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Update on Open Space and Parkland Preservation Program

In 2004, an RFP was released to hire a consultant to implement the Open Space and Parkland Preservation program (aka, Greenbelt Millage). In January 2005, a two year contract was signed with The Conservation Fund to provide needed staff for the program. In the fall of 2006, in anticipation of the contract expiring with The Conservation Fund, another RFP was released for the program implementation. In January 2007, a three year contract was executed between the City and The Conservation Fund. In January 2010, the contract with The Conservation Fund will again be expiring. Since this program has been operating for 5 years and the contract with The Conservation Fund will be expiring in early 2010, I thought it a good time to provide you with an update on the Program. It is my intention, based on the program needs and financial status of the program outlined below and in the attached spreadsheets, to release an additional RFP for the work during fall 2009.

1. Fund Balance (as of June 30 2009):

Total Available Funds: \$16,395,816
 Greenbelt Advisory Commission portion \$11,847,534
 Park Advisory Commission portion \$ 4,548,282

The millage is a 30-year millage, which will expire in 2034. It is anticipated that in addition to the current fund balance listed above, an additional \$1 million will be available per year for land acquisition projects, to be split between the two commissions. This is based on approximately \$2 million in millage revenue annually, minus approximately \$1 million in bond debt service paid annually. The proportion split for the Greenbelt District and in-City parkland acquisitions is based on a 2/3 allocation to the Greenbelt and 1/3 allocation to in-City park acquisitions.

2. Greenbelt Acquisitions:

a. Accomplishments: Completed 12 acquisitions on 1,320 acres, totaling almost \$10.1 million spent by the City, with an additional \$1.4 million from landowner donations, \$4.1

million in grants, and \$4.3 million in partnership contributions. (See attached Chart A for details of completed projects)

- b. Current status of funds and projects: Of the monies available in the fund balance, the Greenbelt has \$11,847,534 (based on 2/3 of the funds allocated to the Greenbelt) currently available for acquisitions. Of that amount, \$2,540,087 has already been approved by Council for acquisitions that have pending closing dates. (See Chart B for details of pending projects). Thus, there is \$9,307,447 available yet to be allocated for land acquisition projects. The Greenbelt has 7 additional applications at various stages currently in process. Local partners are taking the lead on some of those applications. The Greenbelt also recently released a request for solicitations from landowners to submit their price/acre for what they would be willing to sell their development rights to the City. There are 3 applications that were received from the bid process, which the Greenbelt is investigating further, but no appraisals have been completed to date.
- c. Average rate of spending: The Greenbelt has been completing projects at a rate of approximately 2 - 3 per year (since 2005) and spending approximately \$2.3 million per year. While this is the average, it is important to note that the number of acquisitions in the past 3 years have been greater than those in the first 2 years. Given these averages and the current inventory of projects outlined above, there are approximately three years of projects at various stages in the process. Furthermore, with the decline in the real estate market, the cost per project has declined by about 50% over this 5 year period of time. The average appraised price per acre from 2005 - 2007 was around \$16,000/acre. The average appraised price per acre from 2008 to date is around \$8,200.
- d. Future projects:
 - i. Registry Program: Develop a registry program to cultivate landowner contacts for the top 5 - 10 priority properties, for future conservation easement acquisitions. The Registry Program will build a deal flow so that it will take less work in the future to complete the land deals.
 - ii. Signage: The Greenbelt approved a sign for Greenbelt properties that would be in collaboration with Preserve Washtenaw. The basic sign design is completed, but it will likely take through next summer for the signs to be posted and it will require work with landowners of the completed deals.
 - iii. Tour: A bike or bus tour, collaborating with the adjacent townships, to highlight the preservation efforts through the signage. Thoughts are to emphasize local food produced by these farms with a short tour about the farm, acreage and products produced that could be downloadable from the web.
 - iv. Local Food: The Greenbelt Advisory Commission has updated their Strategic Plan and identified local food production farms as a priority. A subcommittee has been formed to review the conservation easement language and make necessary recommendations on changes to the standard template to fit the needs of smaller local food production farms.
- e. Ongoing program needs:
 - i. Annual monitoring of conservation easements;
 - ii. Staff the Greenbelt Advisory Commission meetings (at least once per quarter per Ordinance);

- iii. Grant applications to FRPP and other programs as needed;
- iv. Process applications and meet with landowners, as needed;
- v. Represent the Greenbelt at Preserve Washtenaw meetings;
- vi. Coordinate land acquisitions with partner agencies, as needed;
- vii. Coordinate vendor contracts and coordinate due diligence work to complete acquisitions (i.e., appraisal, survey, environmental and legal work) as needed.

3. Parkland Acquisitions:

- a. Accomplishments: Completed 7 acquisitions on 42 acres, totaling \$5.4 million spent by the City, with an additional \$371,000 landowner donation and \$156,000 contributed through a partnership with Scio Township. (See Chart D for details).
- b. Current status of funds of projects: Currently the Parks has \$4,548,282 (based on 1/3 of the funds allocated to Parks) available for acquisitions. There are no additional properties that have been approved by Council with pending closing dates. There are two projects that are currently in process.
- c. Average rate of spending: Since 2005, Parks has been completing projects at a rate of approximately 1-2 projects per year and spending approximately \$1.4 million per year. Given those averages, there is approximately 2 more years of acquisitions, in order to spend the current fund balance.
- d. Ongoing program needs:
 - i. Grant applications as needed;
 - ii. Process applications and meet with landowners, as needed;
 - iii. Staff the Land Acquisition Committee of the Parkland Advisory Commission as needed for land acquisition;
 - iv. Coordination between parks and recreation, field operations, planning and development, and other city service units as needed;
 - v. Cultivation of landowners identified as priorities by park staff and LAC to ensure deal flow, much like the Registry Program proposed for the Greenbelt.
 - vi. Coordination of plan for the Allen Creek Greenway.

Prepared by: Jayne Miller, Community Services Administrator

Approved by: Jayne Miller, Community Services Administrator