

Council takes up skateboard issue

Farmington City Council members want to make sure there's not a horde of skateboarders rumbling on sidewalks and jumping curbs in parking lots.

They asked city administrators and public safety department to keep an eye on the situation.

In 1989, city council nixed an idea of creating an ordinance regulating skateboard activities. For the most, skateboarders have not been a problem, a city official said.

City Manager Frank Lauhoff said the council could enact an ordinance regulating skateboard in the central business district.

"It's one of those things, though, you don't want to pass ordinances you don't need," Lauhoff said.

Aside from causing pedestrians to fret, skateboarders like to wax curbs to get smoother jumps. The waxy buildup makes the pavement look worn or dirty, Lauhoff said.

Skateboarders damaged a bench near the fountain in the Downtown Center. Those involved had to pay for the bench, said Gary Goss, Farmington Public Safety director.

"Since we took that action, they don't seem to be congregating there as much," Goss said.

City makes plazas center of attention

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Farmington city officials want strip malls and plazas — especially older ones — to spruce up their appearance. They're holding up the Grand-Halsted Plaza up as a sparkling example.

Standard Construction, which owns the center that is home to Kmart on Grand River and Halsted, planted new shrubs and flower beds along the avenue and entrance way. Standard has done similar extensive landscaping at Jamestown and Drakeshire apartments, which it also owns.

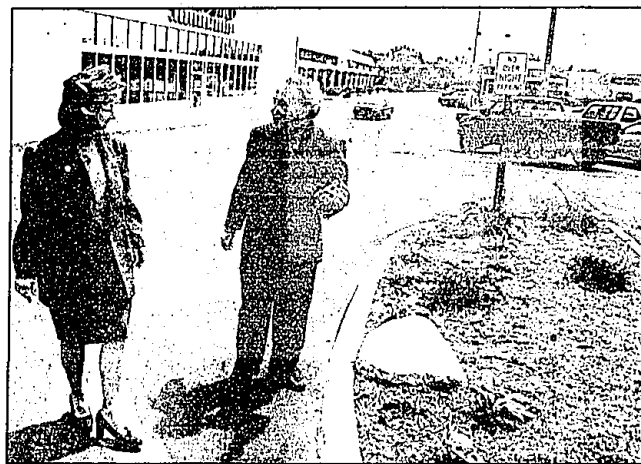
Colorado spruces have been added along Grand River with flower beds containing various annuals and perennials. Boulder beds were added and the sprinkling system has been upgraded, said Stan Cohen, president of Standard Construction.

"It was time," Cohen said. "We work closely with the city. I know they'd like to see other owners clean up their properties and we wanted to take a leadership role."

In addition, the landscaping work makes the Grand-Halsted Plaza more inviting to passing motorists, Cohen said.

"We thought Stan Cohen did an outstanding job," Mayor JoAnne McShane said. "He did above and beyond what we expected in terms of the landscaping. We just think it looks wonderful."

Instead of being green with envy, though, officials want



STAFF PHOTO BY LARRY MCKEE

Green grass: Farmington Mayor JoAnne McShane and Standard Construction's Stan Cohen examine some landscaping improvements done at the Halsted-Grand Plaza.

other owners of similar properties to think of those and other colors as ways to enhance their city appearance.

City council members plan to meet with individual retail center owners throughout the year. Farmington has more than dozen such outlets, some of which are showing their age, city

officials said.

The plan is part of the council's overall goals for the year and is similar to the encouragement the city has given to apartment owners in the past.

Council members will pitch ideas for improvements to the building exteriors and parking

lot as well as ordinance compliance. The purpose is to get voluntary compliance.

"We're an older community, but you have to stay current in order to be attractive in the retail market," City Manager Frank Lauhoff said. "It's going to improve their property... it's really for their own good."

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restrictive (than the ordinance)," said Ellis of his amendment. "I believe we have given telecommunications providers sufficient property in the city to establish their grids."

Highlights of the amendment and ordinance include:

■ Towers and antennae can only be located on property zoned commercial or municipally-owned.

■ Towers' maximum height cannot exceed 100 feet, or 120 feet if two or more providers have co-located antennae on the tower.

■ Towers must have a minimum set-back of 500 feet from residential lot lines; antennae have to be 300 feet.

■ Every provider wanting to put up a tower or antennae must obtain a "certificate of need" from the city after a public hearing before the planning commission and a public hearing and approval by council.

Exceptions to these can only be permitted by council, and only after providers have received the written approval of all property owners within 500 feet of the proposed tower.

Claude Coates, city planning consultant, doesn't think many exceptions will be granted.

"The intent of the ordinance is not to have any other situations," he said.

As of this spring, five companies had 16 cellular towers located in the city: Ameritech, AirTouch Cellular, AT&T, Nextel and Sprint. Applications for approximately 10 more are pending.

The new restrictions were made to the residents' groups in attendance.

"Our members have remained steadfast in their opposition to having cellular towers in residential areas," said Gail Haynes, president of the Council of Homeowners Association. "We think the amendment would be a great one, and we support it."

Debra Rowe, a member of a council-appointed cellular tower study committee, agreed.

"The planning commission's ordinance was so out of line that I am really glad to see Mr. Ellis' amendment," she said.

Telecommunications industry representatives present Monday night weren't as thrilled. Richard Sundquist, who spoke for Ameritech Cellular, called the new ordinance "the toughest in the state, all down the line."

"The 500-foot setback is too restrictive," he said. "The co-location specs we agree with. There are other things we don't agree with."

AT&T representative John Riley said the new restrictions would put his company — a cellular newcomer to the area — at a disadvantage.

"I kind of came here with my guns loaded, to tell you what I didn't like about the ordinance," he said to council. "Now, reading the amendment that's been proposed, I'm agast. I think clearly this discriminates against the new players."

"I can't stress enough that to further restrict your zoning ordinance will prevent carriers from providing service."

Representatives from Nextel and Sprint also spoke against the regulations.

Due to the late introduction of the amendment, some of its sections conflicted with parts of the ordinance. Hills Mayor Aldo Vagnotzi said that when City Attorney John Donohue combines the two, if a regulation is in dispute, the more restrictive of the two will be used.

The improved ordinance will go back before city council July 14 for final approval.

"Since I've been active in the city, I've never seen such an outpouring of comments as in opposition to the placing of towers in neighborhoods," said Vagnotzi. "A large section of the community is concerned about this issue."

There are currently two cellular towers in residential areas in Farmington Hills, at 10 Mile and Middlebelt and 11 Mile and Middlebelt.

Farmington area high school students shine in essay contest

Four Farmington high school seniors are winners in the Duane Kell Essay Scholarship contest, which honors those who promote better understanding between cultures.

Phillip Rubin of North Farmington teamed with Elton Jamoun of Bishop Foley to win the second-place prize of \$750. Marni Katz and Michael Meir, both of Harrison High, joined Victor Jakim of Stevenson High to win a third-place prize of \$500 while Dana Abu of North Farmington, Ann Walker of Troy Athens and Audrey Baker of

Birmingham Groves worked together to win the fourth-place prize of \$400.

The contest is sponsored by the American Arabic and Jewish Friends of Metropolitan Detroit — a sub-group of the Interfaith Roundtable — and brings students of Jewish and Arabic descent together in teams. Teams are challenged to create programs to bring the youths of these different cultures closer.

Entries were judged on their creativity, execution and communication effectiveness.