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Hills says okay to buying property for park



Residents of Farmington Hills are one step closer to a park they can call their own. City officials have signed an option to purchase a

211-acre parcel of land now owned by the Spicer family. The land will be set aside for recreational use.

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

The years-long, hard-fought battle of Farmington Hills community leaders to acquire a city park was won yesterday when city officials signed an option to purchase a 211-acre parksite for approximately \$2 million.

Though the city and the seller of the property, Birmingham attorney Nicholas Spicer, have reached agreement, the deal will remain unofficial until it is approved by the Farmington Hills City Council.

Owned by the Spicer family since the turn of the century, the centrally-located acreage features wildlife, rolling hills and meadows, virgin stands of trees, a tributary of the Rouge River, farmhouses and barns.

THE SITE of the Farmington Community Center, the parcel is bordered by Farmington Road and 10 and 11 Mile Roads.

The purchase is contingent upon the city's receipt of a state land trust grant — funds allocated in December to preserve natural areas in Michigan.

Last year, the Oakland County Department of Parks and Recreation was denied a grant to purchase the land. Farmington Hills has until June to apply for the Kammer Land Trust funds.

A PORTION of the purchase price or the entire cost could be granted. Land trust grants must be approved

by the state Legislature. Farmington Hills Director of Special Services Douglas Gaylor estimates that if the city receives the grant, the Legislature would consider approval next January. It could take up to a year for the money to be paid, he added.

Spicer, who inherited the land from his mother, the late naturalist Eleanor Spicer, is pleased about the agreement for several reasons.

IT WAS his mother's wish that the property remain a natural area. Shortly after her death last June, Spicer approached the city about selling his land.

He said he is drafting a letter to the Observer, voicing his pleasure at being able to fulfill his mother's hopes.

The sale also will mean the lifting for the Spicers of a heavy property and estate tax burden — a major reason the land was offered for sale.

THE PURCHASE was delayed by differences of opinion concerning who should assume the loss should the property be devalued — such as by a forest fire or an "act of God" — before the city receives the grant, said Farmington Hills City Manager Lawrence Savage.

Savage refused to disclose further details about the agreement.

Gaylor recently recommended to the city's planning commission that a committee of special interest groups, interested citizens and parks and recre-

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'Kid' trustee will retire

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

At an age when most public officials are plotting their entrance into politics, 20-year-old Farmington Public School Board Trustee Michael Spiece is calling it a career.

Spiece, one of the youngest school board members ever elected, took office in 1975 at 18. At 22, he was tapped as the youngest school board president in Michigan.

It took three months of deliberation for Spiece to decide that "I have spent 29 percent of my life on the board, and it's time for me to do something else."

"I've never wanted to hang on until I

was out of fresh ideas. It's important, if you're going to be a board member, to react intelligently, but still have fresh ideas of your own."

Though stepping down will create a void in his life, "While I'm still able to do those things, I decided it would be a good time to quit," he said.

Spiece announced his decision at Tuesday's school board meeting. The July 1 expiration of his term will create the board's only open seat. (Those interested in becoming candidates for the four-year term have until 4 p.m. April 11 to file nominating petitions.)

A law student at the University of Michigan, Spiece established a tradition on the board of honesty and con-

viction, said Farmington School Superintendent Lewis Schulman, who first met Spiece when he was a student and Schulman was principal at Harrison High School.

"I have had an unusual opportunity to see a young man mature from a high school student into a fine human being. The values he espoused and emulated as a student stayed with him as a board member."

"The only thing that tempered him, and tempered him well, is maturity."

"It's difficult to speak about Michael except in extravagant terms. His contribution to the district was substantial."

Expansion of the girls' athletic program from 14 to 28 teams, the board's open door policy and the establishment of the curriculum development account (a \$100,000 fund that will enable teachers to implement new educational programs during 1983-84) are among the accomplishments of which Spiece is proud.

But, he said, "the greatest honor I could have received came when former Farmington City Councilman Warren Buckler was running for office (at age 26), and voters would say, 'well, that Spiece kid was okay, so maybe another younger person could run.'"

"One thing I convinced people of was that it is possible to be young, and to make good decisions as a good elected official."

Getting there wasn't easy, he added. Spiece's proposals were squashed.



Michael Spiece

6-1, for most of his first year on the board.

"I was kind of the damn kid who came along and was more a pain in the neck than anything else," said Spiece, who has served as policy consultant to the state insurance commissioner and as committee administrator to the joint legislative committee on aging.

There were positions Spiece took, Schulman said, "which frankly not everybody, including myself, could support."

"But they were always conceived in honesty and sincerity, and presented well. Even though he had strong feelings, he was never mean, carrying or invidious, even though he's political."

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Land rezoned for shopping

By Joanne Maliszowski
staff writer

Even though a Halsted Road homeowner charged Farmington Hills officials with "surrendering without a shot being fired," the City Council gave Troy developer Stuart R. Frankel the green light to proceed with plans for a shopping center on the corner of 12 Mile and Halsted.

"We see no reason for throwing in the towel," said Bernard Ludwig, president of the Historic Halsted Homeowners Association. "There's no reason why we can't have one road that's not obliterated by commercial."

But the council Monday approved a consent judgment (a negotiated settlement) with Frankel allowing him to develop 36 acres into a shopping and office center, complete with a 15-acre strip of cluster homes to buffer nearby single-family homes. Councilmen Donn Wolf and William Lange opposed the approval.

The judgment reversed a January 1981 council rejection of Frankel's original request to rezone the property from single-family residential (RA-1) to shopping and commercial (B-1) and office (OS-1).

At that time, council rejected Frank-

el's rezoning request because members felt another shopping center in the city was unnecessary, said City Attorney Paul Bibeau.

The developer filed suit in March 1981 against the city before Oakland County Circuit Judge Gene Schmelz.

Although Frankel presented the City Council with his own commercial market analysis of the 12 Mile and Halsted area, "we didn't accept it," Bibeau said.

"But in the best interest of the city, they decided to get their own study going," Bibeau said, referring to city planning commissioners.

So planning commissioners hired a research firm to complete a market analysis which later indicated "that the area (12 Mile and Halsted) could support some additional commercial," Bibeau said. The study's results later were incorporated into the city's master plan.

Meanwhile, Frankel's attorney, James Ginn of Southfield, agreed to "put the case on the back burner" until the city's market analysis was complete, Bibeau said.

Both Ginn and Frankel were unavailable for comment.

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Driver is charged in student's death

Jeffrey Scott Jones, 24, of Farmington Hills is free on \$10,000 personal bond following his arraignment Tuesday before 47th District Court Judge Michael Hand. Jones is charged with manslaughter in the death of 11-year-old Jennifer Kasprovecz March 4.

Jennifer, a fifth-grade student at Beechview Elementary School, was struck by a car at 7:15 p.m. at 11 Mile and Middlebelt. She was dead on arrival at Botsford General Hospital of multiple injuries.

The youngster was two steps off the curb walking toward the southeast corner of the intersection when a Pontiac Lemans travelling south on Middlebelt hit her.

Jennifer's brother and another boy, who were walking with her, missed being struck by about five feet, said Of-

ficer Don Fradette of Farmington Hills Police Traffic Safety Division.

JONES, whose car ended up in a ditch, was shaken up but uninjured.

In interviews with witnesses, Fradette attempted to discover what color the traffic light was when Jennifer was hit and the speed at which Jones was travelling. The investigation was completed early this week.

Neither alcohol nor drugs were a factor in the accident, Fradette said.

A plea of not guilty was entered for Jones. A preliminary examination was scheduled for April 28. Manslaughter carries a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison.

Jones, a lifelong Farmington Hills resident, is employed in the Detroit area, Fradette said.

What should be done about dioxin poison?

Recently the accusation was made by a U.S. congressman that the Environmental Protection Agency allowed Dow Chemical Co. to alter a report on Michigan waters contaminated by dioxin chemicals. In the original report, Dow was named as the polluter.

Environmentalists claim the chemicals make fish inedible and endanger Michigan residents who live near the water. Others are upset because they fear Michigan's tourist industry will suffer, with travelers staying away in fear of contamination.

Today's Oral Quarrel Question is:

WHO SHOULD BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR CLEANING UP THE CONTAMINATED WATER? HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE WAY THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION HANDLED THE SITUATION WITH DOW?

You have until 1 p.m. Friday to answer the question by calling 477-5498. Look in Monday's Observer to see what your neighbors think.

Architects hired for police station

By Joanne Maliszowski
staff writer

As the Farmington Hills Police Department headquarters become increasingly cramped, city officials this week hired an architectural firm to develop ideas for providing the department with roomier quarters.

City Council members Monday hired Carl Luckenback & Robert Ziegelerman Inc., a Birmingham architectural firm, to evaluate the department's space needs and determine the quality of four city-suggested plans for providing extra space. The analysis will cost the city \$9,000 with 25-75-percent of that applied to design fees.

Prior to recommending the Birmingham architects, a six-member city administrative committee developed four alternatives for expanding police quarters (which will be considered in the analysis): 1) adding to the existing police station (which is attached to the city hall); 2) building a new structure on the existing site or nearby land the city would acquire; 3) renovating an empty elementary school into a police station; 4) building a new station at some other location in the city.

The police currently use about 7,500 square feet, but need at least 30,000 square feet to operate comfortably, said William Costlek, Farmington Hills assistant city manager.

"Right now, we have no definite plans at all," Costlek said, referring to the lack of any firm decision to provide the city police with more room.

ALTHOUGH THE city recently spent approximately \$56,000 in remodeling the police station with a vehicle port and cell improvements as ordered by the state Department of Corrections, those additions are irrelevant to any needed expansion, Costlek said.

The department's space problems were unaccounted for in the city's 1982-83 budget, according to a budget summary.

But, the department's space problems are mentioned in the summary which particularly notes cramped quarters in the dispatch room and detective division on the second floor, as well as inadequate space for interrogations and filing.

The station's squad room and men's locker room with only 58 lockers for

the 66 male officers, also is considered cramped, according to the budget summary.

Although city officials hired an architect to determine the department's space needs on at least a 10-15 year

basis, police personnel will continue working in cramped quarters for another two-to-three years, the time needed to complete space plans, and if approved, begin construction, Costlek said.

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