

Hills eyes spruced-up parking areas

By Casey Hans
staff writer

The grass may soon be greener on the Farmington Hills side of the fence.

A landscape ordinance — introduced by full vote of the city council July 28 — would add more greenery to the city's commercial, concrete parking lots.

"We're trying to create an environment that's pleasant," Mayor Joe Alkaitis said.

One year ago, the city discovered "surrounding communities have landscape restrictions tougher than ours," City Manager William Costick said. "We wanted to develop standards for a ratio of trees to parking spaces."

"The whole intent is to provide a buffer and break up the pavement."

The proposed ordinance — created by city planning commissioners and administrators — will stiffen the requirements for greenery buffers and design standards for developers.

ALTHOUGH HE approved intro-

duction of the ordinance, Councilman Ben Marks said he may not vote in favor of it. He said doesn't like several of the ordinance provisions, mainly the proposed use of trees in parking areas, according to his arguments to council.

City planner Ed Gardiner presented details of the ordinance, which, if enacted, would amend eight zoning sections of the City Code.

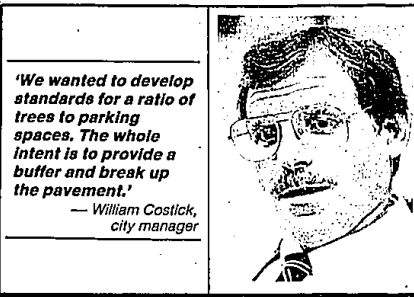
"This is meant to break up the sea of asphalt" in the city, Gardiner added.

"It absolutely counteracts what I feel is a bad effect of large parking areas," Councilwoman Joan Dudley stressed.

MARKS CALLED parts of the proposal "very unfair" and said he didn't understand why the city was concentrating on commercial ventures and ignoring improvements to residential property. "I don't understand it at all," he said.

Most property in the city is residential.

The ordinance would add a 10-foot landscape buffer along parking lots and streets and require landscaped



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— William Costick,
city manager

islands for certain parking lots.

Besides making the area look better, these buffers would aid the city with snow removal problems and parking problems, which "carry across sidewalks," Gardiner said.

"Trees inside the parking area

would require a larger area for parking," Marks said, protesting on behalf of developers who would be required to use prime commercial space for parking lot trees under the proposed ordinance.

City Attorney Paul Bibeau said de-

velopers would have the option of appearing before the city's Zoning Board of Appeals for a variance, if meeting the city's parking requirements becomes a problem.

UNDER THE proposed ordinance, for an off-street parking lot with 16 or more spaces, one deciduous, or leafy, tree would be required for each eight surface parking spaces, distributed evenly throughout the parking area.

In addition, where a residential-C district or multiple housing abuts a single-family residential zone with no street dividing it, a buffer would be required under the new ordinance.

Based on a 20-by-100-foot buffer, greenery would include two large and four small deciduous trees, six large shrubs and two evergreen trees.

"The intensity of the landscape area will decrease with increased bufferwidth," the proposed ordinance said.

Maintenance of these proposed buffer areas brought discussion from several council members, with Councilwoman Joan Dudley adding,

"There is no way to protect against shoddy workmanship."

Maintenance details for the buffers will be brought before council for consideration before an ordinance vote is taken. The planning commission discussed requiring an in-ground sprinkler system for the ordinance, but decided it would be too "costly and burdensome," Gardiner said.

Another provision to the ordinance calls for a planting plan to be prepared by a registered Michigan landscape architect.

"Plans have been a little shoddy," Gardiner said. "Most have come through engineers and architects."

The Farmington Hills Planning Commission agreed to review the city's landscape laws last fall at Costick's request. This followed a beautification commission recommendation that an effort be made to maintain the city's appearance.

The "cement-like" appearance of commercial properties along Orchard Lake Road also prompted comment from local residents and city officials at a September meeting.

City: yes to state public works liaison

Farmington supports the creation of a public works coordinator for the Michigan Municipal League — a group representing cities at the state level.

The city's share will be no more than \$313 annually for a job estimated to cost the league \$103,000 per year in salary, office rental and other costs. Each community will probably be special-assessed for the

fee, City Manager Robert Deadman said.

The city council voted Monday to pay its share toward the new position.

"The league has some similar efforts, but in different areas," Deadman told the council. The league is calling for an intensified, coordinated effort between communities . . .

to achieve a higher level of municipal involvement in the regulatory process, Deadman said.

The league has similar specialists in the areas of personnel and labor, he added.

Such a position would assist communities with water supply, water pollution control and solid waste disposal. The person would lobby on en-

vironmental issues, deal with state agencies, speak at public hearings, monitor proposed appointments and serve as community representative in supporting communities on environmental issues.

"I don't think this (environmental issues) will get any smaller . . . the issue may be larger than the league," Deadman said.

Prompting creation of the new position are problems local communities have had with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and other agencies that have policed environmental requirements forced on communities, the city manager said. "Most of the problems have been technical in nature."

After reading the league's position paper about the new job, Councilman Richard Tupper said it would appear as an adversary to the natu-

ral resource department.

"I think we should encourage the DNR to cooperate," he said. "Are we causing a deadlock when we don't have any continuity?"

Deadman said he doesn't see it as an adversary position. "A clear and concise position would benefit everyone involved," he said.

Mayor William Hartsock suggested city officials talk with the department directly and "let them know we are supporting this effort."

Hills road problems intensified

A company that would have brought 400 jobs to Farmington Hills went elsewhere because of badly needed road improvements, City Manager William Costick told the Oakland County Road Commission in a July 22 letter.

During the past two months, the owner of the Arboretum Office Park project on 12 Mile also "lost a large

prospective tenant who decided not to build in Farmington Hills because of the 12 Mile Road problem," Costick's letter continued.

"These problems are not peculiar to 12 Mile Road of Farmington Hills," Costick said. "I believe . . . we will continue to experience a greatly worsening situation until and unless we can somehow find the resources to deal with these extraordinary growth problems."

A WEST German automotive firm, the Robert Bosch Corp., moved their operations from Chicago to South Carolina after considering moving the company with its 400

jobs to Farmington Hills.

"I was informed by the vice-president of Robert Bosch that a major factor in this decision was our inability to provide a definite date by which 12 Mile Road would be widened and additional interchanges constructed to I-696," Costick added.

Robert Bosch built its automotive emission control laboratory in the Hills in 1982.

At the Arboretum, developers remain concerned about the "inability to lease their building space as originally planned" because of 12 Mile problems and lack of adequate access to I-696, Costick said. "Their

plans for moving ahead with their third building are now indefinite," he added in the letter to Brent Blair.

The possible location of national headquarters for the League Insurance Co., representing 1,000 jobs, and plans for building a national headquarters for Little Caesars International are also on hold until the road situation is rectified, Costick added.

Sidewalk approved

The city of Farmington will install a new concrete sidewalk from Longacre School to Gill Road before the start of the new school year.

The city council voted Monday, Aug. 4, to add the project to the 1985 sidewalk program at a cost of \$12,314. Contractor Italia Construction Inc. of Sterling Heights agreed to do the project at the 1985 rates, and to complete it sometime in August, according to a city report.

The 6,110-square-foot sidewalk will replace an existing asphalt sidewalk and will be five feet wide. It will be constructed in the same area as the current walkway and will be three feet from the street.

Councilman Arnold Campbell called the project a "good deal" for the city. "I'm sure if we went to bid we'd have to pay a much, much higher price," he said.

The walkway was installed by a prior council, and under the same agreement the city will continue to maintain the walkway, City Manager Robert Deadman added.

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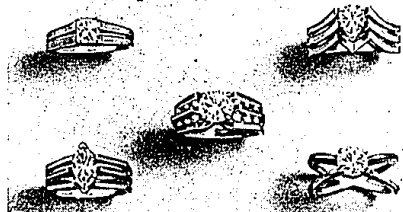
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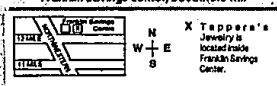
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