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IN THE PAPER TODAY

SPORTS

Gymnastics: Farmington's unified team had its best performance in its invitational meet Saturday, finishing in second place. /C1

Wrestling: Defending champion Redford Catholic Central is favored to win the Ninth Annual Observerland Tournament Saturday. /C1

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Compromise makes for Walgreen's



Cooperative neighbors, a willing developer and a special zoning tool have helped create what city officials and residents believe will be a good project at Eight Mile and Grand River.

BY JONI HUBBED
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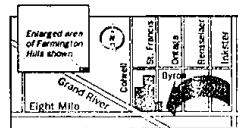
Not every road to development runs straight. However, plans to locate a Wal-

green's drug store at Eight Mile and Grand River in Farmington Hills seem to be on track. The key, officials say, involves a developer willing to go the extra mile, cooperative neighbors and a special zoning tool that accommodates

odd parcel sizes and a proposal to combine residential and commercial parking.

"One of the most important elements (of the project) is the residents and developer working together," City Councilman Jon Grant said at a public hearing Monday. "I feel with that in place, we will end up with an exceptional project."

First, though, developer Steven J.



Site of proposed Walgreen's Parcel Under Development (PUD)

Please see WALGREEN, A2

New look could be in store for corner

BY TIM SMITH
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The northwest corner of Grand River and Farmington Road, home to the Masonic Temple, could be getting a new look.

At a recent meeting of the Farmington Downtown Development Authority, members listened to a proposal from Bill Willson of Jackson Lawn Maintenance and then discussed the plan. Willson's company, if the proposal is accepted, would revamp the corner with new landscaping.

Most of the DDA members agreed that Willson's \$16,650 planting proposal for the Masonic Temple corner would be a positive development for the region. But they decided to study the proposal some more before approving the project. The additional study may include talking with city architect John Griesim.

"If we're looking at a major overhaul of that corner," asked DDA member Bob Heinrich, "are there other things we should be considering?"

Heinrich was cautious because past projects at the Masonic Temple corner usually were met with public criticism, he said.

Farmington City Manager Frank Lauffhoff, however, reassured the DDA about Willson's company and its record. Jackson Lawn Maintenance, for example, did the landscaping - all of it donated - for the "Kid's World" PlaySpace, which opened last summer at Shawwassee Park.

"These folks have done excellent work," Lauffhoff told the DDA.

Willson's preliminary plan includes \$10,300 worth of landscaping materials, including assorted perennials, service berry plants and Siberian pea, among others.

Still to be determined is whether the current multi-level, walled landscaping area would need to be reconstructed.

Paving over Parking PERCEPTIONS

STORY BY
TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

There are pros and cons pertaining to downtowns and malls

Like a hand in a glove, maps of a new comparison study reveal that Farmington's downtown shopping district fits neatly within the footprint of Twelve Oaks Shopping Center in Novi.

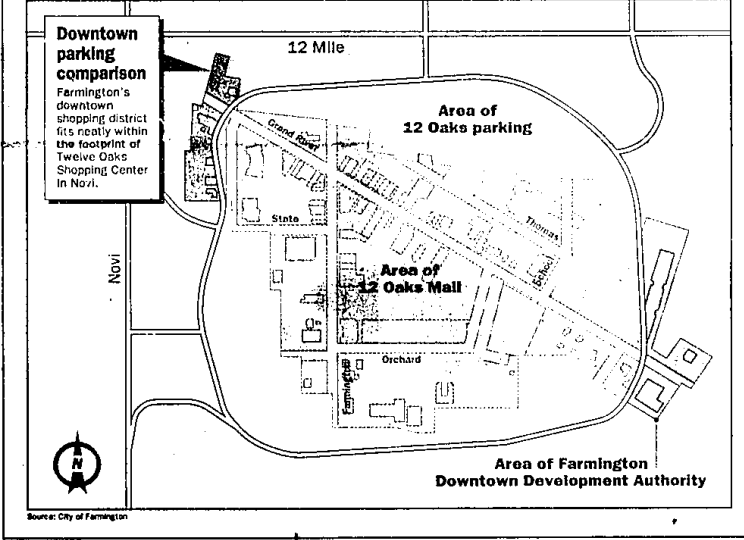
Shoppers who go to the sprawling mall often walk a longer distance to get from their car to stores than do those who go from Point A to Point B within the core of the Farmington Central Business District, according to the study - which features a map of the mall overlaid over one of downtown.

Except for the east and west ends of the CBG, the entire downtown area fits inside

the map of Twelve Oaks, which includes the mall and surrounding parking area.

The study, spearheaded by the city council, intends to educate the public that - even if they can't park right by the stores they want to shop at in Farmington - it's really not any more of a walk to get where they want to go than at Twelve Oaks, said Farmington Mayor Bill Hartsock. And, despite perceptions to the contrary, there is enough public and private parking available, about 2,000 spaces, within a reasonable walking distance.

Please see PARKING, A7



Mercy to take over St. Mary

BY MATT JACHIMAN
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Livonia's Felician Sisters, who have run St. Mary Hospital for 40 years, are turning its operations over to a larger Catholic health-care network backed by another religious order.

In an agreement expected to be completed this spring, Mercy Health Services and the Detroit Regional Community of the Sisters of Mercy will take over the hospital, making it the 10th MHS health-care system in Michigan.

The Felicians, however, will continue to serve in the hospital and will be represented on a new hospital board, said Julie Sproul, the hospital's director of community relations. They will also continue to own the hospital building and property.

The order's desire to expand its mission of health care and offer new programs and services is behind the union, Sproul said. The Felicians have been in discussions with MHS for over a year.

"This is a tremendous opportunity to build on St. Mary Hospital's strengths - our loyal physicians, employees and volun-

Community resource needs community help

BY JONI HUBBED
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If all the world's a stage, then it would make perfect sense to house a community theater group in an aging, but serviceable, dairy barn.

However, the world's a complex interlacing of special needs, consistent growth and the constant need to make the best even better. And so begins the tale of the Farmington Players Barn Capital Building Campaign. "We started this in the fall of 1997,"

said project manager Phil Hadley. "The Players have been doing long-range planning for 10 years, and one of the things on our list was what were our options with the building."

Housed in the big, white barn on Twelve Mile Road north of I-696 since 1955, the Farmington Players staged their first production there in 1959 - downstairs, in theater-in-the-round style. After evicting the pigeons from the second level, the company moved upstairs in 1961.

The building and property were purchased in 1965. Not a lot has changed since then. The building has retained all of its charms and its limitations, Hadley said.

Accessibility issues, a heating and cooling system that never quite seemed to reach all areas of the rooms and a growing need for space led to the deci-

sion to explore a new building. A member of the Presidents' Committee suggested asking students at Lawrence Technological University, an architectural school, to come up with some ideas.

"They had a project that had just fallen through, so we had a chance to slide in," Hadley said. "We've had a lot of lucky breaks on this project."

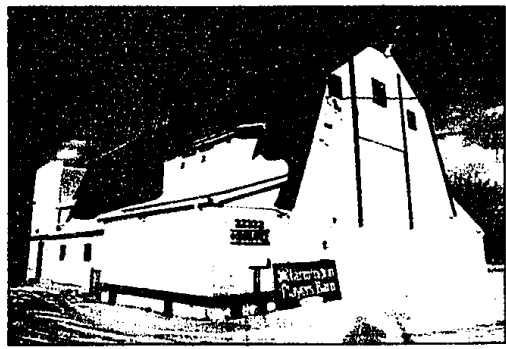
While students recognized the building's potential, most agreed the Players could do more if they knocked the barn down and started over. The vision soon began to include more than just a new home for a theater troupe.

"One of the professors approached it from a civic aspect," Hadley said. "How does it fit into the community?"

As planners began looking at a vacant lot next door, Hadley called the owner to explain why so many people were tromping around taking measurements. He learned the owner was selling it to Sunrise Assisted Living, a facility designed for older adults.

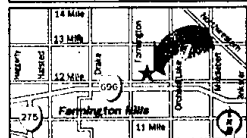
The parcel had been vacant for 20 years because of zoning restrictions and the difficulty of locating a building on it. After a number of conversations among the Players, Sunrise and city representatives, a decision was made to put together a packaged development that would have both projects on parallel tracks.

Please see PLAYERS, A10



Get ready: The Farmington Players Barn theater is due for demolition.

The Farmington Players' new barn project



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