

FARMINGTON CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING

A special meeting of the Farmington City Council was held on Tuesday, January 17, 2006 in Council Chambers, 23600 Liberty Street, Farmington, Michigan. Notice of the meeting was posted in compliance with Public Act 267-1976.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Mayor McShane.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Buck, Knol, McShane, Sutherland, Wiggins.

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

CITY ADMINISTRATION: Clerk/Treasurer Cantrell, City Manager Pastue, Assistant City Manager Richards (arrived at 7:24 p.m.), Attorney Schultz.

DISCUSSION – OF PARASTAR INFORMATION

City Manager Pastue reviewed information provided by Parastar regarding an alternative transportation system. He pointed out that the information lacked specifics regarding the level of service that would be provided. He further noted that Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) considers the Grand River Route 305 a key route.

Responding to a question from Mayor McShane, Pastue stated that if Farmington decided to opt-out of SMART service would terminate the end of September.

Responding to a question from Councilmember Wiggins, Pastue stated his opinion that if the City opted-out, SMART would not be receptive to negotiating separate contracts. Wiggins advised that a contract could be on an annual basis allowing for continual evaluation of service.

Councilmember Knol pointed out that SMART failed to respond to the City of Farmington Hills regarding route and service issues. She noted that if Farmington Hills opted-out and Farmington stayed in, Farmington residents would not only experience reduced service (due to Livonia opting out also) but would continue to pay the 0.6 millage rate. She advised that Parastar could provide the same level of service on Grand River as SMART at a lower cost.

Councilmember Sutherland noted that Parastar has not provided adequate information regarding alternative transportation service.

Knol pointed out that Parastar has agreed to sign a contract with Farmington Hills to provide specific services. She noted that Botsford's (owner of Parastar) reputation would be on the line to honor this contract. She further noted that SMART would likely provide connecting points because of their service to surrounding communities.

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Councilmember Buck expressed concern about the time pressure and insufficient information available to make a carefully planned decision. He emphasized the importance of public transportation and the need for additional service. He noted the limited service in Farmington and asked about taxi service as an alternative approach.

Pastue noted the difficulty of making a determination without knowing the decision of Farmington Hills. He stated that if Farmington decided to opt out there is no guarantee that a viable option would be available.

Pastue confirmed that a decision must be made by January 31, 2006.

Mayor McShane noted some of the results of a recent meeting concerning opting-out of Smart:

- No competitive bidding process has taken place.
- SMART indicated that if Farmington stayed in the program, they would keep the 305 route and the City could use community credits to provide local service; consideration would be given to extending a route to Twelve Oaks Mall; and SMART was open to the incorporation of a teen advisory council to enhance current services or provide new service.
- Community partnership grants were discussed as a means to add service.
- The City could opt-out and provide a system of taxi service, however, that would require significant recordkeeping and present licensing issues.

Pastue confirmed that the City does not have a contract with SMART, but rather the service is provided through Oakland County Transit. He further confirmed that the next opportunity to opt-out would be in four years.

Wiggins asked regarding cost sharing arrangements given the importance of the 305 Route on Grand River, if Farmington Hills opts-out.

Pastue indicated that if Farmington stays in the program and other surrounding communities opt-out, SMART has proposed that those communities should provide some form of reimbursement because of the importance of the 305 Route to them.

Knol questioned why other communities would provide reimbursement to Farmington to continue SMART services on Grand River if alternative transportation would provide the same service.

Pastue agreed that there is no "hammer" to encourage surrounding communities to participate in a reimbursement plan.

Responding to a question, Pastue indicated that the City has no commitments in writing from SMART. He noted that Parastar recognizes the benefit of keeping the SMART 305 Route.

Mayor McShane noted the difficulty in making a decision without sufficient information.

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Pastue asked Attorney Schultz if the City is precluded from contracting with Oakland County Public Transportation Authority (OCPTA). Schultz advised that there are no apparent statutes that would preclude OCPTA from entering into a contract, however, he questioned whether they would have any incentive to do so.

Mayor McShane noted that options to SMART are available and requested that SMART be asked to provide more information including commitments in writing and she further requested a proposal be obtained from Parastar.

Sutherland advised that if the City decides to opt out of SMART, a "Plan B" should be in place to ensure there is no gap in transportation service including to the Senior Center.

Pastue responded that "Dial-A-Ride" services to seniors would continue through the use of the community municipal credits. He confirmed that even if Farmington Hills opts-out of SMART the credits would continue.

Buck questioned whether Farmington residents were being well served by SMART. Pastue responded that due to low ridership levels the City is not served as well in comparison to other communities.

Buck noted that Parastar's proposal would include free ridership to Farmington/Farmington Hills residents.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Earl Opperthausen, Farmington Hills resident, referenced his handout to Council regarding his concerns about SMART transportation. He discussed the inability of SMART to provide adequate service to the community over the last ten years. He noted the number of empty buses running through Farmington Hills and discussed his efforts to encourage communities to opt-out of SMART.

Ed McArdle, representing the Sierra Club, referring to his handout to Council, discussed the devaluation of the regional transportation system if communities start to opt-out. He noted that a mass transit system has a positive impact on businesses and property values. He requested that Council keep the transit system "regional."

Denise Albrecht, Farmington Hills resident, stated that based on her discussions with local teenagers, they are not interested in riding buses because they want the flexibility of their own transportation. She noted the savings and flexibility of contracting with Parastar and pointed out SMART's low ridership. She advised that SMART is committed to providing service until December 1st which would allow enough time to arrange for an alternate transportation system.

Pastue asked if Council wanted to meet to consider opting-out even if Farmington Hills decides to remain with SMART at their January 23rd meeting.

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Discussion followed regarding the City's position if Farmington Hills remained with SMART and whether Parastar would continue providing service to Farmington. Pastue noted that Parastar's proposal was based on service to Farmington Hills.

Wiggins and Knol concurred that Council would not need to meet if the Farmington Hills Council decided to stay with SMART.

Mayor McShane requested that City Manager Pastue obtain a proposal from Parastar and schedule a special meeting if necessary.

DISCUSSION – 2006 PROPOSED FOUNDERS FESTIVAL CHANGES IN SHIAWASSEE PARK

City Manager Pastue discussed proposed changes to the 2006 Founders Festival in Shiawassee. He stated that Farmington Hills is considering a carnival in Shiawassee Park as a way to supplement "Kids Day in the Park." He stated the carnival would operate on Friday, Saturday and Sunday during the festival and would be located at the west end of the Park. He advised that concerns would include security, waste disposal and parking. He stated that Farmington Hills is open to the idea of providing officers to ensure adequate security. He further stated that part of the proceeds would cover waste disposal costs.

Pastue stated that the carnival would provide the opportunity to eliminate the inflatables and small rides that have been located on Grove Street during the Festival.

Pastue confirmed that all kid and teen activities would be located in the park. He further confirmed that the crafters would be moved and that the Farmers' market would be added back to the festival.

Responding to a question from Wiggins, Pastue stated that the City will seek volunteers to assist in cleaning the park. Wiggins expressed concern regarding public safety issues relative to a carnival.

Discussion followed regarding street closings, parking, shuttle services, etc.

Sutherland expressed support for the carnival but noted that the Farmington Area Founders Festival (FAFF) should benefit from the proceeds. She pointed out that a variety of events reap benefits during the festival without FAFF receiving any revenue from them.

Buck also expressed support for the carnival, but questioned whether relocating events for children and teens to the park would be a loss for the downtown activities.

Responding to a question from Mayor McShane, Pastue stated that a decision should be made by the end of January.

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Mayor McShane expressed a few concerns regarding the proposed carnival including: the impact on the surrounding neighborhoods, parking, the festival becoming too large, and the possible negative effect on business in the Downtown.

Knol expressed support for the carnival, but noted that she would also like to see a movie shown in the park, similar to last year. She stated the change would increase space for crafters in downtown and promote greater use of the park. She suggested use of the Maxfield Training Center parking lots as venues for activities linking the park to downtown.

Mayor McShane asked if a carnival would be appropriate at another time of year with the opportunity of using the entire park.

Wiggins expressed conditional support for the carnival.

Mayor McShane requested assurance that the City would share in the proceeds from the carnival and that it has the support of the FAFF Board; and further requested the development of a well thought out parking plan.

Pastue responded that the FAFF Board had expressed support for the carnival.

PUBLIC COMMENT

James Thede, 32718 Grand River (River Glen Condominiums), noted that his condominium complex is adjacent to the park and requested increased communication from the City regarding activities in the park.

Mayor McShane suggested that a representative from River Glen meet with the City Manager regarding their concerns.

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY BOARD

Present: Kenneth Chiara, Norbert Leppanen, Demetra Mehas, Jeffrey Rehbine, Duane Reynolds, Ex-Officio Robert DeCorte, and Public Safety Director Charles Nebus.

Duane Reynolds discussed several issues currently being addressed by the Traffic and Safety Board including Farmington Road south of Ten Mile Road, parking around Farmington High School and a tree blockage at Shiawassee and Hawthorne. He stated that the "hot button" issues include the Flanders Street safe walking route, Downtown Center Parking Lot and the proposed changes on Grand River.

Mayor McShane asked if the Board had received other issues or concerns from residents.

Reynolds responded that residents with concerns are always invited to meetings to discuss their issues. He stated that even if residents do not attend the meetings, the Board will still investigate their issues.

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Buck asked if the Board had addressed ways to improve parking in the Downtown.

Reynolds responded that the Board had done a traffic count in the Downtown Center Parking Lot. He stated that the Board has been very involved in reviewing proposed parking lot changes and resolving parking issues.

Knol referred to a 2004 parking study that recommended cross use of parking lots to alleviate congestion in high use areas and noted a proposal that will be presented to the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) Board regarding use of timed parking in heavily used lots.

Sutherland asked if the Traffic and Safety Board would make a recommendation regarding a parking structure. Reynolds responded that they would provide a recommendation if one is requested. He stated that the Board had considered a parking structure several years ago but it was determined that it was not economically feasible.

Pastue stated that the City is considering a long term financing plan associated with parking enhancements. He suggested forming a temporary committee comprised of representatives from different committees to develop a long term parking plan including the option of a parking structure.

Knol noted that a parking plan presented to the DDA Board should also be reviewed by the Traffic and Safety Board and City Council.

Responding to a question, Pastue stated that the next meeting with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) would be the following day. Knol expressed support for involving the Traffic and Safety Board in those discussions.

Mayor McShane congratulated the Traffic and Safety Board on their outstanding efforts.

Boardmember Chiara noted that the Traffic and Safety Board supports striping the streets in the Downtown Center.

Responding to a question, Pastue confirmed that the Downtown Center streets would eventually be named. He noted that the striping would cost approximately \$900 and has been delayed to ensure it is done properly.

Discussion followed regarding the type of striping to be used.

Ex-Offico member Decorte noted that as a Traffic Engineer he has worked with thirteen communities in Oakland County and recognized the Farmington Traffic and Safety Board as the best. He commented on the dedication and teamwork of the Board and recognized the support from Council. He discussed the thorough process used by the Board to make a decision.

Responding to a question from Mayor McShane, Pastue stated that MDOT is planning alternate routes during construction on Grand River.

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ADJOURNMENT

01-06-006 MOTION by Knol, seconded by Wiggins, to adjourn the meeting. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting adjourned at 7:34 p.m.

JoAnne M. McShane, Mayor

Patsy K. Cantrell, City Clerk/Treasurer

Susan K. Halberstadt, Recording Secretary

APPROVED: February 20, 2006