

Council prefers education

By TIM SMITH
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Youngsters won't get the book thrown at them for not wearing helmets when they ride their bikes. They'll get education.

Although the Farmington City Council last week decided against enacting an ordinance, the city and school district will team up to promote the use of helmets as part of the district's health curriculum.

In addition, the public safety department will conduct bike safety programs — such as last Saturday's Shiawassee Park bike rodeo — and officers will enlist local businesses and bicycling groups to promote the safety benefits of wearing helmets.

Farmington's stance differs from neighboring Farmington Hills, where a controversial city ordinance was enacted in July. In Farmington Hills, kids under 16 must wear helmets when bicycling, in-line skating or skateboarding, or face warnings and then a \$5 ticket.

"I plan on keeping Gary (Goss, Farmington public safety director) good to his word that he's going to work side-by-side with the schools," said resident Julie Devine, following approval of the

HELMETS

council's resolution.

Devine, one of the main proponents of a bike helmet ordinance in Farmington, noted that she has already discussed a bike safety curriculum with the school district's health coordinator, Kathy McElroy.

"I'm sure we'll make great strides this year getting the message out," Devine said.

Priscilla Brouillette, president of the Farmington Board of Education, said she was "very pleased" that the city and district will collaborate on bike safety education.

"It's appropriate for us to be involved in educating kids about (bike) safety," Brouillette said Thursday.

The traffic and safety board recommended a resolution, based on meetings with Goss, residents and other officials. Board members, although supportive of bike safety, determined that enforcement of an ordinance would be difficult.

"It would be more appropriate for a local government to strongly encourage the use of safety devices through education," according to City Manager

Frank Lauhoff's report to council.

No threats

Lauhoff's report continued that the board "sees this situation as an opportunity to create a positive atmosphere for learning and believes that education should be done without police enforcement action."

Representing the traffic and safety board at the meeting was Duane Reynolds, who termed the resolution a "reasonable approach to the issue."

City council member James Mitchell concurred. "We should be encouraging children to wear them, but not threatening them if they don't."

The educational effort includes the use of bicycle helmets and other safety equipment for those who ride bikes, Rollerblade or skateboard (although the latter is prohibited in Farmington's downtown business district).

After the meeting, Goss said that a "myriad of issues," including fairness, was reviewed by the traffic and safety board in putting together the resolution.

"Should we have an ordinance that only applies to juveniles and offenders and only to hikers?" Goss said. "Where do you draw the line?"

According to Goss, "Do I believe they should wear a helmet? Absolutely. And we'll make all reasonable efforts to convince the people to do that."

Despite objections, new condominiums to be built along Rouge

By HEATHER NEEDHAM
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Hills City Council Monday approved a 35-unit condominium development despite strong objections from the public and two council members.

The vote was 5-2, with Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi and councilwoman Vicki Barnett dissenting. Approving the measure means council can direct city staff and state environmental agencies to go ahead with conducting land studies, including the nearby Rouge River floodplain and to make other changes to the site plan if necessary. City Attorney John Donahue said denying the measure would not allow for the land studies.

The site condominium development, Kimberly Gardens subdivision, is planned just east of Tuck, north of Eight Mile, south of Grand River. The only entrance and exit is off Tuck, with interior streets ending in cul-de-sacs, as stipulated by the Hills planning commission. They approved the site plan 5-4 April 22.

The council opponents, some residents and the developer disagreed about the potential flooding risk of the area, which is near the Rouge River floodplain.

"It's my opinion that everything will improve as opposed to impacting them," said Lawrence L. Curran, representing developer JCK & Associates in Novi. Barnett disagreed.

"I'm concerned about it being built against the Rouge River," said Barnett. "I'm concerned about the 100-year floodplain."

She said she feared giving the OK to a project that might end up bringing grief to residents later over flooding. She said there are other developments in Farmington Hills plagued with flooding problems that she wished the council would have never approved.

Barnett also said she was concerned about seven parcels in particular being closer to the floodplain than others. She asked whether the city could step in and prohibit basements in those particular units.

City Attorney John Donahue said council doesn't have authority to do that.

Vagnozzi said he was concerned about flooding on Tuck because of previous flooding problems there, but Curran said it wouldn't be a problem.

"Our plan doesn't have any water going into Tuck Road," he said. "We're either going to improve it or not hurt it any. If anything, we're taking water away."

Resident Kathy Hicks, who lives next to the proposed development, said wetlands and the Rouge were major concerns.

"Building on wetlands is not a practical thing and the (Michigan Department of Environmental Quality) has to take care of it," she said.

A section of the property has become what she said is an "illegal dumping ground," and the Rouge banks have also been used as a dumping ground. She

Kimberly Gardens subdivision

Opponents say the 35-unit condominium development is too close to the Rouge River floodplain but supporters say giving the OK opens doors to environmental testing and that the plan can be changed. The Farmington Hills City Council passed it 5-2.



brought photographs of the area and gave them to council.

"When you build houses right alongside the river, you better make sure that river's not going to change," Hicks said. "The development needs to be looked at real carefully — the developer will walk away with all the profits, but it's the residents who will be stuck with all the problems."

Councilman Jerry Ellis said approving the measure would be better for the residents because the land studies could lead to a cleanup.

"Why would you not want them to go in?" Ellis said. "It might in fact improve your situation."

Robert Hicks, Kathy Hicks' husband, said they didn't object to a cleanup.

"We just want somebody to be responsible to find out what is there," he said. "We think it's something that somebody needs to look into."

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Spooky Gifts

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