

Planners: no to special zoning district

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whether the proposed buildings would generate any taxes for the city. Most of the neighbors addressing the commission spoke out against the conceptual plan for these reasons.

One resident told of "tenuous times" he has had during the past 16 years in Lincolnshire with the storm drainage and sewer backup problems.

"Anytime I hear about additional properties being developed, I think about toilets being flushed and I wonder where it's going to go," he said. "And any additional traffic onto Middlebelt in that area is really going to create chaos."

The sewage problem is expected to be helped by the upgrading of the Farmington-Evergreen Sewer System. Changes should keep sewage from backing up in the adjoining

subdivisions, according to information presented at the meeting.

The new Mercy development would send additional sewage northward into the upgraded Farmington-Evergreen line. The line will run eastbound north of I-96.

Another resident tried to take a neutral view. "It sounded to me that they were attempting to mitigate the burden. At best, we would have maintenance of the status quo."

Storm sewer runoff would still flow southward, but the Sisters of Mercy would be required to have adequate retention ponds to hold additional water generated from the additional buildings, planning commissioners said.

Planning commission chairman Philip Arnold reminded the group this was not a public hearing for rezoning, but one to address the special zoning district proposed by the Sisters of Mercy.

"To accept this proposal . . . requires a change in the zoning," he said. "This is their proposal — not the city's."

Neighbors were drawn to the meeting because of information sent from the Lincolnshire Homeowners Association. The association met with other interested subdivision groups Jan. 7 to garner support against the proposal, according to association president Margaret Reas McKay.

"WE ARE opposed to this project because of the additional traffic problems it would create, the burden it would place on our already inadequate sewer system, and the zoning change that would introduce office zoning into our residential area," McKay said in her letter to homeowners.

"We wish to have the integrity of the master plan upheld," she said at the meeting.

The proposed multiple-use plan was originally proposed two years ago, according to architect Charles Johnston. "This piece of land is not going to remain vacant," he told the residents. "It will be developed in one form or another. The Sisters can no longer continue to keep it as parkland — mowed grass."

The commission majority argued against the SP-3 because it is not in compliance with the city's master plan, they considered it "spot zoning" of a residential district, and at least one commissioner felt it would change the residential character of the area.

It was also noted that the mixed use proposed might be acceptable in other areas of the city in the future, creating problems.

The proposed office building was the deterrent for most of the commissioners; many felt it would set a precedent of holding commercial ventures south of the I-96 freeway in an area the city has traditionally maintained as residential.

"WE ARE greatly deviating from the master plan," said commissioner Jeri VanHouten, who spoke out against the plan and the new zoning district several times during Thursday's meeting. "Eliminate the office building — let them bring us another proposal."

"This is a deviation we would have to defend in court," commissioner Joanne Smith added. Smith recommended the commission either adjourn the issue to receive additional clarification or reject it "hands down."

Although commissioner John Traflet said he saw the need for senior congregational facilities, he couldn't vote for the proposal "because of the office, primarily."

Norman Hyman, attorney representing the Sisters of Mercy, was concerned with the neighborhood comments about the present facilities and future growth.

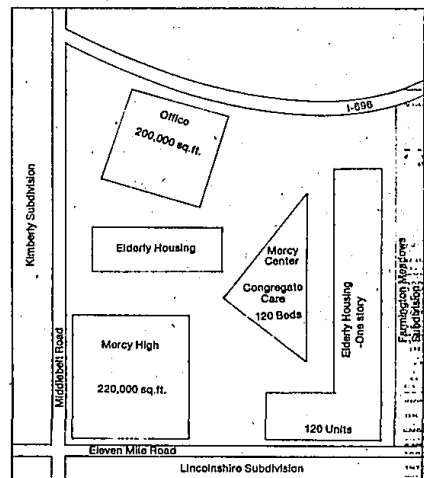
"Either there is a fundamental misunderstanding or . . . a certain callousness," he said. "Substantial public services are being performed, including senior citizen programs, which otherwise would be paid for with tax dollars."

"What's being proposed is to serve the elderly of this community." The plans would consolidate some of the group's present activities, including the housing of nuns, offices for religious superiors and meetings and gatherings, said Sr. Mary Kelly representing the Sisters of Mercy at the meeting.

She said the planning commission asked the group to present a single plan for using the property.

The conceptual plan includes:

- the 230,000-square-foot office building with parking to handle administrative offices for the 16 hospitals Sisters of Mercy operate;
- 120 senior congregational care beds, which will include such amenities as centralized meals;



The Sisters of Mercy conceptual site plan.

- 120 units of one-story, detached elderly housing;
- and a nursing facility.

The Sisters of Mercy hospital administration is now housed in the Mercy Center.

The Sisters also hired a traffic study firm, which revealed the proposed development would generate slightly less traffic than if the property were fully developed with sin-

gle family houses, according to information presented. Many residents disputed these claims and said something should be done about the current traffic problems before more are added.

Paul Bibeau, city attorney for Farmington Hills, said he was not sure how much in taxes would be generated from such a development, but that it would not all be tax free.

Keeping tabs on the city

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sues with city officials, residents, whoever might be in the know.

"I always thought I was not interested in city planning. I guess it stems from my interest in building and architecture," said Joynt, a 12-year Farmington Hills resident.

ONE of the newest council watchers, Joynt — retired for little more than a year from Ford Motor Co., where he was manager of construction and maintenance — is gaining respect for his growing interest and involvement with city and residential issues.

Yet his interest in governmental affairs isn't new. A former Redford Township resident, Joynt was a member of a group that determined to improve the Grand River Avenue-Lahser area.

His work in civil engineering with Ford and a year's stint with the Detroit Department of Public Works fueled his interest in how public services, including streets and accompanying special assessment districts, affect development in residential areas.

In Farmington Hills, it's been more than his hours spent keeping tabs on local government — asking questions, researching — that's earning him the quick respect of both city officials and residents.

A MEMBER of the Springbrook Homeowners Association for the past eight years, Joynt recognized that many problems encountered in his neighborhood were mirrored in other neighborhoods throughout the city.

"Over the last few years, Bill (Lachman) and I would chat that it's too bad we can't talk with other associations," Joynt said. "Then I learned about the homeowners council and thought about reviving it."

With help from other Springbrook Homeowners Association members, Joynt pumped new life into the former umbrella organization. The group's first general membership meeting — with the election of officers and a new set of bylaws — is scheduled for later this month.

"Primarily, our concern will be citywide issues. Our prime interest is in keeping our city a nice place to live," Joynt said.

Though he has high hopes for the organization, Joynt is realistic about the potential pitfalls. Of greatest concern is that the group will become enamored with the political side of issues and forget the larger concern — the city.

He is also concerned that the organization doesn't become a one-issue group.

"If and when an issue comes up, we're going to have to turn it over for comment, evaluation and then give a report."

JOYNT is considering methods of weeding through issues so the organization doesn't go out a limb in support of one simply because a particular subdivision wants it.

After months and months of legwork, research, talking and encouraging other subdivision associations to get involved, Joynt is now content to take a back seat.

"My prime interest was to get it started," he said. "Now I'm quite comfortable to sit back."

It's not that Joynt is abandoning the organization — he's membership chairman — but he wants to make the most of his retirement now that he has the time to do the things he's always wanted to do.

"I end up with too many hours tied up in other things," said Joynt, father of seven and grandfather to 12.

A former civil engineer who has always been interested in building and architecture, Joynt has been trying to set aside time to re-do the inside of his ranch house. An avid sailor, he at one time built his own kayak. But his building isn't limit to personal projects.

SO FAR, he's helped design and build a neighbor's deck and plans to help another tear out and replace the kitchen.

And his children — spread throughout the United States — don't mind their father's help in rebuild-

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