

Home Depot plan gets heave-ho

By BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

The Farmington Hills City Council unanimously voted down a proposed retail store that would have extended business zoning and represented a "drastic change" to the master plan.

After a presentation by representatives of Home Depot USA Inc. a fast-growing chain of home improvement retail stores, the council voted consistently with the planning commission, which had also turned down the project unanimously.

Home Depot, which is planning 20 stores in the Detroit area by 1995 and 10 other stores statewide, had wanted to build an outlet on the south side of 12 Mile on property extending south to the I-696 freeway east of Orchard Lake.

"We want to be a giving corpo-

ration," said John Ferrick, Home Depot's Michigan real estate manager. "We'd cooperate with the city."

Ferrick, and attorney Richard Pohlman, who represents Home Depot, made the case that the retailer is willing to change the plan that was rejected by the planning commission.

Pohlman said the retail outlet would provide a lot of tax money and would be a better use of land that had been zoned for office space. He said the slump in demand for office space would leave the property vacant for several years and that the Home Depot would provide steady traffic rather than the rush-hour variety office use typically brings.

"This site has been vacant for a number of years," Pohlman said. "As an office site, it will probably be vacant for another 10 years.

Although several council members praised Home Depot's presentation, they left little doubt about the chances of obtaining the change from office use zoning and decline Ferrick's request that they delay a decision to further study the proposal.

"This is a dramatic change (in zoning)," said councilman Terry Seaver.

Councilwoman Joanne Smith said the store would worsen an already heavy traffic area because of the proximity to the freeway.

"It would be nice for Home Depot, but bad for us," she said.

Alex Mellanda, representing neighboring St. Paul's Church, said Home Depot had been helpful in accommodating the needs of the church.

"I feel that they are really responding to their neighbors," he said.

Patterson from page 1A

But money for other projects isn't there, and if Patterson's dire fiscal projections are anywhere near the mark, it won't be there next year either.

Despite management incentives that reward departments that save the county money by returning half of the savings to that department, the early out program that will eliminate 147 jobs and cuts of another 120 jobs, the county is still in the red.

"We're experiencing quite a brain and talent drain with the early out program," Patterson said. "But we expect over 200 people to take advantage of it."

The county has also put a freeze on pay increases that will save \$3.8 million, he added.

Key program cut

One program close to the heart of Farmington Hills council members and Fire Chief Richard Marinucci, O-COM, the county's communication system, will also go, Grubba said.

The system, first developed in the 1970s, which coordinates and prioritizes emergency medical runs throughout the county, has become indispensable, Marinucci said.

"This is working very well," he said. "The paramedics can't operate until they have contact with a doctor. If the county gets out of this, we're going to have to find some sort of consortium. I doubt that it will be as smooth as what we have."

The county, which paid for the radio equipment, had to cut back and the hospitals already provide the staff for the system that prioritizes emergency runs and directs them to the closest or most appropriate hospital, Grubba said.

"We should get out of a business we are not mandated to be in," Grubba said. "Participating hospitals will really now have the burden of improving the radio system."

Possible liability gap

Wolf added that the county could be in a liability gap if it runs a program not mandated because it could not use governmental immunity as an out.

But Hills councilman Aldo Vagnozzi questioned why the county was abandoning the successful, cost-effective program.

"I'm concerned about losing county coordination and the ability

to tie into all of our hospitals," Vagnozzi said, adding that the service costs residents 10 cents a year and is important in medical emergencies. "I would hope there would be some way we could avoid losing this."

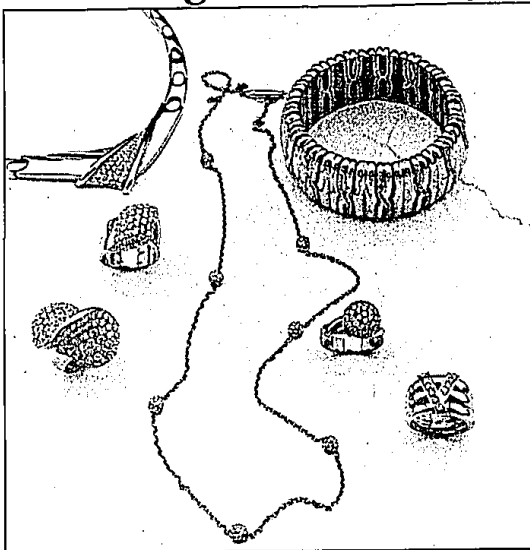
Patterson defended the county's decision, which was made in 1991, well before he took office, to consolidate the county's reference, law and blind and handicapped libraries. He said 95 percent of the blind and handicapped library's operation is done by mail and the new facility will have almost three times as much space as the current facility, housed in the Farmington Community Library main branch on 12 Mile.

After Hills city manager Bill Costick said the city was "bonded to the limit" for road improvements, Patterson reassured him that good roads are a priority.

"Transportation is a key issue," Patterson said. "In order to prepare for growth, we must have a good infrastructure."

But Mayor Nancy Bates said she felt "frustrated" that the city is in the middle of many improvements that have been stopped for lack of money.

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