plan description allowed for single family homes only, or perhaps a church. He suggested the Commission might want to allow a little more flexibility for development of this area. The following discussion included:

- Single family home development was looking less and less likely.
- The Commission did not support high density development in this area. However, multiple family housing units, such as clustered duplexes, tri-plexes, and quad-plexes might be considered.
- A walkable city needed places to walk to. How could the global view of development of these parcels incorporate walkability to and interaction with Orchard Lake and Middlebelt from these parcels?
- Any development would be required to fill in sidewalk gaps along the frontage.
- Commissioners pointed to the Cove Creek condominium complex on the corner of 13 and Middlebelt, which was heavily treed, very attractive, and had the type of multi-family housing units being discussed.
- Across the street, Baptist Manor has a variety of living facilities, including independent living ranch units.
- For the entire Special Area to be developed, a developer would need to assemble land, or provide stub streets to the east and/or west to preserve future internal interconnectivity.
- The lots in the Area are very deep – 515 feet. Incentives could be offered to developers in return for a 100' buffer, for instance, to the properties to the south. With no incentives, and with development under straight zoning, the requirement is for a 35' buffer from the structure to the rear property line. Development of single family lots under straight zoning could also result in removal of almost all the trees.
- The Master Plan can describe in more clear terms – and provide a range of options – regarding what the City envisions for this area.
- New zoning district(s) could be created, as long as the new district(s) did not apply to just one area. For instance, there could be Flexible Residential Districts 1, 2, and 3, allowing a range of allowed density and perhaps heights. This would provide developers and neighboring residents predictability.
- The Commission needed to focus on reasonable regulation of reasonable development, and determine the best tools to achieve the vision of that development. Is rezoning the best tool? Or is the Planned Unit Development (PUD) – traditionally used in Farmington Hills – a better tool?
- If the PUD is the only development option other than straight zoning, the lengthy and difficult PUD process can act as a disincentive, even when incentives (density/height) are offered.
- The Master Plan is not responsible for rezoning areas. Instead, the Master Plan can describe what is desired, and an interested developer can decide how they would like to move forward – whether through straight zoning, a cluster development, a rezoning request, or a PUD.
- Again, creating flexible residential districts or creating an overlay district were also possibilities.
- It was easier to more efficiently defend a requirement for a deep buffer when that buffer had been agreed to via the PUD process. What the City did not have in 2009 was a good description of what it wanted to see in Special Area 1. Having that description, and emphasizing what the City wanted (southern buffer, trees, public benefit) would go a long way to communicating to a developer what would be necessary to bring to the table.
- The Area could be pre-qualified for a PUD with a density of up to (X) units, as long as the developer provided (Y).

Regarding other developable residential areas:

- The area directly south of Oakland Community College could be developed with a small multi-family development, focused on providing housing for some college attendees, including foreign students.
- There were other potential infill development areas along main roads, including vacant parcels with deep lots.

- Commissioner Mantey requested a map be provided of vacant parcels along main roads that had vacant lots with depths exceeding 500’.

Regarding the ongoing Master Plan update:

- The Commission should keep focused on the Master Plan being forward thinking, with appropriate provisions to allow for flexibility and creative development.
- Different parts of the City had to be treated differently simply because of the pre-existing development that was there. The planning vision for the future needed to be balanced with a realistic view of past development and the current and future marketplace.
- There is rarely a development or plan that everyone loves and supports. The PUD process allows for the City, the residents, and the developer to work through things item by item in order to end up with a negotiated agreement.
- For residential areas, the incentives a PUD can offer a developer boil down to density and height. In return, real public benefits need to be offered.
- Master Plan language for special planning areas need to specifically point out what the City wants protected, and what it would like to see in terms of neighborhood compatibility and innovation.
- Farmington Hills has beautiful neighborhoods. It is important to protect them.
- Regarding Old Town, the Planning Commission should continue a past conversation regarding lot widths. Most of the lots in that area were platted before the current zoning ordinance existed, and perhaps lot split regulations and other zoning standards should reflect the platting history of the neighborhood.
- Another potential zoning ordinance change could reflect an “infill standard.”

How does the City want/need to grow?

- The City is not likely to grow population. Farmington Hills is built out, and while new higher density development will bring in some population, the single family homes will continue to have population decrease as the population ages and as young families have fewer children.
- In terms of growth, the focus should perhaps be on keeping neighborhood life as a quality experience, while promoting economic development for current and new businesses. The tax base can continue to be developed through commercial growth, including mixed-use, and especially through nurturing research and development type uses and industrial uses.
- The City’s downtown, for all intents and purposes, is the City of Farmington. This will not change, though nodes of commercial activity and public gathering can and should continue to be developed. Farmington Hills should continue to do well what it is already doing in providing an attractive city for people to live and work, with rolling hills and many trees.
- Single story ranches need to be provided where possible – this is what seniors are asking for.
- Office buildings along 12 mile are undergoing change, and represent another development opportunity for mixed use zoning.
- To summarize, it is important to maintain a balanced land use mix. Successful industrial, commercial, and research and development uses help provide a tax base that supports existing neighborhoods, including infrastructure maintenance.
- The community needs to be flexible enough to allow development that will hold into the future. The Planning Commission, City Council and other City officers and staff need to have the intelligence to zone and plan for a community that provides amenities and buffers, but allows flexibility so that commercial areas can support the community.

Regarding Office Space:

- Commissioners Mantey and Trafelet spoke regarding a recent segment on 60 Minutes on *Commercial Office Space*, regarding commercial debt attached to commercial office space coming due.
- Planning Consultant Upfal pointed out that developers are building new Class A offices instead of reusing existing buildings, in order to more easily provide amenities to get their employees out of their homes and back to the office.
- Commissioner Stimson noted existing multi-tenant office buildings in Farmington Hills that had installed new gyms and cafeterias.
- Planning Consultant Tangari said that such work space amenities, located close to where people live, were becoming increasingly valuable. No one wants to drive an hour to work in a building located within a sea of parking, where you have to drive somewhere else to have lunch.

Commissioner Brickner spoke to the importance of constructing a mixed-use ordinance.

Planning Consultant Tangari noted that the Master Plan process was close to completion, and closed discussion for the evening.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Three members of the public from Westgate Subdivision reflected on their thoughts while listening to tonight's discussion, and asked questions regarding what limitations were possible relative to Special Area 1. The residents expressed appreciation for the Commission's work and noted they found tonight's meeting interesting and informative.

Chair Countegan thanked the residents for attending.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mantey, support by Trafelet, to adjourn the Special Meeting at 7:25pm.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

Respectfully Submitted,
Marisa Varga
Planning Commission Secretary
/cem