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cent, Whiston said.

"Accidents changed in severity from the serious left-turn accidents to rear-end accidents," Whiston said. "So we need to see more safety."

Back ups, though, won't totally be eliminated by Fast-Trac.

"If you're trying to put too many cars on the road, no system is going to deal with that," Whiston said. "But it should help improve it and during off peak it should help improve a lot."

Drivers should pay closer attention to signals since they are no longer predictable, officials warned.

Since left-turning traffic may receive a green arrow at any time, motorists should also yield to oncoming traffic turning left when making a right turn on red. Road commission officials urge motorists to stop behind the thick white line at intersections, so Fast-Trac's telephone pole-mounted cameras can detect the vehicle.

Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield join Troy, Rochester

Hills, Auburn Hills, Pontiac, South Lyon, Walled Lake and Novi with Fast-Trac systems.

Troy officials and residents, though, were less than happy with Fast-Trac, which eventually will manage more than 1,000 intersections in the county. Once tweaks have been worked out, the system is viewed favorably, a Troy councilman said.

One change made involved switching solid red lights — prohibiting left-hand turns before green arrows — to flashing red lights. Motorists can turn left when there is no oncoming traffic.

Complaints went right down after that, Councilman Henry Allemen said.

Orchard Lake traffic flow appears to be improving, said Farmington Hills police Sgt. Dennis Green.



Familiar line: Traffic rolls at 11 Mile and Orchard Lake Road.

"From the enforcement standpoint and the complaint standpoint, I would say they have reduced substantially," Green said.

Jessie LaRiche travels northbound Orchard Lake from 11 Mile to work at Bruergers. She notices some improvement.

"It moves better," LaRiche said. "You don't get stuck as much."

Her boss doesn't agree.

"It's still congested," said DeYoung, who travels up Orchard Lake from I-696. "Orchard Lake has always been congested. I don't think the lights are helping at all."

Cell tower awaits proof

By GARY WIRONCIK
STAFF WRITER

Building a new cellular tower at I-696 and Orchard Lake is a necessity, Airtouch Cellular officials claim. Farmington Hills officials want proof.

Since they didn't get such proof Tuesday night, members of the city's zoning board of appeals again tabled a request for a variance to build the tower.

Airtouch Cellular is seeking a series of variances to allow an 80-foot tower on the grounds of the Best Western Hotel on 12 Mile at Orchard Lake, near I-696.

od by the continued tabling, board vice chair Richard Corey, who had supported the variance, scoffed, "I think it's ridiculous."

Crane stressed in his presentation: "We need this site immediately, the need is imminent. He said the demand for cell phone service in the 12 Mile Orchard Lake area is so great at peak times that many calls are blocked or dropped.

But Swiacki wanted statistics to back up the claims of necessity, showing how many calls were actually blocked and a clearer definition of when and how long are the troubled "peak times."

Crane guaranteed he could provide the data Swiacki requested, but none of the three Airtouch representatives at the meeting had it readily available.

"The question is, is it necessary in the first place," Swiacki said. "If it's just a matter of fuzzy reception in that area, I don't see that as an unnecessary hardship that would itself require a new tower."

Swiacki suggested the claims of necessity due to dropped calls and weak signals were "red herrings" and that the company's desire for a new tower "has more to do with competitive advantage for Airtouch Cellular than pure necessity."

Airtouch site development specialist Kevin Cousineau said he took offense at the implication cell phones are not needed. He

referred to a study a year ago that showed in one week, 194 emergency 911 calls were made in the Orchard Lake-12 Mile area on the Airtouch system.

"It's not just a luxury," he stressed. "A cell phone is a necessity."

Notably absent from Tuesday's public hearing was any opposition from residents near the site of the proposed tower. Residents of a nearby condominium complex argued against the tower at the zoning board's January meeting.

Six variances are requested as by Airtouch Cellular for the proposed tower. The two most significant are a variance to allow an 80-foot tower, twice the size of the allowable 40 feet, and a variance because such towers are currently not permitted in areas zoned ES, which is for expressway service use.

New zoning rules for cellular phone towers, including the possible allowing of towers in ES districts, are pending in an ordinance being developed by the city's planning commission.

At the suggestion of board member Corey, Crane said Airtouch Cellular would agree to conditions attached to the variance, including paying a performance bond and a provision that, if the tower went unused for a six-month period, the city could begin condemnation proceedings to have it removed.

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per bag.

Offsetting that cost is a \$2.60 decrease in the annual fee, from \$46.35 last year to \$43.75 this year. An additional savings of 78 cents is possible later this year.

Another benefit to the renegotiated contract is that telephone books will now be picked up at curbside for recycling.

Residents will have to adopt to the changes quickly, as this

year's yard waste collections will begin in a month. The season usually runs April through November, depending on the weather.

Council member Vicki Barnett expressed concern that there should be a transition period during which people would not be penalized for using plastic bags.

"We're taking everything into consideration to make this transition as easy as possible," Biarelli assured the council. "There will be an educational campaign for residents on this change."

Council member Jerry Ellis moved to accept the new program, followed by a unanimous vote of the council.

"I see substantial benefits to the community from this," Ellis said.

Rather than be technically listed as denied, the motion was instead withdrawn and a vote to table entered. Seeming frustrated

by the city's zoning board of appeals again tabled a request for a variance to build the tower.

Airtouch Cellular is seeking a series of variances to allow an 80-foot tower on the grounds of the Best Western Hotel on 12 Mile at Orchard Lake, near I-696.

The board had tabled consideration of the variances at its January meeting and appeared on the verge of approving them at its meeting Tuesday before a last-second abstention forced the matter back on the table until March 18.

Airtouch representative Jonathan Crane appeared to have won the support of four of the six board members, but a late argument against the motion by board chairman Neil Swiacki persuaded board member Gregory Kocob to abstain. Since four votes are required for approval, the 3-2 affirmative vote with one abstention defeated the motion.

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Hearing Tuesday on liquor licenses

By DAVE VARGA
STAFF WRITER

The Farmington Downtown Development Authority will meet next week to consider new liquor licenses available from the state.

But hold off on the congratulatory toast — the city isn't assured of getting any licenses.

Lawmakers gave the state Liquor Control Commission authority to dispense 60 new

Tavern (beer and wine) or Class C (liquor) licenses late last year. The licenses are available to full-service restaurants in DDA districts of 50,000 or less residents. The aim is for economic redevelopment.

As of this week, though, rules and deadlines haven't been set by the LCC. "They're kind of feeling their way through this," said Frank Lauboff, Farmington city manager.

The city's hearing — at 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 4, at city hall — will give the DDA a chance to find out which restaurants are interested in licenses and what priorities the DDA will use to determine which restaurant gets the city's recommendation.

That could include length of time in the community.

Marco's said five to seven restaurants might qualify under seating, hours and other requirements. Luigi's restaurant on Farmington Road, for one, has requested a liquor license.

However, Farmington's entry or entries in the liquor license sweepstakes must compete against other towns.

Sen. Willis Bullard, R-Milford, said Farmington is doing the right thing by setting up its application process early.

"I think it's anticipated this is going to be a competitive process," Bullard said.

Once the DDA decides which restaurant or restaurants will be recommended, the city council will host another public hearing before approving the application.

Farmington has seven Class C licenses, three in the DDA district — Page's Food and Spirits, Marco's Dining and Cowley's Old Village Inn.

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