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# OPEN SPACE AND PARKLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM

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## ACTIVITY REPORT FISCAL YEAR 2012-2013 JULY 1, 2012 – JUNE 30, 2013

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

PREPARED BY:

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## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

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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 additional parkland and recreational opportunities within the City limits.

The Greenbelt program is in its eighth year and is making great strides in achieving the goals set out for the program. Within the City, the millage has provided funds to add 56 acres of additional parkland within the City limits. These additions have provided critical linkages between existing parks, protected high quality natural features remaining in the City, and increased access to existing parks, increasing the viability of the overall park system for the Ann Arbor residents. All of these are priorities for acquisition are stated in the City's PROS Plan. Outside of the City, the millage has helped to protect over 4,200 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. This year, the program protected an additional 448 acres of farmland and open space and added 11 acres to the City's park system.

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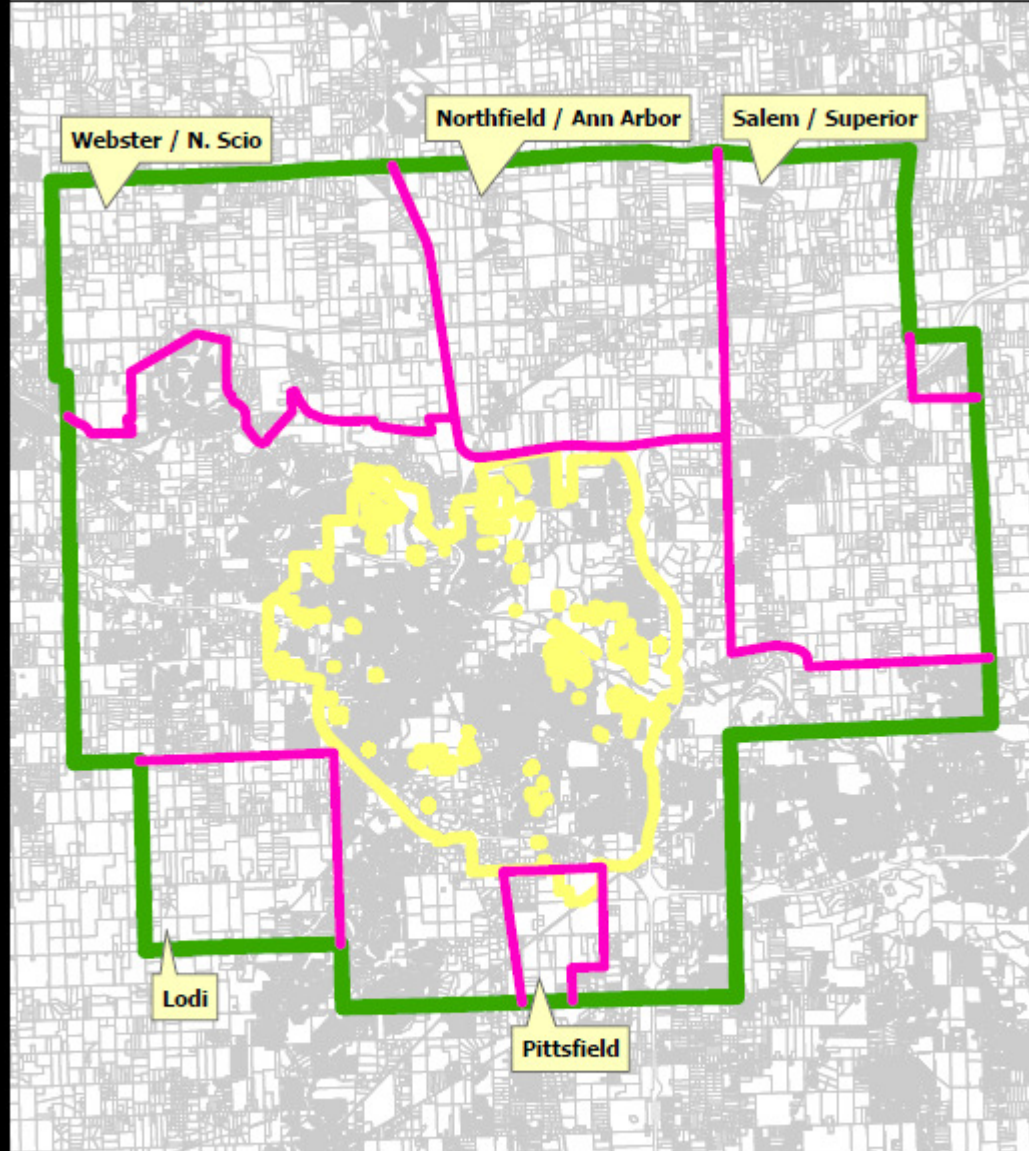
## **GREENBELT**

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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 all land acquisition deals. The Greenbelt Advisory Commission updated the Strategic Plan in 2012.

# City of Ann Arbor Greenbelt



### Map Features

-  Farmland Complex Boundary
-  Greenbelt Boundary
-  City Boundary
-  County Parcels

0 0.5 1 2 3 4 Miles

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<b>Strategic Plan Block</b>	<b>Acres Completed</b>	<b>Acres Approved</b>	<b>Total Acres</b>
Webster / Scio	1484	0	1,484
Northfield / Ann Arbor	1415	0	1,415
Salem / Superior	819	0	819
Lodi	337		337
Pittsfield	89	0	89
<i>Purchases Outside</i>			
<i>St. Plan Blocks</i>	<i>171</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>171</i>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>4,226</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4,226</b>

*Note: These figures are for the Greenbelt related purchases only and do not take into consideration properties protected by other agencies which the Greenbelt was not involved.*

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 greater – 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.

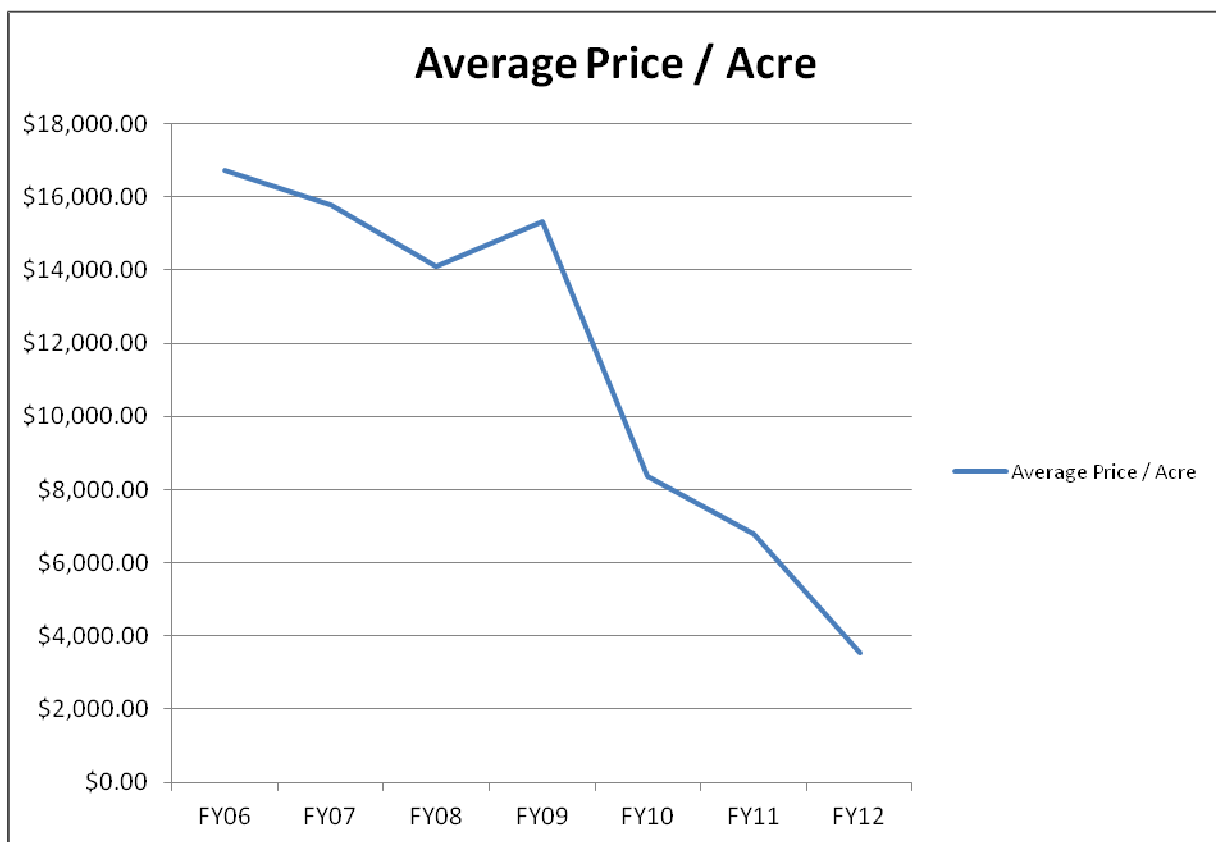
The Greenbelt Advisory Commission also continues to rank the protection of the Huron River as another top priority for land acquisitions. The Huron River is an important recreational and natural resource in the Ann Arbor area. Applications received either along the Huron River or which contain tributaries 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 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 5 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 \$3,500 / acre, as depicted on the graph below.



As of the end of the fiscal year, the Greenbelt Program has helped to protect 4,226 acres on working farms and natural areas (see map below of completed projects). These properties have a total fair market value of roughly \$40.5 million, with a cost to the Ann Arbor taxpayers of \$19.6 million. Thus, the City has contributed roughly 48% of the funds towards land acquisition projects, and the remaining funds have been secured from USDA, Natural Resource Conservation Service Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) grants, local partners, or landowner donations. In many cases, matching funds are secured through a variety of sources.

During the fiscal year 2012-2013 the Greenbelt Program completed 5 acquisitions, protecting a total of 448 acres of working farmland. These transactions include the following:

- The VanNatter farm in Webster Township, which the Greenbelt received a 20% donation from the landowners for the acquisition.
- The Hornback property in Salem Township, which the Greenbelt partnered with Salem Township and Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission, each contributing 20% of the value of the easement. In addition, the landowners made a 10% donation for the acquisition.
- The Robbin Alexander farm in Webster Township, which the Greenbelt received grant funds from the USDA Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) for 49% of the purchase price.
- The Robert Schultz farm in Superior Township, which the Greenbelt received grant funds from the USDA Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) for 49% of the purchase price.
- A portion of the Drake farm, on the south side of Waters Road, in Lodi Township, which the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission contributed 20% of the purchase price.

### **LEVERAGING FUNDS**

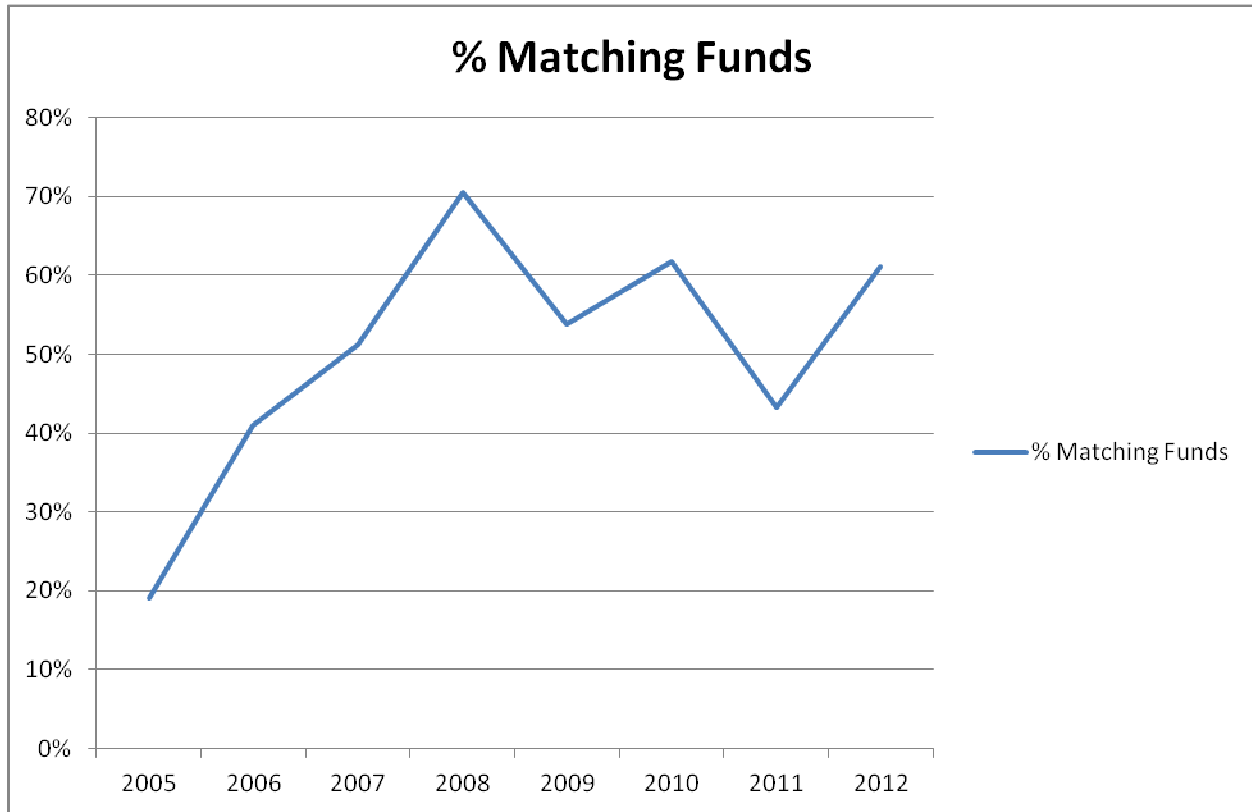
#### FARM AND RANCLAND PROTECTION PROGRAM (FRPP)

For the 2012 FRPP grant cycle, the City was awarded \$396,900 toward the purchase of development rights on the Robert Schultz Farm in Superior Township and the Robbin Alexander Farm in Webster Township. Since 2005, the City has secured almost \$6.7 million from the USDA – Farm and Ranchland Protection Program. These two transactions were completed in December 2012.

In March 2013, the City applied for and received an additional \$202,370 for 2 farms in Lodi Township – the remainder of the Drake farm and the Schumacher farm. These transactions will likely be completed in the next fiscal year.

#### LOCAL PARTNERS

As discussed above, the Greenbelt program partnered with Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission and Salem Township for transactions completed this fiscal year. In total, partners contributed just over \$312,000 toward the purchases completed this year.



*The chart above shows the average percent matching funds the Greenbelt has received annually, since the beginning of the millage. Matching funds include landowner donations, USDA Farm and Ranchland grants, Washtenaw County, Townships and local land conservancies.*

### **PUBLIC AND LANDOWNER OUTREACH**

In addition to outreach to landowners within the Greenbelt District, the Greenbelt Commission and staff made strides in reaching out to the general Ann Arbor public. The Greenbelt continues to work with many landowners who have protected their properties to put up signs at Greenbelt properties. In addition, this fiscal year the Greenbelt organized its third annual Bus Tour for participants to visit Greenbelt properties, meet local partners and landowners who have participated in the program. Commissioners and staff have also participated in many local events to spread the word about the Greenbelt, such as the HomeGrown Festival, the Mayor's Green Fair and hosted an evening event at the downtown Ann Arbor Library.

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

## **FINANCIAL SPREADSHEET**

See Appendix A for detailed financial reports.

## **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 \$647,030 is in the Greenbelt's endowment fund to cover future costs for enforcement or monitoring of easements.

## **STATUS OF GOALS FOR 2012-2013**

### **BUILDING BLOCKS OF PROTECTED PROPERTIES**

- Complete at least 5 transactions this year in the Greenbelt's strategic plan blocks.
  - The Greenbelt completed 5 transactions this year, adding a total of 448 acres of protected farmland and open space to the Greenbelt. All of these properties are located within the strategic plan blocks of the Greenbelt District and added to existing blocks of protected land.

### **LEVERAGING FUNDS**

- Apply for USDA Farm and Ranchland Protection Program grant funds on at least 3 properties.
  - The City applied for grant funds on 2 properties this year.
- Secure partners for any other transactions.
  - The Greenbelt partnered with Salem Township for the first time this year, with the protection of the Hornback property. In addition, the Greenbelt partnered with Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission on the Hornback and Drake purchases.

- Secure at least 20% matching funds on all transactions completed.
  - At least 20% match was received for every transaction completed this year, ranging between 20% and 50% received from landowner donations, local partners, and USDA FRPP grant funds.

## OUTREACH

- Organize annual Bus Tour in fall 2012 and schedule tour for next year.
  - Held 2012 Bus Tour on September 22<sup>nd</sup>. The tour was attended by over 50 participants. Additionally, our partners Ann Arbor Township, Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy and Washtenaw County Parks participated in the tour.
  - The 2013 Bus Tour is planned for September 21<sup>st</sup>.
- Hold public event in collaboration with the Library.
  - Held public event at downtown Ann Arbor Library with a panel of landowners who have protected their land. Approximately 30 people attended the event and the event is published on the library's website.
- Have table at HomeGrown Festival and Mayor's GreenFair. Identify other events, as appropriate.
  - Had a table at both the HomeGrown Festival and the Mayor's Green Fair.
- Finalize branding effort and place signs on all properties, based on landowners' willingness.
  - Signs have been ordered for Northfield Township, Lodi Township and Salem Township properties. Additional signs will be ordered for remaining and will work with landowners and partners on joint signage on properties.

## GOALS FOR 2013-2014

### BUILDING BLOCKS OF PROTECTED PROPERTIES

- Complete at least 3 transactions this year in the Greenbelt's strategic plan blocks.

### LEVERAGING FUNDS

- Apply for USDA Farm and Ranchland Protection Program grant funds on at least 3 properties.
- Secure at least 20% matching funds on all transactions completed.
- Secure partners for any other transactions.

#### OUTREACH

- Organize annual Bus Tour in fall 2013 and schedule tour for next year.
- Finalize branding effort and place signs on all properties, based on landowners' willingness.
- Have table at HomeGrown Festival and any other event, as appropriate.

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## **PARK LAND ACQUISITIONS**

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### **STRATEGIC DIRECTION**

The PROS Plan identifies the following criteria for evaluating future parkland acquisitions. Please refer to the PROS Plan for more details on each criteria.

1. City-wide System Balance / Geographic Distribution as well as Open Space Convenient to Each Neighborhood
2. Natural Resource Protection
3. Open Space and Green Space Imagery/Aesthetics
4. Enhance Access and Linkage
5. Protection of the Huron River, Watersheds, and Water Quality
6. Recreation Value and Suitability for Intended Use
7. Method of Acquisition/Direct Costs
8. Provides for Future Needs/Anticipates Growth
9. Long-Term Development and Maintenance Costs

### **LAND PROTECTION**

The City of Ann Arbor purchased two additional park properties this year and accepted the donation of one property from Ann Arbor Township.

- The City of Ann Arbor accepted the donation of the Braun Nature Area from Ann Arbor Township. The Braun Nature Area is adjacent to existing parkland – Huron Parkway Nature Area.
- Parks also purchased .91 acres along Hampstead Lane, as addition to Kuebler Langford Nature Area.
- Parks purchased .35 acres along Orkney, as addition to Bluffs Nature Area, which provides access to Bluffs Nature Area. Access to Bluffs Nature Area has long been a priority in the City's PROS Plan and over the last 2 years, parks has been able to obtain access on the south, north and now west end of the park.

## **FINANCIAL SPREADSHEET**

See Appendix A for details.

### **STATUS OF GOALS FOR 2012 – 2013**

- Complete 1 – 2 transactions.
  - Purchased 2 properties and accepted the donation of one property.

### **GOALS FOR 2013 – 2014**

- Complete 1 – 2 transactions.

## **Appendix A: Fiscal Year 2011-2012 Financial Report**

