



OPEN SPACE AND PARKLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM

ACTIVITY REPORT FISCAL YEAR 2014-2015

JULY 1, 2014 – JUNE 30, 2015

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

PREPARED BY:

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In 2003, residents of Ann Arbor passed 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 just completed its tenth year and is making great strides in achieving the goals set out for the program. Within the City limits, the millage has provided funds to add 72 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 stated in the City's PROS Plan. Within the Greenbelt District, the millage has helped to protect over 4,500 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.

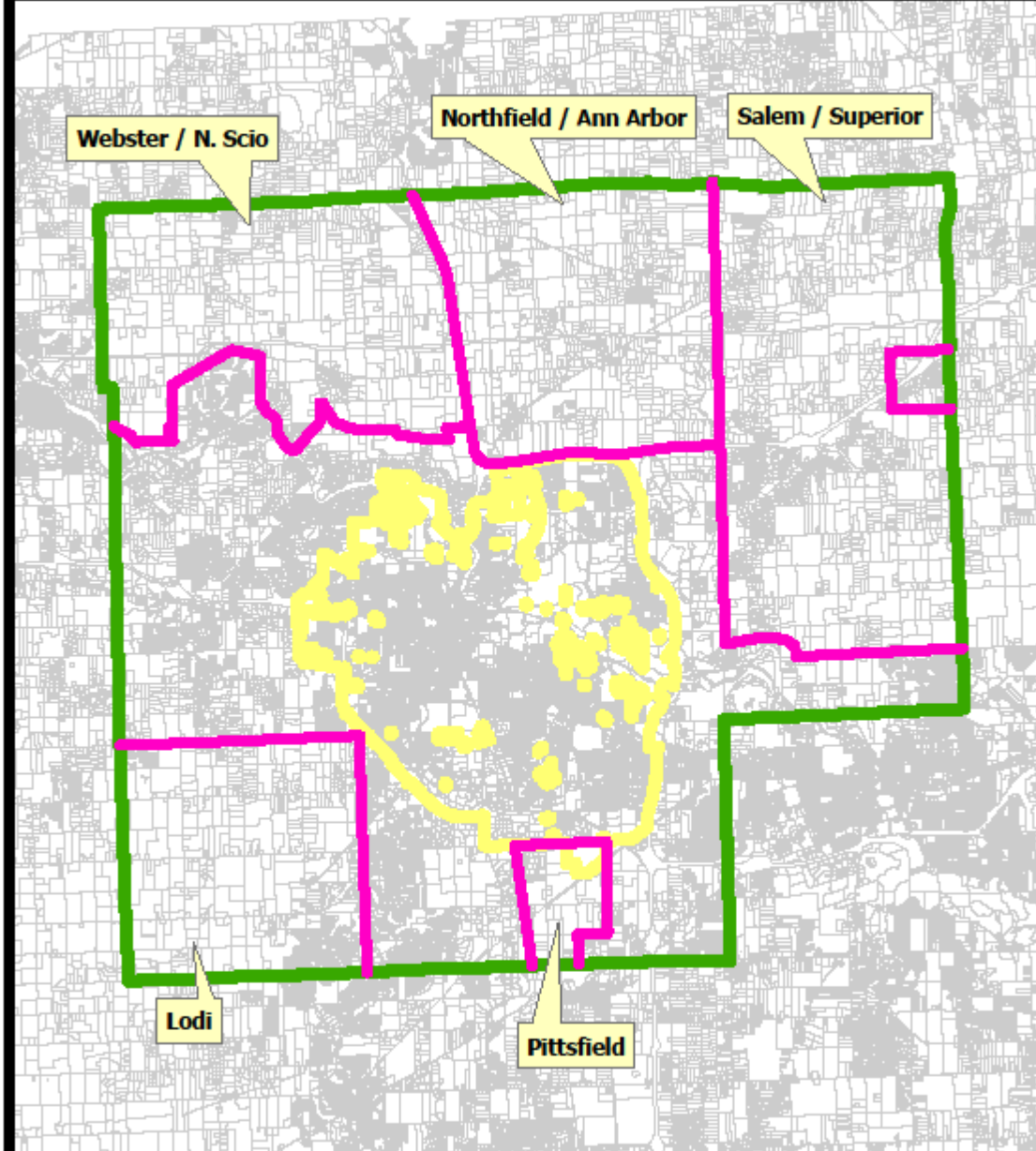
This fiscal year, the program protected an additional 183 acres of farmland and open space in the Greenbelt District.





GREENBELT

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 2013 to include broader information on agriculture in Washtenaw County, additional details on each of the strategic plan blocks, and priority on community outreach on the program.

City of Ann Arbor Greenbelt



-  Fermland Complex Boundaries
-  Greenbelt Boundary
-  City Boundary
-  County Parcels

0 0.5 1 2 3 4 Miles

Map date 6/9/2016

Any aerial imagery is circa 2015 unless otherwise noted

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Strategic Plan Block	Acres Completed
Webster / Scio	1,405
Northfield / Ann Arbor	1,524
Salem / Superior	819
Lodi	418
Pittsfield	89
<i>Purchases Outside St. Plan Blocks</i>	<i>258</i>
Total:	4,513

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.

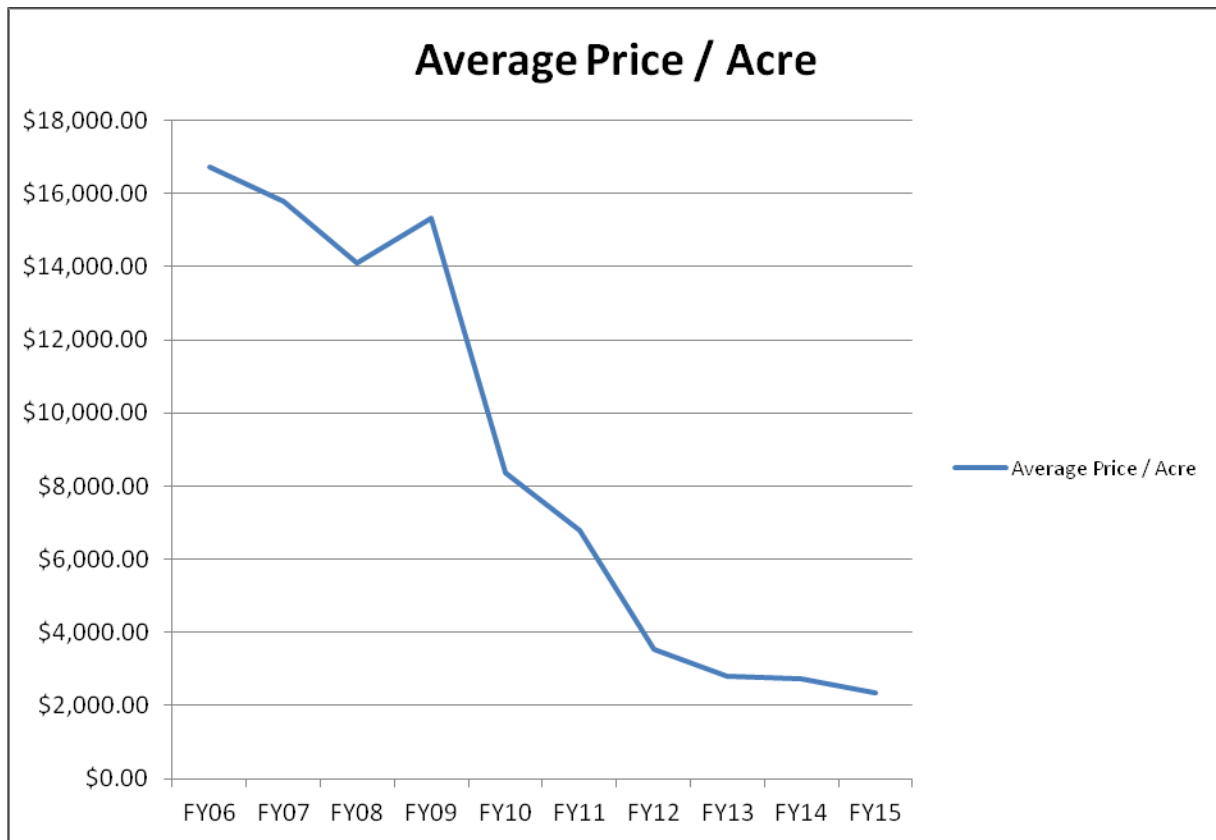
The Greenbelt Advisory Commission also continues to rank the protection of the Huron River as another top priority for land acquisitions. The Huron River is an important recreational and natural resource in the Ann Arbor area. Applications received either along the Huron River or which contain tributaries 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 primary 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 cyclists. 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 7 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 real estate market that began in 2007/2008 resulted in fewer developers buying land in the area and an increase in properties on the market. Furthermore, the properties were remaining on the market for a longer period of time. Ultimately, this equated to appraised values for development rights decreasing from an average of \$16,000 / acre to about \$2,700 / acre, as depicted on the graph below.



Over the last two years, the market has started to recover, especially within the Ann Arbor city limits. According to the Ann Arbor Area Board of Realtors, average home sales prices in Washtenaw County in 2014 increased to \$263,000, up from an average of \$180,000 in 2009. In addition, developers, such as Toll Brothers and Biltmore, who have been inactive in the area over the last several years, are returning to the area with current projects underway, ranging between 26 units up to almost 500 units.

As of the end of the fiscal year, the Greenbelt Program has helped to protect 4,513 acres on working farms and natural areas (see map below of completed projects). These properties have a total fair market value of roughly \$42 million, with \$22 million coming from other local

and federal sources of matching funds. Thus, the City has contributed roughly 48% of the funds towards land acquisition projects. In many cases, matching funds are secured through a variety of sources.

During the fiscal year 2014-2015 the Greenbelt Program completed 3 acquisitions, protecting a total of 183 acres of working farmland. These transactions include the following:

- ***Partner with Ann Arbor Township and Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation:*** Ann Arbor Township holds a conservation easement on the 11-acre parcel. The property is adjacent to active farmland. The adjacent landowner has expressed an interest in leasing the land for pasture of his livestock. Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation also contributed toward the purchase of development rights easement.
- ***Partnership with Scio Township and Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation:*** The Greenbelt program partnered with Scio Township and Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation on a 91-acre property, along the Huron River, across from Dexter-Huron Metro Parks. The property is owned and will be managed by Scio Township.
- ***USDA Farm and Ranchland Protection Program:*** The City of Ann Arbor Greenbelt Program holds a conservation easement on the 81-acre parcel in Lodi Township, owned by Carol B. Schumacher. Partial funding was received from the USDA-Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP). In addition, Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation contributed funds towards the purchase of the development rights easement.

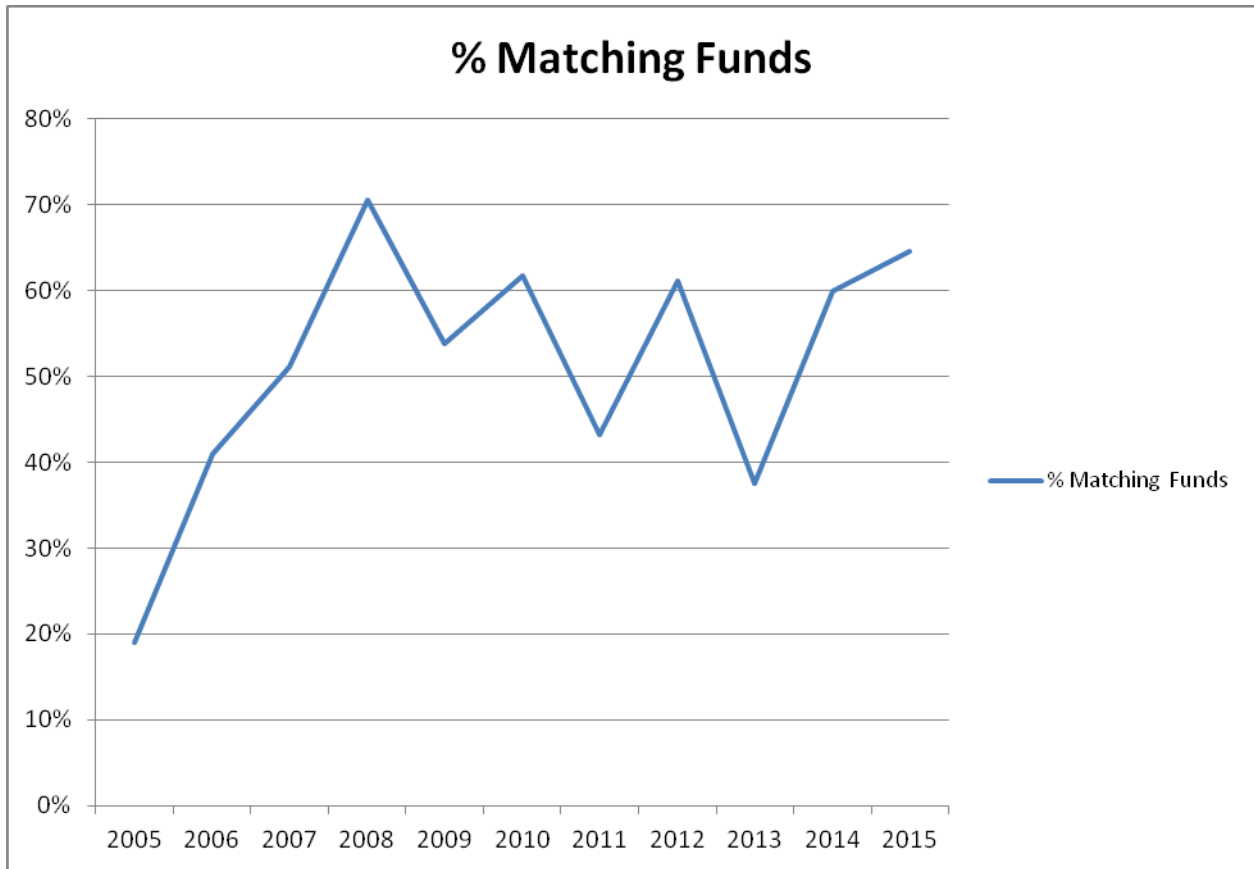
LEVERAGING FUNDS

AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAM (ACEP)

The City submitted applications for two properties to the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), formerly known as the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP). The City anticipates the grant awards to be made in early FY16.

LOCAL PARTNERS

As discussed above, the Greenbelt program partnered with Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation, Ann Arbor Township and Scio Township for transactions completed this fiscal year. In total, partners contributed just over \$751,263 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. Staff regularly presents to classes at the University of Michigan on the Greenbelt Program. Commissioners and staff have also participated in many local events to spread the word about the Greenbelt, such as the HomeGrown Festival. In addition, this year the Greenbelt Program was recognized by the Ann Arbor Board of Realtors and received their annual “Environmental Awareness Award.”

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 8 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, approximately \$24,000 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 \$698,953 is in the Greenbelt's endowment fund to cover future costs for enforcement or monitoring of easements.

STATUS OF GOALS FOR 2014-2015

BUILDING BLOCKS OF PROTECTED PROPERTIES

- *Complete at least 3 transactions this year in the Greenbelt's strategic plan blocks.*
 - AS STATED ABOVE, THE GREENBELT COMPLETED 3 TRANSACTIONS THIS YEAR.

LEVERAGING FUNDS

- *Apply for USDA Agriculture Conservation Easement grant funds on at least 2 properties.*
 - THE CITY APPLIED FOR 2 PROPERTIES TO THE USDA GRANT PROGRAM.
- *Secure at least 20% matching funds on all transactions completed.*
 - OVER 65% MATCHING FUNDS WERE SECURED ON AVERAGE FOR DEALS COMPLETED THIS YEAR.
- *Secure partners for any transactions.*
 - AS STATED ABOVE, THE CITY PARTNERED WITH WASHTENAW COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION, ANN ARBOR TOWNSHIP, AND SCIO TOWNSHIP.

OUTREACH

- *Organize annual Bus Tour in fall 2014 and schedule tour for next year.*
 - BUS TOUR WAS HELD ON OCTOBER 4, 2014. THE NEXT BUS TOUR IS SCHEDULED FOR MAY 2016.
- *Finalize signs on all properties, based on landowners' willingness.*
 - SIGNS HAVE BEEN ORDERED AND WILL BE DISTRIBUTED TO PARTNERS AND LANDOWNERS ONCE AVAILABLE.
- *Finalize Outreach and Communication Plan with subcommittee.*

- THE OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION PLAN WAS FINALIZED.
- *Have table at HomeGrown Festival and any other event, as appropriate.*
 - THE GREENBELT PARTICIPATED IN THE HOMEGROWN FESTIVAL.
- *Implement Land Registry Program.*
 - LANDOWNERS WERE CONTACTED ABOUT THEIR INTEREST IN JOINING A VOLUNTARY LAND REGISTRY PROGRAM. HOWEVER, THERE WAS NO SIGNIFICANT INTEREST IN A REGISTRY PROGRAM, SO THIS GOAL WAS NOT IMPLEMENTED.

GOALS FOR 2014-2015

BUILDING BLOCKS OF PROTECTED PROPERTIES

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

LEVERAGING FUNDS

- *Apply for USDA Agriculture Conservation Easement grant funds on at least 1 property.*
- *Secure at least 20% matching funds on all transactions completed.*
- *Secure partners for any other transactions.*

OUTREACH

- *Organize annual Bus Tour in spring 2016.*
- *Finalize signs on all properties, based on landowners' willingness.*
- *Have table at HomeGrown Festival and any other event, as appropriate.*

PARK LAND ACQUISITIONS

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 did not complete any land transactions to add parkland to the City this year.

FINANCIAL SPREADSHEET

See Appendix A for details.

STATUS OF GOALS FOR 2014 – 2015

- *Complete One – Two Transactions.*
 - AS NOTED ABOVE, NO PARKLAND ACQUISITIONS WERE COMPLETED THIS YEAR.
- *Complete ranking system for evaluation of park acquisition applications.*
 - THE RANKING SYSTEM FOR EVALUATION OF PARK ACQUISITION APPLICATIONS WAS COMPLETED.

GOALS FOR 2015 – 2016

- *Complete One to Two Transactions.*

Appendix A: Fiscal Year 2014-2015 Financial Report