

Memo

From: Wendy J Carman, 2340 Georgetown Blvd, 2nd Ward

Re: Natural Features Protections

I've spent over 40 years representing the Ann Arbor public on various City boards and committees. One of those committees started as the Natural Features Ordinance Committee, which morphed over time to most recently becoming the Environmental Commission's Biodiversity Committee.

You have received many letters this month asking you not to make any changes to the draft of the new Comprehensive Plan. This concerns me. Residents of Ann Arbor have expressed their strong desire to maintain our significant natural features and mature tree canopy. However, the draft Comprehensive Plan does not defend them adequately.

Natural features are essential parts of Ann Arbor's infrastructure for a long list of reasons. We share a desire to be a sustainable and resilient city. There can be no sustainability here if we don't protect our important natural features.

Your proposed approach deletes the existing Natural Features Master Plan and replaces it with a few scattered references to critical natural features and a single page outlining three general and vague strategies. This downgrades the importance of our critical natural features and sets the stage for the goals of density and growth to always supersede the environment we will be living in.

It is true that we currently have regulations on natural features that apply to site-planned developments. They do not apply to low-density residential projects. Once this comprehensive plan is implemented in a revised UDC, those regulations may not apply to any residential properties. The public may have lost the leverage we have with the existing natural features plan.

We currently have a Natural Features Master Plan with goals and implementation details for defending 9 significant natural features. **We need these goals to be met even more now than when they were written.** A summary of these goals and implementation methods is outlined in the attached matrix, adapted from the current Natural Features Master Plan.

Sustainability is critical for the City's future. Working to incorporate all of these 9 sets of goals and strategies is paramount to becoming a sustainable Ann Arbor. The list can easily be inserted into the Draft Comprehensive Plan. Failure to do so will be indicative of how hypocritical this process is. We will be worse than hypocritical if we claim sustainability as a primary goal but fail to protect our important natural features.

Natural Features and Protection Goal Summaries	Methods for Implementation
<p>1. The Watershed of the Huron River and Its Tributaries in Ann Arbor: The Huron River is the central natural feature of the City and its major source of water.</p> <p>Goal Summary: Update watershed plans; ensure that the City's Capital Improvements Plan is consistent with the Natural Features Section of the Comprehensive Plan; add greenways along the Huron River; add flood storage capacity and reduce adverse impacts of heavy rain events, including flooding.</p>	<p>Implementation Summary: Implement watershed plans, the City Comprehensive Plan and the Capital Improvements Plan; work with various partners to implement watershed planning; encourage native plantings and acquisition of lands along the river; improve education outreach techniques; improve city services; and improve GIS capabilities relating to data management.</p>
<p>2. Wetlands, Ponds and Lakes: The City's original wetlands were open meadows, forested swamps, marshes and ponds. A few of the original wetlands remain, and there are numerous retention ponds and small wetlands.</p> <p>Goal Summary: Identify, assess, protect and sustain wetlands.</p>	<p>Implementation Summary: Review and modify City codes relating to inspections, mitigation and other standards for wetlands; encourage stewardship and management techniques to reduce impacts to wetlands resulting from storm water run-off.</p>
<p>3. Floodways and Floodplains: The floodplain is land adjacent to lakes, streams, and rivers that is prone to flooding as water levels rise and overflow the normal water channels during a 100-year frequency flood. The floodway is the sub-area of the floodplain needed to convey flood flows.</p> <p>Goal Summary: Identify, restore and sustain floodplains, especially those of highest-concern; reduce storm water volume and flood occurrences; support watershed groups and implement watershed plans.</p>	<p>Implementation Summary: Review and modify City codes and policies to ensure that best management practices are implemented; restore city-owned wetlands; promote stewardship by educating the public on the identification and value of native plants and activities that can benefit floodplains.</p>
<p>4. Groundwater and Groundwater Recharge Areas: A groundwater recharge area is land which readily permits water to move from the surface into a groundwater system. Groundwater recharge areas provide water for wells and a steady supply of clean filtered water to rivers and streams.</p> <p>Goal Summary: Protect drinking water and identify suitable groundwater recharge areas throughout the City and protect these areas from impervious surfaces and pollutants.</p>	<p>Implementation Summary: Implement policy changes that help to minimize adverse impacts to groundwater and groundwater recharge areas, such as protecting wellhead areas, minimizing impervious surfaces, installing and preserving essential vegetation, and eliminating contamination problems.</p>
<p>5. Land Forms and Steep Slopes: Steep slopes are prone to erosion when the vegetation on them is disturbed and storm water is allowed to move across the surfaces at high speed, or when surface runoff is directed toward them. Disturbed slopes often result in silting watercourses or disturbances to lands below.</p> <p>Goal Summary: Protect steep slopes; identify and protect scenic vistas and sustain the natural features that comprise them.</p>	<p>Implementation Summary: Maintain geographic information database for steep slopes; review standards, codes and policies for possible modifications that would help identify and protect natural land contours and scenic vistas.</p>

<p>6. Woodlands, Savannas and Prairies: Woodlands, savannas and prairies are important elements of the natural beauty of the City. They serve as buffers from pollution, moderate local climate and storm hazards, and provide areas of plant and animal diversity and habitats.</p> <p>Goal: Identify, steward, and conserve woodlands, savannas and prairies to protect water, air, and soil quality, to buffer air and noise pollution, to moderate local climate and storm hazards, to preserve wildlife habitats and natural corridors, and to maintain important elements of the natural beauty of the City.</p>	<p>Implementation Summary: Amend code to include definitions for savannas and prairies; review code to identify areas to improve protection measures, including enforcement; identify sites for possible acquisition; revise PROS Plan to include savannas and prairies in criteria for acquisition; develop native planting policy for city-owned property; develop additional tools and resources for public education and stewardship.</p>
<p>7. Landmark and Heritage Trees: A landmark tree is generally any tree larger than 24 inches in diameter at breast height and any tree of a size listed on the Landmark or Heritage Tree List (in the Land Development Regulations).</p> <p>Goal: Protect and preserve landmark trees that are in good or excellent condition, particularly trees that are rare, unusual, old or historically significant (over 100 years old), provide a diversity of species or contribute to a native forest fragment.</p>	<p>Implementation Summary: Establish a program that identifies and rewards landowners for stewardship of landmark trees; develop tools and resources to educate the public on possible impacts to and recommended care for landmark trees; develop a process to determine long-term impacts of protection measures, including reinspections after development; foster a long-term monitoring program.</p>
<p>8. Native Plant and Animal Ecosystems: Native plants are those that have evolved in the area over thousands of years, adapting to the local climate and providing habitats for native wildlife of the area. The use of native plant species offers great benefits to the City. Many of the native grasses and flowers are insect-rather than wind-pollinated so produce less air pollen. Native plantings require no mowing and once established require less water, hold water on the landscape much better with their deeper roots, and do not need pesticides or fertilizers.</p> <p>Goal: Identify, steward and protect habitats that are rich in native flora or fauna and that are threatened, endangered or contain special concern species, while reducing invasive species and increasing the diversity and distribution of native plants that are adapted to the extremes of climate of the region.</p>	<p>Implementation Summary: Inventory and rate plant species and consider acquiring those with high ratings; develop an assessment system for wildlife; identify best protection techniques; designate areas for on-going management; continue controls burns; develop policy for native plantings in City parks; continue public education regarding stewardship; develop a stewardship program for endangered species habitats.</p>

<p>9. Greenway Linkages between Natural Features: Greenways are linear open spaces connecting natural areas and parks. While greenways primarily link natural features, they may also facilitate connections in the built environment, such as links between neighborhoods retail areas, schools, downtown or employment centers.</p> <p>Goal: Establish a network of greenways throughout the City that provides non motorized connections between various land uses, such as neighborhoods, commercial and employment centers, downtown and the University of Michigan, and helps to retain the shape and continuity of natural features, especially along stream corridors, between parks and through new neighborhoods. The network also should extend to greenways located on adjacent township and County properties.</p>	<p>Implementation Summary: Implement greenway programs and initiatives and coordinate such activities with other organizations and governmental entities; identify new links, including possible acquisition; identify improvements to existing links; incorporate greenway systems and design principles into master plans and zoning; facilitate stewardship of privately owned linkages.</p>
---	--