

**MINUTES
PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
COMMUNITY ROOM
APRIL 17, 2025, 6:00 P.M.**

CALL MEETING TO ORDER

The Planning Commission Special Meeting was called to order by Chair Trafelet at 6:06pm.

ROLL CALL

Commissioners present: Aspinall, Brickner, Countegan, Mantey, Trafelet,

Commissioners Absent: Grant, Stimson, Varga, Ware

Others Present: City Planner Perdonik, City Attorney Schultz, Planning Consultants Upfal and Tangari

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOTION by Aspinall, support by Mantey, to approve the agenda as published.

Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

SPECIAL MEETING

A. CONTINUED DISCUSSION OF DRAFT ZONING TEXT AMENDMENT 5, 2024, TO INTRODUCE DESIGN STANDARDS AND REVISE PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT PROVISIONS

Planning Consultants Upfal and Tangari and City Planner Perdonik led this continued discussion of Draft Zoning Text Amendment 5, 2024, based on the Giffels Webster February 13, 2025 memorandums *Post-Master Plan Amendments: Design Standards and Planned Unit Development Regulations*. The discussion focused on proposed design standards as well as revisions to Planned Unit Development provisions. The conversation centered on ensuring high-quality construction and streetscape aesthetics while maintaining flexibility for redevelopment, minimizing legal risk, and supporting creative architectural design. Key discussion points are summarized below.

Review of past discussion

Design Standards for Materials and Entrances

- Revisions were being considered regarding how front entrances must be treated.
- EIFS (Exterior Insulation and Finish Systems) panels are discouraged, particularly on the ground floor, due to concerns about durability and aesthetics.
- Service doors should be placed at the rear or obscured from the public view; bay doors should not face main roads, with exceptions for restaurant patio-style openings.
- There is concern about requiring doors and windows to face major roads when inward-facing commercial designs are intended.

Application to Existing Buildings vs. New Development

- Agreement that *major redevelopment* (teardown and rebuild) should comply with new standards, but *minor modifications* to existing, older buildings should not always trigger full compliance.
- A tiered threshold is built into the draft ordinance: expansions greater than 50% (of building, parking, or capacity) would require compliance; expansions under 50% would not.

- Concern about retroactive enforcement was discussed, emphasizing that new rules should not unfairly burden existing properties.

Flexibility, Waivers, and Legal Risk

- Emphasis on allowing the Planning Commission flexibility to grant waivers when appropriate.
- Concern was raised that too much flexibility could undermine the ordinance over time if waivers are overused.
- Some cities, like Canton, only allow waivers under very narrow conditions (e.g., replicating historic architectural styles).
- General caution to avoid crafting regulations that might create legal vulnerabilities (e.g., lawsuits over post-facto enforcement).

Encouraging Creativity and Unique Design

- Worry that overly strict design standards could stifle architectural creativity.
- Examples were given of innovative buildings such as the JST building on 12 Mile that might not fit a rigid design ordinance. However, it was pointed out that the JST building actually met ordinance requirements and was a great example of creativity within ordinance standards.
- Desire to balance standards with enough flexibility to allow for diverse and attractive development, rather than enforcing uniformity.
- Anticipated updates to the OS-4 district are expected to help encourage investment in underutilized office and commercial properties, particularly along 12 Mile Road. The new zoning flexibility could help attract restaurants and other amenities similar to nearby communities.

Tonight's discussion focused on:

Masonry and Painting Restrictions

- Color in general will not be regulated under the proposed standards.
- Concerns were raised about painting masonry surfaces, particularly brick and cinderblock, as it can degrade a building's architectural character.
- There was consensus to prohibit painted masonry altogether in order to preserve material quality, and to remove "painted block" from the list of acceptable accent materials.
- Murals could be exempt from the painted masonry prohibition, with decisions made on a case-by-case basis and further guidance expected through the Public Art ordinance.

Architectural Style, Creative Design, and Property Rights

- Discussion of property rights: standards are intended to protect neighboring property values without dictating specific architectural designs.
- Mixed feelings about architectural styles, such as mansard roofs:
 - Genuine, integrated mansard roofs can be attractive.
 - "Tacked-on" mansard roofs look poor and should be discouraged.

Local Identity and 60s–70s "Alpine" Style

- A resident had suggested that Farmington Hills has an identifiable 60s–70s modern "Alpine" style (e.g., sloped roofs) and that the City could encourage—but not require—continuation of this style.
- Commissioners were skeptical, expressing that the city's current architecture is eclectic and lacks clear identity; this idea was set aside.

Revisiting Street-Facing Entrances and Walkability

- Generally, the Commission showed a preference for street-facing entrances, aligning with the master plan's goal of encouraging walkability.

- Entrances facing streets can be required but waived if necessary, allowing flexibility while still setting an expectation.
- Future residential growth near Northwestern Highway (Stonefield and The Emerson) could eventually create a more walkable environment.
- Current lack of connected bike paths and sidewalks was discussed as a challenge to achieving walkability. Past efforts to expand bike paths and sidewalks have been slow but remain a long-term priority.
- Long-term examples such as Davis, California, and Amsterdam were cited to show that major shifts toward bike-friendly, walkable cities are possible but require sustained investment and planning.

Ordinance Direction and City Council Expectations

- City Council seeks a baseline of quality design standards, but not highly prescriptive architectural controls. Baseline standards could improve overall appearance, encouraging neighboring investment through the domino effect.
- Past examples cited (e.g., Meijer at 14 Mile and Orchard Lake) where City Council pushed for better architecture through PUD review.
- The majority of good-faith developers would not be affected negatively by baseline standards; the goal is to capture low-quality proposals before approval.
- Recognition that land values and market realities impact the type and quality of materials developers are willing to use. Many redevelopment projects operate on narrow financial margins, and added costs could deter investors. However, it was also acknowledged that some applications require multiple rounds of revisions due to poor design quality and site planning.

Next Steps

- There was general consensus that the Planning Consultants and staff would create a draft ordinance relative to design standards, in preparation for an up-or-down vote. The draft ordinance will be circulated for review.
- Redevelopment concerns were emphasized; the goal is to support redevelopment rather than discourage it.
- City Council, as the policymaking body, will ultimately decide on adoption.

Planned Unit Developments

Discussion shifted to updates to the Planned Unit Development (PUD) ordinance.

Importance of Off-Site Infrastructure in PUDs

- Staff emphasized that Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) should contribute to broader community infrastructure, such as sewer, water, and road improvements.
- Many cities require off-site improvements as a condition of PUD approvals, and there was support that similar expectations be more clearly spelled out in Farmington Hills' ordinances.

Frequency and Use of PUDs in Farmington Hills

- Compared to other communities, Farmington Hills processes a very high number of PUD applications. Overusing the PUD tool can lead to unintended consequences, while underusing it can miss beneficial projects. The goal should be to strike a balance—using PUDs for truly impactful projects without making them a workaround to avoid standard zoning rules.

- Overuse of PUDs is similar to frequently granting variances, indicating deeper issues with zoning regulations. PUDs should not be a way to bypass existing standards but rather offer a tool for rewarding exceptional projects that provide significant community benefits.

Planned Changes to PUD Ordinance Requirements

- Proposed changes raise the qualification bar for PUDs, requiring developers to provide multiple public benefits upfront.
- Other proposed changes include:
 - Making it harder to initially qualify for a PUD.
 - Simplifying the process for amending existing PUDs, to avoid prolonged and stalled projects.
 - Imposing time limits on how long a PUD agreement can remain unsigned, preventing developers from delaying negotiations indefinitely.
- The revisions are intended to prevent abuse of current regulations and ensure that PUDs truly deliver meaningful benefits.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Brickner, support by Grant, to adjourn.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

The meeting adjourned at 7:22pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kristen Aspinall
Planning Commission Secretary

/cem