

New master plan pinpoints problems

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

The Farmington Hills Planning Commission met with the city council to discuss the new master plan.

The plan provides a long range guide for land use development and redevelopment in the city that reflects community goals. It's a blueprint for planning. The last master plan was finished in 1979.

Planning commissioners began the study in February of 1996 and conducted four public hearings in the four quadrants of the city from April to July. Thursday's joint meeting was informational for city council members.

The planning commission will make final recommendations for a new master plan Feb. 22 and will schedule a public hearing on March 28.

As presented by Claude Coates, the city's planning consultant, there are seven Special Planning Areas where alternative uses and areas are offered. These areas have features or locations that make them difficult to develop or present potential problems to neighbors.

"This is an innovative approach allowing development alternatives for the seven special areas," said Planning Director Dale Countegian.

Some of those seven areas represent potential development controversies the city is anxious to resolve while avoiding court.

Probably the most sensitive area is the 109 acres bordered by Northwestern highway to the northeast, 14 Mile to the north and Orchard Lake to the west. A developer had unsuccessfully proposed a large shopping center with a service road. Area residents had been divided on that plan.

"This was a most difficult area," said Planning Commissioner Phil Arnold. "It surprised me that there was a lot of support for the shopping center."

Under the new master plan, there would be five development options. All would have the goal of establishing some multi-family residential area, redeveloping business frontages on Northwestern and Orchard Lake, providing a connector road between the two and improving traffic circulation.

Planning Commissioner Paul Blizman said although a "community level" shopping center, similar to Hunters Square, could be developed at the site, a megamall would probably be rejected. "A massive shopping center is probably going to be a very hard sell with this planning commission," Blizman said.

Another special area involves 16 acres on 14 Mile north of Northwestern. The three proposed options are designed to protect single-family residential areas north of 14 mile and condominiums to the east with buffers, redevelop business frontage on Northwestern and consolidate traffic access on Northwestern.

The new plan would maintain residential use of Orchard Lake Road frontage on 35 acres between I-696 and 11 Mile and encourage a boulevard street cross-section with two alternatives.

The master plan goal for the 8.7 acres north of I-696 in section 13 would be to provide as much buffering to residential lots to the north as possible.

The plan would protect existing natural features, including a pond and pine trees on 110 acres on West Halsted at 11 Mile while providing citywide recreation in any of three alternative schemes.

The plan also protects and preserves existing vegetation and wetlands and promotes low density residential development on 84 acres along Historic Halsted Road between 12 and 13 Mile.

The special areas also include Grand River east of the city of Farmington where the city has already improved roads, curb cuts and lighting, while removing old utility poles. The city will also landscape the area and has bought out two businesses where it will add sidewalks, public parking and a greenbelt.

Arnold said the areas of special planning is the first of its kind in a master plan in the state. Blizman said the alternative ones meet the goals of the community while allowing flexibility.

"One advantage of the SPA is that it permits us to be tougher on proponents," Blizman said.

The city council will have final approval of the revised master plan.

Hitting the ski trails



SHAWN LA MIA/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

At Heritage Park: John Bacon, an English teacher at Farmington High School, takes a break after the recent final examinations by taking to the cross country ski trails in Farmington Hills' Heritage Park.

Hills accrues 11th national budget award

The city of Farmington Hills has received the national Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for the 11th consecutive year. Farmington Hills was selected for the award by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA).

According to GFOA, the award reflects the commitment of the Farmington Hills City Council and staff to meeting the highest principles of governmental budgeting.

In order to receive the award,

the finance department had to satisfy nationally recognized guidelines for effective budget presentations. These guidelines assess how well the budget serves as: a policy document; a financial plan; an operations guide; and a communication device.

"We have all worked hard to develop and produce this document which fulfills the needs of city council, the management team, and the community as they consider the financial impact of the many issues that challenge this community," said Farmington Hills Finance Director Charles Rosch.

The Government Finance Officers Association is a nonprofit professional association serving 12,650 government finance professionals throughout North America.

Increase sparks heated reaction, SWOCC clears air, files to FCC

CABLE CONNECTION



CAREN COLLINS

issue so it's easy to see why subscribers are upset.

There are some misperceptions I need to clear up: First, most callers are telling us they are upset because they're paying more and not getting any additional service.

Time Warner does plan to give us more channels (including ESPN 2, Country Music Television, The History Channel, Bravo, Black Entertainment Television and Court TV) when their fiber optic installation is completed this year. True, Livonia and Redford (other Time Warner communities) already have additional channels, but that's because their agreements were reached and installation begun before Farmington and Farmington Hills.

But this increase has nothing to do with that increased service down the road. It is the result of a "social contract" between Time Warner and the FCC. This social contract is a thick document that addresses many issues. Many of the benefits spelled out in the contract do not impact us since our cities already enjoy some of

these, such as fiber optic technology.

However, the contract also deals with rates. And Time Warner has agreed to increase rates no more than \$1 a year (plus inflation and external costs) for the next five years. With the volatile political environment, especially in the telecommunication field, chances are rates will go up before they come down, even with the entry of competition (such as Ameritech). At least, Time Warner has some restrictions on how much they can raise rates for the next five years.

Secondly, many callers expect SWOCC to force Time Warner to halt this increase. Unfortunately, SWOCC does not have jurisdiction over these areas where costs are rising. The FCC does. SWOCC regulates channels 1-23 (Broadcast basic service). Those 481 subscribers who subscribe only to this service will be happy since their rates are going down \$1.21. But the majority of cable customers, those who also subscribe to channels 24-37 and 47-64 (Expanded Basic) will encounter a net increase of \$1.88. Remember, this is the tier that the FCC regulates.

So, what can you do?

1. Although SWOCC does not regulate the Expanded Basic tier, we have filed an FCC Form 329 on behalf of the residents of Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi as well as SWOCC. Last year, a similar Form 329 complaint brought about a \$69,000 refund to subscribers.

2. Call or write to the FCC. Since this is the commission with jurisdiction over this increase,

your efforts are better spent contacting them, rather than SWOCC. The address and phone number are on your cable bill. In fact, individual subscribers can file the simple two-sided FCC Form 329, too. The 20-plus customers who have already registered a complaint with SWOCC have been mailed one of these forms. If you would like one, call us at 810-473-7266. But hurry. The form must be sent within 45 days after the day you received your January cable bill.

3. Perhaps now is the time to review your options. If you subscribe only to Basic Cable, you pay only \$9.58 a month. With basic, you get channels 1-23, including all the local broadcast stations and access channels. But if you want the other stuff, like CNN, MTV, ESPN and The Weather Channel, you end up paying \$23.95 for these additional 22 channels on the Expanded Basic tier.

4. If you want a better explanation of this rate increase call Time Warner directly at (810) 553-7300. The next meeting of the Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission is Tuesday, Feb. 13, at 4:30 p.m. at Farmington City Hall.

The next meeting of the Cable Access Committee is Feb. 13 at 7 p.m. at the Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission. A study session is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 10, from 9 a.m. to noon at SWOCC.

Caren Collins is the Executive Director of the Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission.

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Artists visualize inner selves' at exhibit

Some Farmington-area artists will contribute to an exhibit — "Portrait of Self" — at the Downtown Branch of the Farmington Community Library, Liberty and State streets, through Feb. 28.

"In this unusual exhibit, artists go beyond the mirror image of their personal appearance and attempt to make visual their inner selves," said Edie Joppich, a

Farmington Hills artist who is in charge of the program.

"Some explain themselves by symbols and metaphors, others place themselves in a significant setting, real or imagined."

"One artist, middle-aged and intense, stares out at us, a cat at her side. Through the window behind her, we see a little pig-tailed girl looking out to the horizon. It's

the artist as a child.

"Displayed beside each painting is a photograph of the painters and a card telling the viewer about the portrait of self."

"The exhibit will give people a better understanding of the motivating ideas that can separate art of substance from superficial art."