

# Mini-mall plans fade with denial of rezoning



BOB SKLAR/Staff photographer

Howard Road resident Randall Winston addresses the Farmington Hills City Council Dec. 15.

By Joanne Mallazowski  
staff writer

Howard Road residents have won the battle to prevent development of a mini mall at the entrance of Farmington Hills' natural beauty road.

In a 5-0 vote last week, city council members upheld the Farmington Hills Planning Commission's rejection of a request to rezone approximately 11 acres at 26850 Halsted, south of Howard, immediately north of the city-owned San Marino Golf Course. Mayor Joe Alkatech and Councilwoman Joan Dudley were absent.

Proponent J.H. Hudnut requested rezoning of the single-family residential acreage to B-3, the city's most liberal commercial zone.

To the chagrin of Howard Road residents, Hudnut sought the rezoning to build a specialty restaurant, boutique and offices on the acreage that faces the natural beauty road.

Howard resident Randall Winston told council members that any zoning change — particularly to accommodate a mini mall — would change the road's natural beauty, which drew residents to buy homes in the area.

To develop a mini mall or any other type of commercial use "would invite the use of Howard Road" and lead to increased development, including paving, Winston said.

"FRANKLY, I'M worried about my property values and the increase in traffic," resident William Turkus said.

City planner Claude Coates supported residents' concerns about commercial use generating more traffic.

"... adding business use at the intersection would generate unwanted traffic on Howard Road. From a location standpoint, it is poor for business use because it is not located at a significant intersection. Not only is Howard not a through road, it is limited in its ability to carry traffic because of its characteristics," Coates said in a report to planning commissioners.

In denying Hudnut's rezoning request, council members affirmed residents' arguments against the proposed mini mall.

Rezoning the property from single family to general business does not conform to the city's master land

use plan, is a form of spot zoning and would be incompatible with existing residential uses in the area, council members said.

Proponent Hudnut disagreed. "We are not trying to use it as a shopping center," said Hudnut, representing owner Walter Gardner. "The character of this land is such that it cannot be developed for residential."

HUDNUT'S PLANS called for using two existing 2,300-square-foot buildings for a restaurant and boutique. If the property had been rezoned, a third 47,000-square-foot building would have been built for offices.

Hudnut maintained that the acreage could not be used for residential because of the property's swampy area and traffic noise from nearby I-696. He told the council that the property's closeness to the San Marino Golf Course makes residential use difficult.

White Hudnut called the land

swampy, residents call the area wetlands, which draw a variety of wildlife — another reason residents purchased homes along Howard.

Coates also took exception to Hudnut's remarks. If influence of I-696 is to be considered a factor, then it would be logical to extend that argument for the one-mile undeveloped stretch along I-696 that is zoned for single-family use.

Councilwoman Jan Dolan agreed. Since development of I-696, subdivisions have been built along the freeway "so apparently they (other residents) have been able to live with the noise..."

IN ALL other cases, residential property along a golf course is considered prime land that brings top dollar, Dolan said.

Hudnut also maintained that his rezoning request should be considered reasonable — despite the preponderance of single-family zoning — because of city officials' earlier rezoning of acreage across the street, immediately southwest of I-696, to office.

But city officials told Hudnut that the office-zoned acreage across the street was determined to have definite freeway exposure suitable for office use.

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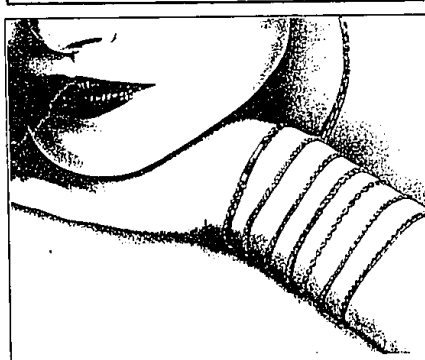


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