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Rezoning issue still on the forefront

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By Jennie Miller
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FERNDALE — Consider this the calm before the storm.

The Ferndale Plan Commission is still pursuing the possibility of rezoning 1,600 residential properties in the city.

A public information forum is reportedly scheduled for Wednesday, Nov. 16, at 7 p.m., at John F. Kennedy School, during which a professional consultant will present information about the Zoning Ordinance, the city's Master Plan, and the Plan Commission's vision for Ferndale.

According to Scott Galloway, a member of both the Plan Commission and the Ferndale City Council, a public hearing will be held in the Ferndale High School auditorium Monday, Nov. 21 at 7 p.m.

"Residents will have the opportunity to share their thoughts," Galloway said. "Individuals will each have three minutes to speak, and if it's longer, they can submit written comments that will be made a part of the record."

The original public hearing on the topic, scheduled for Sept. 15, was canceled after nearly 200 residents showed up to protest the plans, exceeding the capacity of the tight City Council chambers.

Most, it seemed, were opposing plans to change numerous residential properties behind Woodward to a parking district. Residents have since been up in arms regarding how this would affect property values, mortgages, insurance, and the ability to make improvements and additions.

Others are concerned with the change to a non-conforming property. The biggest issue with this is that if a fire or natural disaster destroys more than 50 percent of the house, it cannot be rebuilt, according to Marsha Scheer, director of Community Development Services.

"We've done quite a bit of investigating," said Ray Brown, who lives on Lewiston and is in support of the city's vision, but not at his own expense. "We're not trying to be hard cases against what they're trying to do. I am absolutely in support of their plans. I just don't see why they have to repair a system that seems to be working well so far."

"With all the new development, they're going to need all the parking they can get. But rather than have a large number of these lots, why not follow along with the Troy project and do what Birmingham did and have parking decks all over town?"

Instead of forcing residents to deal with rezoned property, the city should make it easier for the rezoning to go through once a developer has already bought the property, Brown said.

Galloway insisted those issues are going to be addressed once the informational meeting and public hearing have taken place.

"There are going to be revisions — that seems clear to me," he said. "We're going to do something to address the parking. I'm almost certain that will be taken care of."

The Plan Commission will make any necessary revisions to the proposed changes of the Zoning Ordinance and then place the matter before the Ferndale City Council. That meeting is tentatively scheduled for Jan. 9, Galloway said.

According to Scheer, notices regarding the public meetings will be mailed to affected residents the week of Nov. 1.

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