

Council has plans for new park

By Joanna Malozewski
staff writer

Farmington Hills city officials are offering to buy almost 37 acres for \$600,000 for a new park south of I-696, west of Farmington Road.

"All we're doing at this point is making an offer. It has not yet been purchased," City Manager William Costick said.

The city council a week ago gave Costick the go-ahead to buy the land for \$22,430 per acre. The city is offering a \$100,000 down payment and a land contract to be paid within 10 years.

The acreage, owned by Jack Pelz, is part of a swath of land south of the freeway that city officials are eyeing for park use. The Pelz property is immediately east of 44 acres owned by the Michigan Department of Transportation that city officials are interested in obtaining.

Two weeks ago, the city council

sent MDOT a resolution agreeing to give up their request for an I-696 interchange near Drake in exchange for the state-owned land. The state is not expected to donate the land. "The state is under a mandate to sell for market value," Costick said.

SPECIAL CENSUS money from increased state shared revenues for a documented population increase could help pay for the Pelz property. But the city council last week said it would prefer the park and recreation commission use money from the five-year, .05-mill levy for parks and recreation, approved by voters three years ago. That's what the park levy is for, according to the council.

The parks and recreation commission was expected to discuss the issue at its regular meeting Tuesday. Parks and recreation commission chairman Dennis Filzgrald was unavailable for comment Tuesday.

Next year's budget for the park levy is "pretty well programmed," Costick said.

City officials are hoping to secure state grants to help buy the MDOT property. Purchase of the Pelz property with state grants is not a possibility. Grants must be obtained before property is bought, not during or after the purchase, Costick said.

Through plans are still speculative, city officials would like to acquire the entire strip of land south of I-696, west of Farmington Road, totaling 110 acres. That would include 40 acres owned by Mike Horowitz and the Selective Group. The planning commission recently approved a site plan for 72 cluster houses on that property.

City officials are considering additional land for youth athletic facilities, such as soccer and softball fields. A new 18-hole golf course is also an option, though a difficult one because of the terrain of some of the

acreage south of I-696.

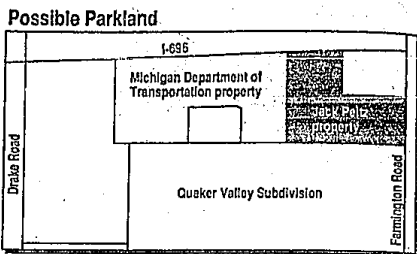
"IN MY view, we can develop playing fields on the northerly portion closest to the expressway where trees are more sparse," Costick said. "On the south side, there's more trees and rolling terrain for leisure recreation — jogging, trails."

Costick said he isn't optimistic about buying the Selective Group property because of price, timing and the suitability of the land for a golf course.

Even if the Selective Group property could be bought, the 110 total acres of the land south of I-696 would probably be 10-20 acres short for a suitable golf course, Costick said.

"All we're doing is assembling property at this point," Costick said.

As a prelude to any buying of additional park land, the city council in early April authorized city administrators to apply for financial help



through the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund.

City officials are applying for a matching grant to buy approximately 85 acres for a cost of up to \$2.5 million. If the city is awarded the grant, the state would pay for 75 percent of a total project cost and the city the remaining 25 percent.

MAYOR TERRY Sever said he has been working this year to find

and possibly acquire additional land in the city for parks and recreation needs, such as ball fields. Costick said the city has plenty of passive park land, such as the 211-acre Heritage Park on Farmington Road, between 10 and 11 miles.

Parks and recreation officials in February confirmed the need for a west-side park to meet the fast-growing need to provide four more softball fields, two soccer fields, restrooms and concession stands.

State Department of Natural Resources guidelines say the city should have 10 acres of park land for every 1,000 residents, which would mean approximately 680 acres for Farmington Hills. The city, however, has 358 acres — primarily in Heritage Park.

Man gets life in prison for murder of 4

The man convicted in the slaying deaths of a Farmington Hills executive, his pregnant wife, their young daughter and an unwed mother the family had sheltered has been sentenced to life in prison without chance for parole.

Detroit Records Court Judge Michael Talbot sentenced Holston Martin III, 31, of Detroit, on Friday. A jury convicted Martin of first-degree murder charges April 4.

On Jan. 11, William Darnell, 34, his wife, Betty, 40, their 2 1/2-year-old daughter, Stephanie, and Alicia

Smith, 24, were stabbed to death. The Darnells' Old Redford house on Cooley, near Grand River and Lahser in northwest Detroit, also was ransacked for valuables.

Because of the deeply religious Darnells' commitment to life, it is inappropriate to talk about capital punishment in the context of this case," Talbot said in sentencing Martin. "We should, rather, pray for the healing of victims in this crime and all others."

Michigan law prevents capital punishment.

Darnell was vice president of American Business Computer Information Systems in Farmington Hills. His wife was a contract programmer at Gemlinger Associates in Troy. The couple took Smith in during her pregnancy. Smith's 16-month-old daughter was with her father in Inkster at the time of the slayings.

THE ADULT victims' bodies were found gagged and tied to a pole in the basement of the Darnell house. The child's body was found in an upstairs bedroom.

Martin, who has spent 13 of his 31 years in Michigan prisons, said in a confession that he stabbed the victims after arguing with Smith about a debt he believed she owed him for a car repair. Martin later withdrew the confession and insisted on Friday that he was innocent.

Martin had visited Smith at the Darnell home and knew they were deeply religious, assistant Wayne County prosecutor Robert Agacinski said. Although they kept guns in their home, they apparently made no

attempt use them, according to court testimony.

"This was known to be a family that would be meek, mild and hopefully would use decency and common sense to work their way out of it. It just didn't work out that way," Agacinski said.

The Darnells moved to Detroit from Houston in 1988 in search of a fresh start because of Texas' sagging economy.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

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Lawyer won't face homicide charge in accident

By Carolyn DeMarco
staff writer

Negligent homicide charges won't be lodged against Bruce Truex, the Orchard Lake attorney who struck and killed a West Bloomfield pedestrian Nov. 20.

Instead, Truex will appear in 48th District Court charged with driving while drunk, special prosecutor J. Robert Sterling said in a press release Monday.

The decision to go with the lesser

charge was made because the victim's negligence contributed to the accident, according to Sterling.

Sterling, a Pontiac attorney, was appointed as a special investigator by Oakland county prosecutor Richard Thompson to avoid any appearance of impropriety. Thompson's wife is employed by Kohl, Wardle, Lench, Clark and Hampton, the same Farmington Hills firm in which Truex is a partner.

HANI TOMA, 40, of West Bloomfield was walking on 14 Mile at Bri-

arwood at 1:55 a.m. Nov. 20 in the rain. He had run out of gas on a return trip home with his wife and daughters. He was walking within two feet of the edge of the roadway when he was struck by Truex's Porsche, and thrown to the shoulder. He died immediately of head injuries.

Truex called police from his mobile telephone to report the accident. His blood level at the scene was 0.12. A 0.10 level is considered legally drunk in Michigan. He was driving

within the the 40 mph posted speed limit, police said at the time.

Truex's blood alcohol concentration was not a contributing factor to the accident, Sterling said.

"The deceased was negligent in that... he was walking in the west-bound lane of 14 Mile wearing dark brown clothing. The deceased failed to use either an adjacent sidewalk or the shoulder of the road."

THE SCENE was recreated by a traffic accident reconstruction expert, Sterling said. It was deter-

mined that a sober driver driving nine miles under the speed limit would have struck and killed the deceased in similar circumstances.

"Both the driver and the pedestrian were negligent," Sterling said in the press release.

Had Sterling sought a negligent homicide charge, he said, he "would have been required to prove that the negligence of Mr. Truex was the sole proximate cause of the death of Mr. Toma. That burden cannot be sustained."

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