

Lot splitting approved during moratorium

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Farmington Hills city councilwoman Jean Fox believes the first lot splitting under a new moratorium might set a precedent.

The council Monday night approved the splitting of two large lots on the northwest corner of Stockton and Middlebelt into five smaller ones of more than 20,000 square feet.

The lot splitting was brought before the city council rather than the planning commission because there is a moratorium in certain areas of the city against lot splitting, pending a review of zoning districts.

The Stockton-Middlebelt area is under the moratori-

um. The city council has asked the planning commission to consider upgrading the residential zone from its current RA-3 to RA-1, which requires larger lots. Despite the RA-3 zone, the Stockton-Middlebelt area has long boasted large, one-acre lots.

The five new lots conform to the minimum 20,000-square-foot lot size required in RA-1 zone. But the frontage on all five does not. Two of the lots are 80 feet wide, 20 feet less than the minimum required.

That inconsistency, however, was necessary because a drain runs through some of the property, a part of which also is in a flood plain, city manager William Costick said.

COUNCILWOMAN FOX voted along with the majori-

ty on the compromised lot splitting but cautioned that a precedent might be set because of the less than minimum frontage on two lots.

"I think this is asking for trouble down the pike. Are you going to want all 80-foot lots when you have RA-1 looking at us?" she asked.

Other council members disagreed. "I think this is as good a solution as you can come up with," councilman Aldo Vagnone said.

Stockton residents sent the city council a petition supporting the lot splitting. Originally, proponent Mike Watzman wanted the two large lots split into seven smaller ones. But a compromise was reached between Watzman, residents and the city.

"You'll have five good-sized lots with several of them

well-treed," councilwoman Jan Dolan said.

In late March, the city council lifted a wholesale moratorium on lot splitting and restricted the practice to certain areas in the city where current zoning allows larger lots to be split. The planning commission is expected to study these areas and consider rezoning.

The lot splitting controversy became public when residents in the Nine Mile-Middlebelt area complained about Keating Community Homes, Bloomfield Hills, and others purchasing large lots and splitting them.

The city council agreed to allow lot splits in the areas under a moratorium as long as the split does not make the new lots smaller than is allowed in the RA-1 land use zone.

Young students learning of drugs

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received drug awareness education this year, Mullins said. They heard speakers from Maple Grove, a substance abuse center at Henry Ford Hospital in West Bloomfield, before Mullins' presentation Friday.

FFA REGULARLY goes into all Farmington third-grade classrooms with its alcohol awareness program and all fifth graders and their parents are educated as well.

"This way, they (the Forest students) get three years of drug education," Mullins added. "I've been encouraging something for the fourth grade."

FFA has taken their efforts one step further with the recent drug awareness campaign. A selection of books, including "It's OK to Say No to Drugs," by Alan Garner and "Gone With the Wind — Teenage Drug Use is a Disease," by Miller Newton, have been purchased for all Farmington elementary schools for students and parents.

At Forest, the books received prominent display in the front hallway.

"We've talked about crack, pot, coke and they all have the same kind of effects. They affect growth patterns and reproductive organs," said



Betty Mullins

Dolores Harris, a fourth grade teacher at Forest, who participated in the discussion.

"I'm sure you're all going to be approached, well, many of you will. You've got to remember . . . youth growth will be affected."

MULLINS ADDED: "Large doses over a long time can cause permanent damage to live, lungs and brain."

Students listened attentively as Mullins showed them the "prop" drugs, the paraphernalia, and explained how illegal drugs are grown and harvested or manufactured.

She also brought it closer to home. "When you get into middle school, you may see this stuff drop out of someone's locker," she added. "We want you to know what this stuff looks like."

Cocaine and marijuana were not the only subjects of discussion. Alcohol, still the drug of choice for young people, and cigarettes, which continue to be prevalent, were also discussed.

Hills sets new guidelines against troubled developer

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Farmington Hills administrators have been given the green light to do what they must to ensure that manufactured housing builder Howard Keating complies with city ordinances.

"My feeling is we ought to do something to make this guy or anybody know we're only going to tolerate so much," mayor pro tempore Terry Sever said. "I think we should take some action to make it hurt."

Doubts about Keating's proper licensing for selling and installing manufactured housing joins a growing list of concerns against the Bloomfield Hills builder, including using two completed homes as sales models. Complaints range from traffic concerns and drainage problems to incomplete site work.

The city council Monday night agreed to continue withholding new building permits against the builder until the licensing issue, cleanup at housing sites and other reported violations are resolved.

The city council gave administrators the authority to set a deadline for cleanup at the construction sites. If the deadline is not met, further inspections, required for a certificate of occupancy, would be withheld. City officials acknowledged that Keating continues to make progress on his sites.

THE COUNCIL also authorized city attorney Paul Bibeau to take whatever legal action necessary, including filing a lawsuit against Keating for violating city zoning ordinances that forbid using two completed houses as sales models.

"I think it's rather evident . . . that he (Keating) has got them staffed periodically, and he's not selling them," Bibeau said.

Two completed houses on Nine Mile at Karen Place, east of Middlebelt, are being used as "jumping jacks" for other uses and other lots in the area," he added.

No representative for Keating Community Homes was present for the latest in a series of discussions about continuing problems with the builder and his building sites.

But Keating Community Homes spokeswoman Brooke Isberg Tuesday denied that the houses are being used as models. "Those homes are for sale. They are indeed bringing prospective buyers through them," she said.

City officials acknowledge that Keating is licensed through the state as a residential builder. But they say he has not yet received licenses from the Mobile Home Commission to sell and install the manufactured houses.

The commission is reviewing Keating license applications, assistant city manager David Call said.

"We want to be sure Mr. Keating is covered and has all three licenses," he said.

KEATING SPOKESWOMAN Isberg confirmed that the builder has met with the state Mobile Home Commission. "We're expecting licensing soon," she said.

Isberg previously acknowledged that Keating hires licensed subcontractors to install the manufactured houses. Keating was out of town and unavailable for comment.

As requested, the city's one-family construction review board reviewed the Keating homes to determine if they fully comply with the city's downsizing ordinance. The ordinance prohibits homes from being too dissimilar from others in the surrounding area.

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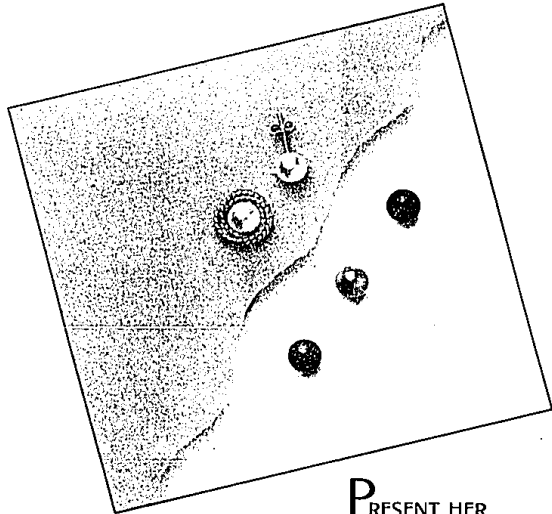
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