

School property eyed for subdivision park

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ing the park. If you don't, there's not much we can do. We hope you will assist us."

ONLY ONE resident took issue with the subdivision's petition and park's insurance at Monday's public hearing. "I do not really feel satisfied with the insurance program set out," said Donald Edwards.

But Bibeau told Edwards the petition "doesn't blind anyone. The special assessment district will."

As far as insurance, Bibeau reminded the resident the subdivision has used the park for years. "That's an exposure we all have. If you worried about getting sued, I suppose you would never do anything," Bibeau said.

Neighbors have used the vacant lot as a park since 1968. They decided to buy the property when Farmington school officials announced the acreage was for sale.

"The park is going to be sold. That's a foregone conclusion. The question is who is going to buy it and what are they going to do with it?" said a subdivision resident.

OVER THE years, residents in the subdivision have maintained the area and have made \$25,000 in improve-

ments with the help of rummage sales, auctions, bake sales and contributions, Paler said.

The park now contains playground equipment, a ball field, picnic tables and a tennis court. A pond in the park is used for fishing during summer and as an ice rink in winter. The subdivision association also has planted 49 trees, Paler said.

"It is used throughout all the seasons," said Lynn Lynch, a 16-year subdivision resident. "We need this park. We need it as recreation near our home."

According to census data, Paler said, approximately 300 children 15 years and younger live in the subdivision. The closest playground is 2 1/2 miles away at Gill Elementary School on Gill Road. "It (the park) is especially important for us as a community gathering place," Paler added.

Originally, the 7.9 acres was just an open field. But residents have voluntarily worked to improve the area, Lynch said.

THE PARK development committee has a five-year improvement plan that calls for installation of new wooden swings and other playground equipment. Wooden benches were recently installed, she added.

Another resident, Shirley Ford, a

real estate agent, said the park is the first sight she shows potential home buyers interested in the subdivision. "It never fails to impress people with what has been done (in the park) on a voluntary basis."

Council members lauded subdivision residents for their voluntary work in improving the vacant lot and organiz-

ing neighbors to support the property's purchase.

"I think this is one of the most exciting, creative proposals that has ever come before council," said Councilman Dean Wolf.

Councilman Ben Marks agreed. "You people would probably qualify as the all-American subdivision of Farmington Hills."

Wider immunity sought

Farmington has gone on record supporting pending legislation granting immunity in third-party liability lawsuits against government agencies. State House Bill 5163 is one of 14 dealing with several types of liabilities.

"In many cases, we can get the government out of the liability, but cannot get the (municipal) employee out, so we pay anyway," according to City Manager Robert Deadman, in explaining the situation to city council Monday.

The costs of paying liability cases is increasing, and Deadman estimates, "If the current trend continues, some agencies such as road commissions will literally spend more money paying claims than they do building new highways."

THE MICHIGAN Municipal League is supporting the bill, Deadman said.

The state House bill resulted from a study of liability and insurance problems statewide. Council authorized a letter from the city to state senators and representatives, the governor, and members of the House Judiciary Committee who are presently reviewing it.

Deadman has a special interest in municipal insurance rates, as chairman of the Michigan Municipal Risk Management Authority (MMRMA). The MMRMA is a group of governmental units banded together to provide guaranteed self-insurance at a lower-than-usual rate.

The group works to help communities cut liability and provides municipal liability attorneys to handle cases.

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