

DNR plants hope for park

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A proposed Farmington Hills park is still a hike from reality. However, a Michigan Department of Natural Resources grant is expected to go a long way in planting the seed.

DNR approved the city's grant application for \$351,000 to buy 15.38 acres on Folsom, between Parker and Lundy.

Last year, area residents suggested to Farmington Hills council that the city buy the vacant horizontal parcel and turn it into a park.

The Farmington Hills southeast site is owned by Fairfax, Va., attorney Richard Golden, city officials said. City Manager Steve Brock has talked to Golden, who apparently is willing to sell.

The city will match the grant through its Parks Millage Fund. A number of hurdles still exist, though, chiefly what the parcel is worth and a selling price.

"We cannot offer less than fair market value, but we don't know what that is," said David Boyer, Hills Special Services director.

Before approving a project agreement, DNR requires two appraisals and an environmental study of the property. Also, the city has to show who has clear title to the land.

The city has until Sept. 1, 2000 to complete the deal in order to qualify for the grant.

City Naturalist Joe Derek said the area is filled with Michigan black cherry, sassafras and 'lip trees that are 100 years old. At least two acres is wetland.

"I hope this will go through because it reflects how residents can affect public policy for the good of the entire community," Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi said.

Neighborhood residents proposed the idea of a nature park with a dose of wishful thinking. A city councilman admitted he's surprised to see the proposal get this far.

"I wasn't real confident we'd get this one," Councilman Jerry Ellis said.

At Monday's meeting, Councilman Jon Grant joined his colleagues in unanimously approving that the city enter into an agreement with the DNR.



STAFF PHOTOS BY BILL BEZLER

Exploring: Sarah Newlin collects fallen leaves during her walk through a proposed Farmington Hills park.

However, Grant said he needs to know more about the intended use of the park and the price before fully supporting the idea.

City officials also cautioned that the DNR grant will require that the park be open to the public, which necessitate a parking lot.

Lundy Street resident Mary Newlin watched the proceedings with a slight smile.

She and her children chased down Vagnozzi during the Founders Festival parade in July 1998 to share her idea of creating a nature park in the southeast corner.

Newlin, who has three children ages 7, 5 and 2, said residents have to travel to 11 Mile

and beyond to enjoy trees and other natural assets.

She's not discouraged with the proposed project's pace, either.

"That's fine," Newlin said. "The fact we didn't sit and let 40 condominiums go up in our back yard was important."



Wonderful walk: Mary Ellen and Roger Newlin and their children, 7-year-old Sarah (right), 5-year-old Brian and 2-year-old Grace walk through the woods behind their Lundy Street home.

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