

Park opens up a variety of opinions

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STAFF WRITER

When it came to the Woodland Hills Park, Larry Lichtman didn't want to reopen Pandora's Box. But he did . . . a little.

"I think this is to an extent a self-fulfilling prophecy," the Farmington Hills councilman said, referring to a proposed plan to maintain the 78-acre park in a passive state.

Lichtman urged practicality from the Woodland Hills Park ad hoc committee, which developed a conceptual plan presented to the council Monday, as well as the parks and recreation commission, which will review a final plan when it's done by Nov. 30.

"Eventually you will see more done on this property than proposed because residents will demand it," Lichtman said, adding that new, younger families will demand more from the city. "Eventually, there will be a need for some type of public facility."

Lichtman's comments opened what in comparison to past discussions on the property was a mild debate about the park's future. Councilwoman Nancy Bates disagreed. "I think as we become more populated it's important to have pieces of property like that."

City officials, she said, should buy and

maintain open land "to preserve yesterday's world for tomorrow's children."

Councilman Aldo Vagnozzi reminded the council that voters approved a half-million, eight-year special parks and recreation millage on the promise that the park on Farmington Road, south of I-696, would be passive. "I hope we would not try to rewrite what voters wanted one year ago."

Ad hoc committee member Roy Lindhardt agreed that someone somewhere will want to use the wooded, rolling land for some type of development. "I think the potential for the citizens demands to use the property are there. But they can't have it."

Joe Derek, naturalist and committee member, asked the council and the community to open their minds to nature and maintaining the Woodland Hills Park as it is. He also reminded the council that he and other so-called birdwatchers never opposed the major sports park, or what is planned for it.

And council watcher Masha Silver spoke of the need to maintain natural areas. "If it goes, we will never get it back."

Councilman Terry Sever suggested using the \$600,000 budgeted over the eight-year millage plan for something other than Woodland

Hills Park. "I do feel there is a value to preserving the land. I have honestly come to the conclusion or opinion . . . that the \$600,000 should be put down on land somewhere in the city."

Mayor Jonathan Grant spoke of his original concern about preserving the land in light of many unfulfilled needs in the community. But he said he's changed his mind about preservation. "I think that's what the people of this community want right now." If the community changes its mind, Grant said he would represent voters accordingly.

Councilman Ben Marks, however, supported buying the property because "I thought it was for an active park." Plans for the park are "not cast in stone," he continued, "otherwise I wouldn't have voted for it."

Resident Ken Perrin, who has long opposed the park, made a proposition to the city council, whose members didn't respond.

Perrin suggested spending no more money on the acreage. Public uses, such as a library or other facility should be reviewed. If no suitable use is found, the land should be sold for residential development.

"How necessary is it?" Perrin asked about the park.

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to unfold — gee, we really have a gem."

The city council accepted the conceptual plan and directed ad hoc committee chairman Mark Davis to have the plan completed by Nov. 30 and distributed to the parks and recreation commission and the council.

Some council members suggested holding public hearings to hear what voters have to say about park plans. Hearings were not scheduled.

Holloway outlined a broad area of the park that represents what he calls a critical habitat core, which includes the Rouge River corridor, the two central creekbed corridors and their valley walls, the wetlands and the southern portion of the central hardwood forest.

"Together they represent the highest levels of species utilization and interaction and are the

In the woodland and Rouge River areas, for example, Holloway suggested placing kiosks where visitors can get information about the species of wildlife and vegetation in those particular areas.

most susceptible to disturbance and large scale degradation," according to the Holloway's report.

The plan includes an entrance directly across from the Oakland Community College entrance on Orchard Lake Road — where there is now a traffic light — into a parking area for approximately 25-30 cars.

An open gathering area and activity area would be placed not far from the parking. In these areas, organizations can gather for educational talks and displays about the park.

In the woodland and Rouge

River areas, for example, Holloway suggested placing kiosks where visitors can get information about the species of wildlife and vegetation in those particular areas.

A small picnic area is proposed near the new wetlands. Holloway also suggested the need to continually maintain the park's prairie areas — to prevent them from becoming forests — as well as the scrub areas.

"There's a shortage of rabbits on this property," he said, referring to the need to provide features to encourage rabbit nesting.

Holloway also suggested providing areas for senior adults and people with handicaps where they can have an opportunity to participate in the richness of the park.

The consultant told the council it is possible to develop certain areas of the park for use without disturbing what is called a core habitat zone, which includes the wetlands area, the two-creek corridor and part of the large woodland zone, for example.

"Preserving that core in perpetuity will preserve the wildlife richness on that site," Holloway said.

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