MEMORANDUM

TO: Greenbelt Advisory Commission
FROM: Remy Long, Greenbelt Program Manager, The Conservation Fund
SUBJECT: Greenbelt Scoring Recommendations
DATE: March 6, 2019

The Greenbelt Advisory Commission has expressed interest in revising the Greenbelt scoring system. This memo serves as a summary of potential considerations for revising the Greenbelt scoring system. The purpose is *not* to suggest a specific scoring methodology, but to prompt questions for exploring scoring options.

1. **Integrating the Strategic Plan – What categories/criteria would better reflect the full spectrum of goals of the Greenbelt's Strategic Plan?**

Fully integrating the strategic program goals embedded in the Greenbelt Strategic Plan (and any update) into the scoring system can take place through revisions to the:

- Acquisition categories (e.g. Agricultural Land vs. Open Space Land)
- Category criteria (e.g Prime soils, wetlands, # of natural features, matching funds)

Some criteria are non-exclusive and can be used in any category (i.e. parcel size, road frontage). However, other criteria will be specific to the category. For instance, if the Greenbelt wishes to support land access for new and beginning farmers who aim to source food for Ann Arbor markets, those farmers are generally looking for 10-30 acres, not 120-200 acres. So, for example, points could be established for "potential for land accessibility/affordability" within the Agricultural Lands category. GAC should consider whether or not the current categories are sufficient given the strategic plan. Agricultural Lands seems to be an obvious priority, but the Greenbelt's work also impacts water quality and source water protection, green infrastructure, climate resiliency, and adding public recreation lands. It may be that GAC establishes different categories of criteria based on the primary strategic goal achieved. (e.g. Agriculture, Green Infrastructure, Recreation, etc.)

Another consideration is having universal criteria for the program, and reduce the confusion on projects where there is both agricultural land and open space, or any other possible combination of potential categories. Streamlining acquisition criteria into a single system could help increase public understanding of the program.

2. **Data Representation – How can visual or other numerical tools be used to more easily and effectively communicate overall parcel value across categories?**

Council's recent discussions have brought to light the need for a more digestible scoring system and readable visualization of the data. This is part of why we are interested in a 2019 summer intern diving into possible data visualizations and communication strategies. Anticipating that work, there are a few things that could be done to make that process easier:

- Make categorical scoring system based on a 100-point scale

- Tie categories/criteria to specific goals/indicators established in the City of Ann Arbor's Sustainability Framework/Sustainability Action Plan

3. **Don't Reinvent the Wheel – How can we be better integrate Greenbelt parcel evaluation with relevant scoring systems that have already been developed for this region?**

The Huron River Watershed Council has done an exceptional green infrastructure analysis of the landscape through their Bioreserve program. They can also extend that analysis outside of the Huron River Watershed, to include the River Raisin Watershed – which covers a portion of the Greenbelt District. Many of the criteria the Greenbelt's own scoring system may deem important are already be included in HRWC's Bioreserve analysis, and – if given a greater weight – may reduce our need to address several individual criteria on our own, and allow us to focus on establishing additional Greenbelt criteria not captured in the Bioreserve analysis.

As well, The Nature Conservancy recently created/shared some excellent climate resiliency data for our region. This analysis could also be leveraged for our own use and save building our own screening system for criteria that addresses the City's climate action plan.

4. **Pros and Cons of GIS Data – How can the scoring system better reflect on-the-ground assessment vs. only GIS analysis? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using a GIS analysis to establish a priority map?**

It would be straightforward to identify parcels that are 40+ acres, intersect with a tributary of source water for the City, and have 75% or more prime agricultural soils. Such an analysis can lead to a binary outcome of priority parcels vs. non-priority parcels – all based on GIS data, without ground-truthing. Inevitably, some parcel that was not identified as a priority parcel in an analysis will actually be a quality site once staff have been able to see its features in person.

Some questions to ask about the criteria included in a scoring system:

- Which criteria are constants, and which could change with time?
- Should the value of those constant criteria be captured in a weighted GIS analysis, instead of individually weighing each criteria in the scoring system?
- Which criteria need to be ground-truthed or can't be obtained through GIS?
- How can we construct a scoring system that is both feasible and accurate?
    - How much staff time will it take to complete (including site visit)?