Checking up

Hills eyes county review of septic fields

By Casey Hans
staff writer

Farmington Hills officials are asking Oakland County to immediately visit the Farmington Acres subdivision to determine whether some septic fields in the area have failed and cannot be repaired.

If repairs are not possible, property owners of 37 parcels along Kirby and on Cass from Rhonswood to Edmonton may be assessed upwards of $9,100 — including an assessment for road paving — to hook up to the sanitary sewer system.

The previously approved road assessment averages just under $3,000 per assessed parcel, according to city officials. For the proposed sewer installation, the average would be $4,627 per parcel plus about $1,500 in costs for sewer hookup.

Though s ome of the more than 20 residents attending the Dec. 8 public hearing before the city council said they have a standing water problem — and a bad ground smell during the the warmer months — they feel the septic field problem can be solved and is simply a maintenance problem.

Mayor Joe Alkateeb agreed.

"Based on what I read about soil, the soil there is good," he said. "It's a maintenance problem, not a septic problem."

IF SEPTIC fields can be repaired, city officials agreed they will not recommend a sanitary sewer be installed along the two streets.

"If this area indeed has viable septic systems, I don't think we should force sewers on them," Councilwoman Joan Dudley said, making the motion to continue the sanitary sewer hearing process until a determination was made by the county. The council approved her motion 4-3, with Alkateeb and councilmembers Donn Wolf and Jodi Scronen in opposition.

Both Wolf and Alkateeb were in favor of totally dropping the sewer proposal and letting city and county officials handle the situation.

"I, too, am not willing to require you to have tremendous cost," Councilwoman Jan Dolan added. "But if there's one area that can't be fixed . . . you all have the problem. If the county comes back and says a sewer needs to be put in, you get the sewer."

Last week's hearing was the first of two hearings — a determination hearing — held to discuss the proposed sanitary sewer. The city received petitions with 48.6 percent of the assessed property parcel owners asking that the sewer system be installed. The city follows a rule of not approving a project unless at least 51 percent of the residents in a proposed assessed area are in favor of a project.

A SECOND, cost hearing will now be scheduled, based on the council action, to give county and city officials enough time to review the situation before the ground freezes and propose a solution.

Although residents do not have a ground odor problem now, one said "the odor in our neighborhood is foul come spring. The odor we have to live with three months out of the year is revolting."

The sanitary sewer proposal was brought to city council not only because of odor problems, but because of the paving project scheduled to be done this spring.

Officials said if a sewer is necessary, it should be installed before the paving is done. Public services director Thomas Biasell estimated it may increase sewer installation costs 25 percent if done after the paving.

"If it (the sewer) is going to be installed within 10 years, it would be cost effective to do it now," he said.

Most of the residents speaking before the council cited cost factors for their opposition to the proposed sewer project. Others said the area had "good septic field potential" but that some of the older fields might be overused by residents.

Harassment suit nearing a settlement

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

If agreements are signed, details involved in a sexual harassment and discrimination suit brought by a former librarian against the Farmington Community Library and former library director Gordon Lewis will never be heard in open court.

Following a pretrial hearing Dec. 11 before Oakland County Circuit Judge Eugene Schnelz, the complaint filed by Jill Locke was dismissed, pending final approval of an out-of-court settlement, Schnelz's law clerk said.

"It was taken off the active docket. Unless someone doesn't live up to the document, we would never hear about it again," the clerk said.

Library Board President Jonathan Grant acknowledged that the suit is being settled out of court. Trustees are expected to review the settlement within the next week. When the settlement is finalized and approved, details will be released, Grant said.

Locke's attorney, Marietta Robinson of Southfield, and Lewis' attorney, Ashley Lipson of Farmington Hills, did not return telephone calls.

IN THE five-count complaint filed in June, former children's librarian Jill Locke claims she was "constructively discharged" — transferred from a supervisory to non-supervisory position — for refusing and rejecting Lewis' alleged requests for sexual favors.

Originally, the cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills were included in the suit. But, in September, an order was entered for voluntary dismissal of the complaint against the cities.

The cities were dismissed because under the state public act under which district libraries are formed, the library is a separate and autonomous authority. The cities only finance the library system.

Locke, who requested a jury trial, was seeking $10,000 on each of the five counts.

A 13-year veteran of the Farmington Community Library staff, Locke resigned in February 1985, about one month after she was transferred to a non-supervisory position as coordinator of community services.

Locke previously had worked in the supervisory positions of branch head for the Farmington Hills library and as children's coordinator for both Farmington and Farmington Hills branches.

THE COMPLAINT claimed Locke was constructively discharged for refusing to work for less-qualified employees who "were engaging in sexual relationships with defendant Lewis."

The former librarian's resignation touched off a flurry of protests, including a financial audit that later led to Lewis' resignation as library director.

He was later arrested and pleaded guilty in 47th District Court in Farmington to a charge of purchase by a public official upon public credit for private use — a misdemeanor. Lewis was sentenced to one-year probation and $105 in costs.

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