

MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL GOALS SESSION MEETING
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM
JANUARY 23, 2016 – 9:00AM

The Special Goals Session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Massey at 9:05am.

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

Council Members Absent: None

Others Present: City Manager Boyer, City Clerk Smith and Director Mekjian

MAYOR'S MISSION:

Mayor Massey explained that he wanted to take this opportunity to discuss how they move forward as a City Council and discuss expectations. He commented that the City has a strong City Manager form of government and discussed the role of governing versus managing. He commented that Council should be careful not to get involved in the day-to-day management of the City, but should be setting the policies and direction for the City Manager and staff to carry out on a daily basis. He added that his vote as Mayor has no more strength than any other vote on Council, and he sees his role as providing Council with some direction.

Mayor Massey asked that Council conduct themselves professionally and that they are respectful to each other, to staff and citizens; and that they operate as a non-partisan body serving the entire community and not just one person or group of people.

He added that he wants to encourage participation and would like to start all of the meetings on time and run them as efficiently as possible to be respectful to everyone's time.

Mayor Massey addressed the role of Council as Board and Commission liaison and stated that it is important to attend as many of those meetings as they can. He has also been speaking to the Chairs to encourage attendance by the members.

Mayor Massey invited creative ideas from Council to address the challenges they may face. He stated that communication is important and stressed the importance of sharing communication with each other that is received from residents; but cautioned not to get into any dialogue over e-mail or at conferences on any issues as that should be done with the entire Council present in an open forum.

He outlined his plan for running public hearings meetings. Discussion was held on the time frame for allowing residents to speak. The Mayor suggested allow 5 minutes to speak and that after 3 minutes he would alert the speaking as to time left. Council concurred with that approach.

Discussion was held on the slip that speakers completed at a meeting to speak. Clerk Smith indicated that the slips are not required for public comments or for those speaking during a public hearing; however, they would be most helpful in those instances, particularly for public hearings when having someone's correct name and address might be very important.

Council liked the idea of having speakers complete a slip in order to speak.

Councilmembers thanked Mayor Massey for his leadership and for running efficient meetings.

Mayor Massey indicated that if Council had any questions on an agenda or items they wished to include on the agenda to send those to both him and the City Manager. He spoke to the Council Rules and Procedures guidelines that all members have received.

Mayor Massey commented that the goals being set at this meeting should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely.

YOUTH COUNCIL FUNDING:

Councilmember Steckloff stated that she would like additional funding included in the Mayor's Youth Council (MYC) budget in order to send a couple of the students each year to the Michigan Municipal League State Conference so that they can have a voice at the state level. She feels that experience is good for the growth of the members. She suggested sending up to 3 members and it was noted that the cost was approximately \$50 per day.

City Manager Boyer stated that the MYC has a budget, but feels that additional funding could be included for education.

Mayor Massey pointed out that often schools pay for a chaperone to attend field trips, but the students' families are responsible for their fees or they have fund-raising events. Mr. Boyer commented that MYC conducts some fund-raising already for other meetings they attend.

Councilmember Rich expressed concern that if they require self-funding that this could be a hardship for some families.

Mr. Boyer would review the budget and include additional funding if needed for education.

INCENTIVE FOR LEED CERTIFIED BUILDINGS:

Councilmember Steckloff stated that she feels Council should continue discussion on environmental sustainable buildings and that Farmington Hills should set some standards and provide incentives to encourage sustainable building. She suggested expedited permitting or perhaps tax abatements as possible incentives. She feels it is extremely important to continue these conversations and to keep the city vital and preserve the natural areas for the future.

City Manager Boyer stated that this issue was discussed at the Brownfield Authority meeting at which it was suggested the city provide funding for cleaning up a site and in return the City would require sustainable building materials to be used for the development on that property. He stated that they are in the process of putting together some standards.

Council concurred with the Brownfield Authority suggestion as a tool to remediate property and at the same time encourage sustainable building; but they did not agree with providing tax abatements as an incentive.

Mayor Pro-Tem Knol added that she feels any sustainable building requirements should be for new construction only so as not to discourage businesses from redevelopment because of the cost. Ms. Steckloff concurred.

Councilmember Lerner commented that these requirements could discourage developers from coming to Farmington Hills. He added that the City is interested in sustainable building and they have a Committee of experts that can provide information.

Councilmember Rich stated that she feels this topic is part of a larger issue and that is the branding of Farmington Hills and what they want Farmington Hills to be known for.

Mayor Massey suggested the City pursue the suggestion of the Brownfield Authority and discussing this issue with the Committee for Energy and Environmental sustainability.

RELIGIOUS DISPLAYS ON CITY PROPERTY:

Councilmember Bruce stated that he received communication from a citizen that was concerned about the menorah on city property during the holiday season and they felt it was not appropriate to have displays from one particular religion on city property. He stated that when he inquired, he was told it was a gift to the city. Dr. Bruce believes the city should allow no religious displays on city property.

The consensus of Council was to not allow any religious displays on city property.

DOWNTOWN:

Councilmember Rich stated that she was curious if the issue of creating a downtown in the area of 10 Mile and Orchard Lake Roads was still on the radar for Farmington Hills.

Discussion was held and many Council members felt that Farmington is considered the downtown area for Farmington Hills and that it would be difficult to create a downtown area.

Councilmember Steckloff stated that she would like the discussion to continue with regard to improving the Orchard Lake Road corridor. Councilmember Bridges concurred

The consensus was to continue to encourage redevelopment and to review zoning and other ordinances that would encourage this type of development to occur naturally.

City Manager Boyer mentioned that the city has overlay districts available that were mainly driven by developers.

Councilmember Steckloff stated that she appreciated this conversation as she feels all of the views are vital.

DEER POPULATION:

City Manager Boyer explained that due to concerns raised regarding the deer population in the community, staff has divided the city into 4 quadrants and will be conducting an aerial deer survey over the next month or two in these areas; and will be sending a questionnaire to various residents. He noted that the Nature Center has more information for residents on what types of vegetation to plant that deer will not eat and how to further deter the deer from entering ones property.

Councilmember Lerner commented that this issue tends to bring people out on both sides of the issue and questioned if this issue comes up at a Council meeting, can Council limit comments to only residents. He mentioned that he received an e-mail from a resident who stated that a friend was bit by a tick and now has Lyme disease, which is another concern.

City Clerk Smith responded that Council could not limit questions and comments to only residents.

City Manager Boyer stated that what he is hearing most are requests to ban feeding deer in the community.

Councilmembers concurred with reviewing a ban on feeding the deer. Councilmember Lerner stated that he is more concerned with ticks and Lyme disease; but would like to make any decision based on the data received from the surveys.

Mayor Massey pointed out that there were several concerns raised with regard to the deer that included car accidents and health issues. He added that Lyme disease is not necessarily correlated to deer and that assumption is not scientifically supported.

City Manager Boyer stated that once they have the survey results, they will provide those to Council and involve the public and proceed from there.

BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS:

Mayor Massey stated that there are over 17 boards and commissions and currently 25 openings for board/commission positions. He asked Council to encourage volunteers to join and he has encouraged all boards and commission to review their goals with their members.

Councilmember Steckloff stated that there seems to be some redundancies with the goals or activities of some boards and commissions as well as additional members over the number allowed due to members from other commissions serving as liaisons. She added that the Mayors Youth Council has often asked activities of the other boards and commissions and she suggested bringing the Chairs from each board and commission together each year to discuss their activities and how those could be coordinated so efforts are not duplicated.

Councilmember Lerner stated that he also feels there needs to be a formal process to remove a board or commission member and to clarify the process for member appointments by the Mayor.

Councilmembers also suggested reviewing their goals and mission statements and the role of the Council and staff liaisons.

City Clerk Smith commented that part of the meeting with the Chairs could be a review of the legal requirements for preparing the agendas and minutes since there is often a turn-over in members and the role of secretary for each board/commission.

Council concurred with an overall review of the boards and commissions to include a review of goals and mission statements, the role of the liaisons, implementing a formal removal process for members, legal requirements for agendas and minutes and to include a meeting of the Chairs of each board and commission to discuss activities and how they can coordinate efforts.

Mayor Massey also suggested an update on the board and commission from the Council liaisons during study session meetings.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN:

Councilmember Steckloff commented that Council has heard a lot about the Capital Improvement Plan as it relates to road special assessment districts and she was thinking of ways to be more pro-active such as pre-notification to residents that may be affected by a future special assessment. She added that the language used in notifications sent to residents should also be easy to understand and not too technical. She also suggested placing a Charter Amendment for a city-wide road millage on a future ballot.

Mayor Massey stated that the FAQ's the City has prepared regarding future road special assessments is a good idea, but he wanted to find creative ways to address this issue and try to find a happy medium that would be most equitable to all residents. He does not feel a city-wide millage would pass as it is not equitable for those that have already paid into a special assessment for their roads. He suggested exploring the idea of working with homeowners associations on creating maintenance funds to help fund their road improvements.

Discussion was held and some concerns were mentioned with regard to some subdivisions having no association or having a voluntary association board and how those associations would handle those who do not pay their fees.

The consensus of Council was that they did not agree with pursuing a Charter Amendment that most felt would likely fail; but they would agree with pursuing alternatives and the creation of a maintenance fund as long as not too much staff time was spent on this issue.

Councilmember Bridges inquired how much is being spent on road maintenance for subdivisions and how many subdivisions are on the CIP.

Director Mekjian stated that he did not have that information with him on funding but could get that information for Council.

City Manager Boyer stated that there are approximately 35 subdivisions and 52 miles of road included in the CIP.

Mayor Massey stated that he would look into the maintenance fund with staff but would not spend too much time.

ALICE PROJECT (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed):

Councilmember Rich stated that this item is related to economic development and mentioned that the United Way has a project called ALICE where they help businesses fill positions. She commented on the number of help wanted signs and wondered what other communities were doing to help businesses fill those positions and what the city could do to help.

Councilmember Steckloff stated that the Commission on Aging is currently working on a program to place seniors back into the workforce.

It was the consensus of Council that while they want to work with business to help them thrive, they do not feel staffing is the responsibility of Council.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Councilmember Knol stated that she feels the City should do all it can do encourage development and to recruit new businesses and restaurants to the area, including Farmington. With regard to some property for sale in Farmington, she believes that Council should support the Farmington Council to encourage upscale mixed uses to attract young professionals to the area who will invest in both communities. She sees the goal as working with Farmington on redevelopment needs.

Councilmember Bridges concurred and stated that Farmington and Farmington Hills should be viewed as one community with regard to economic development. He reiterated the need to review the Orchard Lake Road corridor for redevelopment as well.

Mayor Massey stated that the Council should have a good idea of the strengths and weaknesses of the community and the economic development vision and stakeholders. He feels it is the role of the Economic Development Corporation and the City's Economic Development staff to attract new businesses and the role of the Chamber of Commerce to retain businesses.

Council concurred a goal would be to develop a mission statement and vision for the city's economic development.

Councilmember Steckloff commented that the master plan showed that the average travel time for Farmington Hills residents to their work was 30-59 minutes away and she feels this is something Council should review.

Councilmember Lerner stated that these are all positive comments, but he does not feel property in Farmington is the city's business.

Mayor Massey commented that the joint meeting with Farmington and the Schools would be an opportunity to voice their support.

Councilmember Lerner stated that he has discussed the arts festival and the art display at the founders with the Chamber and will be working on coordinating efforts. He feels another goal would be to work more closely with the Chamber of Commerce (GFACC).

BRANDING:

City Manager Boyer stated that the City is working on a survey to send to residents asking them on their views of Farmington Hills and what they would like to see in the community. The City also works closely with Oakland County and the Chamber with regard to businesses in the community.

Councilmember Lerner stated that a while back he had mentioned Looplink where you can build a website for businesses to include demographics and other information and he still feels this is something the City should pursue. He commented that Looplink is used by the majority of commercial developers.

Councilmember Rich stated that she feels the City needs to ask what the residents think of Farmington Hills and what they want the City to be known for. She expressed concern with the signs at the highway exit ramps to Farmington Hills that say "No Aggressive Begging" and signs along Orchard Lake Road that say "NO Parking". She feels these are negative messages and not encouraging to businesses or young people and questioned if the signs were still needed.

Mayor Massey stated that the aggressive begging signs were installed to address a problem and he would rather have the sign remain than have people begging.

Mayor Pro-Tem Knol added that the problem with people begging at these corners has been better but she does not think it is gone and that the signs are still needed. She feels the no parking signs are a private business matter and not something the City may have control over.

Councilmember Bridges felt that Dr. Rich had a good point and that perhaps the issue of begging could be monitored and the signs removed when it is no longer a problem. He added that welcoming message signs would also be appropriate. He expressed concern with the condition of the median areas and stated that the City should address that with MDOT or the Oakland County Road Commission depending on who has jurisdiction.

Council consensus was that the aggressive begging signs were still needed but they agreed to pursue positive and welcoming signage into the City.

RENTAL INSPECTION PROGRAM:

Councilmember Bruce commented on the implementation of the city's single-family rental inspection program to help protect the neighborhoods; but added that one-third of the housing stock is apartments. He suggested adding apartment complexes to the program.

Mayor Massey stated that Dr. Bruce has a good point, but felt that perhaps the residential rental inspection program could be strengthened first as a next step before they take on the larger issue of apartment complexes.

Councilmember Bridges suggested encouraging the owners of the complexes to come in and meet with city staff to discuss the concerns and allow them to do the improvements on their own.

City Manager Boyer pointed out that the current rental inspection program covers the exterior of homes only. The City has identified 2,500 non-homestead homes and sent the owners a letter notifying them of the rental inspection program and requirements. To date, 526 still have not responded. He noted that the City is dedicating 1.5 full-time employees to handle the exterior inspections and tracking of that information and it will take approximately 3 years to complete the process. He stated that if the direction of Council is to include the interior of the homes, additional staff will be needed in order to accomplish that and if apartment complexes are included that may also require getting experts involved to address specific issues.

Mr. Boyer explained the current rental inspection program is working to improve the aesthetics of the neighborhoods and he would prefer for this first step to be complete before expanding the program.

The consensus of Council was to allow staff to complete the first phase of the current rental inspection program; host a meeting with apartment complex owners to address concerns and then re-evaluate the program after the first phase is complete to consider expansion of the program.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS:

Bill Largent, resident, made the following comments on the various issues discussed:

- He suggested flexibility by Council on the 5-minute rule for public comments at the Council meetings as residents are there to be heard.
- He cautioned implementing sustainable, LEED certified building as a requirement for new construction as that could also be a deterrent to some businesses that may not be able to afford it.
- With regard to the branding of Farmington Hills, he feels that the main reason people choose an area to live is because of the schools and he encouraged the Council to build a relationship with the school board and administration.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further discussion, Mayor Massey adjourned the meeting at 1:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Pamela B. Smith, City Clerk