

MINUTES  
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS  
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MEETING  
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM  
JUNE 8, 2015 – 6:00PM

The Study Session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Brickner at 6:00pm.

Council Members Present: Brickner, Bridges, Bruce, Knol, Lerner, Massey and Steckloff

Council Members Absent: None

Others Present: City Manager Brock, City Clerk Smith, Assistant City Manager Boyer, Assistant to the City Manager Geinzer and Attorney Joppich

**DISCUSSION OF DTE PLANS FOR ELECTRIC RELIABILITY**

Mike Palchesko, DTE, explained that his role is liaison between DTE and local officials in Oakland and Lapeer Counties. He stated that in making plans to address electric reliability, the biggest issue for DTE is dealing with trees. The engineering division of DTE has identified areas that have had a history of outages and the majority of those were tree related.

Mr. Palchesko outlined the tree trimming program proposed by DTE stating that a letter would be sent out in advance of any work to be done. He presented a series of slides showing the areas identified to be included in the program and stated that not every tree or property within the identified areas would necessarily be impacted; but letters would be sent to all property owners. Trees would be identified by DTE and marked accordingly to either be trimmed or possibly removed. He added that the tree trimming would include clearing the area of all debris. Mr. Palchesko clarified that when a storm occurs and trees or limbs have fallen that impact electrical service, DTE will only clear what is necessary to get service back up and running and the remainder of the debris would be the responsibility of the property owner.

Councilmember Lerner inquired at what point DTE would trim trees even when it is not wanted by a neighbor.

Mr. Palchesko explained that DTE historically trims within the 10-foot right-of-way easement; but they now also look at what could grow up into the electrically lines. He stated that if there are limbs outside of the easement that could potentially fall and cause a power outage, they talk to the homeowner to explain the potential impact on the surrounding area and attempt to obtain a release to trim the trees. He stated that if the homeowner does not agree to allow them to trim the tree, they have no authority to do so at that time as it is on private property.

Councilmember Bridges inquired about right-of-way access and if easements have been an issue for DTE with the tree trimming program. City Manager Brock stated that the right-of-way is owned by the city, Oakland County, etc and then easements are granted for access by utility companies. In answer to Mr. Bridges, he stated that this would have no impact on the city's tree ordinance and the City works with residents on the removal of trees per the ordinance.

Mr. Palchesko stated that DTE has people working on identifying the easements within the target areas so that they know where those are and where work can be done. He stated that they are making an effort to increase communication with city officials as well as residents so that property owners know they will be in the areas identified and why they are trimming trees. The communication will include letters to all

residents in the affected areas, press releases and discussions with any residents that would be impacted by tree trimming or the removal of trees. He noted that arborists would be on site to maintain the health and aesthetics of the trees.

Mr. Palchesko stated that DTE is also looking at the how they can get power back on quickly if it goes out, such as jumping to another circuit, etc.

Mayor Pro-Tem Massey inquired if a transformer needed to be replaced and was identified during the tree trimming program, if that would be replaced as part of the process.

Mr. Palchesko responded that this would be reported back to the engineering division to address.

He discussed several areas where DTE was working on replacing poles and wires to address electric reliability in those areas.

In answer to City Manager Brock, Mr. Palchesko explained that if a tree is removed as part of the program, it is cut so that the stump is flush with the ground. DTE would also ground out the stump if requested by the homeowner.

Mr. Palchesko addressed the AMI or SMART meters noting that if there is an outage in Farmington Hills, he could go in and see the scope of the outage with the new meters.

Assistant to the City Manager Geinzer added that the DTE Insight App is a great feature and allows a resident to review data on their energy usage.

Councilmember Bridges inquired the process for when a major outage occurs in the City. Mr. Geinzer stated that typically he and Mr. Palchesko work together to discuss the issue and would notify the other of the outage. Mr. Geinzer pointed out that there is power outage information, including restoration periods and maps on the DTE website, which are a good source of information. He added that the City also puts this information out on Nixle to further notify residents.

Mayor Brickner thanked Mr. Palchesko for providing an update.

### **DISCUSSION ON CITY POLICY REGARDING COUNCIL POSITIONS ON BALLOT PROPOSALS**

Councilmember Lerner stated that he felt it was the policy of Council that they would not discuss any ballot proposals other than their own at the Council level. He feels that while Council members have a right to their own opinions, that this information should not be discussed from the Dias. He suggested adding a sentence to the current policy to that effect.

Attorney Joppich commented that if this was added to the policy, it would seem that Council members would then have to leave their seat at the Dias and go to the podium to comment. He stated that Council has a right to individually express their position on any matter and feels this change would still preserve that right and would not be a suppression of free speech; they would just have to do so from the podium and not the Dias.

Councilmember Knol stated that she does not agree with this change as she feels the general public is interested in knowing where the Council members stand on an issue. She understands that no official vote of the Council can be taken on another proposal and she is fine with that part of the policy.

Mayor Pro-tem Massey agreed that people want to hear from Council and know where they stand on issues, but he is not sure that it should be from the Dias as it could be construed that this was the position of the entire Council.

Further discussion was held on this issue and the consensus of Council was to maintain the current policy and make no changes at this time.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Smith', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Pamela B. Smith, City Clerk