

City from page A1

"It's a healthy place," said Gandy, following the Farmington audit. "The concepts we're talking about (are) improving a great place."

According to Burden, Farmington has "a leg up" on other communities, simply because it has an established downtown.

"By having those buildings in place, those are the anchors — reasons for people to come here," Burden explained.

But now comes the challenge of doing things to increase pedestrian safety, cut down on traffic congestion and enhance the overall feel of the downtown area.

Burden and Gandy said those kinds of things already are being done in Farmington, through efforts such as last year's "visioning" process.

"You've got a lot of the suggestions we're talking about," Gandy said. "This would be tweaking them."

In addition to the walking tour, specific problems were pinpointed and discussed on-site.

Dressing up gaps between buildings with picnic tables and landscaping would work well along the main corridors, the consultants said. But most

intriguing is what to do with the walkway between the Shoe Carnival and the vacant Farmer Jack in the downtown center. Burden suggested turning the sidewalk path into a destination point, simply by adding a portable coffee stand or even swirling neon signs and murals.

The group pointed out inconsistencies in the center's sidewalks and crosswalks — specifically that they aren't always matched up. One crosswalk near Damman Hardware, seemingly goes nowhere, although a second look showed that it does serve several handicapped parking spaces.

Farmington Planning Commission Secretary Alton Bennett, however, thought a crosswalk would be better located if it led from an existing sidewalk along the east edge of the center's fountain island, to the sidewalk in front of Metro Coney Island.

"If there was a crosswalk there, I'd use it all the time," Bennett said.

A suggestion for 10-minute parking near Big Apple Bagel, the soon-to-open Great Harvest Bread Co. and post office store was brought up during the meet-

ing that preceded the walk.

But both Judy Downey, executive director of the city's Downtown Development Authority, and Gary Goss, director of the Farmington Public Safety Department, wondered out loud if 10 minutes would be enough time.

And, noted Goss, the turnover rate already is pretty fast. He said that the Traffic and Safety Board videotaped the parking lot over the course of a day.

"When we rolled the 24-hour tape," Goss said, "it looked like the Keystone Kops."

Planning commission Chair Mardy Stirling also said something needs to be done to help link downtown Farmington with the Kids World PlaySpace at Shawansee Park.

"The playscape now is a 'drive-to,'" Stirling said. "And so, to some degree, is downtown."

The audit — co-sponsored by SEMCOG, AAA Michigan and the Traffic Safety Association of Michigan — included an examination of pedestrian-related problems and examples of good and bad walkable communities from around the United States; and a summary, with possible

sidewalk program" in 1992, McCarthy said. "No one is interested. The program has been offered in every residential neighborhood."

"I think that people who want sidewalks in this community are in the minority," McCarthy added.

Cheryl Cannon, assistant superintendent for business and operational services for the Farmington Public Schools, said sidewalks would help make the walk to school safer for children.

"The city should reconsider its policy" of not requiring builders to install sidewalks, Cannon said. "You'd think the policy would change."

"We developed a residential

After driving through and walking through some of the Hills' busiest intersections, he said he felt sorry for the residents.

"My heart bleeds for you," Burden said. "This is what you have to deal with every day."

Burden suggested creating "urban villages," or designing communities so that people can easily walk to places rather than take the car to go a couple of blocks because it's too dangerous to walk.

Some suggestions he made included converting roads to boulevards, building roundabouts, removing "no parking" and stop signs, removing round curbing and building more sidewalks — something Farmington Hills lacks.

McCarthy said most residents don't want sidewalks and builders aren't required by the city to install them.

"The whole point of this is to carry on a conversation about walking and bicycling in your community," Burden told the group of Hills city and school officials.

"A walkable community is, in a nutshell, a place where you see people," Burden is the director of Walkable Communities in High Springs, Fla.

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Tune in to election day

It's that time of year again. School is back in session, summer is officially over and soon we'll be voting for new city officials.

Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 2. Don't get caught in the voting booth

unprepared. Tune in to your city government channels to learn about the issues and candidates on the ballot.

If you've never watched your government channel, now is the perfect time to check it out. Not only can you see city council and other public meetings, you can learn what your government is doing for you. This election season there is no shortage of programming to educate you on the important issues.

INFO TV-12, Farmington Hills channel 8 and Novi channel 13 are the places to get all of this information and more. Watch Farmington Hills, "the Great 8" for live and taped coverage of several local debates, including the Democratic Club, Republican Club and Council of Home-



MELANIE YOUNG

owners Association. You can also tune in to see Farmington Hills Assistant City Manager Dana Whinnery discuss the charter amendments that will be on this year's ballot. Hear them explained in simple terms so you know exactly what you are voting for.

Novi channel 13 is the place to find all the information you need to know about election day. You can see where precincts are located, hours the polls are open and even view the entire ballot, with the exact language, so you are not surprised on election day. You can also watch a program explaining the road bond proposal that will be on the ballot. See exactly where your money will be spent if the issue passes.

INFO TV-12 and Farmington Hills channel 8 are the only places to see your candidates speak directly to the voters. Each year, SWOCC hosts candidate forums at which each candidate for public office in Farmington, Novi and Farmington Hills can come to the studio and tape a 10-minute segment. The candidates may speak about anything they wish, and most speak to their constituents about what they will do if elected. Tune into these chan-

nels throughout October to see your candidates and hear their views.

Interested in seeing how your favorite Farmington City Council candidate fares against the competition? Watch the Farmington Candidate Debate, only on INFO TV-12. This taped debate was hosted by SWOCC and included respected local journalists Jim Stark from the Northwest Gazette and Joanne Maliszewski from the Farmington Observer as panelists.

On election night, turn to your government access channels, Farmington Hills channel 8, Novi channel 13 and Farmington channel 15, for up-to-the-minute election results. Don't wait until the next morning to find out who your new mayor is. You can find out election results as the polls close. Watch how the election unfolds from the comfort of your own living room. Just don't forget to cast your vote.

Melanie Young is the Community Relations Specialist of the Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission. The next SWOCC Meeting is 4:30 p.m., Tuesday, Nov. 16 at Farmington City Hall. The next CAC meeting is 7 p.m., Tuesday, Oct. 12 at SWOCC.

MPSC hosts public forum

Changes in the telephone, natural gas, and electric industries will be discussed in a forum 6 p.m. Monday, Sept. 27, in the second-floor council chambers at the Pontiac City Hall, 400 E. Wide Track Drive.

The forum is presented by the Michigan Public Service Commission, an agency within the state Department of Consumer and Industry Services. An MPSC commissioner will be on hand to answer questions.

After years of receiving utility service from monopoly providers, some customers will (or soon will) have a choice in selecting their natural gas and electric supplier. The telephone industry is also changing — continually introducing new services, features, and charges.

Topics to be discussed:

- The experiences of telephone deregulation — the benefits and difficulties.
- Electric and natural gas restructuring — what it is, why we are going in this direction, and what you can expect.

In addition, consumers can discuss utility service or billing problems they are experiencing. "Fundamental changes are occurring in the telephone, natural gas, and electric industries," said MPSC Chairman John G. Strand. "My colleagues and I welcome the opportunity to discuss these significant changes with area residents, businesses, and interested groups, and to hear their concerns regarding utility issues."

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