

Complaints range from density to traffic

By Joanne Maliszowski
staff writer

Farmington Hills planning commission chairman John Traflet called it "NIMBY" — Not In My Back Yard.

He was categorizing some of the complaints heard Thursday in a public hearing on the planning commission's proposed changes to the master land use plan. Many residents complained of too much develop-

ment, too many people and far too much traffic in Farmington Hills.

Residents tied their complaints about overdevelopment to the planning commission's desire to designate 11 areas in the city for cluster housing, another form of single-family housing for property that's difficult to develop into single-family homes.

Cluster housing is one of six categories in which planning commissioners have made changes in the

master land use plan, which serves as a flexible blueprint for development in the city. The other categories are multiple housing, office, recreational, streets and miscellaneous.

It was the cluster housing option that stopped the planning commission's master land use revisions from being adopted wholesale. Planning commissioners agreed to drop three areas from the cluster housing designation. They also agreed to designate cluster housing for property

at Haggerty and 12 Mile rather than as multiple.

THE THREE areas planning commissioners agreed to maintain as single-family in the master plan, rather than cluster are: along 14 Mile, east of Haggerty; 13 Mile, west of Halsted by the Copper Creek multiple development; and along Halsted, south of 14 Mile.

The revisions are the result of a months-long review of the master

land use plan, spearheaded by former planning commission chairman Philip Arnold. The review and subsequent revisions are in two facets.

The first facet covers 111 changes that reflect land rezonings, approved by planning commissioners and city council members since the last master plan review more than six years ago. These revisions also reflect zoning changes prompted by court decisions and consent judgments.

Planning commissioners adopted the 111 changes without debate.

and the suspected accompanying increased density.

Cluster housing, he said, was designed to solve problems, not increase density.

"I think the concern with density ... is more a perception," Arnold said.

Disputing claims that cluster housing would increase density by some 50 percent, Arnold did his own mathematical figuring.

Eliminating the three parcels that will remain single-family residential rather than cluster, Arnold said the remaining cluster designations would add some 130 units in the city.

Assuming perhaps three people live in a cluster house, that totals some 360 new people of a total population in the city of about 66,000.

"The density that's being talked about is one-half of 1 percent if it's developing that way in terms of people," Arnold said.

PLANNING COMMISSION vice chairwoman Joanne Smith compared Arnold's figures with what could be assumed about single-family homes.

Using the example of the 20 acres at 13 Mile and Halsted (one of the deleted cluster designations), Smith said that would accommodate enough homes for some 1,500 people, based on families of three children each. That same 20 acres would, based on density restrictions, house some 185 people in cluster units.

"So when someone tells you cluster is going to give you density, they're reading you a fairy tale," she said.

IT WAS the other 33 proposed changes, the review's second facet, that spawned debate with the full house of residents and planning commissioners.

The changes were suggested for property affected by development that has occurred in the city. These changes in the master plan do not reflect existing zoning or uses. Rezoning would have to be requested for the changes to take effect.

Originally, planning commissioners were going to adopt the changes with one fell-swoop vote. But commissioner Paul Blizman objected.

"I think it's a mistake to vote on 30 of them in one motion," Blizman said.

Each of the total 33 changes should be discussed and voted on individually, he said. Finally, commissioners voted on the changes according to category.

BEFORE PLANNING commissioners agreed to reduce the 11 proposed cluster housing designations by three, Arnold addressed residents' complaints about cluster housing

City seeks panel applicants

Farmington officials are seeking people interested in the welfare of the city to serve on a variety of boards and commissions.

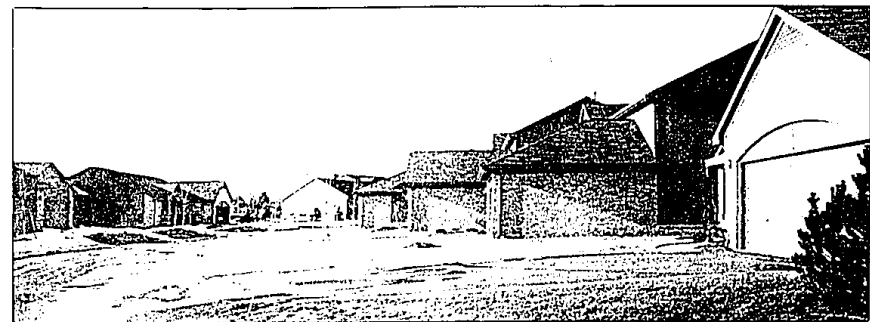
There are currently more than 60 people serving on city boards such as the planning commission, zoning board of appeals, historic commission, beautification committee, board of review and others.

According to information from the mayor's office, approximately 20 people are appointed, or re-

pointed, to fill vacancies on city boards each year.

There are currently openings on the planning commission, historic commission and beautification committee. Residency requirements and terms of office vary.

Those interested should send a letter of interest with a resume to Mayor Richard Tupper, city of Farmington, 23600 Liberty, Farmington, MI 48024.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

The Meadows, on the northwest corner of 13 Mile and Farmington Road, is an example of cluster housing in Farmington Hills.



Phil Arnold

Critics blast cluster concept

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"I cannot, in all conscience, serve on the city council and lend my support to these changes, which would mean a drastic change in this community as we have all known and loved it," councilwoman Jean Fox said.

Fox told commissioners she objects to "the use of cluster designation for any problem parcel along a mile road when you don't know what else to do with it."

Increased density and all the problems it brings — more traffic, more

crime, fewer natural areas — await the city with its growing use of cluster housing, Fox said.

"I think you need time to cover them, consider the validity of them and consider some revisions," councilman Aldo Vagnozzi said, about some of the cluster designations.

THROUGHOUT THE evening, residents spoke of planning commissioners making changes to benefit developers, rather than residents. Sentiments included that residents should have first consideration, and that there's too much tendency to de-

velop each piece of property in Farmington Hills.

"In reality, you are only helping the outside developers," Suzanne Golas said. "We shouldn't be the ones to endure greater problems from greater density."

Mary Johnston offered similar sentiments.

"You have failed to plan this city properly. I am as culpable as you, I came at the 13th hour," she said.

"There's no vision. There's no thought for the future. There's no thought for the woodlands," Johnston said.

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