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## Public hearing postponed due to big resident turnout

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By Jennie Miller  
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**FERNDALE** — It was standing room only for many of the nearly 200 residents who turned up at a public hearing of Ferndale's Plan Commission Sept. 15 to discuss proposed changes to the city's zoning ordinance.

A crowd of residents even gathered in the hallway outside the City Council chambers because attendance inside had surpassed its capacity.

"It is imperative that we meet in a venue that can accommodate everyone, so that we can reasonably and safely have our voices heard," said Plan Commission Chairman Jeff Sharp, who hadn't predicted the spike in attendance after the city sent out letters to 1,600 residents informing them that their properties faced rezoning — some to parking districts.

"When you send that many letters out, you shouldn't hold the hearing in a room with a capacity of 145," one resident could be heard saying, amid shouts from the audience that the commission wasn't being fair to the public and that no changes should be made.

The meeting was canceled. A second public hearing, planned for Thursday, Sept. 22, was also canceled, according to the city's building department.

Scott Galloway, a member of the Plan Commission as well as Ferndale's City Council, said the group plans to sit down and review the information.

"We want to see how we can better inform the residents about what is going on before the next public hearing," Galloway said, predicting the hearing will be held at a much larger venue sometime in October. "We want to get a letter out to folks, answering the most basic questions."

The proposed changes are reportedly the product of seven years of research to update the city's master plan, according to City Manager Thomas Barwin and Community Development Director Marsha Scheer, a member of the Plan Commission. The last time the zoning ordinance was written was 1968.

"The direction of the city has obviously changed since 1968," Scheer said. "We're addressing that and creating a guide to future development."

The first and second residential parcels immediately behind Woodward could be changed from residential to parking, to allow for future developers to meet the needs of their business.

"The city realizes that there is a parking problem and that any future commercial development on Woodward will require parking," Barwin said.

Other zoning changes include north Hilton, south Livernois and West Marshall properties, which could be rezoned for mixed use, as well as parts of East Nine Mile for commercial use.

"This is not going to impact property taxes," Barwin said, addressing one of many concerns raised by residents who would be affected by those changes.

However, residents have even more concerns, as made clear at the public hearing last week. As the commission discussed whether to reschedule the meeting or attempt to continue, residents could be heard conversing about numerous issues with regards to the proposed changes.

What affect will this have on property values?

According to Barwin, the changes should not affect property values, although some residents report that they have heard otherwise. One resident consulted several lending firms who claimed his property would suffer a 30 percent reduction in value if rezoned to parking.

What if I don't want to sell my home to a developer — can it still remain a residence?

Yes. Scheer pointed out that the parcels just south of Nine Mile and east of Woodward

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have been zoned parking since 1975, and residents have continued living there without feeling any adverse affects.

"As long as the use is maintained as residential, it can be residential forever," she said.

What if my home is destroyed by a fire or natural disaster — can I rebuild?

If up to 50 percent of the home is damaged by a fire or natural disaster, it can be rebuilt.

"If it is completely destroyed, it cannot," Scheer said.

Can I still make improvements on my home or build an addition?

Additions and the like can be made on a home that is existing non-conforming, Scheer said, although life safety and health issues are allowed to be improved upon. Permits could still be obtained by petitioning the Zoning Board of Appeals.

How will this affect someone purchasing my home?

"Potentially, there could be a financing issue," said the city's attorney, P. Daniel Christ, with regards to mortgaging a home.

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