

Closed sessions held to interview candidates

By STEVE BARNABY
Farmington editor

The Farmington Hills City Council has been meeting secretly to interview candidates for the vacant city manager position.

Mayor Jan Dolan said this week the council had agreed to meet in sets of two and three with candidates to avoid interviewing in a public forum.

Five councilmembers reached by the Farmington Observer concurred that the council had agreed to that proposed format to avoid the public forum. They were Joe Alkateeb, Dolan, Cathy Jones, Joanne Smith and Joanne Soronen.

Councilmembers Earl Oppertbauer

and Keith Deacon couldn't be reached before publication deadline.

Dolan said she was advised by City Atty. Paul Bibeau that interviewing in this manner would be within the bounds of the 1976 Open Meetings Act because a quorum would not be present. Four members must be present to have a quorum.

To reinforce the lack of quorum policy, a schedule of meetings was circulated with times, dates and members to be present on stationary "from the desk of Jan Dolan, councilmember."

Section 8(i) of the Open Meetings

Act deals with hiring by city council. That section says, "all interviews by a public body for employment or appointment to a public office shall be held in an open meeting pursuant to this act."

That same section does allow a council to privately "review the specific contents of an application for employment or appointment to a public office when the candidate requests that the application remain confidential."

Michigan Atty. Gen. Frank Kelley deals with interviewing practices of city councils in his opinion rendered on the Open Meeting Act.

"If a public body voluntarily or by mandate of its enabling act statute, reserves final decision for appoint-

ment to certain levels of employment to itself, there is no exception which would allow such considerations to be held in a closed session."

The opinion goes on to say, "Even though the contents of the application may be reviewed in closed session, all interviews for employment or appointment to a public office must be held in open meeting."

The council has been meeting with four candidates recommended by Don Outes. He was hired by council to make a city manager search.

The first interviews were scheduled on Nov. 28, from 2:45 p.m. and from 7:30 p.m. A second candidate was scheduled to be interviewed on Nov. 30 between 2:45 p.m. Meetings also were

scheduled for Dec. 6 and Dec. 7 until 9 p.m.

The council has been meeting with candidates at the Botsford Inn.

Dolan said the reason the meetings were held with lack of quorum were:

- Because Oakes recommended it be done that way.
- Because public interviews might endanger the job of a candidate who is presently employed.

Because the mood of the community isn't right for public interviews.

Presently, recall petitions are being circulated to remove Dolan, Jones and Smith from office. Alkateeb is backing the recall effort.

But in this instance, Alkateeb is in agreement with those targeted for recall.

"We must protect those who presently have jobs and, at the same time, we don't want to deprive ourselves of a good candidate," said Alkateeb.

"I don't think the intent is to skirt the law," he said.

The councilmembers agreed that some of those applying for the city manager position who were from out-state were "amazed" that Michigan had such a law.

Smith said it was important that the council abide by the spirit of the law, but agreed confidentiality of candidates was an important consideration.

"We all knew that there wasn't to be four people present. An effort was made to make sure that four people were never together," she said.

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Senior housing bonding issue goes to voters

By MARY GNIEWEK

A special election is scheduled for early next year in which Farmington Hills voters will decide whether to allow the city to authorize sale of \$7 million in municipal finance bonds for proposed senior citizen public housing.

City Council decided to pursue the election, slated for late February or early March, during a special study session in council chambers Monday night. Members of the Housing Commission, Building Authority, Commission on Aging and city department heads joined council members and a sparse group of residents for the discussion.

"WE ARE ASKING voters for the authority to sell the bonds," said Mayor Jan Dolan. "The taxpayers would not pay for the project, the renters would pay for the bonds."

Preliminary drawings for the five-story, 240-unit building were completed by Daniel Tosch of Progressive Associates. Tosch was hired by the Housing Commission from a field of 12 architectural firms.

The building would cost an estimated \$6 million and be constructed on a 10-acre site on Drake Road at Freedom. Tosch said there would be a mixture of single and two bedroom units.

Each apartment would be carpeted and furnished with kitchen appliances. The building would also include a lounge on each floor, central laundry room, game room and arts and crafts facilities.

THE HOUSING PROJECT was first proposed nearly three years ago to meet the needs of Farmington Hill's over 60 age residents. They comprised 11 percent of the population in 1970 and are expected to increase in the next census report. Federal rent subsidies would be made available to eligible seniors through HUD.

The bond issue probably will be split into two parts in the general election. "I'm not sure," said Tom Czuchra, housing commission member. "Working in a 12 month time frame, we could pay interest on the debt even before tenants come in if we hit a snag. But we could bond at the lower amount if things go smoothly."

If voters approve sale, the bonds must be sold within two months after approval. Bids would be taken and council would choose building firms after the election.

CITY COUNCILMAN Joe Alkateeb thought the \$6 million cost estimate was too low.

"I want to be assured that the city will break even on this venture," he said. "I know it (public housing) is needed, but are we going to be able to live with it?"

Discussion of rent fees ranged from \$25 to \$400 a month. City Treasurer Gerard Miller said a \$250,000 cash flow from the city's general fund would be allocated for building expenses until rents are collected to pay off the bonds.

"As long as an entire segment is completed, tenants could move in before the building is completed," Tosch added.

A few residents asked how the federal rent subsidy would be handled.

"The city could act as an agent in rent subsidy," offered Councilwoman JoAnne Smith. "We could provide the necessary forms."

Smith asked the Housing Commission and the Commission on Aging to investigate government requirements on rent subsidy.

"We'll provide the building, but I don't think we should get involved with the rent subsidy," Alkateeb said.

"That should be between the individual and the government."

Not everyone agreed.

"If councilmen are unable to help, I know other elected officials who will be very willing to assist," quipped resident Bob Amori.

Tosch said rent subsidy maximums in the Farmington area are \$300 a month, but the maximums change every year.

Farmington Hills resident Stan Penser asked why the city was building the project instead of a private developer.

"THE CITY CAN retain more control this way," said Dolan. "We want control over the building. We will draw the criteria on what the building will be like and who will be rented to."

"There is a desperate need for adequate senior housing in this area," added Housing Commission Chairman Bill Flattery.

Dolan cited one private housing development, Baptist Manor, as having a four- to five-year average length of wait for vacancies.

A spot poll of the handful of residents present at the meeting showed strong support for the proposed housing plan. Most said they were in favor, a few were undecided, but no one was opposed to the plan.

"There will be many hearings throughout the city between now and election time," Dolan said. "We're going to have to do one big selling job in January and February."



Shell service stations like this one on Eight Mile and Orchard Lake have found their supply of unleaded gasoline curtailed by dealers, forcing up the price of the fuel. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

'No gas shortage' oil expert says

By MARY GNIEWEK

Despite Shell Oil Co.'s rationing of gas sales to dealers, one oil company executive assured motorists this week that the limited gas supplies are temporary.

Former Farmington Hills City Councilman Fred Lichtman, who is vice president of refining and marketing for Crystal Oil Co., said there is no reason to believe a gas shortage will occur. The firm sells gasoline in Michigan through independent dealers.

"There is plenty of gas. There won't be a problem if people don't panic," Lichtman said from his Shreveport, La., office.

He was referring to Shell's 25 percent cut in December gasoline allocations

to dealers, which has caused some local stations to shorten hours, hike prices or layoff employees.

Shell announced the reasons for the cutback as a growing demand for unleaded gas, two refineries temporarily closed for maintenance work, and Department of Energy price controls on unleaded gas.

Lichtman said all oil companies are facing an increase in demand for unleaded fuel.

"EVERYONE IS INCREASING capacity for unleaded gas, but it takes time," he said. "Refineries are hemmed in by the cost of making unleaded gas, and they can't make up for it dollarwise because of strict government price controls."

Lichtman said other major oil com-

panies may follow suit, limiting gas supplies on a staggered, year-round basis.

"Refineries have to shut down for turnaround—stop production and clean out the tubes occasionally. This is done at different times of year by different companies."

Several Farmington Shell dealers said they are shortening hours and losing profits because of the limited gas supply.

"I really haven't figured out how much we've lost," said Don Reynolds, manager of Mattson Shell on Eight Mile in Farmington. "We're closing one day a week and our hours are shorter, so expenses are less."

"WE'RE TRYING TO stay away from rationing and keep enough gas for our regular customers," he said.

Though he hasn't raised the price yet on regular or unleaded gas, he said it is a strong possibility in the near future. Reynolds estimates he has experienced a one-third cut in sales.

Pincas Reis, owner of Pete's Shell Service on Middlebelt in Farmington, said his supply was nearly cut in half.

"I used to get 82,000 gallons a

month. For December, I got 35,600 gallons," he said.

Dealers have been allowed to buy 75 percent of the amount of fuel they purchased last December.

"They're going back to 1977 figures," said Jerry Marx of Jerry's Shell on W. Twelve Mile in Farmington Hills. "But we have grown tremendously over the past year. So our sales have been cut in half."

Marx said he has cut evening hours seven days a week and will be closed on holidays.

Marx had another theory for the cutback.

"Every winter we go through the same thing. Deliveries are slower because Shell begins to make fuel oil. It's in great demand because it's a good product and it's the cheapest on the market."

"I've had to lay off some employees because the station isn't taking in much money. We're supposed to be allowed an unlimited supply in early January. I don't think this is a bad thing if dealers control themselves."

NEW HOURS
WEEKDAYS
6 AM - 10 PM
CLOSED SUNDAYS
TILL FURTHER NOTICE

Because of the cutback in unleaded gasoline by dealers, Shell stations are being forced to reduce operating hours. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

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Possible changes by Congress in the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) have left local government administrators uncertain over the future of some city jobs.

The proposed regulations would place an 18-month limit on CETA workers' terms of employment. Persons who are now employed under the CETA program and who worked for more than 18 months as of Sept. 30, 1979, will be dropped from the program. Their jobs will be available to other persons, according to the proposed ruling.

But for cities such as Farmington Hills, which has almost a quarter of its regular municipal work force under the CETA program, the change in ruling leaves administrators with the problem of deciding which jobs to incorporate into the general fund and which will remain CETA financed positions.

Farmington Hills last year raised its tax to eight mills, one mill away from its charter limit. At the time the extra mill was viewed as a buffer against the possibility that CETA would be altered or discontinued, according to Farmington Hills Finance Director Gerard Miller.

But the Headlee amendment has put

a crimp in those plans. Administrators are uncertain if the city can raise taxes to the charter limit of nine mills under Headlee, or if they must stay within the current eight mill tax.

While the eight mills are bolstered by new construction in the city, uncertainty over the additional mill makes unclear the number of employees the city can afford to add to its pay rolls.

CETA BEGAN as a training program, but, in the earlier days of the system, the regulations were loose enough so cities could hire fully trained personnel such as engineers and planners with the help of CETA funds. The proposed regulations limit the amount of money the city can add to the wages of a CETA employee to about 10-20 percent.

That would make the top CETA wage between \$13,200 and \$14,400, according to Miller.

Of about 230 persons employed under the CETA program.

Among the CETA ranks are persons who would be inconvenient to replace at 18-month intervals, such as the administrative assistant to the city manager and engineers.

CETA employees are represented by (Continued on page 4A)