

Hills throws last-minute pitch for state grant

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

A curve ball

That's what some say Farmington Hills park advocates have thrown by applying at the 11th hour for state money to develop the 26-acre, city-owned Peltz property for sports without public discussion or land use planning.

The decision to apply for the state grant drew battle lines between park advocates and opponents who said a decision has not yet been made on how the Peltz property and the adjacent, landlocked 45 acres owned by the Michigan Department of Transportation, will be used.

City officials are negotiating to buy the MDOT property for more than \$800,000.

"This council has had no vote for the use of this property," said Mayor Jean Fox, who with councilmen Aldo Vagnozzi and Jon Grant opposed sending the application now.

"Sometimes, this council is like the jilted suitor. We're the last to know," Vagnozzi said, referring to the late notice of the application's deadline.

THE CITY council's decision Monday to apply for the state grant also came two weeks after it directed Farmington Community Library director Beverly Papal to examine compatibility of sharing a building with parks and recreation on the Peltz property, south of I-696, west of Farmington Road.

"I don't wish anyone to construe that the areas of the library and areas of recreation are mutually exclusive," Papal said.

The library board hasn't formally discussed use of the Peltz property. "We haven't moved as quickly as our colleagues behind us."

The application, with an April 1 deadline, is to help finance the \$1 million development of soccer fields, volleyball and basketball courts, picnic area, walking trail, entrance

and interior road. If approved, the grant would range from \$250,000-\$750,000.

Planning commissioners criticized park advocates' perceived plan to develop the Peltz acreage for recreation, primarily soccer and baseball, without public discussion or a formal decision as to how the land would be used.

"We're not (asking if) soccer is good, is baseball good. Of course, it is. We're talking about land use," planning commission chairwoman Joanne Smith said.

The application shouldn't be sent until at least nearby Quaker Valley residents are informed that they may have soccer fields near their homes, Smith said. "One thousand people can be there on the weekends. We're talking about attendants from all over."

DENSITY ALSO is an issue for planning commissioners. "That (sports fields) is an intense use. And there's no way to say that's not intense," Smith said, referring to crowds the sports fields could draw to the area.

While parks and recreation commissioners touted the need for more sports land, sympathetic council members said there was always an understanding that the Peltz property would be used for recreation, regardless of a formal vote.

Councilman Ben Marks said he "voted to buy that property for recreation, not a library, (but for) active recreation."

Councilman Terry Sever, who led the \$620,000 Peltz land purchase last year, said that recreation was mentioned throughout minutes of closed meetings when purchase was discussed.

Other council members wanted to apply for the grant, a two-year process, even if plans for the city-owned property change.

"If we approve submission of the application, I want public hearings to start immediately," councilwoman Nancy Bates said.

"Pretty soon, it's going to be too late. I would hate for the city to lose an opportunity if it's available to us."

BUT GRANT, who opposed applying now said, "I don't think that (withdrawing or changing the application later) is the right thing to do."

He also said the property should be studied "in its entirety," especially in light of the council's continuing study of the city's major financial needs.

But sports advocates urged the city council not only to apply for the grant, but to recognize Peltz as the place for sports.

"There's a whole slew of kids out there who don't play organized sports. But they still play baseball, they still play soccer. Give them a place to play," said Paul Jakobs of South Farmington Baseball.

Complaining that the city still doesn't have enough facilities for the kids who want to play soccer and baseball, parks and recreation commissioner Jerry Ellis said, "I believe the time is now to stop giving lip service to the recreational needs of the community."

Addressing council? Forget address

People speaking before the Farmington Hills City Council will no longer have to publicly give their addresses along with their names at the cablecast meetings.

"We feel it will be enough to have

your names," Mayor Jean Fox said. Forms will be available for residents to list their names and addresses to be included in the council's public meeting records.

The new policy, begun at the council's regular meeting Monday, March 26, was suggested by Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer.

"Unfortunately as it may be, in this day and age anyone publicly appearing before council places themselves

in a position of becoming a potential victim for someone's aggression, retaliation..." Dwyer said.

"Anytime an individual divulges personal information about themselves over a public airway, cable TV, they do place themselves in a position of becoming a victim of crime."

"As concerned public administrators, we must endeavor to protect the privacy and safety of the members of our community," Dwyer said.

Hoop restrictions eased

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said. "There are not enough zoning enforcement officers in this city if you do not pass this."

OPPOSITIONISTS said they weren't being un-American or anti-children in their opposition to basketball poles in front or side drives. "I like to play horseshoes. Should I build a horseshoe pit in my front yard?" resident Terry Turner asked.

He also reminded the city council that the ban on poles was never enforced. "I think the city created its own problems. Why it wasn't enforced I don't know. If it had been enforced when it was constituted an

ordinance, we wouldn't be here now," Turner said.

Councilman Vagnozzi lost his bid to change the proposed zoning amendment by eliminating the side-yard option. He also wanted to require pole placement on the inside of residents' driveways so neighbors aren't bothered.

The planning commission recommended the zoning change.

The change notwithstanding, subdivision associations can still ban or limit pole placement and design in their bylaws but must enforce any restrictions through civil prosecution.

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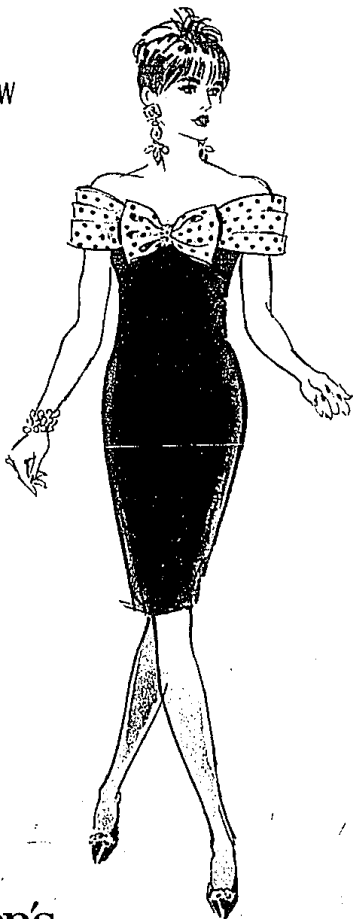
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