

ACTIVITY REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2007 - 2008

ANN ARBOR OPEN SPACE AND PARKLAND
PRESERVATION PROGRAM

PREPARED FOR:

THE CITY OF ANN ARBOR
GREENBELT ADVISORY COMMISSION
PARKLAND ADVISORY COMMISSION

PREPARED BY:
THE CONSERVATION FUND

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GREENBELT

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The City of Ann Arbor residents are fortunate enough to not only have a vibrant park system, but to also have open space surrounding the city that provides scenic vistas and attracts folks to this area. In 2003 residents had the insight to pass the Open Space and Parkland Preservation Millage, commonly referred to the Parks and Greenbelt program. Money is generated through a tax levy 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 provide funds to preserve and protect open space, natural habitats, farmland, and the City's source waters inside and outside the city limits.

Since the passage of the millage, the City has purchased an additional 30.05 acres of parkland. These parcels have added on to existing parkland, protected critical natural areas remaining in the City, and provided linkages between parks, increasing the viability of the overall park system. Furthermore, the City has helped to protect over 894 acres of working farmland and open space outside of the City. Protecting farmland provides many benefits to the Ann Arbor residents by protecting the rural, scenic vistas, local agricultural economy, as well as providing habitat for wildlife.

Furthermore, since 2003, Ann Arbor, Webster and Scio Townships located within the Greenbelt District have also passed similar millages, providing opportunities for the Greenbelt to leverage city funds and collaborate with other jurisdictions on land preservation.

LAND PROTECTION

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

As outlined in the Greenbelt's Strategic Plan, which was adopted in 2005, the program has focused on forming large blocks of protected farmland and open space through the acquisition of easements, as well as protecting land along the Huron River. The Greenbelt identified 5 areas to concentrate acquisitions within the Greenbelt District to form these large blocks of protected land. The Commission continues to use the Strategic Plan to guide recommendations to Council on land acquisition.

Over the last 2 years, however, the City of Ann Arbor has witnessed several changes within the local economy and real estate market, which has had an effect on the Greenbelt Program. For one, there has been a notable downturn in the local residential real estate market. In addition, Pfizer has announced the closing of their Ann Arbor facility. This has all resulted in fewer developers buying land in the area and an increase in properties on the market and properties remaining on the market for a longer period of time. The Greenbelt Advisory Commission strategically responded to the changing real estate market to maximize the impact on land preservation by examining new partnership opportunities, leveraging funds and explored the expansion of the Greenbelt District boundary.

This year, the Greenbelt Commission recommended to City Council to expand the Greenbelt boundary, in order to provide more opportunities in those townships where there are significant public and or private dollars (through local land trusts) for land preservation. City Council approved the Commission's recommendation and expanded the Greenbelt District by one mile to the west in Webster and Scio Townships, one mile to the south in Pittsfield Township and one mile to the east in Superior Township.

This downturn in the housing market has also sparked on-going discussions amongst the Commission on appraisal practices, land values and the ever-changing real estate market. The Commission invited an appraiser, Mike Williams of the Gerald Alcock company in to speak to them on appraisal practices and recent land sales in the area. Julie Frost from Greenstone Farm Credit Services also came to speak to the Commission on agricultural land values and sales in the Ann Arbor area.

LAND ACQUISITIONS

To date, the Greenbelt Program has helped to protect 894 acres on working farms and natural areas. These properties have a total fair market value of \$13,474,254, with a cost to the Ann Arbor taxpayers at \$8,123,705. Thus, the City has contributed 60% of the purchase price.

During the 2007-2008 fiscal year, the Greenbelt completed 3 acquisitions. In July 2007, the City completed the purchase of development rights (PDR) deal on the John and Beverly Alexander Farm. The City received a grant from the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) for a portion of the Purchase of Development Rights.

In late 2007, the City partnered with Scio Township and Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation to purchase the 49-acre Fox property, now referred to as the Fox Science Preserve. The site is an old gravel pit and has long been field trip site for local students to learn about geology and botany. Washtenaw County contributed 50% towards the purchase price and owns and manages the site as a County Park. Both the City and Scio Township each contributed 25% of the funds toward the purchase price.

In June 2008, the City again partnered with Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation to purchase 2 properties in Superior Township owned by Biltmore. These properties are prime examples of the down turn in the real estate market, as they were owned by local residential developer. Both parcels are located in close proximity to land already owned and protected by Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy (SMLC). The parcels contain a mix of high-quality mature woodland, wetland, open

water and farmland. The 55-acre parcel includes a perennial stream and the boundary between the Rouge River and Huron River Watersheds. The 84-acre parcel consists of a large body of open water that hosts a mix of bird species. A portion of both parcels is currently farmland, and will continue to be leased to a farmer and remain in agricultural production. The County owns and will manage these sites as a County Park as well. Superior township contributed \$,1000 and Superior Land Conservancy contributed \$10,000 toward the purchase. Superior Land Conservancy will also assist the County with the management of the site.

LEVERAGING FUNDS

FRPP FUNDS RECEIVED

For the 2007 grant cycle, the City was awarded \$750,050 toward the purchase of the Merkel – Heller – Marr farm in Webster Township. This farm is adjacent to a farm already protected by the Greenbelt, making this a priority for the Greenbelt.

In spring of 2008, FRPP contacted agencies that had received funds in the 2007 grant cycle to solicit additional funding requests. The City submitted requests for additional funding on 8 properties in total and received an additional \$1.686 million for two of those properties. The two properties are adjacent to one another and potentially protect over 300 acres of active agriculture land. Both of those properties are also located in Ann Arbor Township, who will be a partner in the purchase of the development rights on the properties.

Since 2005, the City has secured a over \$4.2 million from the FRPP program. The City has also partnered with other local agencies within the Greenbelt District, which also received FRPP grant funds.

LOCAL MONEY LEVERAGED

As discussed above, the City partnered with the Washtenaw County Parks and Scio Township on the purchase of the Fox Science Preserve. The purchase price for the 49-acre property was \$771,000 with the City contributing \$192,750, or 25% of the total purchase price.

The City also partnered with Washtenaw County Parks to purchase 2 parcels located in Superior Township for a total of 139 acres. The City contributed just under 50% of the purchase price, with the County contributing the majority of the remaining funds. The Superior Land Conservancy made a \$10,000 contribution toward the purchase and will assist the County in managing one of the parcels.

LANDOWNER OUTREACH

Due to the local economic and real estate markets, the City has experience an increase in applications over the last year. In fact, the Greenbelt received twice as many applications during this year, as compared to the previous year. As such, no landowner forums were organized this year.

PARTNERSHIPS

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 3 years, and this past year formed a charter to solidify communication among the groups. 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 also 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 Washtenaw Land Trust, Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Natural Area Program, Raisin Valley Land Trust, Washtenaw Land Trust, Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, Ann Arbor Township, Webster Township, Pittsfield Township, Scio Township, The City of Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County Planning and Environment.

STATE OF MICHIGAN

In collaboration with the Michigan Department of Agriculture's Farm and Open Space Program and Farm Bureau the Ann Arbor Greenbelt Program was highlighted in a Farmland Preservation Panel for the Michigan Association of Counties.

FINANCIAL SPREADSHEET

Financials for the fiscal year 2007-2008 attached.

STATUS OF GOALS FOR 2006 – 2007

- Leverage Greenbelt funds by Applying for FRPP funds on 3 properties

THE GREENBELT APPLIED FOR FUNDING ON A TOTAL OF 9 PROPERTIES DURING THIS YEAR AND RECEIVED FUNDING ON 3 OF THE PROPERTIES.

- Leverage Greenbelt funds by Collaborating with Townships and County on applications

THE CITY PARTNERED WITH SCIO TOWNSHIP AND WASHTENAW COUNTY PARKS ON ONE PURCHASE AND PARTNERED WITH THE COUNTY ON ANOTHER PURCHASE.

- Close on 2 new properties

THE GREENBELT CLOSED ON 3 DEALS DURING THIS YEAR.

- Provide future leverage for Greenbelt funds by Encouraging Salem Township to apply for State PDR

SALEM TOWNSHIP IS NOT ELIBLE FOR STATE PDR GRANT FUNDS.

- Meet with the Homebuilders and Commercial Lenders along with Preserve Washtenaw representatives for a review of properties in their inventory that might make good areas for farmland preservation, natural area and open space preservation

GREENBELT STAFF ALONG WITH WASHTENAW LAND TRUST AND WASHTENAW COUNTY PARKS MET WITH MEMBERS OF THE WASHTENAW HOME BUILDERS ASSOCIATION.

- Develop a pilot registry program.

THE GREENBELT STAFF DEVELOPED A REGISTRY BROCHURE, HOWEVER, DUE TO THE INCREASE APPLICATIONS THIS YEAR, THE GREENBELT HAS NOT FOCUSED ON A REGISTRY PROGRAM.

- Obtain at least 25% matching funds on all transactions from sources including local government, state government, federal government and landowner contributions.

THE GREENBELT HAS RECEIVED AT A MINIMUM 33% MATCHING FUNDS ON ALL LAND DEALS COMPLETED DURING THIS YEAR.

- Explore ways to tangibly connect Ann Arbor taxpayers with the Greenbelt program, including but not limited to newsletters, events, and a Small Farms Initiative with Ann Arbor Township.

AN ADVERTISEMENT WAS PLACED IN THE ANN ARBOR OBSERVER, WHICH PROVIDED AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE. A ONE-PAGE SUMMARY OF THE PROGRAM AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS WAS ALSO DEVELOPED TO PROVIDE TO PARTNERS, NEW COMMISSIONERS OR NEW CITYCOUNCIL MEMBERS. THE GREENBELT STAFF HAS ALSO BEEN INVOLVED

WITH THE FOOD SYSTEM ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP'S LEADERSHIP TEAM TO
EXPLORE AREA OF OVERLAP WITH LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION.

GOALS FOR 2008-2009

- Leverage Greenbelt funds by Applying for FRPP funds on 3 properties.
- Release a Request for Proposals to be sent to developers and bankers who own property within the Greenbelt District in order for them to submit a price / acre bid if they wish to sell their property to the City's Greenbelt.
- Leverage Greenbelt funds by Collaborating with Townships and County on applications.
- Close on 4 new properties.
- Obtain at least 25% matching funds on all transactions from sources including local government, state government, federal government and landowner contributions.
- Continue to explore ways to tangibly connect Ann Arbor taxpayers with the Greenbelt program, including but not limited to newsletters, events, and a Small Farms Initiative with Ann Arbor Township.

PARKLAND ACQUISITIONS

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

During last year, the Park Advisory Commission and staff utilized GIS to embark on a Strategic Planning process for parkland acquisitions. Through GIS, vacant parcels were identified and ranked based on their suitability for acquisition as a park. Separate ranking schema was developed for each of the four types of parks – neighborhood parks, community / active recreation parks, urban parks, and natural areas. The goal of this process is to provide a strategic approach to ensure the viability of the City's park system.

Through the strategic planning process, using GIS, staff was able to identify underserved neighborhoods. In an ideal system, every household should be within walking distance (¼ mile) of a neighborhood park (City of Ann Arbor PROS Plan F6). By using functions of GIS, the housing units not within walking distance of an existing neighborhood park were identified. This helps to ensure adequate access to the park system for all neighborhoods.

LAND PROTECTION

This year the City added an additional 3 parcels for a total of 17.3 new acres to the park system. In July 2007, the City of Ann Arbor completed the purchase of 2.5 acres of land adjacent to Eberwhite Woods. The property was purchased from the Zion Lutheran Church for \$580,000 dollars from the Open Space and Parkland Preservation Millage. The 2.5 acres are now part of the City's park inventory and will be maintained by Natural Area Preservation Staff. Eberwhite Woods is a popular natural area in the Old West Side neighborhood, bordered by Liberty Street and Eberwhite School.

In December 2007, the City of Ann Arbor accepted the donation of the vacant parcel located at 1805 Washtenaw Avenue. Douglas Crary had been the owner of the property. He served on the Ann Arbor Planning Commission and two terms on the Ann Arbor City Council. When Douglas Crary passed away in 2006, the property was left to his daughters, Rachel L Crary and Elizabeth A. Crary. To honor their father's wishes to have the parcel continued to be used as open space, the sisters approached the City to donate the vacant parcel to be used as a park for sledding and other recreational purposes. Neighborhood children currently use the hill on the property for sledding in the winter. The site will be used only for recreational purposes, and no playground equipment will be developed on the site..

Also in December 2007, the City of Ann Arbor completed the purchase of 13.5 acres from the Narrow Gauge Holdings Inc. and Sondra Gunn. The property was purchased from the landowners for \$1.8 million dollars from the Open Space and Parkland Preservation Millage.

The property is commonly known to many as Narrow Gauge Woods. The site was the only site recommended in the Millers Creek Watershed Improvement plan for protection, based on the high

floristic quality of the area and the high quality of Millers Creek on the site. The creek sustains sensitive macro invertebrates and has wetland flora that is unique to this type of habitat. The preservation of the property has been a high priority for the City of Ann Arbor's Natural Area Preservation program for years.

FINANCIAL SPREADSHEET

See attached spreadsheet for details.

STATUS OF GOALS FOR 2007 - 2008

- Use the strategic plan to identify specific parcels for acquisition that provide underserved neighborhoods with neighborhood and active recreation parks.

COMPLETED THE PARKS STRATEGIC PLAN AND WAS APPROVED BY THE PARK ADVISORY COMMISSION AND GIVEN TO CITY COUNCIL. ANALYSIS COMPLETED OF POTENTIAL PARK PURCHASES AND WILL BE PRESENTED TO THE LAND ACQUISITION COMMITTEE

- Acquire 3 top priority parcels that provide natural area, neighborhood park and active recreation areas.

THREE NEW PARKS WERE PURCHASED.

- Develop financial options for landowners that allow the City to pay landowners over time as millage proceeds become available.

FINANCIAL OPTIONS HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED.

GOALS FOR 2008 - 2009

- Complete 1-2 land acquisitions including at least one donation
- Complete rezoning and annexation of ___ parks that were acquired but included in the City system

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Financial Report

Appendix 2: Compilation of news articles

Appendix 1: Fiscal Year 2006-2007 Financial Report

DRAFT

Appendix 2: Compilation of News Articles

DRAFT



Everything Michigan

THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Efforts to preserve land are succeeding

But many parcels lack public access

Monday, August 13, 2007

BY TRACY DAVIS

News Staff Reporter

If local land preservation activists were looking for a year emblematic of the success of their mission, 2006 was it.

In Washtenaw County, 1,143 acres were protected last year by the Ann Arbor Greenbelt Program, the county's Natural Areas Preservation Program, township programs and several private conservation organizations.

In the years prior to 2006 they had collectively protected about 4,000 acres to add to the county's estimated 33,123 acres of land set aside in parks, preserves, recreation areas and through easements.

It was a new pace that reflected the community's anxiety over a loss of open space; the appeal of some short-term tax advantages for preserving private properties; and the work of local conservation organizations and tax-funded preservation programs, advocates say.

It is also part of a national trend. A November report from the Land Trust Alliance, a national umbrella organization for private land conservation groups, showed a 54 percent increase in the number of acres preserved by state and local land trusts since 2000. According to their report, preservation efforts averaged 2.6 million acres a year, reaching almost 12 million acres last year, an area about the size of Vermont and New Hampshire combined. When national trusts, such as the Nature Conservancy, are included, the acreage totals 37 million, an area larger than the state of Michigan.

Tax incentives are part of it. Qualifying farmers, ranchers and other property owners can write off larger proportions of their income for easements donated, said Barry Lonik, a local land consultant.

"That's a hell of a deal," he said. But it only runs through the end of this year, and many organizations have been rushing to close with farmers and other land owners clamoring to take advantage.

Another reason for the current push is a recognition on the part of conservation groups and the public that large-scale land acquisition isn't really taking place at the federal and state levels the way it was during the 20th century, said Jack Smiley, executive director of the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy.

"We've had a growth in land trusts because the government has really dropped the ball, with some notable exceptions," he said. "People have realized that we need to protect land, not just for tree hugging, but for economic viability and quality of life. And they've acted."

Michigan has a purchase of development rights program for farmland, but it has received little funding in recent years, critics say. The state Department of Natural Resources still buys land, said Kerry Wieber, DNR's forest land administrator and chair of the land review team, although "we are always limited by the availability of funds."

The state has implemented a land consolidation strategy that involves selling off "non-strategic" parcels to

generate funding for property better suited for recreational uses, she said. The plan for Washtenaw County's DNR lands was approved last year and is available on the state's Web site.

Private land preservation is also a reflection of economic trends, said Jim Wyerman, a spokesman for the Land Trust Alliance.

"In general, state and federal moneys for land have dried up," he said. "So it has devolved to state and local groups and civic organizations to take the mantle up if they want to have some say in the character there. And ... the pace of development has increased so much that most communities can point to one area of strip mall development that is not seen as the way they want it to go."

In many places, local governments short on cash have not been able to do much. But in Washtenaw County, residents have voted repeatedly since 2000 to tax themselves to fund land preservation programs from the county to the township level.

One casualty of the private land preservation movement, however, has often been access. Because much of the land being preserved now is still privately owned, it is usually not open to the public for recreational uses.

"I think (privately owned preserved land) is going to be a bigger piece of the pie," said Don Amador, a California-based representative to the Blue Ribbon Coalition, a national public recreation access advocacy group. "That is a growing trend. The recreation folks are a little behind the eight ball on this."

According to a Washtenaw County analysis, there is slightly more than 10 percent of preserved lands under conservation easements. While there are exceptions, most of these are simply binding legal restrictions on the land use that prevent further development, but don't grant public access to the land.

Another 20 percent are in the category of "preserves" which may allow access but usually restrict certain types of recreation, such as hunting and fishing and more land-intensive sports such as mountain biking, horseback riding and motorized sports.

Lonik, who has been closely involved with many of the organizations and programs in the area, estimated about 10 percent to 20 percent of the lands currently in the process of being preserved countywide will allow some form of public access.

A notable addition to the store of publicly accessible lands is the county's Natural Areas Preservation Program, which has acquired more than 1,000 acres since it was passed by voters in the fall of 2000. The quarter-mill tax-funded program buys high-quality natural areas to protect them, and permits "passive" recreation, such as hiking and bird-watching. Including its parklands, the county now has 2,700 acres, all of which are publicly accessible, said deputy parks and recreation department director Tom Freeman.

"I think we're happy we have sort of filled in a piece of that whole spectrum," Freeman said. "Land preservation takes a lot of different forms and it's all important."

The Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy usually buys properties outright, which are then made available for certain types of recreation.

Still, Lonik points out, even when land isn't accessible, there are plenty of public benefits. Preserved land helps protect water resources and wildlife, and provides a scenic value that greatly enhances quality of life, he said.

The preserved agricultural lands, which have been the primary goal of the greenbelt program, enhance farming viability. Local farms are a critical part of the local economy, advocates point out, not to mention a source of food that doesn't require the resources of international transport.

"We still seem to have a generation of people who think food grows in the grocery store," Smiley said.

Tracy Davis can be reached at tdavis@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6856.



Everything Michigan

THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Land groups band together

Informal cooperation becomes official in Preserve Washtenaw

Monday, August 27, 2007

BY TRACY DAVIS

News Staff Reporter

Local land preservation groups are formalizing a long-standing agreement to cooperate on preservation efforts with a group called Preserve Washtenaw.

An informal collaboration among local private trusts and taxpayer-funded preservation programs, the group has chartered members and is open to all organizations that acquire properties for permanent protection.

Groups involved so far include the Washtenaw Land Trust, the Raisin Valley Land Trust, the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, the city of Ann Arbor's Greenbelt Program, the county Natural Areas Preservation Program and various land acquisition and preservation programs the townships of Pittsfield, Ann Arbor, Scio and Webster.

As part of the effort, Preserve Washtenaw will launch a Web site, probably through the county's ewashtenaw.org pages, to help consolidate information for landowners who want to preserve property. The idea is to provide information on all of the programs in one place.

"We were looking to establish a single point of contact for people who may be interested in land conservation," said Bob Tetens, director of the county Parks and Recreation Department. "We don't duplicate efforts and we don't want to be perceived as duplicating efforts."

The county's program buys properties outright and requires public access. Other programs and trusts buy open space, or development rights; some accept donations of conservation easements but don't pay for them. Each program has varied budgets as well as geographic and conservation goals. One program may suit one landowner's needs while another would not.

Mike Garfield, of Ann Arbor's Greenbelt Program, said it was something he and others had advocated for since the beginning of the passage of the greenbelt tax in 2003. And it's not new, he added; it's been happening all along in an informal fashion.

"It was clear we needed some regular dialogue" among the groups, he said. "We started holding informal meetings that became regular."

"Sometimes landowners know work is going on, but they don't know who to contact," said Barry Lonik, a local land preservation consultant who has been instrumental in launching some of the local government programs. "People may never call because they don't know where to go."

"We're all working together to provide the best service to residents who want to preserve land," said Pittsfield Township Treasurer Christina Lirones. "I think it's a good idea and it makes it clear that we're all out there to work together to preserve as much land as possible. We're not trying to get into a bidding war."

Tracy Davis can be reached at tdavis@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6856.



Dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of our open spaces and natural features

Fall 2007

Calling all landowners...

If you're considering protecting your property, now is the time to take advantage of expanded tax deductions.

For 2007 only, landowners may be eligible to receive tax deductions for donating a conservation easement.

This includes partial donation of the value of a conservation easement. These tax benefits are greatly increased only for donations made in 2007.

The tax incentive raises the deduction a landowner can take for donating a conservation easement from 30 percent of their adjusted gross income in any year to 50 percent.

Farmers may be eligible to deduct up to 100 percent of their income.

The tax incentive also extends the carry forward period for a landowner to take tax deductions for voluntary conservation agreements from five to 15 years.



Photo by Dan Ezekiel

Greenbelt program making strides

In November 2003, the residents of Ann Arbor overwhelmingly passed the Open Space and Parkland Preservation Millage, also known as the Ann Arbor Greenbelt and Parkland Program. The millage is a one-half mill, 30-year millage.

The purpose of the Greenbelt Program is to protect both working farmland and natural areas.

The purpose of the Greenbelt Program is to protect both working farmland and natural areas, as well as identifying and conserving those lands that are integral to the protection of the City of Ann Arbor's source groundwater and the Huron River - a portion of which is designated a state scenic river.

Accomplishments

The Ann Arbor Greenbelt has purchased the development rights on five farms, protecting a total of 559 acres. The City of Ann Arbor also collaborated with Ann Arbor Township, who also received a Farm & Rand Lands Protection Program (FRPP) grant, for an additional 147 acres of protected farmland, bringing the total to over 700 acres protected with Greenbelt money to date.

With the funds received for the purchase of development rights, landowners may do a "1031 exchange." This provides tax breaks to the landowners who use the money to purchase more working farmland. Of the projects completed thus far, all landowners have put a portion of the money to purchase more farmland and expand their farming business.

The Ann Arbor Greenbelt Program has received over \$2.5 million in Federal match dollars from USDA's FRPP for the purchase of development rights (PDR) on six working farms in Webster, Superior, and Salem Township.



To learn more about the Ann Arbor Greenbelt

Please call **734.997.1316**

Visit us online at www.a2gov.org/greenbelt.html

The Bloomer Farm

"We wanted to continue to develop and improve our farm business, but recognized the difficulty of doing that in the Ann Arbor area's very strong real estate market. We also feel a strong attachment to our land, its history, and its contribution to the local environment.

The Ann Arbor Greenbelt Program offered a unique opportunity to combine our business and conservation goals with the environmental health goals of the community. We have had absolutely no second thoughts."
~ owners, **Rosanne & Tom Bloomer**

The Bloomer farm was the first easement purchased under the Greenbelt Program in 2005. In addition to traditional crops, the Bloomers supply the Ann Arbor market with roasted soybeans and popcorn under the label "Rosie's Roasters." These products are sold at several local businesses.



Photos by Ted Sylvester

Dale & Karen Kapp's story

In 2006, the City of Ann Arbor Greenbelt's program partnered with Ann Arbor Township to protect a 147-acre farm.

This project was the first purchase of development rights under Ann Arbor Township's Farmland Preservation program, which is funded by a millage approved by township voters in 2003.

Combining \$757,000 of Ann Arbor Township funds with \$757,000 provided by the City of Ann Arbor Greenbelt Program and \$698,500 obtained from the US Department of Agriculture's Federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, the City and the Township have ensured the continuation of farming on a 147-acre farm owned by Dale and Karen Kapp and its preservation as open space.

The Fishbeck Farm

"Our farmland is the most important resource this country has and we've been wasting it. The Greenbelt Program offers us an opportunity to preserve our land and our farm economy."

~ owner, **Bill Fishbeck**

Natural Area Preservation News

Protecting and restoring Ann Arbor's natural areas and fostering an environmental ethic among its citizens

Volume 12, Number 3

Autumn 2007

Park Focus: The Onder Property

by Billy Kirst

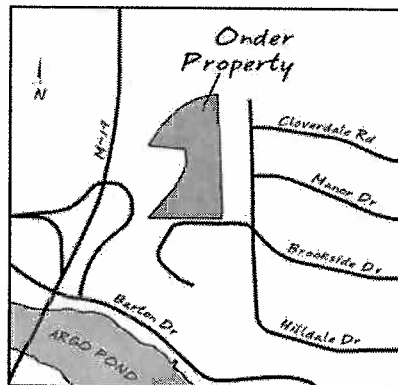
Break out your hand saws and safety glasses – we're about to have another big restoration party! Recently, the city purchased "the Onder property," a 4.2-acre parcel of land. (This nature area hasn't yet been officially named, so for now we'll just call it "Onder.") Though currently overwhelmed by buckthorn and honeysuckle, Onder shows clear signs of natural riches waiting to flourish. The parcel consists of mesic forest, formerly dominated by ash. A few large oak trees, and many black cherry and box elder fill in the overstory. There are two small streams and many pockets of wooded wetlands. The stream at the north end has a nice diversity of mesic and wet mesic woodland wildflowers including trillium, early meadow-rue, and marsh marigolds, woven together by a ground cover of Virginia creeper.

One of Onder's most important ecological features is its location. Positioned between the upland forests of Leslie Park and Black Pond Woods and the riparian complex of Argo, Bandemer, Barton, Bird Hills, and Kuebler Langford, Onder – with adjacent non-developed properties – serves as a "green corridor," providing important habitat connectivity.

Green corridors act in much the same way as those in buildings. Connecting spaces together as a cohesive unit, indoor corridors allow people to comfortably move from room to room without stepping out into the cold or rain. As a green corridor, Onder is a place where birds, mammals, reptiles, insects, and seeds can move through the urban landscape without facing assault from the lawn. Despite deceptive luscious greenery, most lawns lack the shade, water, and other habitat qualities needed by wildlife. Lawns can be places where native plants and animals encounter such perils as mowers, kitty cats,

and herbicides. Connections like Onder offer welcome relief.

Landscape corridors are becoming an increasingly important component of natural areas planning and management. To see for yourself, grab your "Parks Map and Recreation Facility Listing," (free if you contact us or come to a workday!), and let's check out the city from a turkey vulture's eye view. Over 25 natural areas, parks, and green spaces line most of the Huron River as it winds through the city. This corridor provides contiguous habitat and resources for plants and animals. Rivers make especially great corridors since their connectivity not only supports species on land, but provides greater continuity of habitat for amphibians and aquatic wildlife.



Fragmentation of the natural landscape by roads, buildings, parking lots, and agriculture strains the ability of the remaining natural areas to support an ecologically diverse and functional assemblage of plant and animal species. When a natural area is completely surrounded by development, wildlife become isolated from potential mates, and diversity and survival rates suffer. This is particularly true for species with highly specific habitat requirements and limited dispersal abilities. It is also essential in regions where fire is an important historic and current feature of the landscape. Many fire-sensitive species take refuge from fires in nearby ecosystems, only to repopulate into the burned location. Habitat connectivity, therefore, can be a lifeline for many species.

Habitats in large, continuous tracts also buffer the effects of landscape change. Say, for example, that a population of Joe-pye-weed was wiped out by a marauding army of glossy buckthorn. Then some NAPpers came along

Continued on page 6

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Park Focus: The Onder Property *Continued from page 1*

and showed the buckthorn the door with the help of a brush-blade. Eventually, Joe-pye-weed could return to the site, even if there were no plants or seeds left in Bandemer. Because of the corridor of connected natural areas along the river, a few fluffy seeds from the Barton sedge meadow could just hop a flight on the wind or travel down the river to the recently-cleared Bandemer meadow. After a short while, a new population of Joe-pye-weed could become established. One population moving in to take another's place is called "recruitment." This recruitment, made possible by connectivity between natural areas, would be much less likely were Barton a big water park, racetrack, or otherwise without its native sedge meadow.

This brings me back to Onder and our future restoration party. With a little loving care Onder can support and benefit from the "flow" of forest and savanna species

between adjacent natural areas. Birds, mammals, and herps will continue to seek shelter, move under the cover of nature, and enjoy the streams that babble through. But there is work we can do to enhance the ecological effectiveness of Onder. As we expand the ecologically intact area by removing invasive plants and opening up habitat for natives, we will help Onder maximize its potential as a "green corridor."

Editor's note: Your property, regardless of size, can act as a green corridor as well. All you have to do is plant or set aside a natural garden, making sure to use non-invasive plants. NAP has a set of brochures on native plants, and Sara Stein's Noah's Garden: Restoring the Ecology of Your Own Back Yard is an excellent resource. Once you've restored your yard, you can invite your neighbors to do the same!

Staff Updates

hello...



Jacob Job

As NAP's Assistant Ornithologist, I'm getting to participate in one of my greatest joys - birding. My love for all things avian began while studying biology as an undergrad at East Tennessee State. Right now, I'm in the midst of studying in the Ecology and Organismal Biology graduate program at Eastern Michigan

University. After completing this masters, I hope to travel to Montana to pursue another one in Natural History and Filmmaking. Maybe one day, everyone will be watching my documentaries about birds of the world! At the very least, I look forward to sharing my love of birding with the NAP crew and volunteers.

Sean Zera

As NAP's Assistant Herpetologist, I'm helping to survey for reptiles and amphibians at the new Skyline High School. I volunteered during the initial animal rescue there and am glad to continue to see how well these species cope with the changes to their habitat. I have a B.S. in biology from the University of Michigan. My interests include wildlife photography, collecting animal skulls, and growing unusual plants.



changes...

Sheara Cohen

After time off working on my masters thesis (it's almost done!), I'm back, and filling in for Michelle as an Outreach Assistant, putting together *this very* newsletter. With just a couple months left to go before heading off to Boston to finish my landscape architecture degree, I'm glad to spend the time with NAP volunteers and staff.



NAP Alumna News

Fred Kraus

Dr. Fred Kraus, NAP's 1st Herpetologist (from 1995-96), has been a Research Zoologist for the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, Hawaii for the past six years. Most of his field time has been spent in Papua/New Guinea where he has discovered about ninety new species of frogs, lizards, and snakes! He's also putting together a database of alien "herps" from around the world, and hopes to have a new book out on that topic next year.

Michelle Michney

Michelle, NAP Conservation Worker from 1999 to 2001, just got married to John Progar. The newlyweds will be living in Kettle Falls, Washington, where they will start their second year climbing around on ladders at Cliffside Orchard, an organic orchard growing apricots, peaches, apples, and pears.

CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

Soft economy boosts interest in Ann Arbor's greenbelt project

By Daniel Duggan

3:01 am, September 10, 2007

When Ann Arbor's greenbelt plan was created in 2003 to protect farm land and open space, the booming local economy put the plan at odds with developers.

Advertisement

As developers tried to speculate on land where growth was headed, those trying to preserve land found themselves in bidding wars for prime parcels.

As the demand for land has waned, it's a different story today, said Laura Rubin, chair of the **Greenbelt Advisory Commission**, which makes recommendations of land purchases to the **Ann Arbor City Council**.

"In the last six months, with the downturn of the housing market, a lot more developers who bought land are coming to us, a lot more farmers who sold options that fell through are coming to us," she said. "It's an increase in the amount of properties coming our way."

With the soft market, she said, the commission hopes to find more opportunities to save land — but also save money.

"And frankly, we're the only ones with money to spend on land in the area," Rubin said.

The voters of Ann Arbor approved the greenbelt program in 2003 as a way to preserve open space or farmland. Revenue is being generated for the plan in the form of a millage that began in 2004, expected to generate \$84 million during its 30-year lifetime.

The city is purchasing development rights and land with a \$20 million pool generated by bonds that have been sold against future millage income.

To date, development easements have been purchased on six properties. The plan so far has preserved 703 acres at a cost of \$11.26 million. (*See box, this page.*)

While the easements deals have closed, no raw land purchases have been made.

The program has targeted sites in townships such as Ann Arbor, Webster and Superior and has been recently expanded to include a larger section of Scio, Webster, Pittsfield and Superior townships.

The strategy has been to create clusters of land on the perimeter of the area, said Albert Berriz, president and CEO of **McKinley Inc.**, also a member of the Greenbelt Advisory Commission.

"Rather than shoot here and there, we've begun to create synergies of properties that aren't quite contiguous, but are close."

The idea, Berriz said, isn't to buy land that might be developed in the future, but to protect the region

long term.

"You can't head off development in good times or bad," he said. "You're banking away, for the benefit of the community, a block of land that otherwise would be developed."

Berriz has been on the commission from the beginning and satisfies the statutory requirement of having one developer on the board. From a developer standpoint, he said, the program has had the positive impact of promoting infill development in Ann Arbor.

"I went into it from a green perspective," he said. "It's better to use our existing infrastructure and have a strong downtown before we invade the greenfields."

But lack of demand for land won't always mean lower prices, said James Porth, a vice president with the Farmington-Hills based **Thomas A. Duke Co.** who specializes in Washtenaw County land sales.

"There's not a loss in value, there is a loss in the number of buyers," he said.

"If (the greenbelt is) looking to be opportunistic in this environment, the issue is that some farmers would rather die than sell their land at a massive discount."

Berriz said money hasn't been the only argument made to land-owners.

"We are a real-estate buyer in an environment where a lot of other buyers are no longer there," he said. "But the people who sell us property don't just have an economic gain; what they're doing has a positive impact for the future of the community. It's a double bottom line."

Daniel Duggan: (313) 446-0414, dduggan@crain.com

The Ann Arbor Greenbelt Project

Spent so far: \$7.3 million by the city of Ann Arbor. The program buys open space and farmland. The city funding was combined with grants, donations and other local government contributions to generate a total of \$11.26 million to acquire the six easement sites above.

Protected: 703 acres.

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Natural Area Preservation News

Protecting and restoring Ann Arbor's natural areas and fostering an environmental ethic among its citizens

Volume 12, Number 4

Winter 2007

Park Focus: Recent Addition to Eberwhite Woods

by Nancy T. L. Stoll, NAP Office Volunteer

Eberwhite Woods, located between Liberty and Arbdale, is one of Ann Arbor's oldest and largest natural areas. With 32 acres of mature trees and a wide variety of plant and animal life, it also ranks as one of the more ecologically interesting sites in the city. Eberwhite Woods has not been featured in Park Focus before, as the land is owned and managed by the Ann Arbor Public Schools, not the City of Ann Arbor, so NAP does not have jurisdiction over the woods. In July, however, the City, utilizing the Open Space and Parkland Preservation Millage, acquired 2.5 acres of land adjoining Eberwhite Woods from Zion Lutheran Church. This acquisition of land adjacent to Eberwhite has increased NAP's interest in stewardship of the larger natural area.

Way-back-when to the present

In recent times an ancient conch shell was discovered buried in Eberwhite Woods. There was speculation that the shell is an artifact of The Hopewellian Indians who lived in this area as far back as 200 BC. Eber White, who came to Ann Arbor in 1824, is listed as the first "owner" of the land. He lived and farmed on adjoining land, as the area that is now protected was somewhat swampy and hilly, and kept these acres as his "back forty". In 1915 when most of Eber White's estate was being subdivided for homes, the University of Michigan purchased the wooded portion for management and use by the School of Natural Resources, Forestry Department. During this time the land was used for biological research and education by university researchers. The Spotted Salamander is an example of a critter that was studied there. There is also a species of fungus, *Bolitus eberwhitei*, first identified in Eberwhite in 1965, that is named after

the woods. The Forestry Department managed the timber on the land by removing commercially undesirable trees and cutting those they could sell for fuel wood. By 1942 the entire woods had been selectively cut over at least twice. Metal markers from this time can still be seen in the woods. In 1946 the University transferred the land to the Public Schools, and Eberwhite Elementary School

was built on a portion of it. Since then, staff and volunteers at the school have maintained trails and conducted nature activities in the woods. For many years, there has been a committed group of parents and neighbors (currently called the Eberwhite Woods Committee) who provide stewardship and advocate for the woods.

Land acquisition

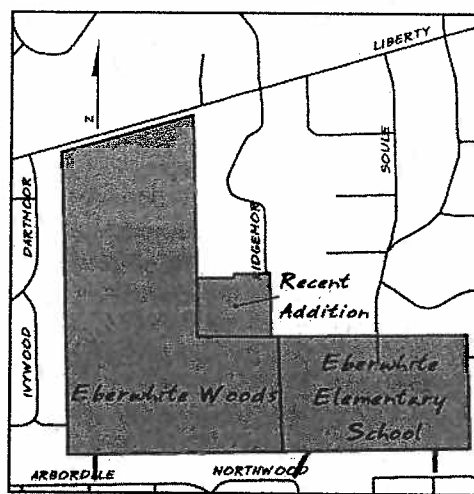
The new acreage is located on the east side of the woods (see map). The acquisition of more land for Eberwhite benefits the natural area not only by increasing its size and the

space available for plant and animal habitat, but also by providing a buffer to surrounding residential areas. In addition, it is a space that can be used for hands-on nature activities with school children without concern for threatening more ecologically sensitive areas.

Eberwhite today

Walking Eberwhite's trails today, visitors can see a variety of mature oak, hickory, black cherry, black walnut, beech, and elm trees. The Kentucky Coffee tree is a species of "special concern" in Michigan. More recently, sugar maples have seeded into the woods and are on their way to becoming dominant. Smaller trees include sassafras, dogwood, and buttonbush. There are at least eighty types of wildflowers growing here, including a few threatened plants in Michigan. The

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Volunteer of the Year

We'd like to congratulate NAP's 2007 volunteer of the year – AC Tanner. AC has helped NAP for years, taking on many different roles. He is one of NAP's longest-term volunteers, starting his volunteering with us in 1995 at our early workdays. Over the years AC has worked at virtually billions of workdays for NAP, but it wasn't enough for him – he wanted more! He has worked on independent projects in Barton, Swift Run, Doyle, and Scarlett Mitchell; cutting invasives shrubs, removing purple loosestrife, and collecting seeds. This makes AC the Park Steward of the most parks in NAP's history! Adding to his skills, AC has recently started co-leading workdays. (When we're in a pinch and need some extra leaders AC is one of the Stewards who often comes to NAP's aide.) AC has also been on our burn crew for the past two years, increasing his arsenal of invasive-removing tools. But AC hasn't always been a buckthorn-killing machine, it's been a long path of learning for him.



AC Tanner - NAP's Volunteer of the Year

A couple decades ago AC's volunteering adventure started with a short stint with the Boy Scouts and then a longer jaunt with Washtenaw Literacy Society, where he helped increase literacy through one-on-one reading. AC recalls that 15% of US-born people were, at that time, non-literate. A turning point for the focus of AC's volunteering was in 1982 when he saw an article for the Master Gardener Certification. He notes that the MG course was very comprehensive, its goal being to teach people about gardening, soils, plants, and pests; then to get those people out into the community with that knowledge. Through this process, and his volunteering for the MG Hotline (a helpline for gardening), AC started his interest in natural landscapes. In 2000 AC decided that his NAP work could easily be applied at other nature areas, like nearby County Farm Park. So he decided to volunteer himself for the County Parks, transferring his knowledge and propensity for killing invasives to this new location. He has done such good work for the County Parks that they decided to start paying him this year!

AC still volunteers at non-ecosystem work too. At the Nursing School Clinic he helps nurse practitioner students and student nurses practice in-home consultation interviews. This is a volunteer job that he fell into while going to the clinic for his own healthcare. AC has also been volunteering for the past year at Neighborhood Senior Services, whose goal is to keep seniors living independently. AC gives about two rides per week, driving low-income seniors to and from medical appointments. AATA subsidizes the drivers in this program, bringing the cost for the seniors down to only five dollars per ride. AC also found this volunteer work through his personal use – when he once needed a ride to a medical appointment. AC notes that the seniors are all quite “with it,” they're just starting to get around more slowly and it's been great to help some wonderful folks.

AC has been a wonderful volunteer for NAP and many other organizations! AC tells us, “it's been a good leadership and social experience.” Thank you AC!

Park Focus: Recent Addition to Eberwhite Woods

Continued from page 1

woods have several ponds that are home to frogs, turtles, and wetland plants. Black squirrels, a recent arrival in this part of Michigan, may also be seen. Due to the hard work of dedicated volunteers, very few invasive species are found in Eberwhite!

Into the future

The plot of land known as Eberwhite Woods has passed through many changes, as Native American stomping ground, white settler woodlot, research space, managed forest, outdoor classroom, and nature preserve. Undoubtedly it will change in the future. Under the current regime of ecological preservation and restoration,

it can grow and bloom with presettlement diversity. Winter dormancy breaks to the cacophony of spring wildflowers and frog calls, summer light filters through the canopy of brilliant green, which changes to dazzling yellow and orange in the fall. Anyone walking through the woods can enjoy the textures of bark and leaves, be surprised by a startled chipmunk, meet a new wildflower, and experience the serenity of proximity to nature.

Thank you to Steve Bean, Dorothy Blanchard, Dave Borneman, Ed Diehl, and Ginny Trocchio for their help with writing this article.

City adds piece of coveted parkland



LEISA THOMPSON, THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Susan Lake, a volunteer with the Huron River Watershed Council, has collected stonefly larvae from a stream on the wooded site near Narrow Gauge Way and Watershed Drive in Ann Arbor. The larva is a sign of high quality water. The land, recently been purchased by the city as part of the greenbelt program, will become the city's newest park.

'Narrow Gauge' woods includes freshwater stream

BY JUDY MCGOVERN
The Ann Arbor News

The stream that threads through Ann Arbor's newest park is just a trickle, but it's the healthiest flowing freshwater in the city.

Huron River Watershed Council officials are thrilled with the pending acquisition of the 13.5-acre "Narrow Gauge" woods property off Green Road, south of Glazier Way.

The \$1.8 million purchase, made with money from the city's greenbelt program, will be final-

ized before year's end.

"It's wonderful news," said Joan Martin, director of the watershed council's adopt-a-stream program.

Ongoing monitoring programs show the stream, a tributary that flows to Miller Creek, is the highest quality stream in the city, she said. That quality is measured by the presence of insects like stoneflies, which are sensitive to reduced oxygen or flow.

Within walking distance of King Elementary School, the property



SONIA L. GOTTFRIED, THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2007

SEE PARK, BACK PAGE

PARK FROM A1

Property takes its name from a railroad track on the site

is a steeply sloped area between Fox Hunt Drive, on the east, and Skynob Drive, on the west.

The city has been interested in the property for some time, said City Council Member Stephen Rapundalo, D-2nd Ward.

The price agreed to by the city and the sellers — Narrow Gauge Holdings Inc. and Sondra Gunn Properties — is more attractive, per acre, than the cost proposed several years ago. The deal was approved Monday by the City Council.

"It's glorious woodlands," said Rapundalo, who had been involved in those earlier discussions as chairman of the city's Park Advisory Com-

mission.

The property takes its name from a narrow — very narrow — gauge rail constructed by the late Harold Allen, an aeronautical and research engineer at the University of Michigan from 1939 to 1972.

The rails were set a foot apart and ran a half-mile through the wooded property that will become the park. Sections of track remain on the Allen's private property.

But there's relatively little evidence of the railroad track today, said Joan Lowenstein, the 2nd Ward's other representative on the City Council, who has also visited the property. However, a street called Narrow Gauge Way preserves the memory of Allen's train.

The new park lies partly in the city and partly in Ann Arbor Township.

Under the purchase agreement, the landowners will retain the property for a year and lease it to the city for \$1. The public will have access to the land during that lease period.

The arrangement lets the sellers take advantage of tax benefits, said Jayne Miller, community services area administrator for the city.

A city appraisal had put the value at \$2.5 million. The difference between the purchase price and the fair market value can be recognized as a charitable donation under IRS rules.

Legal and other expenses

could add up \$54,000 to the purchase price.

Since the voter-approved "greenbelt" tax went into effect in mid-2004, \$17 million in city tax dollars have been spent to buy land and preserve open space in and around Ann Arbor.

When it's completed, the purchase of the Narrow Gauge property will bring the total to just more than \$19 million.

The most expensive property has been Camp Hilltop, a 7.7-acre site purchased from the Girl Scouts of Huron Valley last year for \$2.24 million.

Judy McGovern can be reached at 734-994-6863 or jmccgovern@annarbornews.com.

New park's story behind the story a good one



JUDY MCGOVERN

The Ann Arbor News

The lead was certainly the ecological importance of the stream that flows from the city of Ann Arbor's newest park to Miller Creek

And, beyond the immediate news of the city's deal to buy the 13.5-acre property known as "Narrow Gauge" woods, there might well be the beginnings of another story about the effect the real-estate skid could have on local park and open-space acquisition and protection programs.

But there's also a third story line. And as I poked around trying to learn the origin of the obviously train-related "Narrow Gauge" name this past week, it emerged as a particularly charming tale.

I'm sorry that I never had the chance to meet the late Harold Allen. The train-lover who built

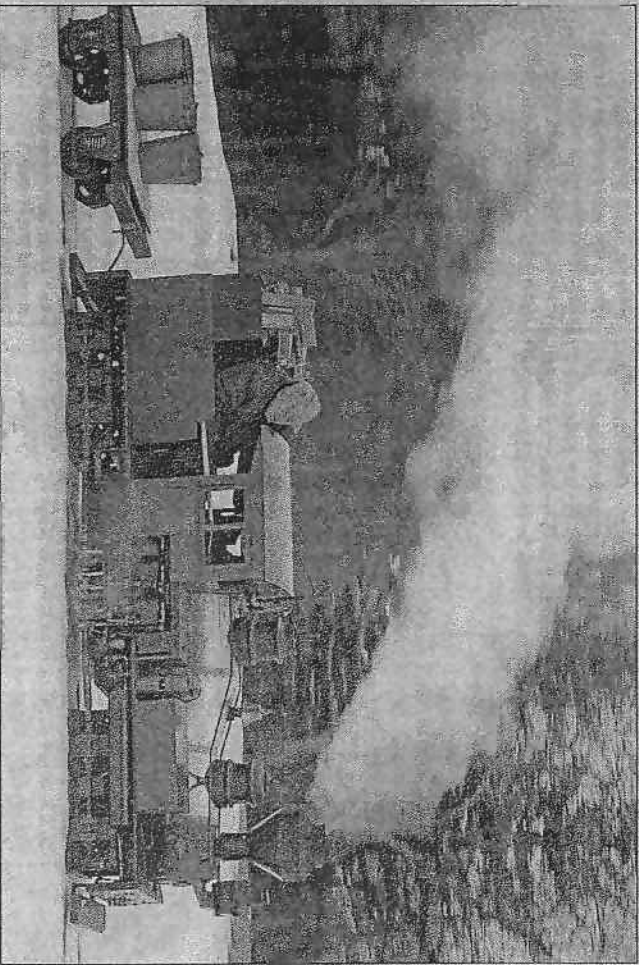


PHOTO COURTESY MICHAEL ALLEN

The late Harold Allen makes his last run on April 1, 2001 through the property that will become Ann Arbor's "Narrow Gauge Woods" park. His steam locomotives ran on tracks set 12 inches apart, a 1/2 scale miniature of a Shay-type logging train. The train gathered maple sap for syrup production in the spring and hauled firewood during the rest of the year.

a 1/2 scale miniature steam railway through the future park and land at his adjoining home, Allen sounds like a man of high energy and high

spirits. The little logging railroad was magnificent, says Henry Pollack who became Phyllis and Harold Allen's neighbor

when his family moved to northeast Ann Arbor in the late 1980s. "He built it himself and, when the whistle would sound,

every kid in the neighborhood would come running."

In the spring, Allen used the train to haul loads of maple sap from a sugar bush on the wooded property off Green Road. The rest of the year it carried firewood.

There were trestles and bridges, and closer to the house, turntables — like any working railroad. The 12-inch wide track covered half a mile or more.

Phyllis Allen recalls picnics. "He'd take the kids around through the woods," she says.

Allen began working on his railway in 1962. An aeronautical and research engineer at the University of Michigan, he retired a decade later and ran trains — including two locomotives he built — through the spring of 2001.

That, says son Michael, a Brighton resident, was when a lease expired that had allowed his dad to keep the railway in place after selling the wooded property.

Allen died later that year at 93. In the meantime, the SEE MCGOVERN, A4

'Narrow Gauge' a reference to railroad

developers who had purchased property named a street parallel to the railroad Narrow Gauge Way. The name will, apparently, now extend to the parkland.

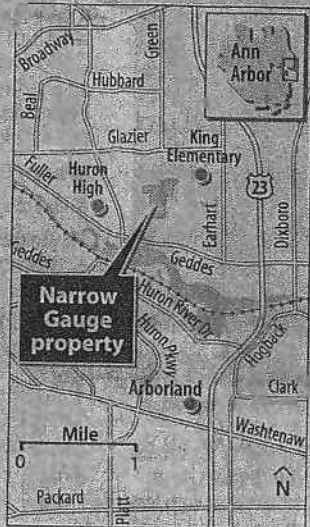
Although the railway was unique, it wasn't Allen's only passion.

"He lived a life of adventure," says Pollack.

A native of New York State, Allen hiked the Adirondacks and was a bobsled driver at Lake Placid. He learned to fly in the 1920s, performed air shows, flew supplies to remote mining camps, and flew in the Navy in World War II.

He had a brush with Buckminster Fuller in the '50s and oversaw some work on a sample panel for Fuller's first geodesic dome. Literally a rocket scientist, he established U-M's Keweenaw Rocket Range near Copper Harbor in 1964.

So while fellow rail buffs remember Allen's capable trains (a loaded log car



SONIA L. GOTTFRIED, THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

would carry logs weighing 600-800 pounds up a long, 4 percent grade); and track maintenance battles with burrowing woodchucks, and ultimately, the erosion that followed development nearby, his neighbor recalls

a great storyteller who lived life fully.

And his family remembers a man who'd have been very happy to see the steep, wooded parcel he once owned preserved as parkland.

It's wonderful, says Phyllis Allen.

"My dad hated to sell the property," says son Doug, who now lives in Oregon. "He was forced to because of the taxes."

If anyone's interested in cementing the history of an engineer, academic, hobbyist and neighbor who, for the four decades, helped make one unique Ann Arbor neighborhood really special, you might find that Michael knows where to find an engine or two. (My suggestion, not his.) One way or the other, the story behind the name of the woods ought to be preserved.

Judy McGovern can be reached at 734-994-6863 or jmcgovern@annarbornews.com.

1/10/08

OPINION

THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

FOUNDED IN 1835

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Gravel pit acquisition smart use of program

Educational parcel preserved, accessible

An old gravel pit that has helped teach thousands of local schoolkids about the Ice Age is becoming a more permanent part of the community, thanks to preservation programs and the land's former owners.

The 49 acres of land is located in Scio Township, and until recently was owned by Mel and Betty Fox. Over the years they've let an estimated 40,000 children and their teachers tromp through to study boulders, fossils and other remnants of our geological and botanical past.

"It portrays a really nice possibility of what the entire Ann Arbor area might have looked like 12,000 years ago,"

John Russell, a retired Ann Arbor Public Schools science teacher, told The News.

Russell, who has taken many classes on field trips to the site, is a member of the Natural Areas Technical Advisory Committee, a group that recommended buying the land. The Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission, which manages

the county Natural Areas Preservation Program, paid half of the \$771,000 cost, with Scio Township and the Ann Arbor greenbelt program picking up the rest.

Now called the Fox Science Preserve, it will likely be open to the general public later this year, after a small parking lot is built for those coming to visit. There will also be signs installed to tell people about the land's natural features - including fungi, mosses, algae and lichens that are starting to grow in the former gravel pit. Those microscopic plants provide a valuable insight into what scientists call primary plant succession - the process of how plant life developed thousands of years ago,

when rock was exposed by a retreating glacier, for example.

Preserving this land and making it accessible to local residents of all ages is smart. That combination is an important one, and one we like to see included as a priority as local land preservation programs evaluate which parcels they'd like to purchase.





TAMMIE GRAVES, THE ANN ARBOR NEWS



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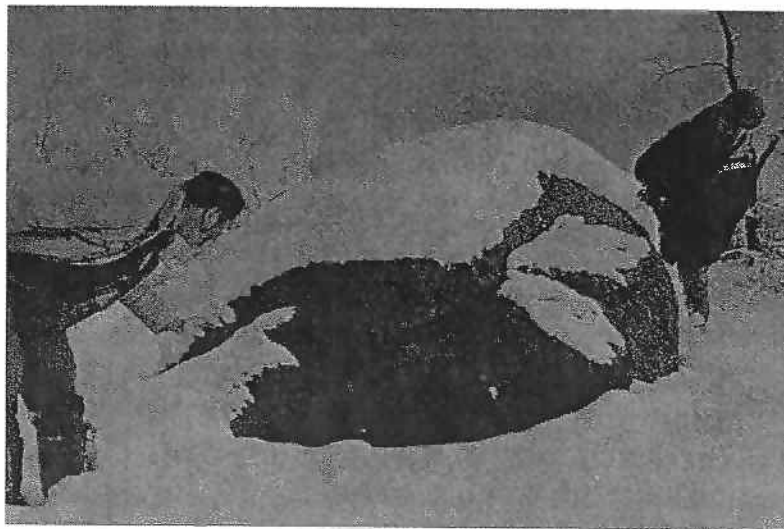
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History-rich gravel pit becomes science preserve

Posted by [John Mulcahy](#) | [The Ann Arbor News](#) January 05, 2008 18:48PM

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Robert Chase, The Ann Arbor News

Anton Reznicek and John Russell examine a boulder that Russell says is more than 2 billion years old.

A former gravel pit is not most people's image of a natural feature to be protected.

But this is not just any gravel pit.

Long recognized locally as a prime location to study ancient geology and botany, the Scio Township site contains numerous glacier-transported boulders, layers of rock with fossils and a mix of plant life giving insight into the Ice Age.

The pit and adjacent land - a total of 49 acres - have been purchased by the [Washtenaw County Natural Areas Preservation Program](#), along with Scio Township and the [Ann Arbor Green Belt](#).



The county Parks and Recreation Commission, which holds title to the land, paid half the \$771,000 purchase price. Scio Township and the Green Belt each paid one quarter of the cost.

The site, located off Peters Road, will be called the Fox Science Preserve, after the couple who previously owned the land.

"It portrays a really nice possibility of what the entire Ann Arbor area might have looked like 12,000 years ago," said John Russell, a retired Ann Arbor Public Schools science teacher and member of the Natural Areas Technical Advisory Committee, which recommended buying the land.

Over the years, Russell has taken thousands of students on field trips to the pit.

He says the former gravel pit provides a unique opportunity to study geology and botany, especially how plant succession evolved after the most recent glacier receded about 12,000 years ago.

A particular landmark at the site is a huge boulder, formed possibly in the earliest glaciation on earth, then transported by some later glacier from north of Lake Ontario to the Peters Road site, Russell said.

"There certainly is a wonderful array of transported boulders," he said.

The pit, which takes up about 45 percent of the newly purchased land, includes sandstone, granite and some limestone containing fossils.

Just as important as the rocks are the fungi, mosses, algae and lichens that have begun to grow on the mined land, much as scientists believe similar plants would have colonized the land just after the last Ice Age. The microscopic plants are the beginning of the plant succession that eventually led to the plants we now see every day.

"They are one of the things that sparks off the primary (plant) succession in places like that," said Tony Reznicek, curator of the University of Michigan Herbarium and another member of the Natural Areas Technical Advisory Committee.

He called the site a "window" into the past of plant succession, but also valuable for its flora in the unmined areas, including the two kinds of oak trees.

The area provides wildlife habitat and has the advantage of being very close to Ann Arbor, Reznicek said.

Tom Freeman, deputy director of the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission, said a chief goal of the Natural Areas Preservation Program is to preserve unique natural areas.

"It fits that as well ... as anything else," Freeman said of the land. Buying the land was complex, taking more than two years, since it involved preserving the right-of-way on a two-track path through the pit so an otherwise landlocked homestead would continue to have road access, Freeman said. The land's former owners, Mel and Betty Fox, also bought a 13.8-acre parcel of land and donated it to the preserve to make the deal work, he said.

Mel Fox said he bought the farm with the gravel pit in 1973 primarily because he fell in love with the barn and wanted to convert it to his home, which he did. The land

was cheap because of the gravel pit, which had been used to mine gravel for building I-94 from Ann Arbor to Jackson, he said.


Just in the years he has owned the pit, nature has replenished growth in it and smoothed its wall to a more gentle angle, he said. Fox estimates that over the years close to 40,000 children have come to the gravel pit to study its natural features. Despite better offers from home developers, he and his wife preferred continuing the educational value by selling the land to the natural areas program, Fox said.

"What they had in mind was exactly what we had been doing," Fox said.

He spent close to \$149,000 to buy the 13.8 acres he donated to the preserve, Fox said.

Freeman said workers will begin building a 6- to 10-car parking lot near Peters Road as soon as the construction season begins this year. Signs will be added to the land to help people understand what they are seeing. The site should be open to the public soon after the parking lot is done, he said.

John Mulcahy can be reached at jmulcahy@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6858.

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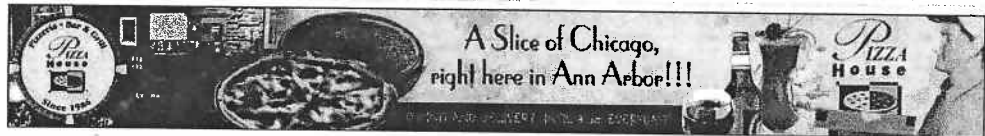
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Tri-Cities Business Review

Dan Meisler: Ann Arbor Greenbelt's land preservation efforts picking up steam

by Dan Meisler | Ann Arbor Business Review

Thursday July 31, 2008, 5:45 AM

Interest in donating land or selling development rights to various open space preservation programs in the county is increasing among developers faced with weaker demand for housing, program officials say.

The Ann Arbor Greenbelt Program, which buys land or development rights from property owners, is working on creating a new bidding process meant to streamline participation in the open space preservation project for the increasing numbers of farmers and developers seeking to take part.

Peg Kohring, midwest director for The Conservation Fund, a contractor with the city of Ann Arbor's greenbelt program, said the program has seen a tremendous increase in interest since the fall.

"It has continued to accelerate," she said. "The interest has changed from the traditional farmer community to more of an interest from some developers who have surplus property."

Ginny Trocchio, also of The Conservation Fund, said the program has received 20 applications over the last year, compared to 10 in the previous year.

The new bid process would allow potential sellers to tell the program what price they would accept for their land, although an appraisal would have to be done, and the final cost would have to be approved by the greenbelt's advisory commission and the City Council.

The greenbelt program is one of several, including federal and township efforts, that purchases land or development rights to preserve open space in the county. The programs often collaborate in putting together money for a particular land buy.

The city Greenbelt program takes in about \$2 million a year from a millage approved by voters in 2003, and leverages those funds by issuing bonds. It has about \$14 million of cash on hand, and has been paying between \$9,500 and \$25,000 per acre on land purchases, depending on location.

Kohring said the housing market has created a situation in which the preservation programs are some of the only options left for developers with extra land.

"It's the housing market slump. As a result, I think that developers have had land they've been holding for a while hoping that the market will continue to go up," Kohring said. "It has not, and as a result they're reviewing their holdings."

The city, Washtenaw County and a few townships have banded together in recent months to purchase hundreds of acres of vacant land, or their development rights.

The land buys completed or under discussion include 155 acres in Pittsfield Township known as the Hilton property near Morgan and Platt roads; the Open Roads land in Scio Township of about 90 acres on Kestrel Way; and the Biltmore property of 140 acres on Prospect Road in Superior Township.

Music agency buys downtown building

Jim Fleming of Fleming Artists, which represents musical acts including



Dan Meisler

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Toad the Wet Sprocket and Ani DiFranco, plans to move the business and its nine employees from the Jackson Road corridor to North Main Street in August.

"We've just kind of outgrown the space," Fleming said, of the 2,100 square feet he has occupied on Little Lake Drive. "We also wanted to be back downtown."

The new building was purchased from an entity affiliated with Blue Hill Development, the developer of University Commons on Huron Parkway, which occupied the 3,800 square foot building.

The structure, at 543 N. Main between Felch and Kingsley streets, was built in 1950.

"We're going to move in the middle of August," Fleming said. "By the fall, we'll be set and ready to go ... our employees are excited about being downtown."

Fleming Artists has been in the Ann Arbor area for 30 years, and Fleming said he's kept the business in town for the quality of life.

"We've decided to stay here because we're happier here," he said.

Fleming also owns the "School of Rock" building at the corner of Main and Summit.

He said there are no current plans to increase the staff, but he wants to be ready just in case.

"Long-term, the plan is to add more, but we just wanted space where if the opportunity presented itself, it was right there," he said.

Jim Chaconas of McKinley Commercial Services brokered the deal. The sale price was \$400,000, and the asking price was \$450,000 he said. The building was on the market for between 60 and 90 days.

According to city records, the building was sold to Blue Hill by Washtenaw County in 2004 for \$280,000.

Contact Dan Meisler at (734) 302-1721 or danm@mbusinessreview.com.

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