

MINUTES  
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS  
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL  
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM  
JUNE 10, 2024 – 6:15PM

The study session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Rich at 6:16pm.

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

Council Members Absent: None

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

**DISCUSSION ON MULTICULTURAL MULTIRACIAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL STRATEGY**

City Manager Mekjian led this discussion item. Tom Shurtleff, Chair of MCMR, was also present.

City Council discussed MCMR during its January 2024 goal session with a priority “B”. Last spring City Council made the decision to hold back funding until a discussion could be held relative to reconstituting MCMR into an official City committee/commission. MCMR was created in the 1990s.

City Manager Mekjian researched other communities in the state to understand similar efforts, and presented a draft Committee Mission, Vision, and Objectives statement as a springboard for discussion.

**Discussion focused on:**

- **MCMR Mission:** It is difficult to understand what the current mission of MCMR is, what value it can provide to Farmington Hills and Farmington, the School District, and the Library. It is also unclear as to who the voting members are.
- **Broad coalition of sub-communities or 11- or 13-member joint City Committee?** Originally MCMR reflected a broad coalition of sub-communities, with well-attended community breakfasts 4-5 times per year, and multiple ongoing separate activities. MCMR intentionally was independent of any municipal oversight, and was (and is) *by all and for all*.

If MCMR changes to a smaller, more traditionally organized committee, who would constitute membership? City of Farmington is very interested in participating. Would someone from the Library sit on the committee? Someone from the schools? The school representative could be someone from the Superintendent’s office, for instance. Could such a small group bring together the diversity of the community it represents?

- **Historical perspective and current-day experience:**
  - Bylaws define 24 “seats” on MCMR, including members from the Cities and the School Districts. There are 9 ad hoc seats that can be filled by community organizations including the Library, faith community, etc. There is a process for bringing prospective members forward.
  - Farmington Area Interfaith Association is still active with MCMR. The Interfaith Association is also a non-chartered, non-corporate entity.
  - There are about 20 currently active MCMR participants, with no current youth involvement.

- Tom Shurtleff is still in contact with Karen Bolson, who was chair and co-chair of MCMR in the 1990s forward. At that time there was a resonance and energy in the community for community-building that has been lost, perhaps only temporarily.
- MCMR was active during Councilmember Dwyer's tenure as Chief of Police; he remembered it as being very successful on several levels, and he participated in its meetings. MCMR was effective because it brought together so many groups to the same table; Dwyer did not support reducing its size to 11-13 members.

**Discussion included:**

- Council could support the idea of an official MCMR committee/commission. There is a need for this organization, in light of all is going on in the City and broader community. MCMR has historically been an established force for good.
- Organizations that are too large and undefined over time become unwieldy, and can lose their way.
- If the City is going to contribute to MCMR, it does need to have some say in its mission and accountability.
- Boleware had reached out to Karen Bolson some time ago and received an extensive email regarding the formation of MCMR. She will forward that email to City Manager Mekjian, who can distribute it to Council.
- It remains an open-ended question as to whether MCMR should be officially affiliated with the City, or remain an independent organization.
- Council expressed a desire to continue this conversation. Karen Bolson should be invited to attend a study session to give perspective on MCMR's early days and purpose, and Council expressed interest in Tom Shurtleff returning for further discussion.
- City Manager Mekjian will continue to research best practices across municipalities.

**DISCUSSION ON PANHANDLING SIGNS PROGRAM**

City Manager Mekjian led discussion on this item. Referencing his June 10, 2024 memorandum, Mekjian explained that the City was looking for ways to respond humanely and constitutionally to organized groups of panhandlers at city locations. Panhandling is a constitutional right under free speech.

**Discussion included:**

- **Practices in other cities:** Some other cities, including Scottsdale AZ and others, have instituted a sign program in an attempt to discourage people from giving money to panhandlers. The signs are placed in locations where panhandlers gather, and encourage people to donate their money to local charities and non-profit organizations for the homeless. The back of the signs also provides a list of organizations and phone numbers for individuals in need of food, clothing, and shelter.
- **Suggested for Farmington Hills:** A similar sign program is being suggested for Farmington Hills. The signs would be temporary enough that they could be moved from location to location, and could be placed where panhandlers gather, based on observation and complaints. The list of helping organizations and phone numbers could also be utilized using a QR code.

This initiative could show the City's efforts to address this problem as a City, without being demeaning or restrictive to panhandlers.

Consensus of Council appeared to support this initiative.

**DISCUSSION ON AMENDMENTS TO THE RULES OF CITY COUNCIL AND GUIDELINES OF CONDUCT**

City Attorney Joppich led discussion on proposed amendments to the Rules of City Council and Guidelines of Conduct.

**A. Regular and Special Meetings**

**A.1. Regular Meetings**

**A.2. Special Meetings**

Amended language provides greater flexibility relative to scheduling and cancelling City Council regular and special meetings, including cancellation during adverse weather events, maneuvering around holidays and summer schedules, and scheduling a study session in lieu of a regular meeting. All changes meet the requirements of the Open Meetings Act.

After discussion and with suggested clarifying edits, the amended language in A.1 and A.2 was supported for inclusion on a future City Council agenda.

**E. Citizen Participation**

**E.3. Persons addressing the Council/Attending Meetings, sub. pars. E. and I.**

Amended language addresses adjustments to public participation at meetings, related to meeting disruptions, use of microphones and speakers, and amplification systems, including bullhorns. Amended language also provides language that has been upheld in the courts relative to obscene, defamatory or similar disruptive language that substantially interrupts, delays, or disturbs the peace, or constitutes a threat to an individual or individuals.

It was noted that during a disruption, the Mayor or Mayor Pro-Tem can recess the meeting, which will silence all mikes and official visual recordings.

It was noted that when the corridor is officially made a part of the meeting space in order to accommodate an overflow crowd, the same rules will apply in the corridor that apply in Council Chamber.

After further discussion including clarifying edits, the amended language in E.3. as discussed this evening was supported for inclusion on a future City Council agenda.

**City of Farmington Hills Guidelines of Conduct**

**D. Resolutions and Proclamations involving Community Relations and Other Matters**

New draft language addresses and limits when resolutions and proclamations can be issued. This section represents City policy.

**Discussion included:**

- Council offered suggested edits and changes to clarify the language.
- Councilmember Boleware thought that the amended language had no clear outcome, and could encourage negative outcomes. There was policy in place currently that basically said the same thing as this language. When a group of people wanted to disrupt, the amended language was not going to change that, and could encourage it.

The new language under Guidelines for Conduct, D., did not yet have consensus approval.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The study session meeting adjourned at 7:23pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk