

'New' robber holds up Hills store

An armed robber, stating he was "new to this," stole more than \$700 during a holdup at a store on Eight Mile and Grand River Saturday night.

Around 8:15 p.m., the cashier saw a man walk past her and toward the video section. Suddenly, she felt a hand on her shoulder and something being poked into her side. When she turned around she saw a short, white man with a semi-automatic gun.

He told her not to move and that he wanted to rob her. He walked her over to

the register where he grabbed a shopping bag and ordered her in a calm voice to put the money inside.

As she did so, he told her he was getting nervous and added, "Don't hate me; I'm new to this."

He told her not to push any buttons until he was gone and asked, again, that she not hate him.

He left the store and walked toward the Eight Mile and Grand River intersection as the cashier phoned police.

With a K-9 tracking dog, police followed

footprints to a nearby Wendy's restaurant parking lot. The tracks disappeared in the falling snow.

The suspect is about 20 years old, 5-foot-3 with a trimmed beard. He was also wearing blue jeans and a gray hooded sweat-shirt.

Another man saw the man with the woman behind the counter, but thought the two knew each other. The store has a surveillance camera, but the tape hadn't been changed, police reports said.

DDA sees new park for city's downtown

By TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

How does the idea of another park in downtown Farmington grab you?

It could become reality, perhaps as soon as 1998, according to the latest batch of proposals being considered by the Farmington Downtown Development Authority. That is, provided the bottom line makes sense, said DDA member Ronald Oglesby.

"It's going to be budget driven, no matter what we do," Oglesby said.

First up among a number of preliminary downtown improvements proposed during last Wednesday's DDA meeting by the Grissim-Metz architectural firm is creation of the "pedestrian friendly" park, next to Farmington City Hall at Grand River-Liberty.

That park, which would include brick pavers, benches and maybe a fountain or statue, would be located in the "large front yard" near city hall, according to the architect's proposal as it currently stands.

Oglesby said whether a park does go up - a project that would essentially mark the west entry point of downtown - is linked to how successful the DDA is in persuading the city to foot a significant but yet-to-be-determined portion of the bill.

A cost estimate of the park project was expected to be disclosed at the city council's next meeting, 8 p.m. Monday, Dec. 1. Also at that meeting, Grissim-Metz will listen to input from council members, which could have a bearing on final proposals.

"It's premature to talk about it because we haven't discussed it," said council member JoAnne McShane about the city chipping in financially for the park development.

Talking in general terms, however, McShane said she likes parks. "They're great places for people to sit and reflect."

Oglesby emphasized that the proposals are being served up at the council meeting as a courtesy, to solicit ideas from city officials. The council does not have authority to decide one way or another on the plans.

Another Grissim-Metz concept being bandied about is to enclose and improve a gazebo located at the east end of downtown, near Farmer's Market.

"It would be a more private area for people," Oglesby explained, "to make it feel like they're not sitting out on Grand River."

The park and gazebo projects have the potential to make important statements about Farmington to motorists entering downtown from each end of the central business district, he said.

Those projects would probably be tackled simultaneously, perhaps in 1998 if the budget can be worked out. The DDA would want an answer from the city in December because it begins work on next year's budget in January.

Oglesby added that some of the architect's other proposals for downtown might be slowly phased in over a 10-year period.

"We liked all of (Grissim-Metz's) suggestions," said Oglesby, referring to last week's DDA session. "But we just felt we'd take it a year at a time."

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Ice from page A1

Ice arena proponents pledged the new facility would include dry floor activities to voters during its campaign, the councilman noted.

"In my mind, it was billed as a multipurpose facility," Sever said.

A spokesman for the Ice Arena Advisory Committee said council members have to make up their mind one way or another.

"I'm more concerned as chairman of the ice advisory committee about the yo-yo syndrome where we don't know what we're doing one season to the next," Dennis Fitzgerald said. "You lose momentum in your activities when you go with ice one summer and dry floor the next."

Hockey and figure skating organizations book ice in advance and need to know if a rink is available, Fitzgerald said.

Many municipally operated ice facilities close down during the summer. That's not the case in Farmington Hills where hockey and figure skaters clamor for ice time year-round.

Although Suburban Hockey is opening a private, two-rink training facility in the Industrial Park area soon, the city-operated arena is expected to have spillover business from there, said Eric Wurmlinger of the city's Special Services Department.

Other costs have to be considered with dry floor activities, parks officials said.

A sprinkler system needs to be installed - estimated at \$20,000 - at one of the rinks in order for public events to be held there. Electrical upgrades with wall mounts and ceiling drops could run an additional \$10,000.

To melt and make ice runs \$2,427 in labor costs.

In 1996, the city hosted four weeks of dry-floor activities that included a Golden Gloves boxing event, a movie night and inline skating clinics and classes. The boxing and film events were not well-attended, but the inline classes were, Wurmlinger said.