



OPEN SPACE AND PARKLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM

ACTIVITY REPORT FISCAL YEAR 2010 - 2011 JULY 1, 2010 – JUNE 30, 2011

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

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.

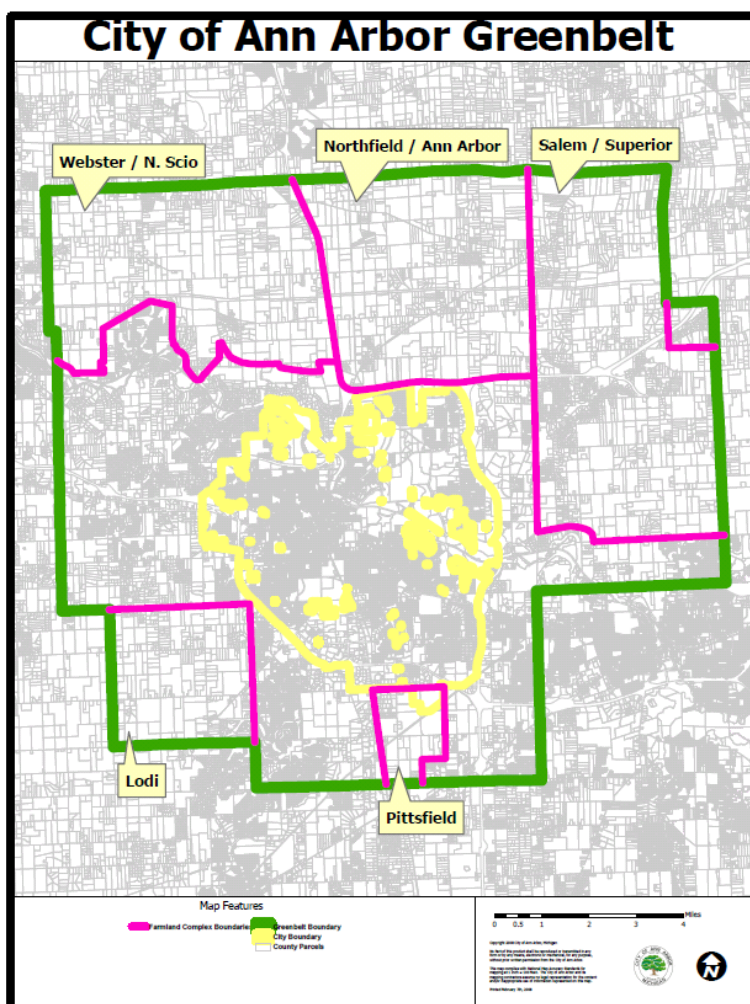
The Greenbelt program is in its sixth year of land acquisition and is making great strides in achieving the goals of the program. Within the City, the millage has provided funds to add 45 acres of additional parkland within the City limits. These additions have provided critical linkages between existing parkland, protected high quality natural features remaining in the City, and increased access to existing parks, 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 3,200 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 1,472 acres of farmland and added 2 properties to the City's park system.

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.

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 land acquisition.



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Strategic Plan Block	Acres Completed	Acres Approved	Total Acres
Web. / Scio / Ann Arbor	1,850	0	1,850
Northfield / Ann Arbor	664	0	664
Salem / Superior	371	0	371
Lodi	101	110	211
Pittsfield	89	0	89
<i>Purchases Outside St. Plan Blocks</i>			
	<i>139</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>139</i>
Total:	3,214	110	3,324

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

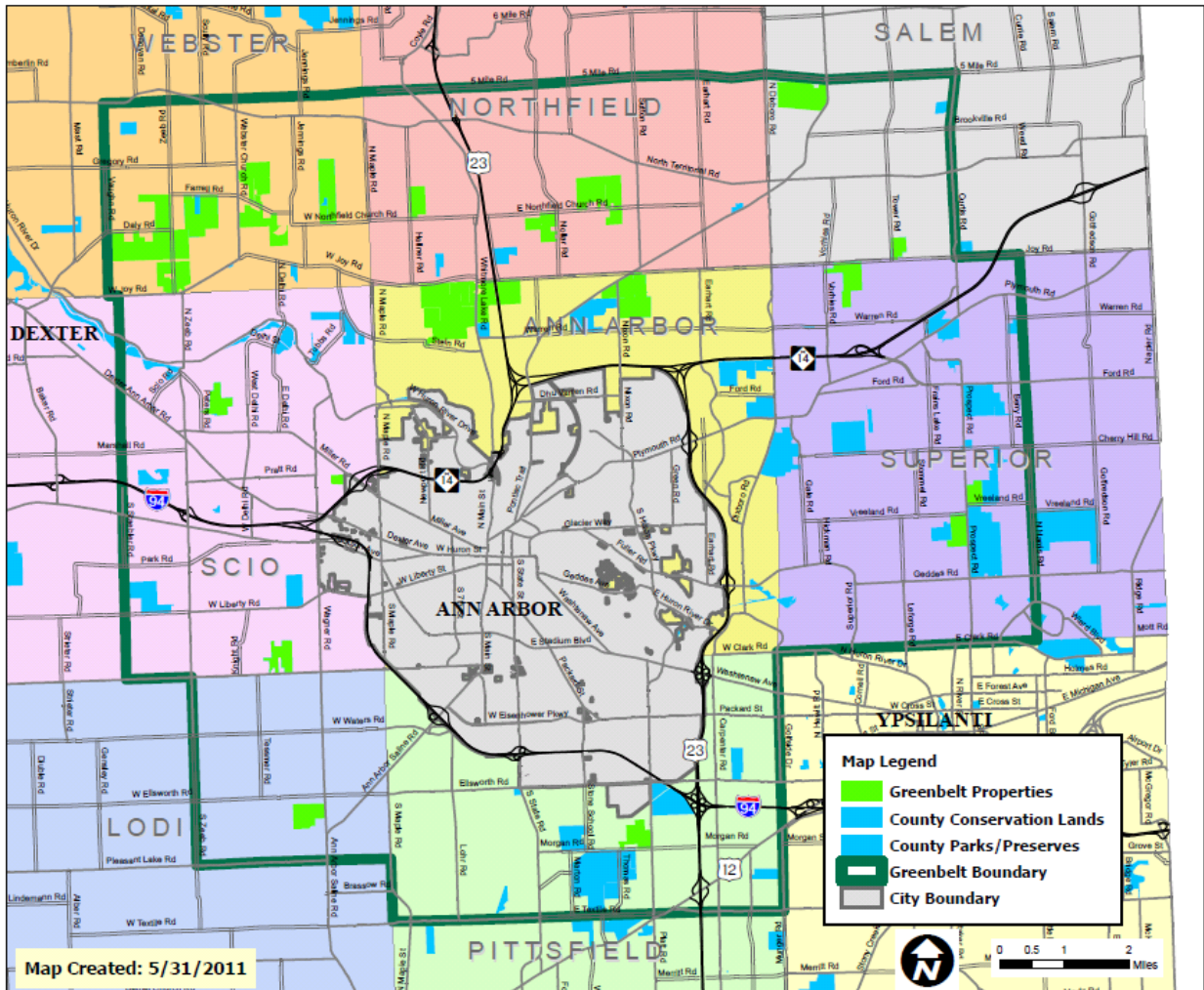
will continue to be a part of the scoring criteria. Furthermore, the strategic blocks encompass major corridors, so an added benefit of forming large blocks of protected land will be preserving critical viewsheds within the Greenbelt District.

LAND ACQUISITIONS

Over the last 4 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 between \$4,500 - \$5,000 / acre.

As of the end of the fiscal year, the Greenbelt Program has helped to protect 3,200 acres on working farms and natural areas (see map below of completed projects). These properties have a total fair market value of roughly \$35.8 million, with a cost to the Ann Arbor taxpayers of \$17.8 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.

The 2010-2011 Fiscal Year was the busiest yet for the Greenbelt, completing 12 acquisitions, to protect a total of 1,472 acres of working farmland. These transactions have included protecting almost 680 acres of farmland along Whitmore Lake Road, that provide scenic views and active agriculture land along a heavily trafficked corridor that serves as a “gateway” into the City of Ann Arbor. The acquisitions also added an additional 242 acres of protected farmland in Webster Township, to bring the total to over 1,200 acres protected in Webster Township within the Greenbelt District. The transactions also protected 336 acres in Northfield Township, to continue the “belt” north of the city limits.



LEVERAGING FUNDS

FARM AND RANCLAND PROTECTION PROGRAM (FRPP)

During this fiscal year, the City was awarded \$886,675 for the Purchase of Development Rights on the Nancy and Rose Geiger Farm in Salem Township and the Lee and Lori Maulbetsch Farm in Northfield Township. Funding for this award was possible due to an additional allocation of funds for farmland preservation under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

For the 2011 FRPP grant cycle, the City was awarded \$312,620 toward the purchase of development rights on the Lindemann – Weidmayer Farm in Lodi Township. Since 2005, the City has secured almost \$6.3 million from the USDA - FRPP program. The City has also partnered with local agencies within the Greenbelt District who have received additional FRPP grant funds.

LOCAL PARTNERS

The City partnered with a number of local partners on each of the completed projects during this fiscal year. The City of Ann Arbor and Ann Arbor Township, each contributed \$2.3 million to protect 680 acres (on 4 farms) in the township. Webster Township also contributed \$109,676 toward the protection of an additional 207 acres in the Township.

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 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 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 to spread the word about the Greenbelt, such as the HomeGrown Festival, Heart of the Lakes Annual Conference, and co-hosting an event at a protected farm.

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 5 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 details.

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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 \$442,274 is in the Greenbelt's endowment fund.

STATUS OF GOALS FOR 2010-2011

- Apply for grant funds on 2 properties in 2011 cycle.
 - Applied for grant on 1 property. Additional landowner withdrew application.
- Close on 4 properties.
 - Closed on 12 properties during the fiscal year.
- Complete 1,000 acre block for Webster Township.
 - 1,200 acres protected in Webster Township, within the current Greenbelt Boundary.
- Complete the first Greenbelt Bus Tour and develop plan for future tours.
 - Held first Greenbelt Bus Tour in July 2010. Additional tours will be organized for next fiscal year.
- Obtain at least 20% matching funds on all transactions.
 - At least 20% received on all transactions. Overall average for fiscal year was 52% matching funds for transactions completed.

GOALS FOR 2011-2012

- Apply for grant funds on 2 properties in 2012 cycle.
- Close on 3 properties.
- Obtain at least 20% matching funds on all transactions.

Appendix A: Fiscal Year 2009-2010 Financial Report

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Appendix B: Compilation of News Articles

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