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Rezoning study begins despite housing foes

By STEVE BARNABY
Farmington editor

Despite some residents' objections, the Farmington Hills City Council has approved the study of zoning changes to accommodate a proposed senior citizen and low income housing project.

For the second consecutive week, residents living in the southwest section came to protest the plan which, if approved, would allow the project to be built on the northwest corner of Drake and Freedom roads.

In a 5-2 vote, council approved a resolution to allow the city's planning commission to study rezoning the 11-acre for senior citizen housing use (RCE and RCE-1).

Voting against those two zoning designations were council members Joe Alkateeb and Joanne Soronen.

Mrs. Soronen and Alkateeb did join in support of a motion to allow the planning commission to study multiple low rise (RC) for that acreage.

Under RCE, senior citizen housing up to 30 feet high could be built. The RCE-1 stipulation allows structures up to 60 feet high.

Although the motion was on the zoning study, comments from residents attending the session revolved around the same subject on resident's minds since the project was proposed — mid-rise senior citizen housing combined with low-income housing.

Presently, the land is zoned for use as an ice skating rink.

Protesting residents repeated arguments from the week before, saying that although they supported senior citizen housing, they were opposed to the location, height, low income units and the zoning change.

Their main objection to changing the zoning to RCE or RCE-1 is that a November advisory referendum ballot question will ask Farmington Hills residents for their views of those designations.

The city already has approved a senior citizen housing project, on Orchard Lake between 13 and 14 Mile Roads, to be constructed under RCE-1.

Other residents requested that a city-financed proposal be put on the ballot for voter approval. But council unanimously rejected that suggestion as inappropriate, saying it doubted that residents would ever approve increased local millage.

The present plan calls for construction of the project, financed with bonds sold through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA). Rent subsidies would come through HUD.

Earlier in the year, council rejected a plan for self-financing after studies revealed rents would be too high to accommodate most senior citizens.

Objection to state and federal aid for the projects are the stipulations which require low-income housing, according to residents.

"The facts indicate that we can't afford it (senior citizen housing) unless we get a subsidy," said Councilman Joe Alkateeb.

Mayor Earl Oppenheuser said the idea that property values surrounding a subsidized project would decrease is untrue. He cited the Baptist Manor in

Farmington Hills, a single-story senior citizen complex built a number of years ago and financed through HUD.

"Property values around that area haven't decreased. They've increased just as much as the rest of the city," he said.

But one resident said comparing Baptist Manor to the proposed project was like comparing apples to oranges.

"This project would be a mid-rise," said the resident. "This won't be funded under the same laws as when Baptist Manor was constructed."

Although Councilwoman Soronen voted against zoning studies for PCE and RCE-1, she did support the concept of the present plan for MSHDA-financed housing.

"I don't jump up and down over the height or the low income," she said. "But it boils down to (the fact) that there is no other way to get senior citizen housing."

Councilmember Joanne Smith said that if voters approved one mill to finance and subsidize the housing through city funds it would be a 40 year obligation.

She said that school districts around the metropolitan area had often rejected millages after a time, leaving schools without desired funds.

"We risk having a white elephant on our hands," she said.

Residents countered with examples of HUD housing which had become "white elephants" after HUD discontinued funding the projects. One such example is a senior citizen complex in Taylor.

Federal money, they said, was just as unreliable as local millage.

Mrs. Smith said that MSHDA projects in the metropolitan area had a good track record.

Mrs. Julieann Hovenas, president of the Freedom, Beechwood, Gull Homeowners Association, the group opposing the project, asked that further study be made of alternative financing for senior citizen housing.

Her group has formed a committee which, she said, is willing to work with the city to find a solution.

But Aldo Vagozzi, Commission on Aging spokesman, countered that argument and said that senior housing had been studied for a number of years by residents.

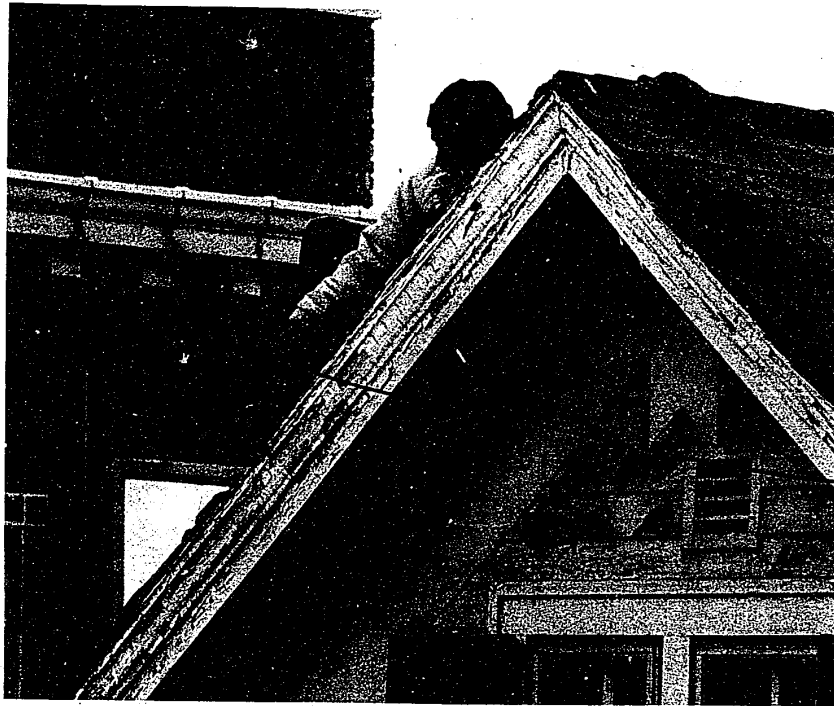
"The Commission on Aging is a citizens committee. We have discussed all of the proposals. We have come to the conclusion that this is the best one," he said in defense of the yet-to-be-approved MSHDA plan.

Vagozzi said he resented the fact that protesting residents wanted to vote on senior citizen projects when all other housing projects in the city were approved by city council.

"Every meeting there are rezonings. And 95 percent of persons moving into those projects are from outside our community. If we put this (MSHDA) plan up for a vote, then let's put every housing rezoning up for a vote," he said.

Vagozzi said that a different criteria was being used for senior citizens than for other residents. He also noted that a project proposed by the Nardinners, a church group, had been opposed.

It was to be a two-story project.



Clearing the way

Allen Sykes was the center of attention this week in downtown Farmington as he straddled this historic landmark. To see what he's

doing up there risking life and limb, turn to Page 3A. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

4 schools pass asbestos test; No health threat, officials say

Ceiling samples from four Farmington public schools passed Michigan Department of Public Health testing for cancer-causing loose asbestos fibers.

North Farmington High School, Middlebelt Elementary School, Ten

Mile Community School and Farmington High School received clean bills of health, according to Farmington School Superintendent Lewis Schulman.

Not all of the public schools in Farmington will have ceiling samples ana-

lyzed, according to Schulman. Building administrators have been directed to look for flaking and loose insulation. Suspect insulation will be analyzed.

Inhalable asbestos particles has been linked to lung cancer, recently. From the early '50's to the early '70's, asbestos was used in construction as a fire retardant material, said Alvin VanderKolk, division chief of the Technical Supporting Services of the Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Health of the Michigan Department of Public Health in Lansing.

"There are a limited number of buildings which have it," he said. "It's not every school building in the state which faces potential asbestos problems."

Asbestos was found to be a hazard 40 years ago but it is only recently that the low exposure levels and cancer have been linked, according to John McGuire, Midwest administrator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

LOOSE PARTICLES of the material are easily inhaled and were found to be dangerous.

In 1977-78, the Department of Public Health conducted a pilot study of about 200 schools in the state, checking for the level of asbestos exposures. Although officials admit that the asbestos is present in the schools they don't consider their findings to indicate a dan-

gerous situation, according to VanderKolk.

At the beginning of 1979, a letter signed by Dr. Maurice Reizen, director of the Department of Public Health, and Dr. John Porter, state superintendent of schools, was sent to Michigan's school superintendents.

It discussed the potential hazard of flaking asbestos and asked the superintendents to volunteer particles of classroom ceilings for analysis.

The volunteer program has yielded evidence of asbestos in the state's 200 school districts, according to VanderKolk.

Intact, covered asbestos doesn't pose a health problem, he added.

"It's not airborne. It doesn't hurt anyone," he said.

Sprayed on asbestos insulation and hanging clumps cause cancer by spreading the fibers in the air.

REMOVING ASBESTOS from ceilings poses new problems, added VanderKolk. Asbestos removal is the subject of a newsletter which will be mailed to the state's school superintendents in the next few weeks.

The use of spray-on asbestos was banned in 1973 and handling of the fiber is governed by regulations from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Scherrer faces court on fraud

By MARY GNEVIER

A pre-trial examination will be held in Farmington's 47th District Court this morning for Farmington Hills attorney P. Scott Scherrer, charged March 29 with four counts of embezzlement.

The pre-trial will determine whether the young attorney will be bound over for trial on those charges to Oakland

County Circuit Court.

Scherrer, 30, is being held in the Oakland County Jail since last Friday when he was unable to post \$100,000 bond. He was arraigned Friday before District Judge Michael Hand on 40 more warrants related to fraudulent land and bond deals.

He also faces trial on six counts of printing false bonds and taking money under false pretenses.

Scherrer, who was declared bankrupt after the massive police probe into his business activities began last February, will be represented today in court by attorney Michael Schloff.

He requested and was granted a court appointed attorney to represent him on the 40 warrants issued last week. Scherrer will be represented by Birmingham attorney Joseph Harding on those charges.

According to Farmington Hills Police Detective John Hedrick, five investors are involved in the land fraud (embezzlement) prosecution.

The chief investor is Dr. J. David Ausum, a Livonia dermatologist who allegedly paid Scherrer \$152,000 in 1978 for two parcels of land in Farmington Hills. That includes acreage in the I-75, Nine Mile area and another piece of property at Twelve Mile and Farmington that houses a church.

Ausum said he was introduced to Scherrer by some friends who knew the attorney. He said the deals were incomplete and Scherrer was holding the money.

"I gave him a couple of checks," Ausum recalled. "I'm sure there's a big pile of money somewhere. I think there's a good chance it will be recovered."

Ausum is scheduled to testify at the pre-trial exam.

Political placards?

Hills looks at lawn signs

By STEVE BARNABY
Farmington editor

Farmington Hills residents could have a new sign in their lives if city council gives final approval to a new political sign ordinance.

In a 4-3 vote, the council introduced an ordinance which would allow posting of political signs on residential lawns. Presently, political supporters are allowed posting signs only in their windows.

Voting in favor of the change were Mayor Earl Oppenheuser, councilmembers Keith Deacon, Cathy Jones, and Joanne Smith. Opposing the ordinance were councilmembers Joe Alkateeb, Jan Dolan and Joanne Soronen.

Mrs. Soronen doubted that posting of political signs would increase political

participation in elections.

"It would be ample for us to put up signs notifying where polling places were," she said.

But Mrs. Jones said the present ordinance was unenforceable.

"I feel our present sign ordinance is unenforceable," said Mrs. Jones.

She was backed up by Oppenheuser who said the proposed ordinance had enough teeth in it to ensure that signs were cleaned up after elections.

Under the proposal, residents would be required to remove signs two days after an election.

"Our sign ordinance is too restrictive. If it was legally attacked then we wouldn't have any control at all," he said.

Mrs. Smith concurred.

"The reason for the ordinance is to enforce rules. After all, we allow real

estate signs on lawns. For whom we vote is just as important," she said.

"I think I can trust people enough who put a sign in front lawn to take them down. If we can't get people excited enough through the issues than that's just too bad," he said.

But zoning officer Hal Rowe said he didn't anticipate any increase in workload if the ordinance was approved.

"We are still faced with signs being plastered around on utility poles after the election."

The city, he said, would be forced to take down those type of signs with or without the proposed ordinance.

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