

Farmington Observer

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Hills is king in house race for the region

By MARY GNIEWEK

Following a peak decade of residential development, Farmington Hills has just about reached its limit.

According to the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), Farmington Hills replaced Sterling Heights as the community with the greatest number of single home building permits (829) issued for the first six months of 1979.

It also registered the biggest number of multi-family building permits with 384.

With few exceptions, the city's 34 square miles are built up or divided into proposed subdivisions, according to city planners.

"Most of the city, the bulk of it, is committed," said Laurence Leeds, a staff city planner.

Despite the residential boom, Leeds and others at city hall don't think the term bedroom community applies to their city even though Farmington Hills is supported 74 percent by property tax revenues from residential developments.

"There is a lot of light industrial research type development," Leeds said.

Statistics support that commercial development is on the rise, but industrial growth is lagging. According to figures released Jan. 7 by Farmington Hills Building Supervisor Richard Miller, commercial development in tax valuation rose 300 percent last year, from a \$6 million base in 1976 to \$19 million in 1979.

BUT AT the same time, industrial building permits dropped off sharply. While 33 permits were issued in 1979, accounting for \$8 million in valuation, only 11 permits totaling \$5 million valuation were issued last year.

"It's just a phase, the outpacing of residential growth to the rest of the community," said Michael Dornan, a city administrative aide.

"We're getting big office and commercial plans now," he said, citing Hunters Square, a new shopping development at 14 Mile and Orchard Lake roads.

"I don't think we're going to see a slow down or a decline in growth," Dornan said. "If at all, there will be a mild leveling off."

Dornan's theory is that different factors of residential growth, such as a heavy influx of "computer and electronic-type executives," will spawn office growth in related areas.

"The trend will be those types of companies moving into the Hills," he said. "We've already seen it with Texas Instruments, Sony, Panasonic, 3-M and Magnetics Video."

"We're getting electronic type companies because a majority of their employees live here."

City Planner Leeds said the 1980s will see just much industrial and commercial growth, as par with the city's master plan. But even with projections, Leeds admits there are a lot of ifs.

ONE OF the ifs is a proposed Industrial Research Office (IRO) zone the city's Industrial and Economic Development Corp. hopes city council creates.

"That plan suffered a setback earlier this year. Proponents hoped council would adopt an IRO zone to lure new businesses with a 60-foot (five story) height limit.

"That would make the IRO zone competitive with neighboring communities, such as Novi. Businessmen reason that since the price of land is an expensive investment, mid-rises are more economical.

But city council opted for a 50-foot height limit, while Novi has a 65-foot limit and Southfield has no limit at all. Part of the reason: last November voters defeated an advisory ballot question which asked if they'd favor 60-foot tall buildings in a special zone.

"Sixty feet would allow flexibility for the firms we hope to attract," explained Shirley Stadler, executive secretary of the Farmington Hills Planning Commission.

She pointed out that the zone would be well buffered from view and that there is already a building on the Oakland Community College campus taller than 60 feet.

"And I don't think anyone is aware of it," she said.

Mrs. Stadler's concern has been echoed in other corners of the community; a concern about the eventual rise in residential property taxes to support the ever-increasing demand for city services.

"ONCE THE city is fully developed, there will be a greater demand for services," Mrs. Stadler said.

"The money is going to have to come from somewhere, either millage increases or office development.

"We want to furnish a tax base we cannot get with two or three story empty warehouses," she said.



Winter's hope

While most of us sit around wondering just what happened to all that winter cold, Tom Hester and Denise Wright took to the on again, off again ice rink on Shiwawasee and Farmington roads. To see

how this unusual weather has changed working and recreation habits, turn to page 3A. (Staff photo by Randy Borst)

Small guys get the ear of Jimmy

By MARY GNIEWEK

Small business accounts for 58 percent of private employment, 90 percent of all newly created jobs in the past seven years, and 48 percent of the gross national product in the United States.

With that in mind, President Carter invited more than 2,000 small business men and women from across the country to Washington, D.C. last week for the first national White House Conference on Small Business.

Edward J. Lane, executive director of the Farmington Chamber of Commerce, joined the Michigan delegation to the nation's capital for a week of conferences and workshops.

Lane, appointed by U.S. Rep. William Brodhead, D-Detroit, was one of 45 delegates from Michigan who began planning for the conference last June in Detroit.

The group hammered out stands on 15 major issues related to business, from inflation to government regulation, to present a semi-united front at the conference.

In Washington, each delegate attended workshops in two areas of their choice. Lane attended inflation and capital formation and retention workshops. Each issue had sub-categories that were discussed at length.

By the end of the conference, every delegate voted for 15 options they believed most important. Later this month, when the votes are tabulated, the top considerations will be presented to the president and congress.

"THE CONFERENCE" wasn't intended to cure all the problems of small business, but to look at how it can be helped," Lane said.

"The Michigan delegation proposed a resolution to redefine what a small business is. By redefining, some small businesses might be exempt from certain laws.

"It might give them a better chance to stay in business. Continuation of small business is difficult with the current tax laws," he continued.

"There should be a change in the tax structure. Hopefully, something will be started on it — 90 to 95 percent of our economy is small business."

Lane believes one of the biggest problems small businesses face is being able to retain capital, to borrow money at a reasonable rate.

"The Small Business Administration provides loans but many banks don't participate. Hopefully more loans will become available. Very little government money is involved."

Lane said each delegate had his own pet ideas to discuss at the conference. He did, too.

"Individual tax schedules have to be more graduated with inflation," he said. "Also, we need a simplified depreciation system and tax credits for new businesses."

"I HOPE" all the delegates involved will follow up and make sure the government follows up on this too," he said.

Besides the business at hand, the group was treated to a White House tour highlighted by a personal welcome from Rosalyn Carter, and an address by the President.

Carter told the delegates he called the conference "to further strengthen small business in America... necessary to sustain the national economy and maintain our military strength."

Senior housing site citizens' meeting topic

The Citizens for More Responsible Government will conduct a meeting at 7:30 p.m. in the Farmington Library on Liberty on Jan. 30.

The topic of discussion will be the use of the property at Freedom and Drake roads which the Farmington

Hills City Council has eyed for senior citizen housing.

Residents of both Farmington and Farmington Hills are urged to present their ideas which will be given to the Farmington Hills City Council at its study session on February 4.

Ham radio buffs beaten in battle of the towers

By MARY GNIEWEK

Despite an hour of arguments from licensed amateur radio operators Monday night, the Farmington City Council refused to suspend special requirements for installation of 75-foot antenna towers.

Ham operators object to the stipulation that towers cannot be erected closer to a property line than the measured combined height of antenna and tower. That means a 75-foot tower, which fans argue is needed to operate effectively on all radio frequencies, could only be constructed on lots at least 150-foot wide.

Radio operators must have at least a technician's class license from the Federal Communications Commission to install a tower. And the antenna cannot be erected in a front or side yard.

One other stipulation, added by Councilman Richard Tupper, requires a licensed operator to remove the tower if he/she moves from the residence.

The radio operators, collectively known as the Farmington Amateur Radio Club, asked for the exception to the city's height ordinance which limits structures to 10 feet above the home.

The antenna tower issue stems from a meeting last year when the council denied permission for a backyard tower to one of the club's members, Earl Pressel. He hired attorney George Goldstone, also a radio operator, to argue the case.

GOLDSTONE SAID that keeping the tower's "safe-fall" distance within the property line of the radio operator is a misinterpretation of the safety code which regulates such structures.

"The safe-fall distance is meant for rooftop antennas, not radio towers," he said. "This is an unfortunate transposition."

"There is no question to the element of safety covered by the building code. This (condition) is an injustice to this group of radio amateurs who are anxious to perform public service."

More than a dozen members of the club attended the public hearing Monday. Some radio hobbyists from Farmington Hills spoke in their favor. But there was also a minority from Farmington Hills who opposed the exception.

Members of the council were concerned not only with safety, but with aesthetics particularly concerning towers on small residential lots.

"I'm concerned with the people who live next door," said Councilman Ralph

Yoder. "People might resent towers of this size on small lots."

The five-member council unanimously approved the ordinance exception with the conditions attached. The council must adopt the ordinance at a regular meeting, expected Feb. 4.

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