

Spicer House future tied to historic group review

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The Spicer estate house is one of five buildings in Farmington Hills that was designed by famed Michigan architect Marcus Burrows. The other four buildings are in the city's historic district. "All of his (Burrows') homes are beautifully sited," Fox said.

PUTTING THE Spicer house in the historic district will make it "subject to all the protections of the ordinance," Fox added.

Sorenson's suggestion that the historic district commission provide ideas for its use, however, prompted comments from some council members concerned that the Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Commission will consider the request "a slap in the face."

At a joint meeting of the city council and parks and recreation commission in December, council mem-

bers were told that the once-hoped-for plan of converting the estate house into administrative offices had been cast aside.

Instead, parks and recreation commissioners are looking at the possibility of transforming the estate house into a visitors center, said Dennis Fitzgerald, commission chairman.

Cost estimates for renovating the house into a nature center and offices for the city's special services department, including parks and recreation, totaled approximately \$530,000. "We made a decision it was an unwise expenditure," city manager William Costick said.

The house is being used for a few parks and recreation activities, such as day camp and the cross country skiing program, Costick said.

At the December joint meeting, Fitzgerald said the house can be stabilized until a final decision on its

use can be made. In addition to extending water service to the house, city officials also are faced with an asbestos problem at the house.

"WE NEED to do some initial things to stabilize, preserve the house to prevent it from further deterioration," special services director Dan Poter said in December.

Some council members Monday also expressed concern from the reaction of parks and recreation commission members about the house. Councilwoman Jan Dolan quoted Fitzgerald's comment in December that "you'd be putting a lot of money making a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

Following the December joint meeting, Dolan said she felt the parks and recreation commissioners feel the house isn't worth saving.

Speaking on behalf of parks and recreation commissioners, Poter told the council that commissioners

are concerned about comments made at the December meeting that might have led council members to believe commissioners' felt the house wasn't worth saving.

The parks and recreation commission has since issued a memo to council members. "The parks and recreation commission would like to clarify its position regarding the Spicer house and surrounding property. Our short term goal is to:

- Develop a plan, including budget, to use the existing house as a visitor center and small office, if necessary.

- Develop a plan, including budget, for the stabilization of all structures.
- Develop a plan, including budget, for the improvement of the grounds immediately surrounding the estate house."

COUNCILMAN JOE Alkateeb said he liked the idea of using the

Spicer house as a visitors center. "Utilization has to go with whatever you decide," he said, adding "the question is how much will it cost? I'm a little concerned. Are we slapping the parks and recreation commission by saying we're going to take it out of your hands and give it to the historic district commission?"

His comments were followed by other council members' words of praise for the parks and recreation commission. But council members agreed the historic district commission should have a chance to use their expertise.

"They parks and recreation commission) are going to come up with budgets, stabilization," Sorenson said. "We're asking (the historic district

commission) for a recommendation and some comments about the district and the use."

Fox said the council wants an opinion from people involved with history and historic preservation. "I think no one is unhappy with the work of the parks and recreation commission."

The council agreed that the house should be saved. The council, in fact, has twice confirmed that in the past with formal votes.

But councilman Aldo Vagnozzi voiced concern about the parks and recreation's lack of definite plans and cost estimates. "I'd like to know what the overall costs are going to be," he said. "I'm in favor of keeping this house — up to a point."

School boundary, building use talks set

By Casey Hens Staff writer

Come early if you want a seat. The Farmington school board has scheduled a study session next Tuesday to discuss ways to alleviate overcrowded schools on the west side of the district.

Redistricting, a variety of building uses and other education choices will be discussed at the meeting.

If community reaction this week is any indicator, every seat in the Farmington High School auditorium will be taken when the meeting begins at 7:30 p.m. Residents, especially elementary parents, were meeting and distributing petitions this week in opposition to redistricting.

"It's a difficult one, because people are anxious," said Farmington Superintendent Graham Lewis.

He is encouraging residents to attend the meeting with an open mind,

to bring their ideas and voice them. "There's no way we're ramming something down people's throats," he added.

Last fall, school officials made the decision to involve the community in the review of school boundaries and facilities.

Thirty-seven parents began studying alternatives to overcrowding in October and have compiled their results in three different reports — elementary, middle school and high school.

THE REPORTS will be presented to the board Tuesday by a seven-member citizens panel appointed by the school board Oct. 6.

Some of the alternatives to be discussed include building a new elementary on the west side, putting additions on elementary buildings, reopening Shilawasee Center as an elementary, and equalizing atten-

dance at the high school level.

No immediate changes are expected at the middle schools, where crowding is not currently a problem.

Gatherings with a "town meeting" format were held in November; elementary and high school parents came out in force to give ideas and opinions to the citizens groups.

West-side growth had pushed at least five of the district's 11 elementary schools beyond capacity in 1987, according to a report presented last March to the school board.

Discussion of building a new elementary school at Halsted and 11 Mile on the district's west side was discussed at public meetings as early as February 1986, and crowding has been an election issue during the past two years.

Information given by the district this fall indicated enrollment increases at the elementary and decreases at Harrison High School had reached "critical proportions," prompting the recent study.

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Officer joins auto theft unit

Farmington public safety officer Tony Gubacz will join other law enforcement officers from Farmington Hills, Novi, Southfield and the Oakland County Sheriff's Department this month in an effort to decrease the number of car thefts in these communities.

Several arrests have already been made by these Oakland County officers assigned to a special auto theft prevention unit based in Novi.

The Farmington City Council voted Jan. 4 to use \$6,100 — the city's share of a one-year state grant — to purchase and insure a vehicle for their officer's use. Council waived the bid process to lease a Pontiac 6000 from Bob Jeannotte Pontiac of Plymouth at \$395 per month on a 12-month lease.

Although the auto theft prevention grant is funded for only 12 months, it can be continued for up to five years.

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