

City cracks coffers for ice

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

A city of Farmington grant proposal for Shiawassee Park didn't skate with the Department of Natural Resources.

However that won't stop the Farmington City Council from spending \$20,000 to resurface a parking lot that doubles as an ice rink in the winter.

Council members approved reallocating the \$20,000 it had set aside as matching funds for the DNR park grant. The Michigan DNR turned down the city's grant application for Shiawassee Park improvements, including

the resurfacing of one of two parking lots.

Every winter, the west lot is flooded for use as an ice rink. "Because it's deeper, it never freezes correctly," said City Manager Frank Lauhoff.

A level parking surface, though, would create a larger ice rink and would need less water. More skaters used the rink this winter after a string of cold spells allowed for a consistent ice surface, Lauhoff said. The Department of Public Services also added a picnic bench.

The parking lot has been used for ice skating for more than 10 years. An outdoor rink was moved from across Shiawassee after safety concerns with the sled hill.

In warmer months, the lot handles parking for baseball and softball games.

Cost to resurfacing the lot is \$35,000. The city will use \$15,000 from the general fund as well as the reallocated \$20,000 to pay for the project.

Work is expected to be completed by June 30.

The lot is in disrepair and hasn't received an upgrade in 25 years, city officials said.

Parking lot resurfacing was

part of the initial DNR grant application, which was rejected. The city plans to apply again.

A hearing on the grant application will take place 8 p.m. Monday, March 3, at city hall.

The application — with improvements totaling \$60,870 — calls for installing children's playground equipment, new bleachers, and park benches as well as new volleyball pits, and refurbishing the other parking lot.

The city would match half the money involved, including \$20,000 from the general fund and \$10,583 from in-kind contributions from materials and labor from the DPS to build the volleyball pits.

Farmington applied for the grant through the Michigan DNR's recreational bond program and the land and water conservation fund. The city applied before, with no luck.

The DNR gets several million dollars worth of requests a year, said Bill Richards, assistant city manager. DNR officials tend to favor proposals that include buying land for park use, work at waterways and bike paths, he said.

"We do it (apply) because we feel we have an obligation to the residents to ask for the funds," Richards said. "It's a 'nothing ventured, nothing gained' type of thing."

Downtown and dirty



STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LAMBERT

Light work: The first steps to installing new traffic signals at Farmington and Grand River began this week. The new stop lights will be equipped with SCATS, a system that uses cameras and computers to adjust the red and green signals to meet traffic needs. Above, Lou Lapari, a worker for Rauhorn Electric Inc., secures conduit to the truck after it has been unrolled and installed underground. At left, Rob Hentkouski, an electrician for Rauhorn Electric, reaches into the hole under Grand River for an auger that broke off. The project is supervised by the Road Commission for Oakland County. New lights are expected to be operating by mid-May.



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would be the first in the central business district on someone else's property, which establishes a precedent, Lauhoff said.

Council members Mary Bush and Jim Mitchell said they drove by the area.

"I couldn't support this," Mitchell said. "I do feel there are other ways to do this."

"I'm not sure what you're proposing would accomplish

what you want to do."

Another factor will be the expected closing of the Farmington post office next door. Customer operations will be moved to the Downtown Center mall next month while distribution is headed to a facility on Indoplex Drive, Lauhoff said.

That might free up additional parking and a different place for a sign, McShane said.

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