

Residents, developer clash over request for parking lot

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While the Farmington Zoning Board of Appeals conducted a hearing Tuesday, a Parkhill Street resident was trying to come up with the title of a 1970s pop ditty.

She knew the lyrics. The Joni Mitchell song refers to taking paradise and turning it into a parking lot. The tune sums up the Parkhill issue perfectly, the resident said.

"We enjoy the sights and sounds of Parkhill," said Nancy Hughes, who attended Tuesday's special meeting. "The owls, rabbits, red fox and deer... contrast that with car doors slamming, horns honking, tires squealing and car radios blaring."

"Do you know what this will do to our bit of country in the city — our bit of paradise?"

The owner of the closed Old Orchard Theater wants the city to rezone the 3.5-acre parcel in the subdivision from residential to parking. The city council and

Do you know what this will do to our bit of country in the city — our bit of paradise?'

Nancy Hughes
—Parkhill resident

planning commission have said no.

Arie Leibovitz pleaded with the ZBA to reconsider the denial at Tuesday's special meeting. Without the rezoning, he contends the 8.5-acre site cannot be properly developed.

If unsuccessful, he can go to court. According to a state Supreme Court ruling, a developer has to exhaust all options with the city before legally challenging its decision.

The previous Old Orchard Theater owner bought parts of four residential lots 18 years ago. He failed in his attempts to have the parcels rezoned to parking and sold the theater and surrounding land to AMC.

In February, Leibovitz bought the land that also includes 5 acres of office on Orchard Lake Road. He tried reopening the theater but an independent cinema operator closed it down July, saying it lost too much money.

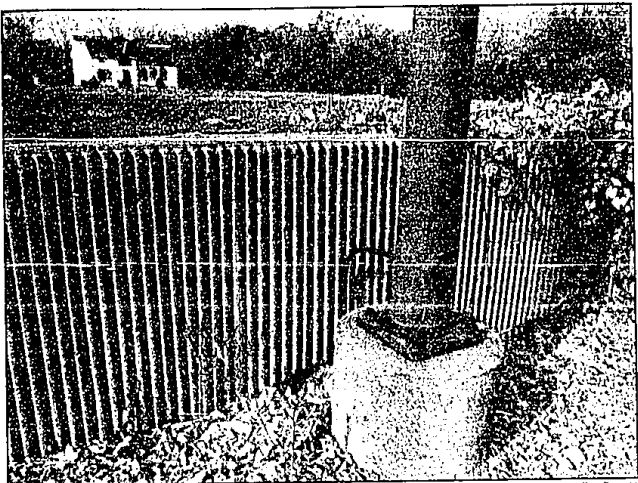
"In essence, I studied it backwards, forwards and everything in between so I could look you in the face and tell you that I've done everything, but I cannot develop the area without losing a fortune," Leibovitz said to the ZBA board members. "Or, more importantly, without failing."

Leibovitz's attorney calls the 3.5 parcels in adjoining Parkhill "dead land." Residents and board members question why the commercial developer bought the land knowing the zoning and history.

The 8.5 acres on Orchard Lake near 12 Mile and I-696 was too good to pass up, said Leibovitz, a Southfield developer who specializes in revitalizing commercial property.

He has other projects in Farmington Hills.

Please see REZONING, A10



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRADLEY

Lot to worry about: Residents fear that parking behind the Old Orchard Theater will encroach on their residential neighborhood.

City offers fall cleanup tips

Farmington Hills Public Services Department reminds residents of a few tips when tackling fall cleanup:

- Plastic bags — whether clear or colored — are not acceptable for yard waste.
- Options for preparing yard waste for collection include paper yard waste bags or rigid cans marked with a yard waste

- sticker, which are available for free from city hall or DPW;
- Bagging leaves should be a last resort. Mulching and back yard composting are better.
- Plastic pumpkin bags filled with leaves are not acceptable for yard waste disposal and will not be taken.

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