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Property eyed for recreation development

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

More than 200 acres of virgin woods, rolling hills and open fields traversed by the Rouge River could one day be the site of a major park area for Farmington Hills residents.

Nicholas Spicer, owner of the property on the west side of Farmington Road between 10 and 11 Mile roads, recently approached city officials about the possible sale of the land.

The city's engineering and assessing departments are putting together plans and maps of the property, worth \$4.6 million, said Doug Gaynor, Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation director.

Residents already have access to five acres, site of the Farmington Community Center. That land was donated by Spicer's late mother, Eleanor, several years ago.

UNTIL HER death last June at the age of 72, Spicer lived in a rambling house on the land given to her as a wedding present. She inherited the estate from her father, Detroit attorney Luman Goodenough. Goodenough bought it in 1915 from seed farmer Palmer Sherman.

Conversion of the property to park land would be particularly fitting in that Spicer, a naturalist, wished the land to remain in its present state, Nicholas Spicer and Gainer said.

The prospect also represents the last large area of land available for recreation within Farmington Hills city limits.

"This is absolutely the last (privately

owned property) of its kind left in this part of the country," said Spicer, a Birmingham attorney. As a youngster, Spicer romped along the estate's Indian trails, learned to ski the hills, traveled to school in a sleigh and grew accustomed to the company of a governess, butler and 12 gardeners, he said.

"I'D LIKE the property to remain as is. I won't sell it piecemeal. Absent that, we'll have to make the best of it," said Spicer, who has not listed the property for sale.

"It's been in the family for two generations, but it's no longer practical. I'd like the city to end up with it eventually."

"It would make a beautiful wildlife preserve, perfect for nature trails, cross country skiing, hiking and water sports."

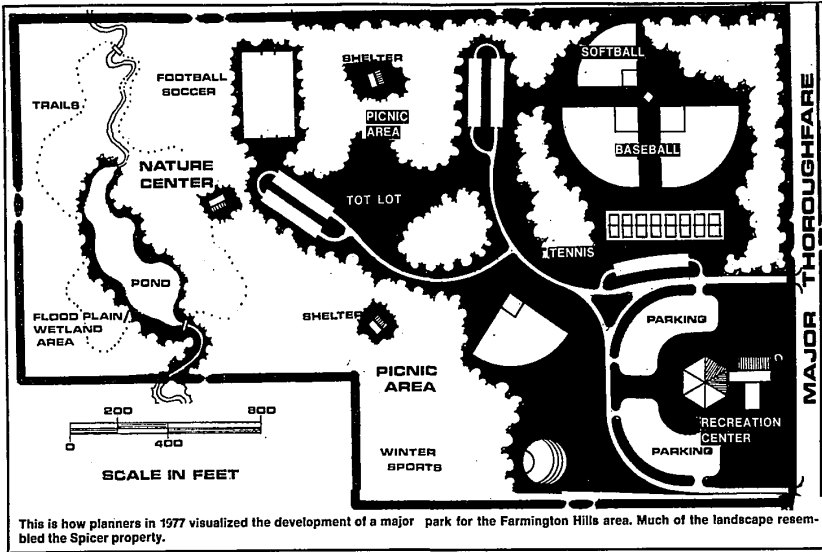
"There are deer, fox, wild flowers and beautiful open fields. There are virgin woods that have never been touched by man. They've been there since time began."

Gaynor covets the land, or a portion of it, preserved as a recreational facility in its natural state.

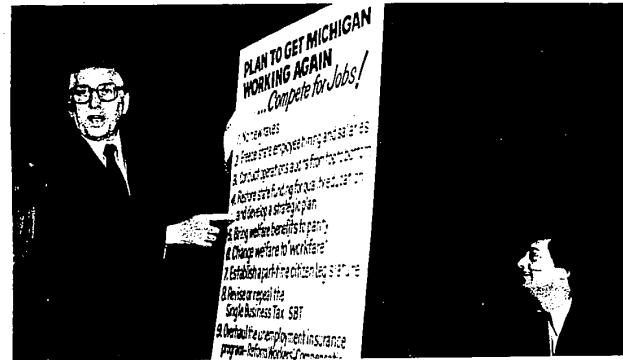
"It's the last piece of land the city could acquire with the aesthetic value of open space, and some of it is conducive to recreational development," Gaynor said.

BEFORE ESPOUSING particular uses for the property, however, it's important to establish the needs of the community and the desire of the city to

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This is how planners in 1977 visualized the development of a major park for the Farmington Hills area. Much of the landscape resembled the Spicer property.



Richard Headlee, debating gubernatorial candidate James Blanchard in a joint meeting of the Oakland County chambers of commerce, tells the audience that Michigan could become the "miracle state" after he turns the economy around. Blanchard said he wouldn't promise miracles but would ask business and labor to work together.

STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Strike issue dominates gubernatorial debate

By Suzie Rollins Singer
staff writer

Both gubernatorial candidates oppose teacher strikes, but Republican Richard Headlee favors striking public employees.

But his Democratic opponent, James Blanchard, said school boards already have that power, and the state "must get to the root of the problem" — under-financed schools.

Schools were a major topic when Headlee, a Farmington Hills insurance executive, faced Blanchard, a congressman from Pleasant Ridge, before members of chambers of commerce in Oakland County. It was their first head-to-head debate since they won the Aug. 10 primaries.

"TEACHER STRIKES are illegal, and people who break the law should be replaced," said Headlee. "We can no longer afford having teachers using children as pawns."

He advocated a plan that calls for requiring collective bargaining to begin on or before June 1, opening collective bargaining to the public, requiring

school boards and teachers to reach agreement or certify an impasse by Aug. 1, and requiring schools to open on or before the day after Labor Day.

Under Headlee's plan, if school opens without a contract, both sides' final offers must be submitted — stating the level of taxes needed to support each offer — to the voters for a local referendum/tax election in 30 days. If voters reject both offers, the school board must operate with last year's tax rate and teachers must work under last year's agreement.

BLANCHARD said he, too, condemns public employee strikes, but dismissing strikers isn't the answer.

"We have to increase state aid to education and restructure school financing to diminish the emphasis on property taxes," he said.

The audience in the San Marino Club in Troy was heavily Republican, evidenced by applause when they were asked which primary they voted in. The audience vigorously applauded Headlee's digs at Blanchard's voting records and spending habits.

In contrast, some of Blanchard's

lines which drew thunderous applause at the Democratic state convention in Flint fell flat in the San Marino Club. Blanchard frankly appealed to moderate Republicans, characterizing Headlee as representing only a conservative wing of the GOP.

HEADLEE SAID voting for Blanchard was a vote in former President Jimmy Carter's camp.

"He (Blanchard) voted with Carter more than any member of the Michigan delegation, and Jimmy Carter brought us the Carter-Blanchard-Blanchard-Carter misery index, of a 21.5-percent prime rate, 14-percent inflation and 10.5-percent unemployment," Headlee said.

"Today, 11 months after Reagan's so-called trickle down economics has been in effect, it beats the hell out of dried-up politics from Carter-Blanchard," he added.

WHEN BLANCHARD pointed out that Headlee contradicted himself over his attorney general nominee L. Brooks Patterson, Headlee laughed and agreed.

"Mr. Patterson is first of all dishonest, he is so anxious to attack, he plays fast and loses the truth. It's dangerous to have people like that in power," Headlee was quoted as saying to a reporter.

But the crowd roared with laughter and applause as Headlee shook his head and didn't attempt to defend his words.

WHILE BOTH candidates agreed on several issues, they each advised voters of their clear choice Nov. 2.

• Open meetings — Blanchard and

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5 school mills on ballot, but scare tactics shunned

A millage election that will determine the fate of 13 percent of the Farmington School District budget will be decided on Tuesday when voters will be asked to approve a five-mill renewal that would expire in 1992.

But you won't find school Superintendent Lewis Schulman spreading scary stories about the horrors that are in store for students in the form of curricula cuts if the renewal is rejected by voters.

"I don't want to use scare tactics," Schulman said Monday. "We've been

very upfront with our people. You have a very intelligent electorate in the Farmington School District. You don't bamboozle them."

Five mills mean more than \$6.5 million to the district, according to Schulman, or 13 percent of the district's current budget of \$41,310,779 in fiscal year 1982-83.

But Schulman says the renewal is just that — a renewal, not a millage increase, and it comes close on the heels of the school board's decision last spring to reduce the millage by 1.55

mills. The action was taken because of the increase of the state equalized valuation (SEV) which placed the taxable value of property in the school district at \$1.1 billion — \$1,107,343,574 to be exact.

"WE'VE BEEN reducing the millage requirement for the last few years," Schulman said. "As SEVs have increased, we haven't had the need for additional millage."

In the 1973-74 school year, Schulman notes, the Farmington School District had the third highest millage rate in Oakland County. Today, he says, the district ranks 21st of 28 school districts in terms of how many mills are levied against taxpayers. The district levies 33.7 mills out of a possible ceiling of 50 mills. Neighboring Clarenceville, for example, is close to the limit.

A breakdown of the 33.7 mills — reduced from last year's levy of 35.25 mills — shows 31.6 mills going toward the operational budget and 1.9 mills earmarked for debt retirement on school bond issues.

While it has been three years since Farmington Public Schools have gone before voters with a millage request, Schulman notes that for the next five years there will be a millage renewal on the ballot every year.

The last millage renewal proposal, which also was for five mills, passed by a 69-percent margin, according to the superintendent.

Drivers roll sans contract

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

Bus drivers for the Farmington School District still are without a contract despite recent lengthy bargaining sessions.

The drivers' two-year contract expired July 1. But bus service for Farmington students has been unaffected because of a contract extension.

Talks began last June but reached an impasse late last month when a mediator was requested by both sides. State mediator Leon Cornfield of the Michigan Bureau of Employment Relations was unable to bring about a settlement after a full day of bargaining Aug. 31.

Drivers' wages and working conditions remain the stumbling blocks to reaching an agreement.

But chief negotiators for both the bus drivers and the Farmington Board of Education are satisfied progress is being made.

"On the basis of the last two bargaining sessions I'd say our differences have narrowed considerably," said Robert Coleman, the district's personnel director and head negotiator.

"Cornfield had some interesting concepts for both sides about how the contract should be settled. What we're supposed to be doing now is working out the language of the proposals."

MARY ANN LIGATO, the bus drivers' bargaining representative, called the proposals "a possible basis for settlement."

"We've made progress — we're optimistic," Ligato said.

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IN THIS ISSUE...

oral quarrel

How does community feel about police?

In recent weeks some area merchants have expressed dissatisfaction with police response to a rash of robberies and burglaries. Today's Oral Quarrel question is:

HOW GOOD OF A JOB DO YOU THINK THE POLICE FORCE IS

DOING IN FARMINGTON OR FARMINGTON HILLS? PLEASE EXPLAIN.

When calling Oral Quarrel at 477-8410 please tell us whether you are talking about the Farmington or Farmington Hills law enforcement agency. The lines will be open until noon on Friday.