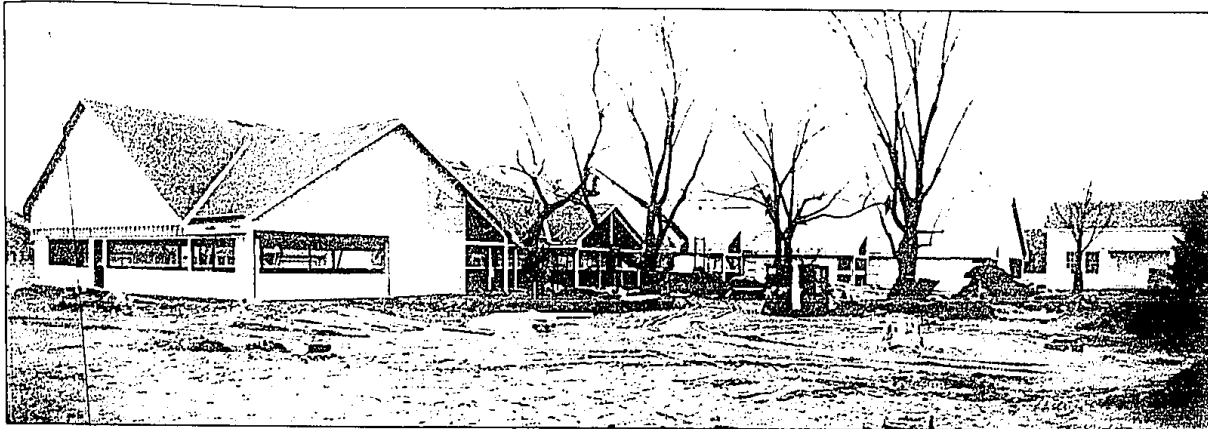




The new 16,000-square-foot office complex at 14 Mile and Middlebelt in Farmington Hills will retain the old charm of the historic farmhouse on the site.

RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Historic farm gets new look, but keeps old

By Noreen Flack
staff writer

HISTORIC HOUSES in Farmington Hills are usually bought by residents captivated by the history within the walls.

But the Farmington Hills Historic District Commission has approved one historic farmhouse to go commercial and become a modern-day business while maintaining the charm of the old site.

West Bloomfield developer Stan Finsilver is converting an 1840 Greek Revival farmhouse and barn southwest of 14 Mile and Middlebelt, across from Eagle Elementary School, into a 16,000-square-foot office complex.

He's working as a partner on the \$2 million project with David Friedman of Friedman & Associates, Birmingham, a commercial broker. Project architect is David Lubin & Associates, Bloomfield Hills.

The Ward Eagle House, one of 60 properties in Farmington Hills' historic district, Ward Eagle was Farmington Township supervisor in the early 1890s.

"This is the kind of thing we have been encouraging for the past 10 years in order to hold on to these historic spots," said Jean Fx, Farmington Hills mayor and historic district commissioner.

trict commissioner.

"This type of construction is drawn to contain the same ambience while molding together the old with the new," Fox said. "We are really fortunate to have people like Stan who are willing to come in and save these treasures."

THE HISTORIC district commission recognized it would be hard to find a good use for the farmhouse, which is near a business commercial intersection. The site is now zoned office.

"I don't know any other business in Farmington Hills that has an old stone garage that used to be the place some guy kept his two horses and carriage for his transportation right next door to his little house," Finsilver said.

"This is really a gorgeous piece of property."

"But it's a good sound business decision, too," he added. "So now I have something to sell that can't be found any place else. If I didn't think I could renovate that old house, preserve some of the history and still make it attractive in order to lease it out, I wouldn't be able to do it."

THE PROJECT began in November. Tenants are scheduled to occupy the office space by July. Space is leased at about \$20 a square foot.



Stan Finsilver points out windows where he original glass was salvaged and reused in the new windows to help preserve the historical accuracy of the farmhouse.

Finsilver said.

Buz Holzman, a West Bloomfield photographer, will occupy the farmhouse as the Buz Holzman Studio.

"When I first saw the house, it looked really beat up and I couldn't imagine what it would be used for," Holzman said. "After I had a chance to look around, I realized that it was perfect for me."

"Compared to rent for any nice storefront on a thoroughfare, I think the rent is well worth the charm and the whole idea of the place," Holzman added.

The farmhouse was used as a residence until last fall. Before that, it was an antique shop owned by Emily Brown. But the demands of historic caretaking seemed impossible for past owners, Fox said.

ASIDE FROM the farmhouse and barn, Finsilver will add an office building to the site. It will resemble the Greek Revival architecture of the house, including the colonial ceilings and windows.

The new building will be leased by Cardiovascular Services, a medical service business. Partial space will be leased to a marketing company. The cobblestone barn will be used as Finsilver's warehouse.

"It's very costly. To do a rehab can cost more than if you just tore it down and started all over again," Finsilver said. "But I really enjoy it. You can bring it back to its original condition and still make it acceptable to a commercial tenant."

Troublesome aspects of restoration for the old farmhouse include sandblasting pillars to remove as many as 14 coats of paint and replacing rotten planks and gutters, Finsilver said.

Other projects include replacing authentic windows, engineering a modern heating and cooling system, insulating walls and preserving antique doors.

THE STURDY side of the historic home includes logs, running across the basement ceiling, which "actually hold the house up," Finsilver said. Large drilled holes were embedded into the logs and flanks of wood

were run into the holes in place of nails. The logs bear clean-cut hatchet marks to create grooves in the wood for a secure fit against the wall and ceiling.

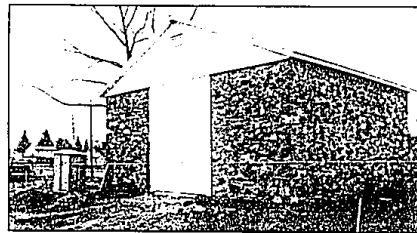
"Landscaping and pleasing aesthetics is really what sells your property," Finsilver said.

"I give as much credit to my tenants for the beautification awards I have received as to myself," he said. "I have to keep the property up but they pay for it. They want it kept up just as much as I do."

IN SEPTEMBER, Finsilver completed the 18,000-square-foot Courtyard fashion mall at 32500 Northwestern Highway, which he co-owns with Tamara Friedman, owner of Tamara's Institute De Beaute, located there.

The Courtyard and the Ward Eagle Office Park are two of Finsilver's six Farmington Hills properties.

His other building* house the businesses of Stewart Travel, 30018 Orchard Lake, Banker's Realty, 30038 Orchard Lake, Harper Associates, 29870 Middlebelt, and J.W. Korth



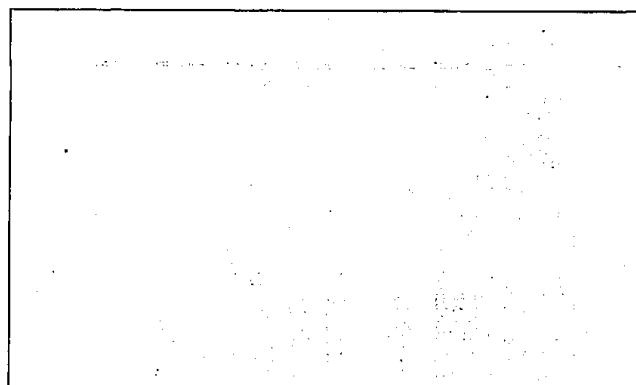
This is a view of the old cobblestone barn that Stan Finsilver plans to use as a warehouse.

Capital Markets, 29905 Middlebelt. He has won many city beautification awards within the last five years.

His pride and joy restoration project stands in Rochester Hills — the building occupied by St. Joseph Mercy Hospital's Mercy Care Clinic on S. Rochester Road. He received the President's Award in 1988 from Rochester Hills for the restoration.

Finsilver also owns commercial property in Royal Oak, Birmingham, West Bloomfield, Novi and Troy.

The Michigan Historic Preservation Network will sponsor a statewide convention at the Botsford Inn on May 11-12. It will include a showcase of preserved historic sites in Michigan such as the Ward Eagle Office Park.



Liquor enforcement plan delayed for legal review

News briefs from the Farmington and Farmington Hills city halls will appear regularly in this column.

FARMINGTON HILLS

• Action denied — The council has delayed acting on Terry Sever's six-point liquor law enforcement plan until tonight to give city attorneys more time to explore legal ramifications.

• Hexagon OK'd — In 7-0 votes, the council has Monday approved the introduction of two rezoning requests.

— One acre in the west side of Halsted, south of 14 Mile, from SP-1, special purpose district, to RP-1, planned residential district. The change is requested by the planning commission because the SP-1 district no longer allows day care centers, one of which Children's World of Michigan, is now on the acreage. The residential district allows day care use. The change brings the zoning into conformance with the actual land use.

— Nine acres on the southwest corner of 13 Mile and Halsted roads, from RC-2, multiple family residential, to RCE, elderly housing. The change brings the zoning into conformance with the city's master plan for future land use.

Resolutions OK'd — In 7-0 votes, the council adopted two resolutions: — Council members are petition-

CITY HALL newsbeat

ing the Oakland County Drain Commission to build an intra-county drain in the Heritage Park drainage district to carry drainage water that originates in Oakland County.

— Council members requested the use of the Oakland County Sheriff's Departments new state-funded traffic and accident patrol unit, without cost. The unit can operate in the city along county roads such as Haggerty, Orchard Lake and Middlebelt, at city request and availability of patrol schedule.

FARMINGTON

• Vote for garbage — Council members are supporting pending state legislation that would allow city residents a chance to vote on an additional 3 mills to pay for future garbage collection.

House Bill 4285, now being considered by the state Senate, addresses the issue of increased garbage processing costs, which all communities will face, said city manager Robert Deadman. "Chances are... if (garbage removal) probably will not stay as a property tax. It will go under a utilities tax," Deadman added.

• Rate increase — After two years with no increase, the city of Detroit will up its wholesale water and sewer rates to the suburbs, city manager Robert Deadman reported last Monday. A public hearing is set for Jan. 24, in which the city of Farmington will be represented. The city is not expected to oppose the increases.

• Project on hold — There is still no firm date on the start of a project to widen Orchard Lake Road, from Grand River to 10 Mile, because of problems obtaining right-of-way, city manager Robert Deadman told the council last Monday. "We still don't have a definite date nailed down," he said. If Oakland County officials can obtain the needed right-of-way by April, bids will be let this summer and construction will start this fall, he said.

The project, affecting both Farmington and Farmington Hills, is expected to take one year to complete.

• Repair authorized — The city authorized a \$5,000 repair to a newer model dump truck this week, after an electrical short caused the truck to catch on fire in a public works garage in December. A DPW worker spotted the fire, which was extinguished immediately before spreading to the garage. With the exception of \$1,000, the repairs are expected to be covered by insurance, city officials said.

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