

Downtown

Plans to upgrade take shape

By Casey Hans
staff writer

Formal surveying and planning for Farmington's Downtown Development Authority district will begin soon, following the hiring Tuesday of architectural and engineering firms.

They will start immediately on the first phase of the five-phase, \$1.44 million downtown project, expected to cost \$500,000.

DDA president Harry Wingerter and City Treasurer Patsy Cantrell were also given authority to negotiate a \$400,000 loan agreement with the city council on behalf of the DDA, according to action by the DDA board.

Board member Larry Leneher was absent for the votes. "I think we're all in agreement, time is of the essence now," Wingerter said about getting the downtown rejuvenation project under way.

The DDA timetable calls for the engineer to give survey results to the architect by Dec. 19, and for project bids to be awarded in February, officials said.

CHRISTOPHER WZACNY and Associates of Birmingham was hired as project architect with a \$50,000 cap and the Livonia engineering firm of Orchard Hiltz & McCliment Inc. hired with a \$15,000 cap. Both

will begin immediate work on the Phase I of the project. Wzacy did the preliminary work in designing and proposing the downtown plan.

Orchard Hiltz & McCliment does engineering work for the city. City manager and DDA board member Robert Deadman suggested the DDA hire the architect on a "percentage of construction" basis, and that the engineering firm be retained by the hour. Finalized contracts for both companies are expected to be approved shortly.

The project's first phase includes work on Grand River from Oakland to Warner and Farmington Road between Alta Loma and the Masonic Temple north of Grand River. A parking area north of Grand River will also be included.

In addition, the board voted Tuesday to shift some of the money budgeted for constructing a pedestrian crosswalk to planning and designing work along Warner Street, which was originally slated for the third phase of the project. The crosswalk will be shifted to a later phase.

The DDA board is planning each of the project's five physical phases one at a time. "The plan is to do the architectural and engineering plans phase by phase," city administrative assistant Robert Schultz said. "Because of the money crunch, we don't

want to get more than a year ahead of ourselves."

THE CITY loan sought by the DDA is the only money the governing body will have until the first money from the tax increment financing plan becomes available at next July's tax collection, according to Deadman. Figures from the city assessor detailing the base assessed value for the TIFA will not be available until this February, officials said.

The city council has already accepted the loan arrangement in principle, since it was included in the DDA plan that they adopted, Deadman added.

DDA board member Robert Heinrich suggested that negotiating DDA representatives bring plans for both fixed and variable rates of interest for the payback to the city to the DDA board for consideration.

The city is expected to charge the DDA one-half a percentage point over the city's normal earning index, based on pooled fund earnings from municipalities, Deadman said.

The DDA board is expected to hold a special meeting to consider the loan arrangement so it can be taken before council as soon as possible.

"The dilemma is there's only one source of money for us — the city," Deadman said, speaking for the DDA. "We have no other options at this time." The option of selling bonds is on hold because of pending litigation in other parts of the state, Deadman said.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Indian tales

Storyteller Florence "Dinghy" Sharp (standing), visited Longacre Elementary School Thanksgiving Week for 45-minute student assemblies of traditional Indian stories.

Sharp is also known for her founding of the Farmington Public Schools Bucket Brigade Tutorial Program.

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Cove Creek's site plan OK'd

A site plan for the Cove Creek Condominiums was approved Nov. 24 by a unanimous vote of the Farmington Hills City Council.

The 31-unit project is planned for a 19-acre parcel at the southwest corner of Middlebelt and 13 Mile. The plan was also unanimously recommended for approval by the Hills Planning Commission.

The city successfully defended the property's RA-1 residential zoning in court, according to information from the city. It allows a density of 3.1 units per acre, with which the Cove Creek project complies. Proponent Alexander Bogaerts has been asked

to pay an escrow deposit of \$51,000 to insure completion of the project's 4.12-acre open space.

The council vote followed a public hearing where no comments were received.

At previous hearings before the planning commission, members of the adjoining Holly Hill Farms subdivision worked with developers and agreed on an amended plan that addressed their concerns about landscaping, retention pond and the flood plain.

Holly Hill Farm residents were also concerned about the city allowing a maximum of 3.1 density in a flood plain area.

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