

MEMO

TO: CITY COUNCIL AND MAYOR
FROM: CATHERINE RISENG, GREENBELT ADVISORY COMMISSION, CHAIR
SHANNON BRINES, GREENBELT ADVISORY COMMISSION, VICE CHAIR

The purpose of this memo is to inform Council and the Mayor of the Greenbelt Advisory Commission's intent on starting a Landowner Registry Program.

A landowner registry program is a tool commonly used by land trusts and land conservancies across the country. The program is a non-binding agreement to honor landowners for voluntarily protecting their property. A registry program is a handshake agreement between the Greenbelt and landowners who agree to continue to protect their property, and agree to let the Greenbelt know if there are any proposed changes to their property and to call if the landowner plans to sell their land (see attached brochure content).

Why consider a Registry Program for the Greenbelt?

After the current fund balance has been expended, the millage funds generated annually minus the bond debt service will be accruing approximately \$1 million per year. Those funds will then be allocated to both Greenbelt and Park acquisitions. As a result, depending on land values, the Greenbelt will be able to acquire farmland easements at the rate of approximately 1 or 2 every year, much reduced compared to the last couple of years.

The registry program is a way to develop landowner relationships now and cultivate those relationships so that when the Greenbelt has accumulated funds to protect land there will be landowners ready to sell their development rights. Cultivation of landowners takes time, but is also critical for the success of a land protection program. Therefore, having landowners familiar with the program and potentially willing sellers will be a more efficient and economically prudent approach.

When the Greenbelt program started, the program received more applications than could be done in one year, and in some instances landowners wanted to protect their land, but were not interested in completing it right away. Over the last 9 years, we have worked through the high priority applications. A registry program will help to cultivate future landowners applicants.

The Greenbelt can use the registry program as an opportunity to honor individual landowners who are independently preserving their property, many of which are key properties and open space within the Greenbelt. The landowner registry program is a way to honor these landowners and thank them for their initiative and for being good stewards of their land. It will never be possible to protect all the lands that make Ann

Arbor a great place to live and work, this is a way to say “thank you” to these landowners that are voluntarily helping to create the “Greenbelt”.

What properties are priorities for the landowner registry program?

A landowner registry program does involve some investment of time from the initial contact through yearly contact and follow-up on questions, therefore, it is critical that only priority properties be targeted. Proposed priorities might include: 1.) Priority properties immediately adjacent to current permanently protected properties; 2.) Properties that provide connectivity between Greenbelt or other already protected properties, and 3.) Other properties larger than 40 acres within the strategic plan focus areas and key Huron River properties.

Why would landowners be interested?

Landowners receive a framed copy of an aerial photograph of the property, as a way to honor the landowner for their voluntary conservation of the Greenbelt. On the back of the plaque are the three things that they agree to do along with a phone number to call if there are questions, interest in selling their property or a threat to their property. If the landowners are interested, a press release can be written outlining the landowner’s commitment, facts about the property and how this property is important to the Greenbelt.

Summary

A basic landowner registry program involves:

- a. Meeting with the landowners and creating a database of interested landowners.
- b. Delivering a framed aerial map of the property.
- c. Yearly contacting the landowners through a newsletter, email and / or letter to bring them up to date on the program and inform them of completed projects in their area.