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SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS

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IN THE PAPER

TODAY

Spend and worry: The Farmington Public Schools plan to spend a little, save a little . . . and worry a little. /3A

Talking trash: They dumped a lot of hazardous trash in Farmington recently — and officials were happy to have it. /4A

Hold that line: Farmington Hills will likely adopt a "hold-the-line" budget which will seem more like a line in the sand for future additional services. /5A

Local scam victims: Two Farmington religious organizations have taken a hit due to the bankruptcy of the Foundation for New Era Philanthropy. /5A

Student charged: A Farmington Hills high school student will face an armed robbery charge stemming from a holdup in Redford Township. /6A

TASTE

Master chefs: Schoolcraft College culinary arts professors help students master skills. /1B

Prize-winning cake: Oakland County resident Eleanor Froehlich wins first prize in a national cooking contest. /1B

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Golf regional: Mercy High attempted to qualify again for the state finals in regional play Friday. /1C



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Residents fear end to country life



BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

A development that residents believe would ruin one of the area's most bucolic Natural Beauty Roads will have to be changed to win approval from the Farmington Hills Planning Commission.

The proposed plan for the 41-home

Oakwood Hills subdivision, that would be built on 23 acres on the west side of Old Power Road north of 11 Mile, was turned down unanimously by commissioners, but will not likely go away.

"We're not used to seeing this level of caring about a community in other communities where we've worked,"

said Richard Scamstad, a consulting engineer representing developer Joseph Trupiano.

Scamstad made the case for the development, which would push from 30 to 71 the number of houses on the meandering dirt road that has been officially cited as a Natural Beauty Road by the city for its bounty of flora and fauna.

But 28 residents, many from Power Road and many from other parts of the city, protested the plan as "too dense" a development for the historic, pastoral area. Many of them mentioned the controversial Timbercrest

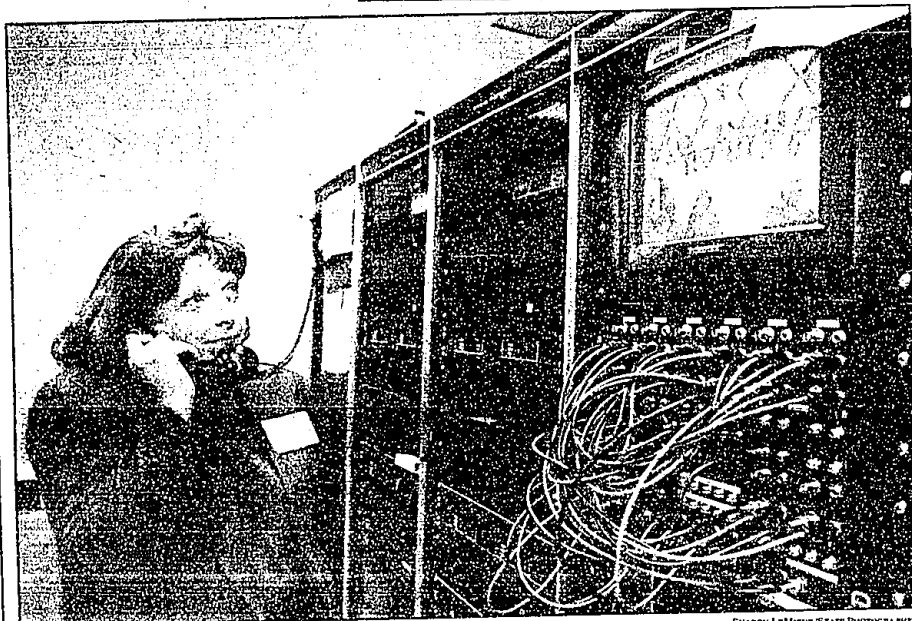
project, to be built on 92 acres at 12 Mile and Middlebelt, and worried that Oakwood Hills would "ruin the area."

"Come back with a plan that works with the existing zoning," said James Thelring, a 14-year resident of Power Road. "A plan with 16 or 20 homes could really blend in."

Commission Chairwoman Jeri VanHouten told the residents she was sympathetic to their concerns, but added that the proposal was within the current RA-1 (no more

See COUNTRY, 4A

Dialing up a debate



SHARON LESTER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

On hold: Farmington schools parent Carol Luckscheiter waited nearly a half-hour to get through during Thursday's electronic town hall meeting on educational reform. Luckscheiter, who has two daughters, asked the panel its opinion on the voucher system. Farmington High served as one of 250 sites for the satellite feed originating from WKAR-TV (Channel 23) studios in East Lansing. For more on the discussion, please turn to 3A.

Attorney general's office: Lichtman job legal

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

Appearances aside, a job change by Farmington Hills Councilman Larry Lichtman to a law firm that represented a developer of a controversial project voted on by the city council is legal.

That was the reaction of Chris DeWitt of the state Attorney General's office in Lansing. "If he had joined the firm (Carson Fischer of Birmingham) prior to negotiations (concerning the Timbercrest development at 12 Mile and Middlebelt), that would be a different story," DeWitt said. "But there is nothing I am aware of in state law that would prohibit him joining after. As far as appearances, that may be a different matter."

Lichtman, serving his third two-year council term, had been a shareholder in Bustal Long, the state's fifth largest law firm before moving to Carson Fischer beginning May 1. On its own, that move wouldn't have

been controversial. "It's not unusual for an attorney to move from one firm to another," said City Attorney John Donohue.

John Donohue
city attorney

But the job change in this case, he said, led to some second guessing about appearances. Lichtman had accepted campaign contributions from the developer, Gary Jonna and his family, and had been a strong supporter of the Timbercrest project.

That was enough reason to bring an unsuccessful recall campaign against Lichtman when he was mayor in 1994. The move to the firm that represented Jonna seems to some a further indication that Lichtman should have abstained from any votes or discussion about the project.

Lichtman sent a memo to fellow council members announcing his new job and the fact that he would not take part any longer in discussions and votes concerning Timbercrest.

To some, it's closing the barn door after the horses have left. "If there was no problem, why did he feel he had to tell us?" said Councilman Aldo Vignozzi, a critic of Lichtman's conduct during the entire Timbercrest discussions and vote.

Donohue, who said the council has not directed him to give an opinion as to the legality of Lichtman's actions, said Lichtman and other council members have previously abstained on issues where they might have a conflict of interest.

Donohue added that the Michigan Bar Association has a code of conduct that covers conflicts of interest. The code says that "except as law may otherwise expressly permit, a lawyer shall not represent a private client in connection with a matter in which the lawyer participated personally and



Larry Lichtman

substantially as a public officer or
See LICHTMAN, 2A

Out-of-court settlement reached in civil rights suit

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

An out-of-court settlement has been reached between the Farmington police and the family of a Farmington Hills woman, who said her civil rights were violated.

The suit stemmed from two traffic stops by Farmington police in 1993 involving then Southfield resident Joy Durrah.

Federal District Court Judge Patrick Duggan ruled the police officer's actions were "reasonable" on the first stop April 24, 1993. A second traffic stop six weeks later was still under review.

The strongly worded civil suit charged the stops were part of an ongoing practice by Farmington police, alleging they regularly pull over black motor-

ists and wreak "widespread terror upon the black community." The city denied any wrongdoing.

Durrah, who is black, will receive an undisclosed financial settlement. The city is not guilty in either incident, attorney Christopher Johnson said.

"The city feels very strongly about that," Johnson said. "It just becomes purely economic as to how long they want to or whether they want to continue."

"It's expensive to go to trial," Durrah's attorney, Anthony Patil, declined to discuss the case. Durrah could not be reached for comment.

On the first stop, Durrah was pulled over on Farmington Road across from Baskin Robbins after police were told by witnesses she pulled a gun on them during a dispute in the Burger King park-

ing lot. She was told to exit her gold Mercedes Benz by officers with their guns drawn, which police said is proper procedure during a felony stop. No gun was found.

A landlord-tenant dispute led to the confrontation between Durrah and the men in the Burger King parking lot. The men were helping a friend move from a Hills residence when they noticed a gold Mercedes Benz following them.

The men blocked the Mercedes Benz in a parking spot when the woman began beeping her horn. Police were called.

In the second incident, Durrah was stopped for a defective brake light. When approached by an officer, she reportedly became hysterical and was released without being given a ticket.