

Comments read at the 2/15 meeting of PAC by
Dorothy Nordness
114 8th Street
Ann Arbor, MI, 48103

I would like to comment on three areas of the PROS plan than I find disappointing and problematic. The first is the lack of commitment to a near-downtown greenway. Other cities have done it. Much smaller towns than ours have done it. The longer this idea is put aside, I fear the less likely it is to happen. I grew up in a city where city planners years ago thought far into the future and not just how they would make it through the coming year. They wisely made commitments to their wide-ranging open space plans, and over time developed them into public parks that are now used year round – never mind that the temperatures in winter often go far below zero. Yes, colder than here. Their vision was for public land surrounding all eight of the lakes within the city limits and a parkway with foot and bike trails that wound through neighborhoods following a lively little creek to the Minnehaha falls and into the Mississippi. The result of their foresight has produced a city that people love at first sight. I challenge Ann Arbor to do the same – to make a commitment in this planning document to the Allen Creek Greenway. The exact features can be put in place and the funding worked on over time; the important thing is to give make it a commitment with a high priority for phased development over the next, say, 12 years. What a difference it would make in the near-downtown area and to our city!

A second weakness I see is that this document settles for parks having no special designation that would protect them. I strongly suggest that you, whose mission is to protect our parks, recommend that our current parkland have its own “Park Land” designation, and with it, protective language that prevents the land from being sold, leased, or otherwise re-purposed. Such changes to parkland should only happen as a result of a vote of the residents of the city. Already the flat lot leased to the University on Fuller road parkland, which in its current state could at some point be returned to an active recreation area, is under siege. The construction of a parking garage at this site says to us, the residents who pay the taxes and vote for the millages to support and acquire park lands, that we have no power over these decisions. If the city wants to change a park into a parking structure, or let it be used for football game parking, it can go right ahead -- there’s nothing in place now preventing such misuses. With park land now included only under the general designation of “public land” our parks have no protection from being changed to non-park uses at the whim of the city.

Finally, I am dismayed by the document’s promotion of public-private partnerships being set up to run park functions. **Having profit-motivated companies may in certain instances work out satisfactorily for the public, but it can be a slippery slope, It will require monitoring by the city to assure that citizens are benefiting from the arrangements. I see such partnerships as situations that could potentially allow the city to feel less responsible for our parks.*** I ask that the PROS document address this issue, and minimally assure that strict rules and periodic evaluations be set up for and public-private partnerships at our parks..

Thank you.

*** I ran out of time; the text in red above was not read.**