

# Hills opens door to housing plan for handicapped

**BY BILL COUTANT**  
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Hills plans to join with some other Oakland County communities to provide affordable housing for the handicapped. The Hills City Council gave tentative approval to a strategic plan developed by the state along with the Corporation for Supportive Housing, a national not-for-profit financial and technical group to help individuals with special needs find affordable housing in the community.

Farmington Hills, Southfield, Pontiac, Royal Oak and Waterford have all shown interest in the program that would find independent housing of 300 units throughout the state. Oakland County is applying for 100 units.

"I don't think people realize what a desperate need there is," Joan Rolick told council members at Monday's regular meeting.

Rolick, a 28-year resident of Farmington Hills and advocate for the developmentally disabled and mentally ill, said disabled people often can't afford to live in their home communities, near their families, doctors, churches and friends, because they can't afford to live there.

"A lot of times, these people are destined to be low-income wage earners because their problem is cyclical," she said. "They are not the kind of people who can rise to the top in business."

The program, co-sponsored by the Michigan Department of Community Health and the

Michigan State Housing Development Authority, and the Corporation for Supportive Housing will select three counties for the three-year demonstration program.

The first phase would allow \$50,000 in Michigan planning grants to be used for a strategic plan. The second phase would provide \$200,000-\$250,000 in CSI loans to non-profit organizations to develop the supportive housing.

Rick Lampi, the city's community development coordinator, said if the city signed on for phase one, it was under no legal obligation to provide any money for the second phase.

But City Attorney John Donohue asked that the council give him until Monday to review the documents so that he could bring back a formal resolution to the council.

"I want to make sure you're not

buying something that you don't know," he said.

The council approved tentative support, pending Donohue's report. Councilwoman Masako Kurzeja, the lone dissenting vote, said she believes in the program's goals, but wants more information before obligating the city.

"I'd like to know what I'm in for," she said.

Mayor Aldo Vagnuzzi said County Executive L. Brooks Patterson supported the idea and suggested the council adopt the concept, "pending review." He said the city's Community Block Development Grant money could

be used to keep up funding for the project because it conforms to the grant's goal of providing housing for the lower and middle class individuals, other money would be used first under the proposal.

Rolick said handicapped people, particularly the mentally ill, must often live in poor housing because they can not keep the type of job that pays well. That can add to their problems.

Councilman Terry Sevor said parents of disabled individuals have told him they are concerned that as they become older or die, they will not be able to provide safe housing for their children.

"The intent of the program is to provide affordable housing and a support network," Lampi said, adding that the council's support is not necessary, but will provide backing for the program.

The council plans to take formal action Monday.

Rolick said independent living, which is the goal of the plan, has been the best arrangement for the mentally ill. Group homes do not work as well, she said.

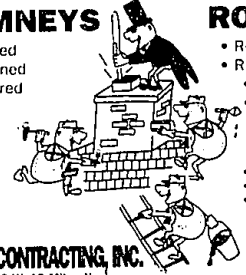
"Four and six-packs (group homes) are out," she said. "If you are concerned about mental health, you have to be concerned about where people live."

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