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Officials look at funding options for Costick Center

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FARMINGTON HILLS — The Aug. 4 primary election has come and gone. In the city of Farmington Hills, officials had floated the idea of going to taxpayers to ask for additional funding for the new Costick Center. But ultimately, the option did not appear on the ballot, and so officials continue to consider their options.

According to Thomas Skrobola, the city's finance director, the prospect of a new millage was first raised at the City Council meeting June 8, in the form of an increase to the existing parks and recreation millage, which is less than a half-mill.

The idea was to ask voters to approve increasing that rate to 1 mill. The city collects \$1 for every \$1,000 of a property's taxable value, multiplied by the millage rate. For the typical taxpayer in Farmington Hills, this would have been a tax increase of about \$6 per month.

Skrobola said this increase would have resulted in an additional \$2.8 million in funding, which would go toward other special services and needs related to parks and recreation — including the construction of the new Costick Center, estimated to cost around \$30-\$35 million.



The Farmington Hills City Council continues to look at funding for the new Costick Center. Previously, the council considered a millage increase for the Aug. 4 option that ultimately was not placed on the ballot.

Photo by Patricia O’Blenes

The council needed a supermajority — five “yes” votes from the seven-member council — but the vote broke down 4-3, with Farmington Hills Mayor Theresa Rich and council members Jackie Boleware, Bill Dwyer and Charlie Starkman voting for the option, while council members Valerie Knol, Jon Aldred and Michael Bridges voted against it.

Knol said she voted “no” for two reasons.

“I know there are people struggling to make ends meet. I didn’t want to raise the overall millage on them,” Knol said. “I would like to keep Farmington Hills an affordable place to live.”

The second reason was that she and Aldred had offered an alternative proposal where the overall rate would not be increased, but rather, previously allocated money from the state for roads would be legally shifted to help fund the new center.

“Farmington Hills will be receiving additional revenue from the state for road funding,” Knol said. “Our suggestion was that we have two separate road millages, (and) lower one of the road millages by the equivalent amount we were getting in additional revenue from the state.”

If council had supported this, Knol said she would have voted for the millage option. However, the mayor noted that some federal and state funding has yet to materialize.

According to Rich, in 2024, Farmington Hills was hoping for about \$4 million in federal funding for the Costick Center.

“In 2024, a budget was not passed by Congress. They kept doing a continuing resolution after continuing resolution. Therefore, no one in the entire country received (the funds) that entire fiscal year,” Rich said. “That money would have made a big difference.

“At this point we don’t know if the federal government will pass a budget or continue with continuing resolutions like in 2024,” Rich continued. “We are optimistic, but the money is not guaranteed.”

State lawmakers had previously allocated \$5 million for the project, but that funding did not make the final cut when the state budget was approved June 30, Rich noted.

“We are going to build a beautiful activities center that is going to meet at least most of the wants of the community, and we are going to stay within our means,” Rich said. “Later in the year, we will hire a construction manager that will focus on what we can deliver for \$25 million.”

Both Rich and Knol agree it’s important to stay within the city’s budget for this project.

The architects on the project are Neumann/Smith Architecture. Rich described this project as “state of the art” and a “once-in-a-lifetime project” made with future generations in mind.

Some of the non-negotiable elements of the new activities center are a commercial kitchen, a large gymnasium for activities and dancing, a pool, space for memory care and a place to vote, according to Rich.

The current Costick Center kitchen serves nearly 115,000 meals a year, she said, with congregant meals and the Meals on Wheels program. There will also be one pool deep enough for water aerobics. The city wanted two pools, but one pool is what the budget currently allows.

“It is sad that the residents didn’t get to decide on the millage,” she added.