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# OPEN SPACE AND PARKLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM

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## ACTIVITY REPORT FISCAL YEAR 2009 - 2010 JULY 1, 2009 – JUNE 30, 2010



PREPARED FOR:  
THE CITY OF ANN ARBOR  
GREENBELT ADVISORY COMMISSION  
PARKS ADVISORY COMMISSION

PREPARED BY:  
**THE CONSERVATION FUND**

*America's Partner in Conservation*

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## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

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Ann Arbor residents are fortunate enough to not only have a vibrant park system, but to also have protected open space surrounding the city that provide scenic vistas, reprieve from urban closeness, and recreational opportunities. All of these factors play a role in the quality of life for Ann Arbor residents, and as a result, Ann Arbor has received numerous awards for being one of the best small towns to live in America. The Open Space and Parkland Preservation Program, also known as the Greenbelt program, helps to ensure this quality of life is maintained for current and future generations of Ann Arbor residents.

In 2003, residents had the foresight to pass the Open Space and Parkland Preservation Millage. Money generated through this tax levy is used to purchase parkland within the City, as well as, to protect farmland, open spaces and natural areas within portions of 8 Townships surrounding Ann Arbor, known as the Greenbelt District. The purpose of the initiative is to preserve open space, natural habitats, working lands, and the City's source waters outside the city limits, as well as add parkland and recreational opportunities within the City limits.

The Greenbelt program is in its fifth year of land acquisition and is making great strides in achieving the goals of the program. Within the City, the millage has provided funds to add 41 acres of additional parkland within the City limits. These additions have provided critical linkages between existing parkland, protected high quality natural features remaining in the City, and increased access to existing parks; thus, increasing the viability of the overall park system for the Ann Arbor residents. All of these are priorities for acquisition stated in the City's PROS Plan. Outside of the City, the millage has helped to protect over 1,782 acres of working farmland and open space. Protecting farmland provides many benefits to the Ann Arbor residents by protecting the rural, scenic vistas, local agricultural economy, as well as protecting land along tributaries of the Huron River.

Ann Arbor, Webster and Scio Townships located within the Greenbelt District have also passed similar land preservation millages, providing opportunities for the Greenbelt to leverage city funds and collaborate with other jurisdictions on land preservation. Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation also has funds for the purchase of high quality natural areas, and have partnered with the Greenbelt on several purchases.

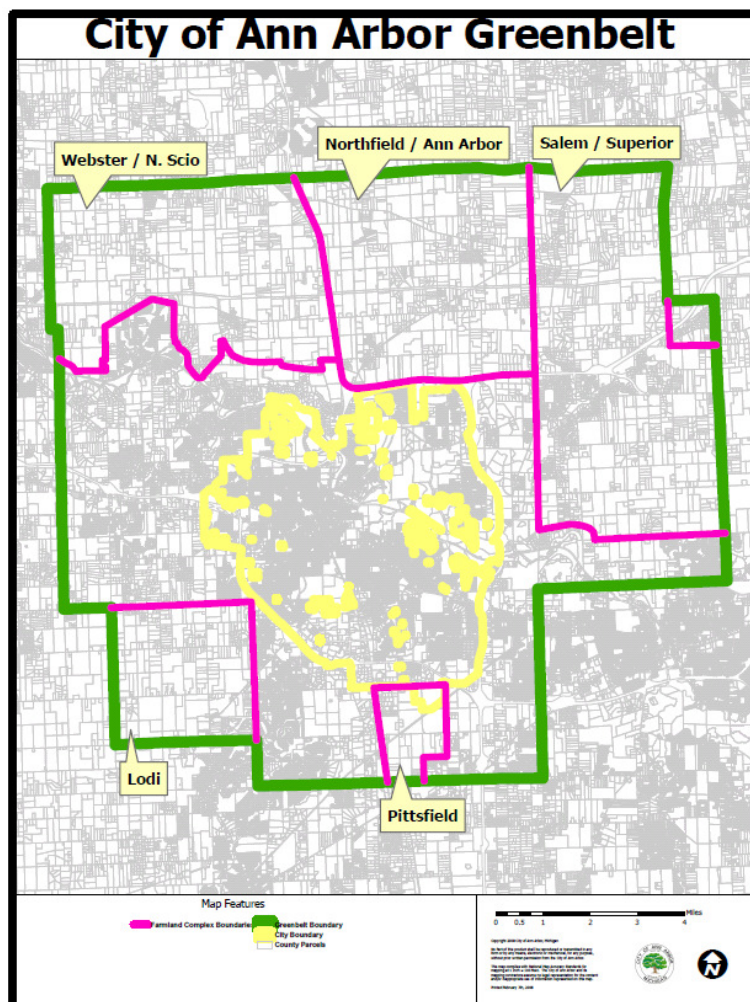
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## GREENBELT

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### STRATEGIC DIRECTION

As outlined in the Greenbelt's Strategic Plan, which was originally adopted in 2005, the program has focused on forming large blocks (1,000 acres or greater) of protected farmland and open space through the acquisition of easements, protecting land within the Huron River Watershed, and capitalizing on partnership opportunities. The Greenbelt identified 5 areas to concentrate acquisitions within the Greenbelt District to form these large blocks of protected land (see map below). The Commission continues to use the Strategic Plan to guide recommendations to Council on land acquisition.



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<b>Strategic Plan Block</b>	<b>Acres Completed</b>	<b>Acres Approved</b>	<b>Total Acres</b>
Web. / Scio / Ann Arbor	940	337	1,277
Northfield / Ann Arbor	217	353	570
Salem / Superior	296	0	296
Lodi	101	0	101
Pittsfield	89	0	89
<i>Outside Blocks</i>	<i>139</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>139</i>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1,782</b>	<b>690</b>	<b>2,472</b>

*\*Note: These figures are for the Greenbelt related purchases only and do not take into consideration other protected property.*

The Greenbelt Advisory Commission modified the Strategic plan in 2008 to also include language to acknowledge the increased interest from owners (and prospective owners) of small farms and local food producers. Prior to 2008, the Greenbelt focused on larger farms – 40 acres or great – that were eligible for Farm and Ranch Land Protection (FRPP) grant funding. The Greenbelt continues to explore ways that the program may also be a viable option for smaller farms that are producing for the direct market in the Ann Arbor area in order to protect a diversity of types of agricultural properties in the area.

The Greenbelt Advisory Commission also continues to rank the protection of the Huron River as another top priority for land acquisitions. The Huron River is an important recreational and natural resource in the Ann Arbor area. Applications received either along the Huron River or which contain tributaries of the Huron River will be a priority for the Greenbelt, recognizing the significance of the Huron River to the Ann Arbor residents as their source of drinking water.

The Greenbelt scoring criteria awards points to applications that provide scenic views, and visibility from major corridors frequently traveled by Ann Arbor residents. Examples of these major corridors are along the highways that surround the city, which are often an entryway into the City, or routes that are frequented by bikers. The scenic value of each of the applications will continue to be a part of the scoring criteria. Furthermore, the abovementioned strategic

blocks encompass major corridors, so an added benefit of forming large blocks of protected land will be preserving critical viewsheds within the Greenbelt District.

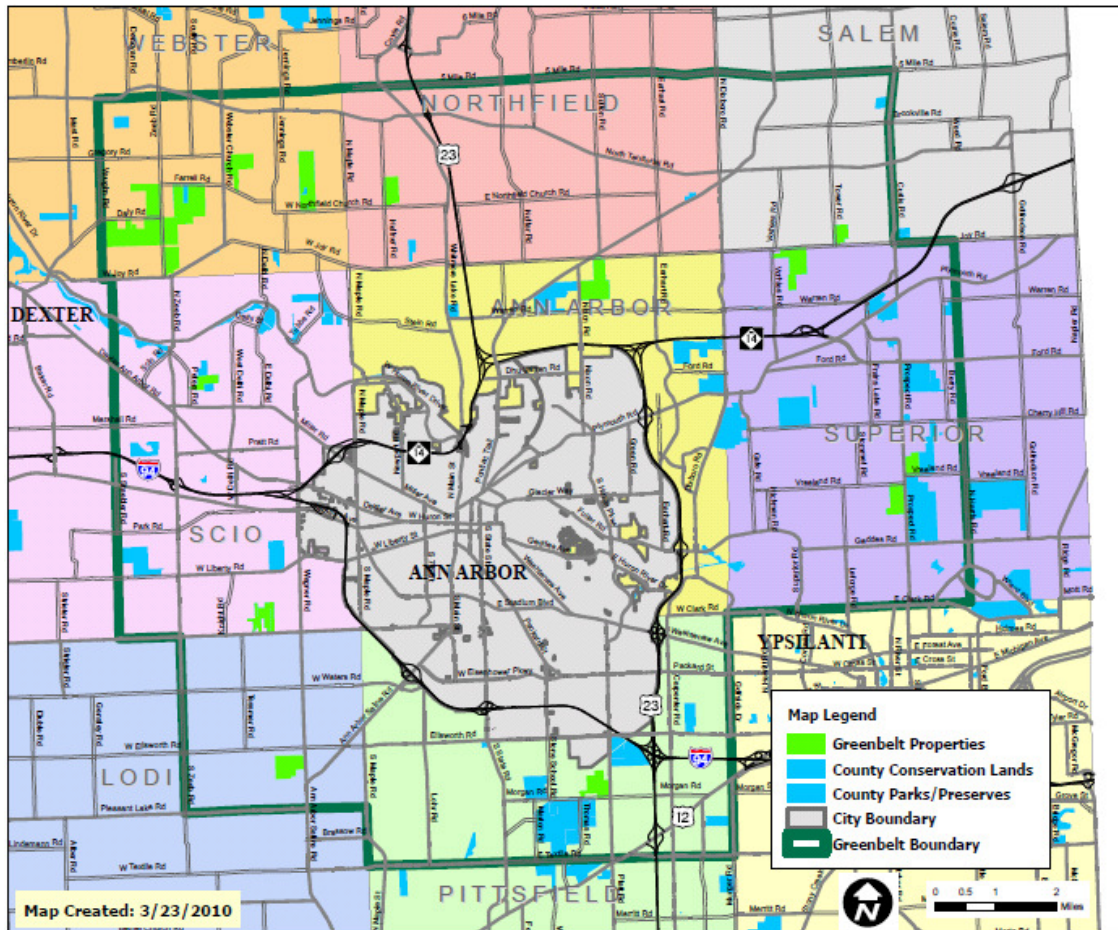
## **LAND ACQUISITIONS**

Over the last 3 years, the Greenbelt has witnessed significant changes within the local economy and real estate market, which has had an effect on land acquisition transactions. The downturn in the market has resulted in fewer developers buying land in the area and an increase in properties on the market. Furthermore, the properties are remaining on the market for a longer period of time. Ultimately, this has equated to appraised values for development rights decreasing from an average of \$16,000 / acre to about \$6,000 / acre.

In order to get a better understanding of the changes in the local real estate market, the Greenbelt hired a local appraiser, Mike Williams of Gerald Alcock Company, to conduct a market analysis in Webster and Superior Townships. The appraiser determined that based on the current properties on the market that it would take between 5 and 8 years for the market to absorb the availability of homes and vacant property.

As of the end of the fiscal year, the Greenbelt Program has helped to protect 1,782 acres on working farms and natural areas (see map below of completed projects). These properties have a total fair market value of roughly \$24.3 million, with a cost to the Ann Arbor taxpayers of \$12.5 million. Thus, the City has contributed roughly 50% of the funds, and the remaining funds have been secured from FRPP grants, local partners, or landowner donations. In many cases, matching funds are secured through a variety of sources.





During the 2009-2010 Fiscal Year the Greenbelt completed 3 acquisitions, protecting a total of 460.89 acres of working farmland. In November 2009, the purchase of development rights easement was purchased on the Webster United Church of Christ property, located along Farrell Road in Webster Township. The property is located in close proximity to other protected farms. Webster Township contributed funds toward the purchase, as outlined below in section on “Local Partners”. In December 2009, the purchase of development rights easement was purchased on the William and Cherie Nixon Farm in Webster Township and Stephen, Frederick and Christopher Girbach Farm (formerly known locally as the Frederick farm) in Lodi Township. The Nixon Farm is located at the corner of Zeeb and Daly Road in Webster Township and is adjacent to both the Merkel / Heller farm and Smyth farm, already protected by the Greenbelt and Webster Township. The Girbach farm was the first completed project in Lodi Township. This project would not have been possible without the partnership of both Lodi Township and the Legacy Land Conservancy.

## **CONSERVATION EASEMENTS – TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP**

For the first time, properties that the City owns a conservation easement on have been transferred to new owners. The Hilton Trust farm located in Pittsfield Township was sold to Duane Mason for \$3,200 per acre. Duane Mason is a local farmer and continues to farm the property in row crop agriculture. The Girbach farm was the second property that was transferred to a new owner. The City completed the purchase of development rights in December of 2009 and shortly thereafter the farm was purchased by Michael and Hope Vestergaard for \$4,300 / acre. In addition to the 101.9 acres easement parcel, the Vestergaards purchased the additional 10 acres with the house and farm buildings that are not encumbered by the conservation easement. The Vestergaards plan to turn the farm into a grass fed beef operation. They also hope to develop public education component to highlight agricultural production and will open a small market to sale additional local products. While the Vestergaards renovate the house and farm buildings, the farm is leased to a local farmer and continues to be in row crop agriculture.

## **LEVERAGING FUNDS**

### **FARM AND RANCLAND PROTECTION PROGRAM**

For the 2010 grant cycle, the City was awarded \$679,380 toward the purchase of development rights on the Gilbert and Kathryn Whitney in Webster Township and Honke Family LLC property in Northfield Township. Once completed, these properties will total another 242.51 acres of preserved farmland. The Whitney farm is ideally located, adjacent to the Webster United Church of Christ property that was completed this fiscal year and will complete the first 1,000 acre block in Webster Township. The Honke Family LLC is also located in proximity to several projects in the works and will contribute to the continuation of a “greenbelt” along the northern boundary of the City.

This year an unprecedented amount of FRPP dollars have been obligated to Michigan for farmland preservation. An additional grant cycle was announced for FRPP, with funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. The City submitted an additional 3 properties and are awaiting notice of awards on the applications.

Since 2005, the City has secured over \$5.4 million from the FRPP program. The City has also partnered with other local agencies within the Greenbelt District, who have also received FRPP grant funds.

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## LOCAL PARTNERS

As mentioned above, the City partnered with a number of local partners on each of the completed projects during this fiscal year. Webster Township contributed \$77,000 toward the purchase of development rights on the Webster United Church of Christ deal and \$200,000 for the William and Cherie Nixon deal.

It should also be noted that the land preservation millage originally passed in Webster Township in 2005 was a 5 year millage and on the November 2009 ballot for renewal. The millage again passed with 60% approval rate of the millage renewal, showing continued strong support for farmland preservation efforts.

The purchase of development rights on the Girbach Farm marked a couple of new local partners for the Greenbelt. Lodi Township contributed \$1,000 toward the purchase and Legacy Land Conservancy committed \$37,000 toward the purchase.

## PUBLIC AND LANDOWNER OUTREACH

Letters and Greenbelt applications were mailed to over 250 landowners who own 20 acres or greater within the Greenbelt District, in order to solicit new applications.

In addition to outreach to possible applicants within the Greenbelt District, the Greenbelt Commission and staff made strides in reaching out to the public. For one, the Greenbelt worked with many landowners who have protected their properties to put up signs at Greenbelt properties. In addition, this fiscal year the Greenbelt began planning for its first Bus Tour for participants to visit Greenbelt properties, meet some local partners and landowners who have participated in the program. Commissioners and staff have also participated in many local events and presented at conferences to spread the word about the Greenbelt, including: hosting a booth at the HomeGrown Festival, presenting at Land Trust Alliance's Midwest Regional conference, Food System Economic Partnership Annual Conference, Ottawa Greenbelt Visioning Workshop, Michigan Organic Food and Farming Annual Conference, and the Michigan Affordable Housing Annual Conference.

## PRESERVE WASHTENAW

Preserve Washtenaw is a collaborative group consisting of public agencies and private organizations in Washtenaw County, focused on land preservation. Preserve Washtenaw has informally been meeting for over 4 years. The City is an active member of Preserve Washtenaw. The purpose of Preserve Washtenaw is to serve as a coordinating body for ongoing public and private land protection efforts, ensuring the highest possible level of cooperation and communication, and least possible amount of duplication and overlap. The group also hopes to provide a virtual single point of entry for landowners interested in land protection and/or stewardship to reduce confusion for landowners. The partners include

Washtenaw Land Trust, Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Natural Area Program, Raisin Valley Land Trust, Legacy Land Conservancy, Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, Ann Arbor Township, Webster Township, Scio Township, and the City of Ann Arbor.

## **FINANCIAL SPREADSHEET**

See Appendix A for details.

## **STEWARDSHIP FUNDS**

For each conservation easement that is purchased, between \$23,000 and \$25,000 is set aside in a separate endowment fund. These endowment funds are to cover the annual monitoring requirements in perpetuity and enforcement obligations of any violations on the easements. To date, a total of \$\_\_\_\_\_ is in the Greenbelt's endowment fund.

## **STATUS OF GOALS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2009 – 2010**

- **APPLY FOR FRPP FUNDS ON AT LEAST 3 PROPERTIES.**

The City applied for FRPP grants on 6 properties – Gilbert and Kathryn Whitney, Honke Family LLC, Nancy Geiger Trust and Rose Geiger Trust (2 properties), Lee Maulbetsch Trust and Lori Maulbetsch Trust, and Betty L. Nollar Trust.

- **CLOSE ON AT LEAST 5 PROPERTIES.**

The City closed on 3 properties during the fiscal year and have another 2 under contract, awaiting FRPP approval for closing.

- **COMPLETE 1,000 ACRE BLOCK FOR WEBSTER TOWNSHIP.**

The City has protected 940 acres in Webster Township and received additional grant funds for another property in Webster Township.

- **OBTAIN AT LEAST 20% MATCHING FUND ON ALL TRANSACTIONS FROM LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, STATE GOVERNMENT, FEDERAL GRANTS OR LANDOWNER DONATIONS.**

For the transactions completed this fiscal year, the City averaged 38% match.

### **GOALS FOR 2010-2011**

- Apply for grant funds on 2 properties in 2011 cycle.
- Close on 4 properties.
- Complete 1,000 acre block for Webster Township.
- Complete the first Greenbelt Bus Tour and develop plan for future tours.
- Obtain at least 20% matching funds on all transactions.

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## **PARK LAND ACQUISITIONS**

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### **STRATEGIC DIRECTION**

During the previous fiscal year, the Park Advisory Commission and staff utilized GIS to embark on a Strategic Planning process for parkland acquisitions. Through GIS, vacant parcels were identified and ranked based on their suitability for acquisition as a park. The goal of this process is to provide a strategic approach to ensure the viability of the City's park system.

Through the strategic planning process, using GIS, staff was able to identify underserved neighborhoods. In an ideal system, every household should be within walking distance (¼ mile) of a neighborhood park (City of Ann Arbor PROS Plan F6). By using functions of GIS, the housing units not within walking distance of an existing neighborhood park were identified. This helps to ensure adequate access to the park system for all neighborhoods. This fiscal year, the Park Advisory Commission began to build on the GIS study and to dig a little deeper in the underserved neighborhoods. Each Commissioner took a section of the City and the GIS maps created to determine the areas that are underserved for neighborhood parks.

In addition, at the end of the fiscal year, the City parks staff began the process for updating the PROS Plan, which included a series of public meetings and online surveys. The updated PROS Plan will include an updated list of priorities for acquisitions.

### **LAND PROTECTION**

The City of Ann Arbor added 2 additions to existing parks this fiscal year. The first was an addition to West Park, along Chapin Street. The site currently has a house on the site that will be demolished during the next fiscal year. The property adds visibility to the parking area from the street for better safety. In addition the house that is located in floodplain will be demolished and will help with ongoing storm water mitigation efforts at West Park associated with the Allen Creek Drain.

Secondly, the City accepted a donation of a portion of land that connects Redbud Nature Area and Scheffler Park. The linkage also contains a portion of Malletts Creek. The site was donated from Dr. Linkner to the City of Ann Arbor parks.

### **FINANCIAL SPREADSHEET**

See Appendix A for details.

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## **STATUS OF GOALS FOR 2008 – 2009**

- COMPLETE 1 – 2 TRANSACTIONS, INCLUDING ONE DONATION.

The City purchased 2 properties as additions to existing parks.

- UPDATE PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE LAND ACQUISITIONS.

The Land Acquisition Committee and staff worked to generate updated maps for underserved

## **GOALS FOR 2009 - 2010**

- Complete 1 – 2 transactions.
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## **APPENDICES**

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Appendix A: Financial Report

Appendix B: Compilation of news articles





## **Appendix A: Fiscal Year 2009-2010 Financial Report**

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## **Appendix B: Compilation of News Articles**

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