

# Hills council votes to cablecast meetings

By Joanne Maliszewski  
staff writer

Some say the Farmington Hills City Council's three-member financial study committee has been the most divisive controversy in the city since the new council took office in November.

But out of it came a promise to continue cablecasting the weekly council meetings.

"We are united and this will be done," Mayor Jean Fox said Monday after council's unanimous decision to continue broadcasting the meetings on cable television with portable equipment.

FOX'S COMMENT followed a compromise that brought an end to the debate over the controversial study committee, which prompted councilwoman Nancy Bates to request the cablecasting of the meetings.

The Feb. 12 meeting, which lasted about six hours, was taped. Because of late notice, the meeting could not be cablecast live.

Monday's meeting was cablecast live. "I know of many people this evening who are watching it tonight because they were not able to attend," said Julian Hovanessian, a member of the city's Committee to Increase Public Participation, which supports televising meetings.

Resident Carole Boyd agreed. "The information of what is going on is getting out into the community."

The council balked in August at the estimated \$68,000 in remote-control video production equipment and estimated \$12,000 in audio equipment needed to set up the council chambers for cablecasting meetings.

A majority of council members in August said they preferred to spend that kind of money on other projects, such as sidewalks or drainage improvements.

The quality of the 11th-hour taping of the Feb. 12 meeting surprised most city council members. The Feb. 12 and Feb. 19 meetings

were televised with three portable cameras and three operators.

"The question I ask is why not televise: all the meetings," councilman Aldo Vagnozzi said, asking for a regular schedule.

BUT COUNCILMAN Terry Sever expressed concern about the cost of televising the meetings. Councilman Lawrence Lichtman said he favors using the portable cameras and doesn't want to "interrupt" the televised meetings "looking for numbers."

"This has caused me to wonder how much we need to spend for a permanent system," Lichtman added.

Councilman Ben Marks questioned where the money to pay for televised meetings will come from. He asked that other needed city projects are not "hurt or diluted" because of the cost of cablecasting.

City manager William Costick said he will provide the council by early March with an analysis of the cost of using the portable equipment versus permanently equipping the council chambers. He also is expected to seek cost proposals to improve the audio and video equipment in the council chambers.

Metropolitan Oakland County Cable Co. will be asked to activate the institutional cable channel from its headquarters, Costick added.

## Despite compromise, controversy took its toll

By Joanne Maliszewski  
staff writer

Despite a compromise dissolving the Farmington Hills City Council three-member study committee, mixed feelings remain.

"I think it's very unfortunate that in the past couple of weeks we had to go through this debate," said council-

man Lawrence Lichtman, a member of the now-defunct study committee.

Relief hung in the air Monday as attempts were made to patch the rift between the majority of the council and committee opponents Mayor Jean Fox and councilman Aldo Vagnozzi.

Still, it was evident some remained annoyed that the controver-

sy reached the peak it did, with residents shouting verbal darts at their elected officials.

"I think the council functioned fairly well for the first couple of months we were together," Lichtman said, adding that at that time issues and comments were not "personalized" and each gave the other "the benefit of the doubt."

Angry residents had accused the ad hoc committee of conducting city business behind closed doors because three members is one less than the required quorum for public meetings.

Committee members, however, had invited the press to attend its two meetings. Finally, committee

chairman Jonathan Grant Feb. 12 opened the meetings to the public.

"I DON'T LIKE feeling defensive," councilwoman Nancy Bates said. "I hope citizens realize there was no legal reason why the committee had to be formed openly."

"Conclusions were not the study committee's charge. The three members were expected to bring back recommendations. We've heard you. I wonder if you've heard us," Bates told residents.

Concerned about a comment she made several weeks ago that she didn't want a quorum of the council

at the committee meetings, Bates said her rationale was that a quorum could enact business. "I wanted them to come back with facts."

Councilman Ben Marks turned to the audience Monday and told them he would rely on them to push for a resolution of the financial issues facing the city, such as an expanded library, need for a senior adult center and a community activities center.

"Let me see you continue with that impact for the positive," Marks said.

## Hills council scraps study panel

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"The method by which this goal (studying financial needs) is to be accomplished has met with much public criticism and the objective has been lost in the controversy," Grant said.

His proposal to restructure the committee met with opposition from residents and from Fox and councilman Aldo Vagnozzi.

A surprised Fox said she "thought a compromise was attained," with the intention of "reconstituting as a committee of the whole."

GRANT DISAGREED. "I think possibly you did misunderstand me," he said, adding later, "I don't believe we can accomplish this during the framework of regular council meetings."

Resident Martin Krohner said the

financial issues to be studied are similar to those studied by the six task forces that developed the Year 2000 report. "What purpose did we study all those thousands of hours, to restudy the issues?" asked Krohner, a Wayne County assistant prosecutor.

"Government by committees is wrong," Krohner continued. "Your function is to carry out the will of the people, not your own private agenda."

After listening to Krohner's call the committee a "preconceived" idea among certain council members, Lichtman said: "I'm disappointed, with your professional background, that you make accusations impugning someone's integrity."

PLANNING commissioner Philip Arnold urged the council to do some

"serious financial planning" particularly because "there's a reluctance out there" to pay the bill for the city's growing and competing needs.

"You must forge ahead as a unit-

ed team, not as a group of individual superstars," Arnold cautioned. He suggested that the city's boards and commissions study some of the financial issues.

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