

MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MEETING
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM
DECEMBER 14 2015 – 6:00PM

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

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

Council Members Absent: None

Others Present: City Manager Boyer, City Clerk Smith, Directors Lasley, Mekjian and Schnackel and City Attorney Joppich

MIDDLEBELT TUNNEL PROJECT UPDATE:

City Manager Boyer introduced staff from the Water Resource Commission to provide an update on the Middlebelt Tunnel Project. He also recognized residents from Woodcreek Subdivision who were present and interested in the project.

Tom Axwell, Project Manager, and Director of Public Services Gary Mekjian provided some history with regard to past sanitary sewer deficiencies in the area and Administrative Consent Orders (ACO) required by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to address these deficiencies. Mr. Mekjian explained that the City complied with all of the ACO's and addressed the issues but it was discovered that the amount of flow discharging to the county interceptors was in excess of the contract terms. He noted that the County system was issued an ACO in 2004 and the City at that time was faced with addressing the excessive flow on their own, which would have been costly; or collaborating with the County and other communities to address the sanitary sewer issues.

Mr. Mekjian stated that the DEQ outlined short-term and long-term corrective action plans and the Middlebelt Tunnel project was included as part of the long-term corrective action plan.

Councilmember Bridges inquired why there was a change in the ACO and if there were issues or delays due to the City or County actions.

Director Mekjian explained the history of the ACO's issued and commented that there was a shift in environmental policies that were more stringent that played a part. There were no delays in action on behalf of the City or County, but he feels the policies changed and knowledge evolved on how to more accurately operate the sanitary sewer system.

Councilmember Lerner inquired about the timeline for the 8 Mile Road tunnel project and if the City would be responsible for costs associated with infrastructure projects along that corridor to Detroit.

Director Mekjian responded that there is a tunnel project for 8 Mile Road proposed, but that is 2 or 3 years down the road. He explained that the intent was to construct the Middlebelt Road tunnel and see how that affects areas downstream and perhaps the 8 Mile Road project may either not be needed or at least minimized. Mr. Mekjian stated that infrastructure costs would be inclusive in the water and sewer rates.

Mr. Axwell reviewed the Middlebelt Tunnel Project and where they were to date and the issues experienced with some of the residential wells due to the necessary de-watering in the area due to the soil conditions.

Councilmember Bridges inquired why this location was selected. Mr. Axwell responded that the location was selected as it was the most efficient location for design of the project.

Mr. Axwell went on to explain the soil conditions and how the water drains and he showed a picture of the tunnel boring machine and explained how that operates.

Councilmember Steckloff inquired if the tunnel was being built large enough to address an increase in volume down the road.

Mr. Axwell replied that the tunnel project was being built to address the ACO and meet those requirements, but that it was approximately 300,000 gallons in excess of what was required.

Jason Edberg, NTH Consultants, Ltd. explained the de-watering process and why it was necessary. He explained that the issues they ran into were due to the fact that there were more residential wells existing than expected and varying or unknown depths of the residential wells also created more issues. He stated that it is not uncommon that they would impact some of the residential wells, but they did not anticipate the number of wells that would be affected. He added that part of the issue was that most of the wells pre-dated the time when records were maintained so there were no records of them and some residents did not even know they had a well or where it was located.

Mr. Edberg explained that corrective measures that were put in place to address the impacts on residential wells included having the contractor provide a temporary 300 gallon water tank, evaluation of existing wells, modification of existing wells or drilling of new wells in some cases and connection to a water main where available.

Mr. Axwell displayed on a map the residential wells that were impacted and stated that there were a total of 40 that they had to address.

Mayor Massey inquired about the current location of the tunnel boring machine to date. Mr. Axwell responded that they are just south of 12 Mile Road at this point and once they are north of 12 Mile Road, the soil conditions improve and they should have no issues tunneling until they get to the Pebble Creek area just south of 13 Mile Road.

Councilmember Rich inquired if any homeowners were currently without water. Mr. Axwell replied there were not.

Mr. Axwell explained that the de-watering currently taking place must be maintained throughout the project; but once a certain water level is reached, there should be no further impact on residential wells. He stated that it is anticipated that tunneling would be complete by June, 2016 and they should be able to shut down the de-watering process in August with completion of the project anticipated in November, 2016. He mentioned that due to these issues experienced, they have already contacted the residents in the area of Pebble Creek and 13 Mile Road that may be affected as the project moves forward asking them to provide more information about their wells. He stated that they will not use de-watering in this area but are exploring 3 other options. Those options include installing shallow wells in the area, moving the location of the tunnel in that area where there are better soil conditions or installing a storage tank. Those options are currently being reviewed to determine costs and impacts on the area and residents.

Councilmember Knol inquired about prior notification to the affected residents whose wells went dry. Mr. Axwell responded that they had met with residents of Woodcreek Subdivision as they expected impacts in that area but they did not meet with or notify all affected residents as they did not expect such widespread issues. He stated that they worked with the Homeowner's Association President who helped to get information out about whom the residents should contact if they were having any issues.

Mayor Massey asked that the City and Council are updated as the project progresses and notified of any future impacts on residents.

DISCUSSION ON SOUTHWESTERN OAKLAND CABLE COMMISSION (SWOCC):

City Manager Boyer stated that both he and Mayor Massey were appointed to the SWOCC Board and discussions have taken place for a while now on the future of SWOCC. He noted that Farmington Hills, on behalf of SWOCC, contracted with CBG Communication, Inc. to perform a review of SWOCC's existing operation and how those operations currently help administer cable franchises and facilitate governmental and public access television and also provided options for the future. Mr. Boyer noted that there has been a reduction in subscriptions, which is how SWOCC is funded, with a 10% drop in revenue over the last 3 years.

Mr. Boyer explained that the City of Novi is looking at other ways to provide these services in house and has asked both Farmington and Farmington Hills to review the option of dissolving SWOCC. At the last SWOCC meeting, the Board recommended extending the deadline to withdraw under the current contract from January 1st to April 1st to provide all communities more time to review the matter and determine how to move forward.

Mayor Massey added that discussions regarding the future of SWOCC have been ongoing for over a year. He stated that the proposed resolution to amend the agreement, which is on the regular agenda for consideration this evening, would only provide for an extension of time to withdraw and not change any other terms of the agreement.

City Manager Boyer discussed the current staffing and funding for the SWOCC building and operations. If SWOCC dissolved, the City would maintain its current full-time staff and look for an alternate location and means to provide these services.

Councilmember Bridges inquired if the City of Novi or Farmington has made any decisions. Mayor Massey responded that the City of Novi wants to withdraw from the agreement and Farmington has indicated that they want to join efforts with the City of Farmington Hills to provide for these services.

Councilmember Lerner commented that he sees no reason for the Resolution to extend the time to withdraw when Novi knows that is what they want to do as it is not changing any of the other terms of the contract, which all communities fall under until June 30, 2016.

Mr. Boyer commented that if SWOCC dissolved, the communities would also have to determine what to do with the assets. He mentioned that an appraisal is currently being done on the building and should be complete in January.

Mayor Massey stated that the extension will give time for all communities to collect data on the building and determine how to move forward.

Mr. Boyer added that the ultimate goal is to maintain and enhance programming.

Councilmember Rich stated that as long as the proposed resolution does not put Farmington Hills at a disadvantage, she would not object.

The consensus of Council was to move forward at the regular meeting with consideration of the proposed resolution to amend the agreement with SWOCC.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further discussion, Mayor Massey adjourned the study session at 7:28pm

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. B. Smith', written in a cursive style.

Pamela B. Smith, City Clerk