

Hills resident groups win zoning battles

Hospital office building rejected

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Woodcreek residents and the Farmington Hills City Council agree there are enough offices near the subdivision, south of Northwestern Highway.

Southfield-based Providence Hospital last week lost its bid before the Farmington Hills City Council to rezone acreage on the southwest corner of Inkster Road and Northwestern Highway for an office building.

The council upheld the planning commission's earlier recommendation of the request. Councilwoman Jody Soronen abstained from voting. She said the hospital, which has two facilities in the city, is a dues-paying member of the Farmington-Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce, for which she is executive director.

Providence Hospital officials wanted to rezone 15.5 acres of a 21.3-acre parcel near Woodcreek subdivision, for an outpatient rehabilitation, therapy and education facility. The master plan recognizes the existing use, known as quasi-public, of the land where the original Marillac Hall of the St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center sits vacant.

The council denied the request because it doesn't conform with the master plan and because the request was for more acreage than needed to complete the hospital's proposed offices.

Woodcreek residents, who have filed and signed petitions against rezoning for Providence Hospital near their neighborhood, said they are tired of falling victim to encroaching commercialism along Northwestern Highway.

"WE WANT to think single-family as far as Woodcreek," Woodcreek Civic Association president Hank Murawski said. "We do know exactly what we want. We are vehemently



BOB SKLAR/staff photographer

Douglas Ellman, an attorney representing Woodcreek residents, told the city council the Woodcreek rezoning request is only another case of the "trauma and harassment" Woodcreek residents have suffered from office expansion along Northwestern Highway.

opposed to any development that's going to jeopardize the residential area."

Hospital president Brian Connelly maintained that the proposed office building would not hurt the neighborhood because of the hospital's plans to maintain the existing wooded area on the western six acres. "We believe this buffer will meet many concerns of the homeowners association," he said.

When councilman Ben Marks asked hospital officials to dedicate the wooded area as open space, no one responded.

Connelly also argued that rezoning the property would be appropriate because other properties near the site are zoned for office use and the Applegate shopping center across the street in Southfield is zoned commercial. He also assured the council that St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher

Center officials have no plans to change the use of their land near the proposed office.

Douglas Ellman, an attorney representing Woodcreek residents, told the council the request is only another case of the "trauma and harassment" Woodcreek residents have suffered in the last 15 years from office expansion along Northwestern. "This project will destroy the seclusion of Woodcreek," he added.

RESIDENT BYRON Slegel agreed. The proposed project and rezoning would create a negative, devastating effect on the subdivision. "This would be just another slice of the Bologna."

Woodcreek association treasurer Jack Holmes said, "We've raised a war chest and we're prepared to do battle."

Ellman also maintained that the office building does not conform with the master plan-designated, quasi-public use, which is institutional such as St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center. He argued that already with an 8-mile radius of Woodcreek, there are at least 15 medical facilities, excluding physicians' offices.

Increased traffic, negatively affected wetlands and the proposed size of the office also are concerns, Ellman said.

Though hospital officials proposed a 50,000 square-foot office on the site, there's room for a 200,000 square-foot building because of the wooded area on the western edge of the property, city planning consultant Claude Coates said. "The city would have no real way to prevent that from becoming office," he said.

Bank headquarters near I-696 nixed

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Tired of the noise, the lights and traffic problems, Forestbrook and Pebblebrook residents chalked up a victory in their defeat of yet another proposal for offices near their neighborhoods.

The Farmington Hills City Council last week upheld planning commissioners' earlier recommended denial of Michigan National Corp.'s request to rezone acreage near its almost-complete new corporate headquarters, immediately north of I-696, between Inkster and Middlebelt.

Councilwoman Jody Soronen abstained from voting on the bank's request. She said the bank is a long-paying dues member of the Farmington-Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce, for which she is executive director.

Michigan National asked to rezone 8.6 acres, adjacent to Forestbrook and Pebblebrook subdivisions. Bank officials wanted the residentially zoned property rezoned to make way for offices to house some of the bank's subsidiaries next to the new corporate offices. The city's master plan designates the acreage as residential.

Residents made it clear they are already tired of living next to the bank's new corporate headquarters and don't want any more offices on their doorsteps.

"We want to protect our property values and the integrity of our residential area from commercial development," Forestbrook resident Stella Milnton said.

MICHIGAN NATIONAL'S unsuccessful 11th-hour attempt to postpone the council's decision was met with ire from the council and nearby residents.

"I think everyone would be best served by the postponement," Michigan National attorney Edward Ruby said. Because a majority of residents' complaints concerning the rezoning centered on problems with the new corporate offices, bank officials asked for a postponement "to complete the commitments we have

already made to the neighboring property owners . . ."

But council members refused the postponement. "I'm dead-set against these 11th-hour postponements," councilman Aldo Vagnozzi said. "I think we're tilting the scale in favor of the developer."

Ruby received the same negative response when he later asked Vagnozzi to withdraw his motion to deny the rezoning on 8.6 acres of residentially zoned property immediately south of the Forestbrook and Pebblebrook subdivisions, north of I-696. The rezoning was denied primarily

because the request for office does not conform with the residential use designated in the city's master land use plan.

Rezoning the acreage once owned by the Farmington Public Schools, from residential to office, Ruby said, would be a logical extension of the bank's new headquarters site.

Residents disagreed. "There's no trade-off for the neighborhood. We've got nothing in return for this. We now have a very large building. We have noise. We have lights. We have commercial," said Robert Harkness, Forestbrook-Pebblebrook homeowners association president.

GREENCASTLE SUBDIVISION association president Barry Ryan agreed. He urged the council not to change the master plan. The "social, political, environmental, economic factors haven't changed to merit rezoning," he said.

As they did before planning commissioners in January, Forestbrook-Pebblebrook residents complained about lack of privacy, increased traffic, drainage problems, and accidents and near-accidents on Inkster.

City planning consultant Claude Coates said the property west of the bank's corporate offices just north of I-696 can and should be developed for single-family residential, as suggested by the master plan. "A change in this would make it more difficult for the city to maintain (as residential)," Coates said.

Slime hopes: They want to mess things up

By LeAnne Rogers
staff writer

It wasn't the chance for choice seats to see Bruce Springsteen or Michael Jackson that had lines forming in Southfield at 3 a.m. Monday.

Hundreds of youngsters and their parents were lining up outside the studios of WKBD-Channel 50 on 11 Mile east of Inkster Road for a chance to get slimed on "Super Sloppy Double Dare," the nationally syndicated children's television show.

After two rounds of auditions, four youngsters were selected to be contestants on shows that will be taped in May. Two West Bloomfield residents, Adam Mueller and Matt Colman, both 13-year-old students at Gretna Lake Middle School, made up the successful Disco Dynamos team.

The other team selected was the Competitors, with members Jason Finn of Birmingham and Jennifer Knott of Dearborn, both 13 years old.

Auditions were scheduled to begin at noon, but lines began forming about 3 a.m., according to show publicist Lisa Silfen. Although the show increased the number of two-member teams permitted to audition from 300 to 450, a large number of would-be contestants were turned away.

"We are looking for spunky, energetic kids who want to have fun," Silfen said. "We have a messy obstacle course and the kids love it. They love it when they get slimed."

SHOW CO-HOST Dave Shiklar echoed that statement when talking with children from throughout the metropolitan area who were auditioning. "You don't have to be the brightest or the most athletic, just the most fun," he said. "Keep excited when you know the answer."

Aired at 7 a.m. weekdays on Channel 50, the show is seen on 150 stations across the country and is the top Nielsen rated program for children 6 to 11 years old.

"Super Sloppy Double Dare" hopefuls, required to be 10 to 13 years old, went through a two-part audition.

The first part of the audition required one team member to throw marshmallows to a partner, who had 15 seconds to catch three in a plastic foam cup held between the teeth.

The second part of the audition included interview questions about favorite television shows and performers, along with enthusiastic shouting of their team names.

PARTICIPATING in the auditions were the show's co-hosts Robin

Marella and Shiklar, who appeared at Autorama last weekend.

Among the participants making the cut to the second round of auditions were the Chickettes: Terri Fogel and Courtney Kling, both 13-year-old Farmington Hills residents and eighth grade students at Dunckel Middle School.

The Chickettes stood out at the audition with matching white sweaters and lots of excited screaming and giggling.

"We were a little nervous. We were trying not to be disappointed if we didn't get picked," Fogel said.

The mazes and opportunities to get dirty, specifically covered with Jell-O, were cited by Kling as among her reasons for wanting to appear on the show.

"I wanted to be on the show for a long time, since I was little," said Fogel. She admitted that she and Kling had cut classes for the audition, with their parents permission.

ANOTHER TEAM to make the first cut was the Force from Rochester. "When the show was on at 4:30 p.m., we watched it all the time, so we wanted to be on," said 11-year-old Rick Corteville. "It's too early now."

His partner, Jonathon Griffin, also 11 years old, said "Super Sloppy Double Dare" is really fun, especially "getting slimy and gooped up."

Kids who auditioned without making the cut received a cast photograph and a show pennant like those used in the program's obstacle courses. Even those youngsters who weren't kept for a second audition seemed to have had a good time.

Detroit's Victoria Brauner, a fifth grader at Friends School, said "We had fun in the audition, but I was sort of disappointed. Well, kind of disappointed."

SEVERAL HUNDRED hopefuls later, Heather Charron and Doug Tomczak of Rochester Hills were standing out in the snow near the end of a line of a couple hundred more auditioners.

"It's worth the wait," said Charron, a student at Van Hooser Middle School. "What I like best is the mess of it."

Two teams will be selected from among the Channel 50 auditioners.



Farmington Hills residents Terri Fogel (right) and Courtney Kling are interviewed by Julie Robertson of the syndicated television show "Super Sloppy Double Dare." The Dunckel middle school students survived the first round of auditions but weren't among four finalists selected to appear on the children's game show.

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