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Rezoning now in the hands of City Council

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 By Jennie Miller
 C & G Staff Writer

FERNDALE — After four months of controversy, complaints and compromise, the updated Zoning Ordinance now lies in the hands of the Ferndale City Council, and its just one step away from being approved.

The latest public hearing was held Jan. 5 by the Plan Commission and was based on the newest changes members had agreed upon at its regular meeting last month.

Unlike the first round, when such a large number of residents turned up in protest that the hearing was postponed, there were reportedly only eight residents in attendance, and only two spoke out against the changes.

"There were concerns reiterated from the last public hearing," said Marsha Scheer, director of the Community Development Services department. "The comments will be incorporated into the report that must be presented to council for their consideration."

The commission feels the new proposal satisfies both the needs of the city as well as the wishes of the majority of the residents.

"There are still people who aren't happy," said Scott Galloway, Plan Commission and City Council member. "I wish we could make everybody happy, but that's impossible."

Scheer requested that the item be placed on the Jan. 23 City Council agenda. Galloway expects the issue will wait until February.

The Plan Commission initially sought after such controversial changes as a parking district for properties directly behind Woodward lots, and a large mixed-use development district on Marshall. Tweaks were made to accommodate the residents who deemed the proposal unfair.

The new changes may not be as aggressive as they once were, but Galloway feels the product still satisfies the commission's mission.

"The real vision of the Plan Commission was to try to bring more people downtown; to have more dense residential areas close to downtown and Woodward; and to step back as you go further north or west," he said. "That vision is still in place, I think."

The changes now include mixed-use districts on Hilton, Livernois, Marshall (although smaller than initially proposed) and Nine Mile, Galloway said.

"The mixed-use idea wasn't even in our old zoning, so it's still forward-thinking now that we have that in place," Galloway said.

The definition was modified, allowing existing single-family dwellings to remain in the district; but once a property is changed, it cannot go back.

The commercial districts are now simplified from five categories down to three; there are new definitions for front yard setbacks, and limitations for garage sizes.

As for the parking issue, which had intended to make it easier for developers to come into the area, Galloway predicted that the Plan Commission will end up tweaking a portion of the Master Plan to accomplish that.

"I think the controversy has cooled down," Galloway said.
 You can reach Jennie Miller at jmiller@candgnews.com

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