

RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Developers want to convert Clarenceville School District's vacant Westbrook Elementary School on the east side of Osmus in Farmington Hills into senior citizen housing. But the school sits in a neighborhood with unpaved roads and no direct access to a major thoroughfare. Neighborhood residents oppose the developer's rezoning request because of the roads and access problems.

# Housing for elderly eyed

By Joanne Maliszewski  
staff writer

Developers who are behind a move to convert a vacant school in the south-end of Farmington Hills into senior citizen housing have been sent back to the drawing board.

Farmington Hills City Council last week postponed a decision until April 21 on a request to rezone the Clarenceville School District's old Westbrook Elementary School on Osmus from single-family residential (RA-3) to elderly housing residential district (HCE). The eight-acre parcel is east of Osmus, between Salvador and Junction.

Council's action followed a public hearing during which nearby residents expressed concern about the possibility of senior housing in the old school that does not have access to a major thoroughfare, as required under the HCE zone.

Council members told developer Jeff White they were willing to consider the old school for senior housing if he could develop an alternative plan that would help solve potential traffic problems on the unpaved roads in the neighborhood and provide better access to a major road for senior citizens.

White told council he believes senior housing is the best option for the old neighborhood school because the elderly prefer living in residential areas. Rents most likely would be less than \$380 a month, he said. In August 1985, planning commissioners denied White's request to rezone the property for apartments.

BUT CITY planners referred to zoning requirements that call for senior citizen housing to have access to a major thoroughfare.

Councilmen Ben Marks and Terry Sever opposed council's action. Marks said he preferred to see single-family homes constructed on the site. The property could be rezoned for smaller lots, allowing for a greater number of homes on the eight-acre school parcel. "It's important to me that we maintain the character of the neighborhood," he said.

Sever opposed council's action because of the unpaved roads, and lack of access to a major thoroughfare where senior citizens could shop. Sever said he would approve the request only if developers agreed to improve roads near the school.

"The accessibility factor is very great. I feel very concerned that we would end up creating a situation where the elderly would be trapped," he said.

Residents of the Section 34 neighborhood west of Orchard Lake, north of Eight Mile and south of M-102, echoed concerns similar to Sever's.

Although residents maintained they are not opposed to senior citizen housing, they are opposed to it at the vacant school because of the condition of the roads in the neighborhood and lack of access.

"YOU ARE going to put seniors in there and they'll be forgotten," said resident Diane Bannister, referring to lack of access. Single-family housing is the best option for the acreage, she added.

Farmington Hills Planning Commissioners in February recommended denial of White's rezoning request. Commissioners denied the request because the proposed zoning does not conform to the city's master zoning plan, inadequate road access and that the zoning would be incompatible with other existing uses in the neighborhood. In October 1985, the zoning board of appeals also denied the developer's request for a use variance to allow senior citizen housing in the school.

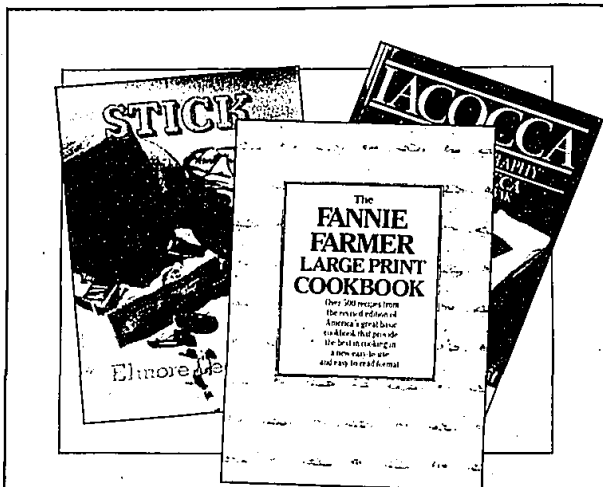
But the majority of council members held out hope that something could be worked out so the vacant school and acreage can be used for senior citizens.

"I happen to believe the building is there and something should be done with it," Councilwoman Jan Dolan said. "Senior housing is certainly a logical use for it."

Councilwoman Joan Dudley agreed. "I don't think we have to turn this proposal down. I am not ready to act on this. I heard from the residents an open-mindedness. I hear an attitude out of the proponents that they want to cooperate."

BOTH COUNCILMAN Donn Wolf and Mayor Joe Alkateeb favored senior housing. But both cautioned that the city's zoning ordinances must be followed.

"I, too, would like it to become senior citizen zoning. My concern is that we are getting very close to contract zoning. We are walking the fine line," Wolf said.



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