

# Hills council eyes shorter meetings

By Joanne Maliszewski  
staff writer

It's a tough image for the Farmington Hills City Council to break. But shorter meetings are a possibility.

In an unprecedented move, the council has taken a step to shorten its characteristically long meetings with the help of a consent agenda.

Non-controversial routine items will be lumped under one motion to be voted on by the council.

The consent agenda, however, will not preclude either council or residents' questions or debate about a particular item, Mayor Jody Soronen said.

"The public has access to the agenda, and if there is something of interest to anybody in the audience, I presume we would honor a request to pull that out," Soronen said.

But tardy residents who saunter in after the 7:30 p.m. starting time might miss the opportunity to have an item pulled from the consent agenda. The agenda and motion to approve the items will be conducted shortly after the start of the

meeting as the first order of business.

THE CONSENT agenda will be posted in city hall at least 18 hours before a council meeting. Meeting agendas are currently posted on city hall exterior doors. Copies of all items that will be placed on the consent agenda are available to the public in the city clerk's office.

Jack Joynt, council watcher and a member of the Farmington Hills Council of Homeowners' Associations, is taking a wait-and-see attitude toward the consent agenda.

"I don't really thoroughly understand it," Joynt said. "I don't know what their intent is other than to shorten the meeting, which is good."

Joynt also said he's never had a problem obtaining copies of reports that he has requested. "I've felt that, generally, they're open."

Residents who wish to discuss a particular item are expected to follow the current procedure of filling out a name card requesting to speak. "It doesn't have to be a complicated procedure," Soronen said.

COUNCIL AGENDAS will feature a paragraph, expected to be read aloud, announcing when to request deletion of items from the consent agenda.

All discussion must be conducted before a motion to approve the consent agenda is made. The motion to

approve a consent agenda cannot be debated. Council must have a unanimous vote to approve the consent agenda.

The type of items that would be included on a consent agenda include meeting minutes, correspondence,

approval of easements, licenses, contracts and agreements, setting public hearing dates and routine personnel matters.

Also to be included on a consent agenda are routine financial management actions, such as transfer of

funds and approval to advertise for bids. Routine traffic items also would be included.

Any items that require a roll call vote, such as ordinance enactments, would not be included on the consent agenda.

## Open meetings law applies

The Farmington Hills City Council's decision to use a consent agenda for routine business does not excuse it from making its decisions in public.

Michigan's Open Meetings Act of 1976 requires that all decisions of a public body, such as the city council, shall be made in public.

Residents who are interested in receiving council agendas or reviewing copies of agenda items can call city clerk Joan Reynolds at 473-9580 or at city hall, 31555 11 Mile, during business hours.

All deliberations of a public body that requires a quorum of its mem-

bers must be conducted at a meeting open to the public. A meeting cannot be held unless there has been public notice.

THE OPEN Meetings Act allows public bodies to meet in closed session for certain purposes:

- to consider the dismissal, suspension or disciplining of, or to hear complaints against a public officer, employee or staff member when that person requests a closed hearing. This also applies to students in a school district.
- For strategy and negotiation sessions of a collective bargaining

agreement when either party requests a closed hearing.

• To consider purchase or lease of real property up to the time an option to buy or lease that real property is obtained.

• To consult with attorneys for trial or settlement strategy, but only when an open meeting would have "a detrimental financial effect on the litigating settlement position of the public body."

• To review specific contents of an application for employment or appointment to public office when the applicant requests a closed meeting. But all interviews by a public body for employment or appointment to public office shall be conducted in an open meeting.

• To consider material that is excluded from public discussion or disclosure by state or federal statute.

## DDA awards bid for landscaping

A Flat Rock contractor will handle landscaping work in the first phase of a \$1.4 million downtown Farmington rejuvenation project.

The Downtown Development Authority board voted Tuesday to award the bid to 2001 Nursery and Garden Center of Flat Rock. The company was the low bidder for the project at \$24,575. Seven other companies also bid.

A decision on which general contractor will coordinate the project has not yet been decided. That bid, which will cost nearly \$300,000 or more, is expected to be awarded at a special DDA meeting at 8 a.m. Friday, Feb. 12.

City planner Chris Wzany, who recommended the landscape bid, will also make a recommendation for the general contractor's bid.

Price, duration of the project and references will all be considered.

The apparent low bidder in general contracting is Concord Cement of Farmington Hills, which has promised a 33-day duration for the project.

Other contractors have bid upwards of \$450,000 and offered up to 180-day durations. A total of seven

general contractors have submitted bids.

Phase one of the project is expected to begin "as soon as the weather cooperates," according to DDA executive director Wendy Strip Sittsamer.

The actual time frame to complete the project will depend on weather conditions this spring and summer, she added.

## Hard lessons

### Activist urges parents to use discipline

By Bill Kole  
staff writer

If black parents spare the rod, they'll spoil their children, human rights activist James McPherson warned a group of Oakland University students Monday.

Only when they impose discipline, Meredith said, will the black community see relief in its battle against poverty and drug abuse.

"We've got to take control of our community — I mean control like the Italians and their godfathers," Meredith said in a speech launching OU's observance of Black Awareness Month.

"When we do that, then we get rid of (drug dealers). We have to get these people out of our community — for their own good as well as for the good of the society."

On Sept. 30, 1962, Meredith made headlines around the world when he became the first black student to enroll in the University of Mississippi.

More than 4,000 U.S. troops descended on the campus in Oxford, Miss., when the move sparked riots that killed two students. Meredith was hung twice in effigy as white

students outside his apartment chanted, "Go back to Africa!"

BUT MONDAY, Meredith — now 55, bearded and balding — was hailed as a "hero" who opened higher education to thousands of black people.

Meredith told the OU gathering he wanted to attend "Ole Miss" because of "elitism. Every citizen should be entitled to everything offered by public money."

"My position was, I thought men of my kind were entitled to that," he said.

He said his lifelong crusade for

equal rights was sparked by a harrowing train ride from a 1948 visit in Detroit back to his native Kosciusko, Miss. The conductor ordered 15-year-old Meredith to "get back there where all the other niggers are" and ride in the rear of the segregated train.

Meredith ended up standing in the baggage car, weeping, for the entire trip.

"That's the first time I ever knew my deal was the bad deal," Meredith said. "I was humiliated. And ever since then, I've been fighting back."

But Meredith focused his remarks Monday on recent newspaper stories

about inner-city residents struggling with drug abuse and homelessness.

MEREDITH BLAMED those problems on the failure of black parents to adequately discipline their children.

He said education without discipline won't work.

"You cannot train a child if you cannot discipline," said Meredith. "If he's not prepared by the time he comes to college, all of the programs in the world aren't going to make him successful."

Meredith also criticized OU for 66 percent black enrollment when Detroit is 63 percent black.

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