

On a limb

Trees won't stand in way

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
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A builder and city officials are not about to let a few trees stand in the way of a 21-unit development on Orchard Lake Road.

At Monday's meeting, Farmington Hills City Council and developers for Forest at Orchard Lake agreed to split the amount — \$9,500 each — to go into the city's tree bank fund.

Council also unanimously approved the use of the city's single-family housing cluster option.

As part of the city's tree ordinance, developers are required to replace every mature tree taken down. What cannot be replanted on the site goes into a tree fund.

The site requires 424 replacement trees. Plans for the site include 126, leaving a deficit of 298 trees, city officials said.

The city agreed to waive a requirement to 100 percent of the trees removed, partly because they all wouldn't fit on the site. Instead the city settled for 25 percent.

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—Resident

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The developer said there was still a \$19,000 discrepancy over 126 trees. Any additional costs would likely be tacked onto each unit, which are projected to sell

for \$300,000 each.

"Every item counts," said Stuart Michaelson of Forest at Orchard Lake.

Councilman Jerry Ellis suggested the city and the developer split the difference to move the project along.

That irked some residents, who felt city officials were too quick to compromise.

"I think you've been very generous in waiving 75 percent. I hope you would not let go of the other 25 percent," said Brenda Hawkins, who lives on Edgemoor Drive.

Added George Sarkisian, "Sooner or later, the balance of nature is going to fall on Farmington Hills. Remember that the next time you strike a deal with a developer."

In terms of nature, the alternative would have been worse, city council members said.

The city bought the 9.2-acre site — known as the McMahon property — after a protracted court battle with the previous owner who wanted to build an office complex.

City officials feared an office complex would lead to similar developments and erode the residential setting along Orchard Lake, between 11 Mile and I-690.

The city put the property up for sale, choosing the least amount of density over money.

Two other developers offered between \$1.15 and \$1.2 million but wanted to build a 100-unit apartment complex or a 96-unit condominium project.

The city sold the land for \$735,251 to the Forest at Orchard Lake group, which proposed building 21 units on nine acres. That is 2.3 units an acre and below the 3.1 units per acre allowed in the RA-2 district.

Ellis and his colleagues didn't want a small issue to hold up the project.

"If there is a misunderstanding and (City Attorney) John Donohue can't find it... I take them at their word," Ellis said.

Majority of council is skeptical about sending AV ballots to younger set

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
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If MTV can "rock the vote," a Farmington Hills committee believes it can at least give a nudge to those 18-25 years old to hit the polls.

The Committee to Increase Voter Participation proposes the city mail absentee voter applications to the post Generation X set, which is traditionally lax on election day.

People that age are either away at college or apathetic, said committee member Ryan Geund, who proposes the resolution. Geund asked the city to try mailing AV applications for two years.

"By sending out absentee ballot applications, you are also showing the most disenfranchised part of the electorate that the government wants them to vote," Geund said.

At a meeting Monday, Farmington Hills City Council members applauded the committee for the effort, but most are skeptical. They cite cost and potential litigation for discrimination.

City Clerk Kathy Dornan estimated mailing applications to 5,000 residents would run \$3,180, which includes staff time, application forms and postage.

The Farmington Hills City Clerk Office already sends AV ballots to people 60 and older, who are allowed by state law to automatically vote absentee. No such provision exists for younger age groups, though.

To provide AV applications to one group not covered under state law might incite the litigious ire of others, council members said.

"I can't give you a clean bill of health on this particular proposal," City Attorney John Donohue said.

With a couple of children in the 18-25 age range, Councilwoman Cheryl Oliverio doesn't think mailing AV applications will increase voter turnout.

'I can't give you a clean bill of health on this particular proposal.'

John Donohue
—City attorney

"People vote because they feel it's important to vote," Oliverio said. "I don't care if you put voting booths in shopping malls... How much more convenient can you get than going to your school or church to vote?"

Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi said the plan is worth a try, saying the committee's charge is to increase voter turnout.

However, voter committee members appear somewhat divided on the idea. People who are out of town, regardless of age, can still get absentee ballots, another committee member said.

"It's not like we're depriving a student of an absentee ballot. It's a matter of how convenient it is for them," Chris McRae said.

More awareness is needed, said Councilman Jon Grant, who suggested the clerk's office send a letter to members of that age group explaining the absentee ballot process.

Grant's colleague wondered if even that would duplicate efforts. City Clerk's office already does mock elections in high schools to increase voter participation.

Similar mock events will take place at the Farmington public high schools for the next election, which is Nov. 2.

Those in the 18-25 age group need to understand the importance of voting, said one resident who is native of Poland.

"This is a privilege," said Sonia Raczowski, mother of Farmington area state Rep. Andrew.

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David Lepper

As assistant to the president for college relations; and Gary Oster as director of technology planning.

David Lepper joins Tyndale from the Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Institute where he completed a \$100 million capital campaign.

At Tyndale his first priority will be to complete the \$20.8 million phase one of the New Millennium Capital Campaign which will include construction of the MindLab computerized learning resource center and the Center for the Natural and Environmental Sciences.

He holds a bachelor of arts degree in journalism and public relations from Central Michigan University.

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