

Members sought for toxic study group

By Bob Sklar
staff writer

To tackle concerns about putting industrial-research-office zones near residential areas, the Farmington Hills City Council will form an ad hoc committee on toxic and hazardous materials.

The five- to seven-member committee, the idea of councilman Philip Arnold, will evaluate city policies on the types of materials permitted in IRO zones and look at existing controls and need for more controls.

People with related technical or environmental backgrounds interested in serving on the committee should, by Aug. 25, write city manager William Costick, 31555 11 Mile, Farmington Hills 48018.

"There are very few people on the city staff, planning commission and council who have the background and personal knowledge on the subject, so it makes it difficult to evaluate existing or proposed situations," Arnold said.

Arnold sees the committee examining toxicity across the city, not just in IRO zones. He cited the transport of gasoline to gas stations and the use of cleaning agents in commercial zones as two issues that could be studied.

He sees the committee recommending steps such as limited usage, usage bans, restricted locations, warehousing prohibitions, code or ordinance revisions and regulatory standards.

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"While this moratorium is in place, we should consider repealing the change that allowed IRO zoning outside the original location in the 'light industrial area,'" Vagnozzi said.

Other council members opposed a moratorium.

"Our ordinance has already put a lot of checks and balances into the hands of the planning commission as to what goes into the IROs," councilman Ben Marks said.

Marks called toxicity "a very acute" problem, "something we should address." But, he said, he didn't "like the overreaction of all of a sudden, smack dab, you've got to have a moratorium."

BUT ARNOLD doesn't think the planning commission has the expertise to respond to public concerns about toxicity.

Councilwoman Jean Fox said she favors a moratorium. "We should stop what we're doing until we decide which way we want to go on this thing and not go every which way in the mean time while we're studying it," she said.

Councilman Paul Sowerby said he wasn't "convinced there's a problem with the IRO at this point" but didn't oppose the committee's formation. He opposed a moratorium.

THE COMMITTEE comes in the wake of a request to rezone 14.5 acres on the east side of Drake, north of Grand River, from office service to IRO.

The acreage is near a condominium complex and two residential subdivisions. Some residents fear a toxic threat to their neighborhood. But the developer contends the city has sufficient controls to regulate the kinds of businesses that might locate there.

The city council has tabled the rezoning request until Sept. 24.

On Monday, the council voted 5-1 to form the committee pending a determination of its scope and timetable.

Councilwoman Jody Soronen opposed forming such a committee. She felt the fire department has a sufficient handle on toxic and hazardous materials in the city.

Councilman Aldo Vagnozzi was absent but, in a letter to Mayor Terry Sever, agreed to Arnold's proposal in concept. He suggested "defined responsibilities" to avoid "another layer of bureaucracy."

Vagnozzi suggested the fire chief be a member since he "is required by state law to compile a list of chemicals that are stored throughout the city."

ONCE FORMED, the committee will issue findings within 90 days to a joint meeting of the city council and planning commission.

Meanwhile, council members and city planners will meet in a special joint session at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 7, in the Farmington Hills City

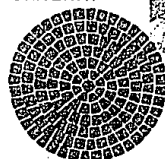
Hall to review IRO zoning and share toxicity concerns.

Committee members will attend the meeting to "get a sense of what's being discussed," city manager William Costick said.

Vagnozzi joined Arnold in calling for a moratorium on requests for IRO zones near residential areas, pending completion of the committee's report.

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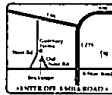


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