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# Safety first concern for sled hill

See our editorial, page A8

BY TIM SMITH  
STAFF WRITER  
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Officials from the cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills and Farmington Public Schools met Friday to work on solutions to ongoing problems on the Shinwassee sled hill.

Apparently, progress was made. "We want to make sure it's safe," said David Boyer, director of the Farmington Hills Department of Special Services. "And work will be done to remove some of the (broken) hay bales and fencing."

Boyer said another possibility is elimination of one of the sledding trails, probably the center trail.

The hours of operation won't change and neither will the times when the hill is supervised, which currently is on weekends and scheduled school vacation days. But, emphasized Boyer, all three parties in the sled hill consortium will step up efforts.

For example, staffers from the school district will increase routine patrols of the sled hill, located adjacent to the Lewis Schulman Administrative Center on the northeast corner of Shinwassee-Farmington roads. And, Boyer said, police officers from the two cities will have more of a presence to "make sure everything is OK."

It is hoped that the improvements will be put in place by February, Boyer added.

This winter's heavy snowfall has generated a huge amount of activity on the sled hill. But some users have not followed posted rules or vandalized hay bales and soft-plastic fencing. The hay bales and fencing are intended to protect sleds from injury.

"I've never witnessed this level of chaos on the hill," Kevin Guahman, director of the Farmington Department of Public Services, said last week. "It appears as though there's been a lot more vandalism than we've seen in the past."

Boyer concurred that the use of the sled hill is "a serious issue, a lot of people are using it and our goal is to keep it safe" for those people.

# Baker Street

from page A1

approves the rezoning from residential to central business district (CBD), Raymond soon will move her nine-year business into the historic district. Her lease is ending at Village Commons Mall in Farmington.

The site plan calls for Raymond to make sure the business blends in with surroundings, with measures such as ample landscaping, unobtrusive signs and lights. Baker Street Draperies would require nine parking spaces, with six on the property and three at nearby Masonic Temple.

"I'm very pleased," Raymond, a Farmington resident, said after the meeting. "I think the public didn't really understand it was either here, out of Farmington, or nowhere for Baker Street. And, I'm glad it's here."

During the public hearing, 20 people spoke, most of them opposed to the plan. Some questioned whether Raymond has demonstrated enough of a business hardship to warrant moving onto Oakland rather than another retail spot in the city.

The Felset and others residing in the historic portion of the city also voiced concerns that a business there would cramp already narrow Oakland, overload existing parking, impact drainage, lower property values and create a precedent that might further whittle away at the character of the neighborhood.

Morency later said those concerns "will be addressed. The parking will be addressed. The drainage will be addressed."

But the city's master plan for future land use, adopted in 1998, lists that property as one of three current Oakland locations that could have dual zoning — the Felset home and Why USA Real Estate. Morency began the hearing by emphasizing that point.

Another concern was "evolution" of the property, which is located between the Felset residence and Salem United Church of Christ. The rezoning would remain in place whenever Raymond might sell.

"I'm totally convinced Mrs. Raymond will improve the property," said Jim Atkinson. "What I'm concerned about is the evolution of that property. I want some assurances."

**In defense**

Current owner Ken Johnson defended Raymond's bid. "Raymond" didn't come to me, she went to the city and the city told her to go to the guy on Oakland Street because it's zoned for dual use, Johnson said. "Someone has to come to her defense. She's a good citizen, she's had a good business in the city."

"This house is suitable for professionals. It's not suitable for a fast food restaurant, that's for sure."

Johnson also challenged any notion that the stretch of Oakland currently is totally residential, noting the existence of a church with a 50-space parking lot.

Farmington Assistant City Manager Bill Richards said during the meeting that the future use of the property would be better protected under CBD zoning, because a future owner would need to have a site plan approved for that business.

Several residents, including Jim Pfeiffer, suggested that the master plan be amended to eliminate the dual zoning for that portion of Oakland Street, only 20-feet wide.

"The master plan is not a good

**'The bottom line is I love Farmington as much as you do.'**

**Shelley Raymond**  
Baker Street owner

plan if it involves sneaking businesses into that 20-foot area," Pfeiffer said. "It should be amended."

**Not here**

Pfeiffer turned toward Raymond, seated in the front row, and added that "business is a tough world and I wish you the best of luck. Just not on Oakland."

Several representatives from Salem United — located just east of the proposed studio — also spoke against the rezoning.

"We have nothing against Baker Street Draperies," said church deacon Richard Newman. "It's opposition to any business going in. It's a house, it's not appropriate for a business to go in there."

Newman said the lack of parking is the primary concern.

Among factors working in Raymond's favor is she is an established, well-respected business owner with sophisticated clientele.

A letter of endorsement from Metrobank President Bob Heinrich, also of the Farmington Downtown Development Authority, was read into the record. The letter stated that Baker Street Draperies is "economically viable" and the kind of business the city needs to support.

**She'll walk**

The historical commission and zoning board of appeals previously gave the required approvals that would enable Baker Street Draperies to move into the treasured historical district.

In December, the ZBA allowed a parking variance that would enable the business to use three spaces in nearby Masonic Temple's parking lot.

On Monday, Raymond reiterated that the business would not create much of a parking burden. Baker Street Draperies has four designers, including Raymond, who would need a place to park. Typically, the studio only works with a few clients per day.

"I'll walk to work if I have to," she told the commission.

Meanwhile, trash generated at the studio will be transported to a warehouse facility.

"The bottom line is I love Farmington as much as you do," said Raymond, in comments prior to the public hearing. "And I don't want to do anything that would be bad for the city."

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