

# Officials explain MDOT wetlands proposal

By Joanne Maliszewski  
staff writer

It's not cast in concrete. That's the view held by Farmington Hills administrators about a conceptual plan to use at least 16 acres of the city-owned MDOT land to replace wetlands along 12 Mile for the proposed boulevard.

The 4.5 acres of wetlands along 12 Mile, Drake to Haggerty, are mostly ditches filled with cattails and simi-

lar weed growth that the state Department of Natural Resources says is typical of wetland vegetation.

That means the city cannot proceed with the second, one-mile stretch of the boulevard, Halsted to Haggerty, until it obtains a permit to replace the 12 Mile wetlands elsewhere.

The MDOT land, south of I-696, west of Farmington Road, is a current plan for wetlands replacement.

The Peltz-MDOT ad hoc committee has yet to study the plan — sent

to the DNR to obtain a wetlands permit — and is expected to discuss it at their meeting tonight at 7:30 at the Heritage Park visitors center.

THE CITY has been awarded a \$3.6 million grant — good through the end of 1992 — to help build the next estimated 77 million one-mile boulevard stretch from Halsted to Haggerty roads. The wetlands also extend into the third-mile stretch between Drake and Halsted roads slated for construction later.

City Manager William Costick, assistant City Manager David Call and engineering consultants explained the wetlands replacement plan to some ad hoc committee members at an informational meeting Nov. 14.

Unlike other sites in the city that were considered, the city would not be faced with purchase costs with the MDOT land, according to city officials.

Call also said MDOT seems most reasonable because the plan calls for putting two separate wetlands on either side of an existing drainage course near I-696.

The plan also includes a 16-foot high berm along the northern-most wetland. An unpaved access road about 10-12 feet wide also is shown. "We would try to go out and spade trees and bushes that are indigenous to the area and transplant them," Call said.

Around the two wetlands there may be grading to fill low areas to make a smooth transition to the wetlands. A structure also would be built connecting the two new wetlands — and the drainage course —

to control water flow. Of the estimated 16 acres targeted, 7.5 will be devoted to wetlands, three to berms and the rest will be the graded area, Call said.

THE PLAN also includes enlarging one of the proposed new wetlands as a replacement of wetlands along Howard Road that have been the core of controversy for residents who want noise berms along I-696. The Howard Road wetlands prevents those berms.

After ad hoc committee member Roy Lindhardt raised the issue, Call and Trussel explained how a retention pond at Copper Creek affects 11 Mile and its wetlands. A culvert on 12 Mile was designed to accept a maximum discharge from Copper Creek. But the DNR denied an earlier wetlands permit because a different discharge is required.

For that reason, the city council is expected to grant a variance — actually a letter — to the discharge requirement addressed by the DNR. "It's a paper shuffling thing," Call said.

That request was scheduled on the council's preliminary agenda for Monday. But when Costick became aware of the agenda item at the Nov. 14 meeting, it was removed.

Ad hoc members did not embrace the MDOT plan Thursday. Lindhardt asked if the wetlands would be a park. "That's in the purview of this committee," Costick replied.

City administrators reminded the committee that plans can be changed up to Feb. 1. But time remains crucial. Construction of the second boulevard mile must begin in March or the project will be delayed. Costick and Call told committee members they believe the MDOT plan to be the best because wetlands would ensure that the acreage remain in its natural state. Wetlands would eliminate any future attempts to place ballfields on the flat area of the parkland.

Administrators and consultants admitted they have not taken soil samples of the 12 Mile wetlands or completed other studies to determine how new wetlands on MDOT would affect the total acreage.

## Committee member 'used,' calls whole process a joke

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THE COUNCIL met again in closed session Nov. 11. But some ad hoc members were already aware of the issue and news reports had already made the issue public.

"It was generally agreed this was a matter for public discussion," Vagozzi said, adding it was agreed the issue would be sent to the ad hoc committee for discussion and recommendation.

"Absolutely not," was city attorney John Donohue's response to inquiries whether he felt the council violated the Open Meetings Act. A decision has not yet been made on the wetlands plan, he added.

But that explanation didn't hold much weight for some. Resident Masha Silver, a reporter for the Northwest Gazette, blasted the council for what she and others believe is a breach of the Open Meetings Act — particularly the Nov. 11 closed session.

She also blasted the council for what she charged is a betrayal of public trust by making plans for the MDOT land after the council issued a resolution limiting development prior to the May parks and recreation millage election.

The resolution states, "It is the intent of the city council to limit the development of the Peltz-MDOT properties to the development of access roads, limited parking,

nature trails, and small picnic areas and related issues."

Derek announced that city officials told him the land would be preserved if he wrote a letter to the Observer supporting the parks and recreation millage election.

He also reminded the council of the resolution. But at least two councilmen disputed any reference to a promise that Peltz-MDOT be preserved beyond the eight-year parks and recreation master plan.

"I don't recall anyone on this council making an out and out promise that Peltz-MDOT would be preserved," councilman Jon Grant said.

Councilman Larry Lichtman agreed. "I was afraid this very type of thing would happen. If that's what the council had said, there would have been no purpose in creating an ad hoc committee."

Council members also said they resented references to collusion and secrecy on the city's part. "It's wrong to suggest the council as a group was engaged in some collusive activity," Lichtman added.

Vagozzi, however, acknowledged the resolution, which does not specifically limit any of the council's intentions to the eight-year master parks and recreation plan.

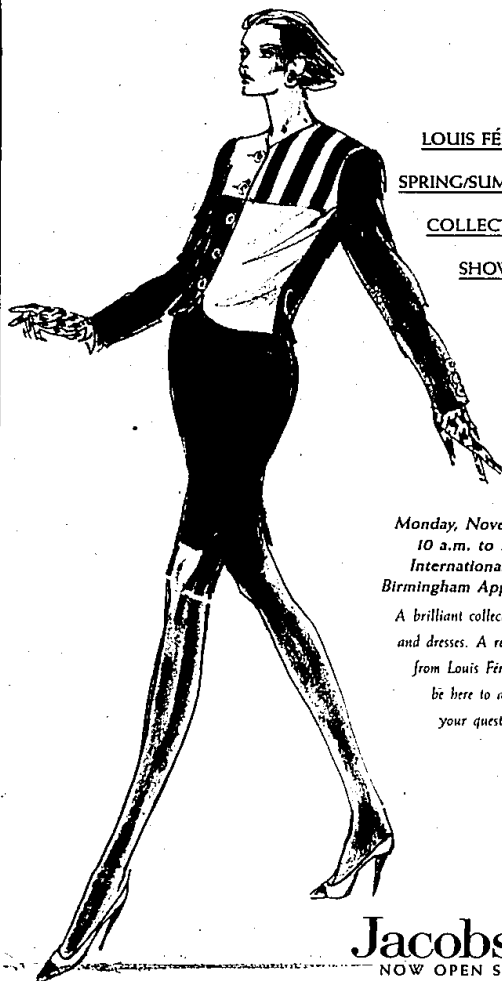
"Building 18 acres to create little ponds (for wetlands replacement) is not preserving it (Peltz-MDOT)," Derek said.

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