

# Farmington Observer

Volume 88 Number 81

Thursday, July 28, 1977

Farmington, Michigan

72 Pages

Twenty-Five Cents

## Parks ruled deficient; expansion eyed

By STEVE BARNABY

Farmington editor

Farmington Hills residents are being inadequately supplied with recreational facilities, but that could change if the city adopts a far-reaching master plan for parks, according to a study presented to city council this week by Bills and Childs Associates, a planning consultant firm.

The firm was hired earlier this year to study the city's recreational needs after political debate had divided the community on what kind of parks to develop—small neighborhood parks or a large regional facility.

Basically, the study recommends a combination of both concepts, utilizing school properties, subdivision common areas and a 80-100 acre parcel for a major park.

The study emphasizes that land purchases must be made now in order to

serve a population which is estimated to double by the year 2000.

"AT THE present time, Farmington Hills has only eight acres of publicly owned parkland serving a population of 58,000," says the study results.

"Although the inventories covering school sites and subdivisions common areas somewhat offset this deficiency, they won't nearly provide the total optimum public open space and recreation facility requirements recommended by the National Park, Recreation and Open Space Standards (NRPAS).

To meet future needs of the estimated 116,000 population, Farmington Hills will have to acquire at least another 460 acres, according to the study.

The study emphasizes that the lack of a

**'Recreation is no longer an isolated concept, it is now an important part of American life and a means for producing a desirable quality of life. This is the age of recreation in America.'**

—Bills and Childs report

recreation center, lack of a major park, a deficiency of eight neighborhood parks (minimum 56 acres). Presently, the city has only one park, Waldron, in the city's south end.

Other deficiencies cited by the study were the lack of city-owned baseball diamonds, playfields, indoor swimming pools, tennis courts, golf courses, natural skating rinks, trails and bikeways, outdoor theaters and environmental areas.

THE STUDY urges the city to correct these deficiencies because of changing philosophies on recreation.

"Recreation is no longer an isolated concept, it is now an important part of American life, and a means for producing a desirable quality of life. This is the age of recreation in America."

A two-pronged, 13-year program of parks and recreation development is recommended in the study.

The first segment, to run from 1977-

82 recommends the following to be accomplished:

- Establishment of a city park and recreation division in accordance with the city charter. This step already has been taken with the formation of the Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Division in July and the dissolution of the Farmington Area Recreation Commission.

- Establishment of a maintenance department functioning as a component part of the city parks and recreation division that can be supplied and programmed to adequately serve daily park and recreation requirements.

- Establishment of a cooperative recreational agreements with school districts (public and parochial) for joint use of present and future recreation sites. Also similar agreements with quasi-public agencies such as the

Farmington Community Center and the YMCA.

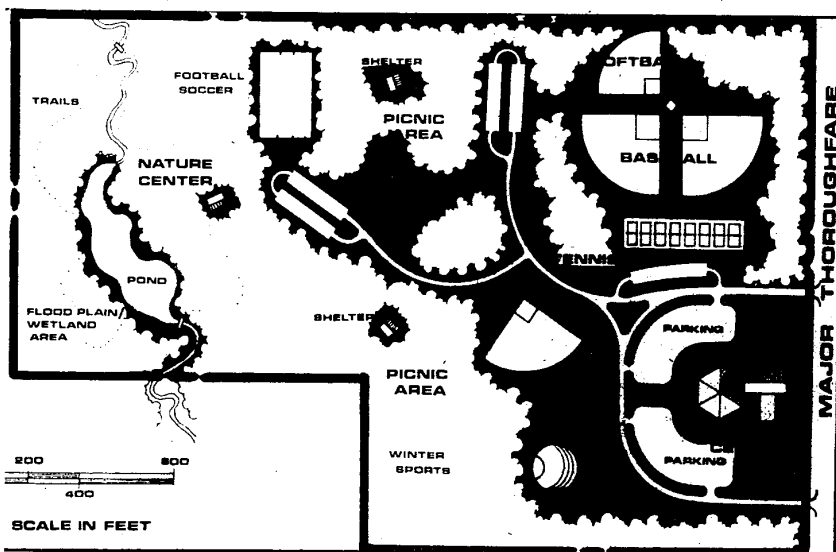
- Development of a city-wide plan for bicycle paths and routes utilizing existing public easements and rights-of-way.

- Development of low cost-high impact improvement of existing school site facilities for both neighborhood use and programs administered through the city parks and recreation division.

- Development of land acquisition priorities for neighborhood park sites.

The long range action program would run from 1977 to 1990. Its primary goal is to acquire two major park sites. The acquisitions could be financed through federal and state matching fund assistance, according to the study.

(Continued on page 15A)



A major park area, as envisioned by the proposed park master plan, would contain a recreation center, baseball and softball diamonds, nature center, picnic area, nature trails and a winter sports

area. The planning consultants have proposed such an area be purchased before 1980 to avoid increasing real estate prices.

## Study criticized for inaccuracies

Farmington Hills City councilmembers were unwilling to accept the proposed park master plan study by Bills and Childs Associates and have tabled action on it until the consulting firm's representatives explain what some council members feel are inaccuracies in the study.

The study was presented this week for council scrutiny but council members were less than happy with the 86 page study which calls for a 13-year developmental plan of a large 80-100 acre park and small neighborhood parks spread throughout the city.

While the study pointed to deficiencies in the present parks and recreation scene, councilmembers were just as strong in their criticisms of the study.

"We have much more going for us in this city than this study shows. Besides this study already is outdated," said Councilmember Jan Dolan, who noted the study was completed in May, yet presented to the council only this week.

MRS. DOLAN CRITICIZED the study for excluding swimming pools which exist on school properties in its survey. She also pointed to the outdoor theater at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge campus which also was excluded.

In the study, a listing of current requirements of various recreational facilities for Farmington Hills was named, with a corresponding column

of how the city lacked in these requirements. The comparison showed that Farmington Hills was lacking in almost all of the designated areas.

"I don't understand why the study didn't make a connection between all the recreational facilities within the city limits. They didn't even name all of the 'swim clubs,'" said Councilmember Joanne Smith.

Parks Commissioner Betty Frankel also expressed dismay at the study.

"I am dismayed at all of the inaccuracies in this study. We do have baseball and softball fields in this city, but they aren't listed," she said.

"This certainly is a professional looking study but it is sloppy and inaccurate and needs to be corrected."

Councilman Earl Opperhauser derided City Mgr. George Majors' comment that this was just a draft of a study.

"This is a pretty fancy draft. It looks like more artistry than care taken in making an inventory," he said.

But Majors defended his statement, saying that the \$12,000 study could be replaced page by page at minimal cost in order to make corrections.

Defending the study was Parks Commissioner Robert Pugh.

"We must remember that this is just a study. I don't think it is necessary to have a complete and perfect plan on day one. But this is an excellent first step."

## \$300,000 in offing?

## District agrees to land sale

By LYNN ORR

Farmington School District's coffers may get a little fatter in the near future, if the prospective buyer can get 20 acres of school district property rezoned.

Farmington School Board members voted Tuesday to accept the offer of J. Ross, representing Herman Ross Associates, a Farmington Hills land development firm, to purchase the land in the northeast section of the district for no less than \$300,000.

The T-shaped piece of property in Section 1, bordered by Northwestern Highway, Inkster, Middlebelt, and Fourteen Mile, was purchased by the district in 1968 for \$200,000 as a possible site for a junior high.

Prospective buyer Ross wants to rezone the property, currently zoned single-family residential, in two sections, according to school district Business Mgr. William Prisk. Five acres contiguous to Ross' commercially zoned property fronting Northwestern would be rezoned commercial.

Ross is interested in rezoning the other 15 acres for multiple housing, Prisk says.

"The density of the multiple zoning I'm not sure about," Prisk said.

The land sale can be finalized in two ways, Prisk says. A \$250,000 cash deal contingent on rezoning is one option.

Another option would be the release of property in five acre parcels over a three-year period, contingent on rezoning approval requested by Ross. Ross would be obligated for the entire \$250,000 sum, although the five acre parcels would be released at a price of \$20,000 an acre, Prisk says.

At the end of the three-year period, the entire 20 acres would be released if the total sum of \$300,000 was paid in full.

Ross will have a six-month period to have the entire property rezoned. If he is unsuccessful, he can renew the option period for another six months.

At the end of the one year period, the sale would be canceled and the school district would retain the \$7,500 option money, Prisk adds.

"Why we feel perfectly safe with this contract is that the entire property will be rezoned," Prisk says. The land deal also requires easements for access and utilities through any acreage released to the remaining 15 acres, once the first five acres is released.

FORMER TRUSTEE Gary Lichtman, along with Prisk, initially pushed the negotiations begun a few months ago for the land sale, pointing out that the property is unproductive to the school district and the Farmington Hills tax rolls.

Board members Adrieal Spieker, Anne Struble, Helet Prutow, Richard Wallace, and president William Gravius supported the motion to accept Ross' offer.

"It's an excellent deal for the district, and as far as risk on our part, we aren't taking much of any," Spieker said.

Trustee Dr. Mervyn Ross (no relation to the prospective buyer) voted against the sale.

"I have the same concerns I expressed earlier about releasing property piecemeal," Dr. Ross said. "I can't vote for this in good conscience." Trustee Emma Makison was absent from the meeting. Because the property was initially purchased with bonded money (funds raised through the sale of bonds), any

funds generated by the sale must be used for the building and maintenance accounts and cannot be used for operations.

## Dudley punches, council blinks

By STEVE BARNABY

Farmington editor

Farmington Hills' newly elected mayor, Joan Dudley, had her first showdown with political opponents and the other side blinked.

The confrontation came at this week's council session when Mrs. Dudley's appointment of Mrs. Jean Fox to the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) was upheld by a vote of 4-2.

Voting against the measure were Councilmembers Jan Dolan and Joanne Smith. Fred Lichtman was absent from this week's council session.

Board and commission appointments, usually an uncontroversial process, became the center of a heated political battle when Mrs. Fox was appointed to replace Mrs. Smith, whose term was expired. Mrs. Smith had wished to stay on the ZBA.

Aldo Vagozzi, Farmington Democratic party activist and Smith supporter challenged the removal of Mrs. Smith, saying she had done a good job on the ZBA and deserved to be reappointed.

"I wonder about the wisdom of replacing a person who has done such a good job and who wants to be reappointed," he told Mrs. Dudley.

The money could be used for capital improvements such as repairing roofs or to pay off bonds acquired over the years for building purposes.

She related arguments from those who said it was important to have a council liaison on city boards and commissions.

"Usually the only time the council has any business with the ZBA is through the attorney."

Councilman Robert Amori supported Mrs. Dudley, saying it was possible that councilmembers could act in an advisory role, rather than as actual members of boards and commissions.

The ZBA is the board of final appeal in a city when a property owner, who has requested a zoning change, has been turned down by other city bodies. The appointment is considered significant because Mrs. Smith is considered more liberal than Mrs. Fox in matters of zoning.

Mrs. Dudley also turned back arguments by Vagozzi and Mrs. Dolan that Mrs. Smith's experience was needed on the ZBA.

"This city council only has two members who have served for more than four years. That shows that even the voters agree it doesn't take a lot of experience to serve the city."



Floating art

The Central Church of Christ got in on the Farmington Founder Festival act during the parade. To see how other residents turned out to participate, turn to page 3A. (Staff photo)

### inside

Community Calendar  
Editorial Opinion  
News  
Sports  
Suburban Life  
Classifieds

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9B  
18A  
Section A  
Section B  
Section C

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