



MEMORANDUM

TO: Planning Commission, City Council, City Administrator, Planning staff, Parks & Recreation staff, and Concerned Citizens

FROM: Brad Pitts, Christine Crockett, Jeff Crockett, Richard Dokas, John Godfrey, Lisa Jevens, Irma Majer, Ellen Ramsburgh, Tom Stulberg, Michael Watts, Hank Barry

DATE: June 24, 2025

RE: Proposed Comprehensive Plan Parkland Acres / 1000 Residents Ratio

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ann Arbor city officials are using manipulated data to circumvent voter-approved protections for public parkland. The City's draft Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) deliberately excludes **≈ 484 acres** of municipal golf courses and nature areas from its parkland inventory, reducing the official parkland ratio from 17.96 to 13.9 acres per 1,000 residents—a 22% reduction with significant legal and financial implications.¹

City Administrator **Milton Dohoney Jr.** underscored his view that growth is unavoidable, telling the Planning Commission: "We have a 200-year-old city... we're excited that it is growing, and we need and expect it to grow more. We embrace the idea that more people should have the opportunity to call Ann Arbor home."⁴⁰

This manipulation exploits incomplete data from the Trust for Public Land's ParkServe system, which city officials have failed to update since 2018, despite knowing of the omissions. The exclusion appears designed to circumvent the 2008 voter-approved Charter amendment requiring public approval for parkland sales, while reducing millions of dollars in developer contributions for parks and recreation.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

I. BACKGROUND ON TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND AND PARKSERVE

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is "to create parks and protect land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come."² TPL operates ParkServe, a national database that maps public parks and calculates walkability scores for communities across the United States.

Cities provide their parkland data to TPL, which then creates maps and calculates metrics like "10-minute walk" scores that measure how many residents can reach a park within a 10-minute walk. These scores have become important tools for urban planning, grant applications, and development decisions. TPL emphasizes that participating cities are responsible for ensuring their data is complete and accurate.³

Mayor Christopher Taylor pledged Ann Arbor's participation in TPL's "10-minute walk" campaign in 2017,⁴ recognizing that walkable access to parks is fundamental to livable communities. The City's parkland data was

subsequently transferred to TPL's system. However, this data is incomplete and has never been properly updated, creating the foundation for the current manipulation.

Importantly, TPL is committed to preserving municipal golf courses as public parkland. The organization actively opposes transitioning public golf courses to development, instead helping communities acquire and convert golf courses into parks and environmentally-critical open space.⁵

II. THE COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN'S RELIANCE ON WALKABILITY METRICS

The draft CLUP extensively relies on walkability metrics derived from TPL data. The plan emphasizes that "most residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, which is an essential neighborhood amenity" and establishes this as a key planning principle.⁶ The word "walk" appears 86 times throughout the plan, demonstrating the central role of walkability analysis in the City's planning framework.

Strategy 3.1 of the draft CLUP specifically calls to "Continue to maintain high-quality parks and recreation areas and align with land use patterns," noting that "the city has a high ratio of parks per resident, and most residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park."⁷ This ratio calculation is directly derived from TPL's ParkServe data.

Most significantly, Strategy 4.1 directs the city to "Leverage public and institutional land to accommodate growth in walkable neighborhoods," specifically instructing officials to "evaluate its public land in alignment with land use and focus on underutilized spaces (such as parking lots, school and institutional lawns, low quality open spaces and natural features such as lawns that require maintenance but do not provide ecological benefit) to explore strategic disposition for the development of housing."⁸ The reference to "lawns that require maintenance but do not provide ecological benefit" appears to be coded language for municipal golf courses, which are essentially large maintained lawns. This strategy provides the mechanism for converting parkland to development while bypassing Charter protections through euphemistic terminology.

III. THE MISSING PARKLAND

Ann Arbor's official Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan (PROS), adopted by City Council in January 2023, reports the City's assets as "164 Park Properties, 2,210 Total Acres of Park Land" with "17.96 Acres of Parkland / 1000 Residents."⁹ The PROS plan, which has a comprehensive inventory that is inclusive of the city's two municipal golf courses and several nature areas now missing from the draft CLUP, explicitly states it is "officially part of the City of Ann Arbor Comprehensive Plan."¹⁰

Rather than using the PROS Plan's complete parkland inventory, the draft CLUP uses TPL's incomplete dataset, which omits **≈ 484 acres** including both municipal golf courses (Leslie Park and Huron Hills), multiple nature areas (Hickory, Willow, Buttonbush, Oakwoods expansion, Ruthven expansion, Mary Beth Doyle expansion), the 2570 Dexter Road property, Leslie Science Center, and Fairview Cemetery. Remarkably, the TPL data also excludes the 108.76-acre Nichols Arboretum, numerous other University of Michigan parks, and all but one of the eligible Ann Arbor Public Schools parks.¹¹

A note on "edge" parks. Three city-owned nature areas—**Marshall Nature Area (87 ac)**,¹² **Brokaw Nature Area (24 ac)**¹³ and **Forest Nature Area (17 ac)**¹⁴—are situated more than a half-mile beyond the corporate boundary. Under TPL's published method, only parks *inside* a place or *within* a ½-mile buffer are counted when it compiles the "City Statistics" table. As a result, **≈ 128 ac** drop out of Ann Arbor's official ParkServe total even when the data are flawless.¹⁵ This memo keeps them in the discussion because the City's own PROS Plan treats them as integral to the park system.

IV. EVIDENCE OF DELIBERATE NEGLIGENCE

TPL's documentation confirms that it catalogs "all public parks in a boundary regardless of the public entity that owns it."¹⁶ Other Michigan cities actively maintain their TPL data. Detroit and Grand Rapids submit quarterly updates. Madison, Wisconsin (Ann Arbor's peer city) has made hundreds of updates since 2018, including comprehensive batch updates as recently as January 2025.¹⁷

In April 2021, Ann Arbor made only one minor update to its TPL data, correcting three small issues while leaving the major omissions untouched.¹⁸ This selective maintenance suggests deliberate negligence rather than oversight, particularly given that city officials possess complete and accurate parkland data through their own GIS systems and in data they have submitted to the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG).¹⁹

V. COORDINATED OFFICIAL OPPOSITION TO GOLF COURSES

City Council members have been remarkably candid about their intentions regarding the municipal golf courses. During a March 4, 2024 Council meeting about golf cart leasing, multiple members expressed their opposition:

Councilmember Travis Radina stated: "I am not personally a fan of urban golf courses. I think there are better uses for land.... Golfing is not a priority of mine. I think urban golf courses are a terrible land use."²⁰ Significantly, Radina serves as City Council's liaison to the Park Advisory Commission, giving him direct knowledge of parkland classifications, while participating in efforts to undermine Charter protections.

Councilmember Jen Eyer declared: "I've, in my time on Council, made no secret of the fact that, given that we have a housing crisis and a climate crisis, that golf courses are just not a good use of land within the city."²¹

Councilmember Jenn Cornell suggested the golf courses conflict with city values, stating: "I think that as a city park it's taking more away from what we believe in and the values that we have."²²

Councilmember Erica Briggs explicitly connected opposition to land use planning: "I believe that the golf courses conflict with our land use goals" and expressed willingness to "investigate better uses for the land."²³

Most revealing was **Councilmember Lisa Disch's** direct suggestion of coordination with the CLUP process: "Is it too late to make sure that the Comprehensive Plan team considers what we might want to do with our golf courses... Is it still possible to get the Comprehensive Plan team to consider what we might do with them other than what we are using them for."²⁴

Councilmember Disch serves as the *ex officio* member of the Planning Commission and its Comprehensive Plan Subcommittee, positioning her perfectly to coordinate the golf course reclassification through the CLUP drafting process.

Administrative Support for Conversion Strategy

The coordination extended beyond elected officials to city administration. During the same March 4, 2024 meeting, Community Services Administrator Derek Delacourt provided financial justification for golf course conversion, stating that "between the two golf courses, we on average lose a little bit of money annually."²⁵

However, Delacourt's own analysis revealed that Leslie Park Golf Course actually generates revenue above operating costs, making it one of only three park facilities that "the city actually makes money from."²⁵

Delacourt's selective presentation of financial data—emphasizing overall losses while downplaying Leslie Park's profitability—demonstrates administrative alignment with council members' conversion agenda. His promise to "relay the suggestion to the city's planning team" when council members proposed alternative uses shows direct coordination between administrative and planning functions in developing the golf course conversion strategy.²⁵ This administrative support provided the technical foundation for the subsequent data manipulation in the draft CLUP.

VI. PLANNING COMMISSION COORDINATION

The coordination became explicit during a September 2024 Planning Commission Subcommittee meeting, when **Vice-Chair Donnell Wyche** discussed city-owned land including "Concordia and Huron Hills with the golf course," suggesting the city could "designate some of that public land as an opportunity Zone... where we might encourage... complete neighborhood development." Wyche acknowledged the legal obstacle: "I know our parks cannot be designated like that, those are Charter changes, so we could tee up the fact that we may want to look at divesting some of the unproductive park."²⁶

This discussion occurred while planning staff and consultants were simultaneously excluding golf courses from the CLUP's parkland inventory. This resulted in the manipulated ratio of 13.9 acres per 1,000 residents ratio that appeared at the CLUP's October 2024 public open house and then in both versions of the 2025 draft CLUP.²⁷

CHARTER ANALYSIS

I. CHARTER PROTECTIONS AND CIRCUMVENTION STRATEGY

In November 2008, Ann Arbor residents voted overwhelmingly (81% approval, 42,969 to 9,944) to amend the City Charter to require voter approval for parkland sales.²⁸ This represented broad community consensus that public assets should be protected from official overreach.

City Council considered strengthening these protections in 2012 to include "lease," "license," or "re-designate" actions, recognizing that creative reclassification could undermine voter intent.²⁹ The 2018 Urban Park Charter Amendment further affirmed community commitment to the principle of preserving public land.³⁰

Crucially, during the March 2024 discussion, Councilmember Radina explicitly acknowledged the legal obstacle that the voter-approved charter amendment had established for parkland sales: "if the land is ever going to be put to new use other than parkland, it requires a vote of the people."³¹ His comment shows that Council members fully understood the Charter requirement as they orchestrated the manipulation of the draft CLUP to circumvent it.

The draft CLUP sidesteps this requirement in Strategy 4.1: "leverage public and institutional land to accommodate growth," directing the city to "evaluate its public land in alignment with land use and focus on underutilized spaces... to explore strategic disposition for the development of housing."³² The draft CLUP attempts to resolve any issue of conflicting data by giving priority to itself, stating: "This plan does not replace the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan... there should be coordination with strategies of this plan to

ensure alignment."³³ The constructed ambiguity allows the CLUP to take precedence when conflicts arise, circumventing voter-approved Charter protections.

II. THE MILLAGE AS RECURRING VOTER MANDATE

Beyond the Charter protections, Ann Arbor residents have demonstrated consistent and overwhelming support for parks through direct financial commitments. In November 2024, voters renewed the Park Maintenance and Capital Improvements Millage with 72% approval,³⁴ representing the most recent in a four-decade pattern of residents voluntarily taxing themselves to support parks and open space preservation.

This millage renewal represents far more than a funding mechanism—it constitutes a recurring public mandate and a clear expression of community values. The financial foundation of the park system reflects a powerful and enduring social contract between residents and their government. For forty years, Ann Arbor citizens have consistently voted to tax themselves in support of parks and open space preservation, both within the city and at its periphery through the Greenbelt program.

In the context of the current land use debate, this mandate should serve as a significant legal and political counterweight to arguments favoring development at the expense of parkland. The recent 20-year renewal should be understood as a city-wide referendum on the value the community places on green space. The strong positive result sends an unmistakable signal to city leaders about public priorities that directly contradicts the draft CLUP's treatment of parkland as "underutilized" space suitable for conversion.³⁵

The timing is particularly significant: voters approved this millage renewal in November 2024, just months before the draft CLUP's release in 2025. City officials cannot credibly claim uncertainty about public sentiment regarding parkland preservation when residents had just voted overwhelmingly to continue funding park maintenance and improvements.

III. FINANCIAL IMPACT ON TAXPAYERS AND DEVELOPERS

For years, Ann Arbor has used the established ratio of approximately 18 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents in its formula for developer contributions to parks and recreation.³⁶ The manipulation reduces this ratio by 22%, significantly decreasing the amounts developers must contribute as the City anticipates adding tens of thousands of housing units by 2050.

This reduction benefits developers at taxpayers' expense, forcing residents to subsidize park maintenance and improvements through higher taxes while developers pay less. The lost revenue could total millions of dollars as the CLUP's ambitious growth targets are pursued.

Example: The Standard Development Consider the impact on a specific project like The Standard (405 S. Main; 218 units). Under the current formula of approximately \$620 per dwelling unit (derived from 0.0124 acres/unit at \$50,000 per acre), this development would contribute \$135,160 to parks and recreation. However, with the manipulated ratio reducing contributions by 22%, the payment would drop to approximately \$105,425—a loss of nearly \$30,000 from just this single project. Multiply this across dozens of developments over the coming decades, and the cumulative financial impact becomes staggering.

The motives for this manipulation may relate to the draft CLUP's massive infrastructure funding shortfall. Implementation would require \$3.2-4.8 billion in additional infrastructure improvements with no identified funding source.³⁷ City officials may view parkland sales revenue as helping to offset these costs, despite vague

assurances that "the community should be confident the city has the ability to identify, build and pay for the infrastructure necessary."³⁸

IV. CONTRADICTIONS IN CITY POLICY

The parkland manipulation directly contradicts other recent city initiatives. Ann Arbor's VISIONS 2025 Plan—the comprehensive ADA Transition Plan released in June 2025—treats golf courses as parkland requiring accessibility improvements.³⁹ The City recently honored Huron Hills golf clubhouse "for contributions to Ann Arbor's historic charm" while simultaneously working to exclude it from parkland protections.⁴⁰

These contradictions suggest that the draft CLUP's misuse of parkland data is revenue-driven rather than a principled and transparent policy position.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This is not planning—it is subterfuge. Professional planning requires honest data, transparent analysis, and respect for public participation. The current process fails on all counts.

The draft CLUP's treatment of municipal golf courses and nature areas represents a fundamental betrayal of public trust and democratic governance. City officials are using data manipulation and definitional sleight-of-hand to circumvent voter-approved Charter protections, opening the door for backroom deals with special interests eager to acquire valuable city property.

We recommend:

- 1. **Immediate correction** of parkland data in the draft CLUP to reflect the complete PROs Plan inventory
- 2. **Public acknowledgment** of the data manipulation and explanation of how it occurred
- 3. **Restoration** of accurate developer contribution calculations based on complete parkland inventory
- 4. **Compliance** with Charter requirements for all parkland
- 5. **Transparency** in all future planning processes and negotiations regarding public land use
- 6. **Suspension** of work on the Comprehensive Plan until effective public engagement has occurred and the major issues outlined above and in the May 5 memo to the City, which do not meet professional planning standards and undermine the City Charter and the Plan's stated values, are corrected

The residents of Ann Arbor deserve a planning process built on honest data and democratic principles, not one designed to subvert the public will through bureaucratic manipulation. As detailed in Appendix C, even accounting for TPL's methodological exclusions of edge parcels, the city-controlled omissions inside the border still slash the per-capita parkland ratio by 18%. The policy story does not turn on geography; it turns on selective data upload.

Respectfully submitted,

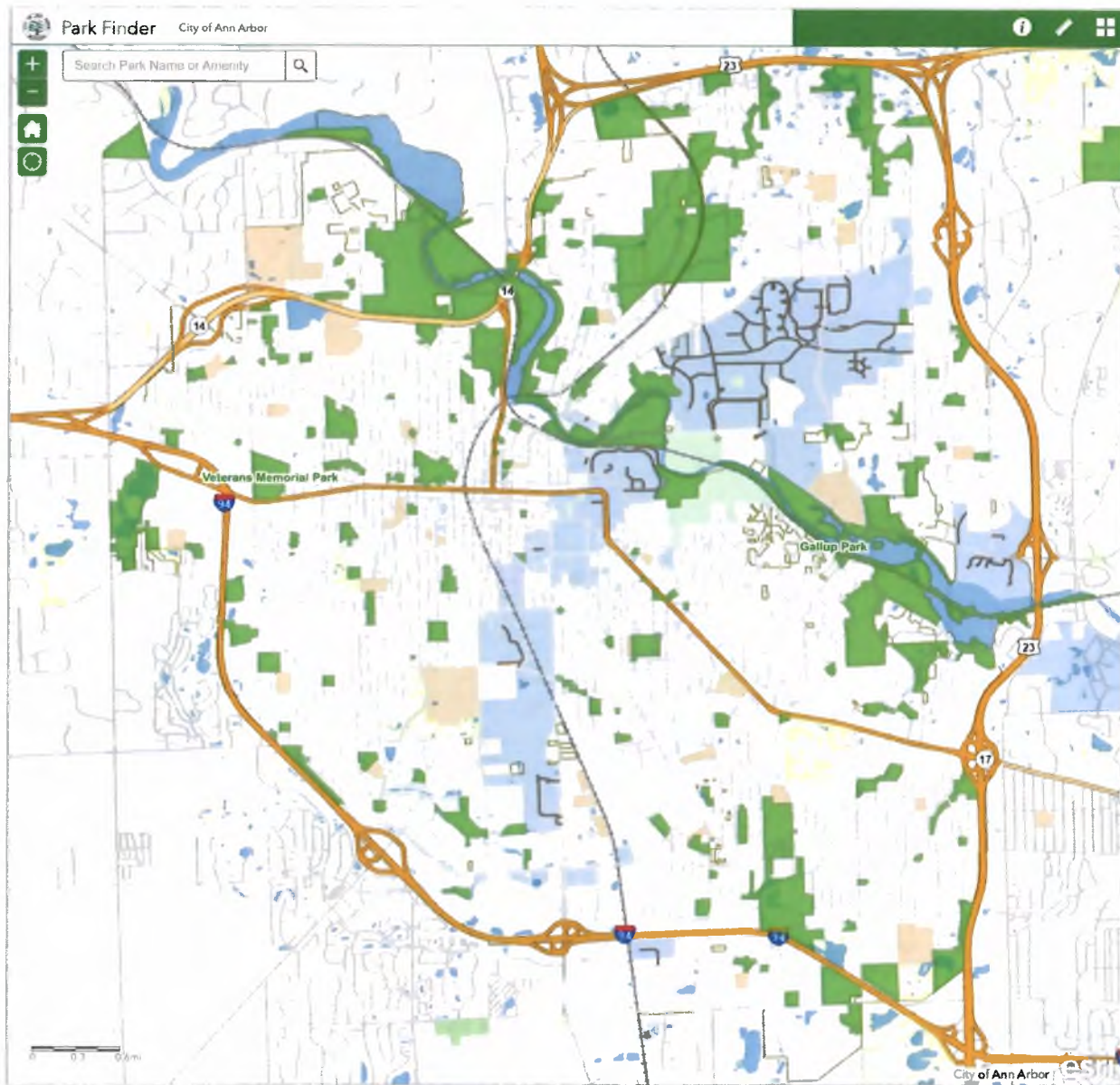
Brad Pitts
Richard Dokas
Irma Majer
Michael Watts

Christine Crockett
John Godfrey
Ellen Ramsburgh
Hank Barry

Jeff Crockett
Lisa Jevens
Tom Stulberg
Ann Arbaugh

APPENDIX A: CITY OF ANN ARBOR OFFICIAL PARKFINDER MAP

Source: City of Ann Arbor GIS ParkFinder System (<https://www2.a2gov.org/GIS/MapAnnArbor/ParkFinder/>)
Accessed: June 24, 2025



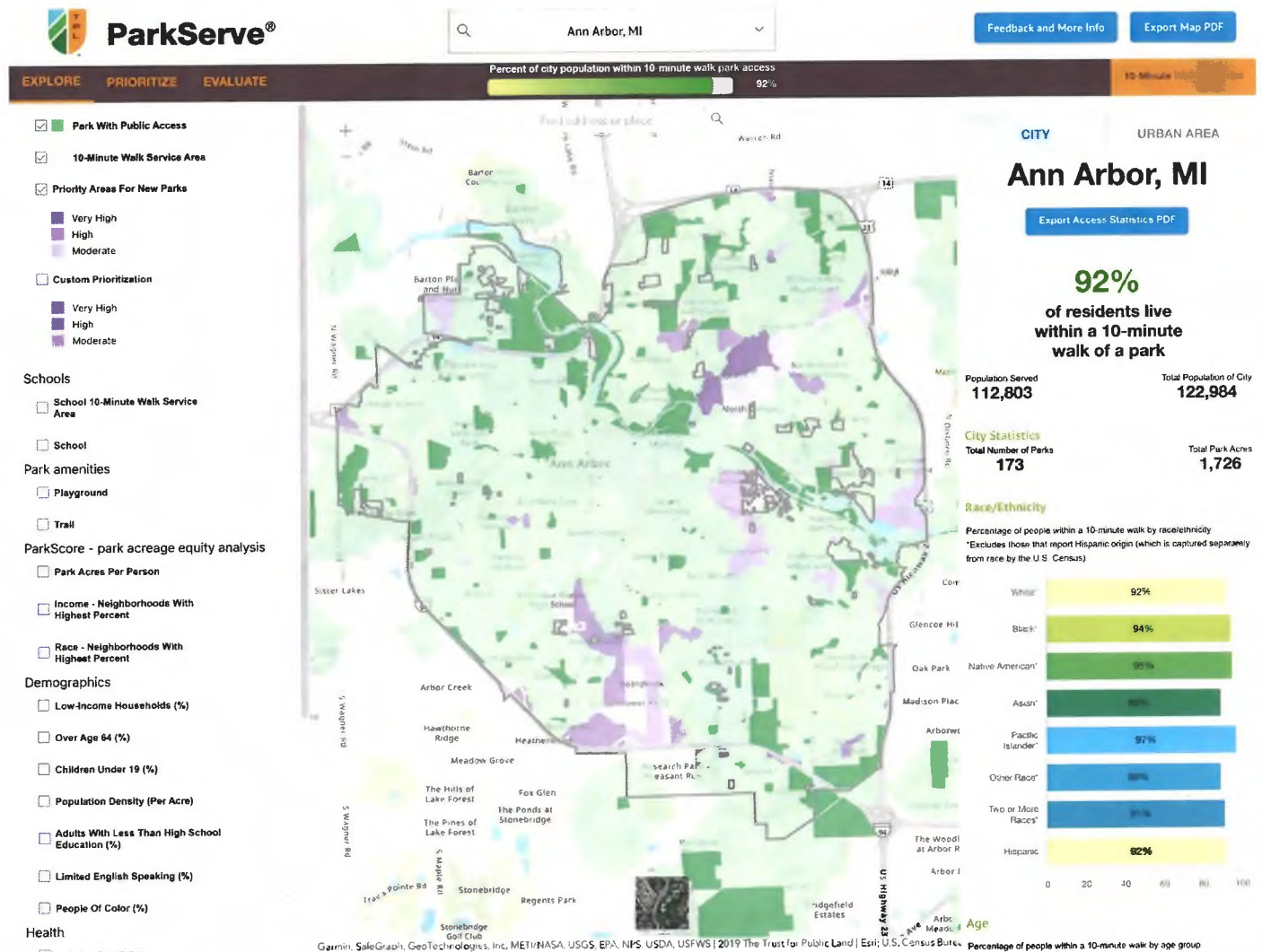
Key: This official City map displays all parks and recreational facilities maintained by Ann Arbor Parks & Recreation, including:

- Parks (shown in green)
- Golf Courses (shown in green) - Note Leslie Park Golf Course in the southwest and Huron Hills Golf Course in the northeast
- Nature Areas (shown in green)
- Total mapped parkland: 2,210 acres across 164 properties - Note Marshall Nature Area, Forest Nature Area, and Brokaw Nature Area are part of the A2 Parks System, but not counted under TPL scoring as they are more than ½ Mile outside the City Boundary

APPENDIX B: TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND PARKSERVE® MAP OF ANN ARBOR

Source: TPL ParkServe Database (<https://parkserve.tpl.org/mapping/#/?CityID=2603000>)

Accessed: June 24, 2025



Key: The TPL database reflects only the incomplete data submitted by the City:

- Shows only 173 parks totaling 1,726 acres (per the "City Statistics" panel on right)
- Both municipal golf courses are conspicuously absent from the map
- Missing multiple nature areas and expansions acquired since 2018
- Claims 92% of residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park—a figure that would be even higher if the missing **≈ 484 acres** were included as well as the parks noted below
- Note - AAPS Scarlett Mitchell Woods is present, but all eligible AAPS school parks are missing
- Note - Nichols Arboretum and all other University of Michigan parks are missing
- Note - Parcel count inaccurate due to polygons for some parks not being grouped properly (e.g. Graydon Park)
- This incomplete data forms the basis for the draft CLUP's manipulated 13.9 acres/1,000 residents calculation

APPENDIX C: COMPREHENSIVE DRAFT PLAN VERSION TWO (SELECTED PAGES)

Source: City of Ann Arbor (<https://engage.a2gov.org/comprehensive-land-use-plan>)

Delivered to City: June 10, 2025

Released to General Public: June 12, 2025 (No explanation given for 2-day delay)

C-1 PAGE 18

DRAFT



WE'VE MOVED INTO OUR FIRST HOME AND LOVE IT, BUT...

...WE HAVE TO DRIVE TO GET OUR ESSENTIALS



STUDIO / 1 BA

6 BR / 2 BA

OUR FRIENDS WHO LIVE DOWNTOWN ENJOY WALKING TO THE STORES, BUT THERE AREN'T MANY HOUSING OPTIONS THAT FIT THEIR NEEDS



WE WISH THERE WERE MORE OPTIONS SO THAT WE DIDN'T HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN PRICING EVERYWHERE AND HOUSING THAT MEETS OUR NEEDS

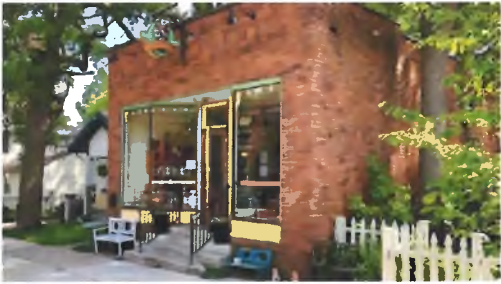
There is currently a mismatch between desirable housing types and access to walkable amenities.

Proximity to amenities

Access to essential destinations is crucial for quality of life, but communities of color are more likely to reside in neighborhoods with limited access to groceries, parks, and schools.

Retail is concentrated downtown, around anchor institutions and in auto-oriented shopping centers along corridors, but there are limited neighborhood-serving shops and services in many parts of the city. There are spatial inequities regarding who has access to walkable retail, particularly for residents without a car. Aside from downtown, most residents do not live within a 10-minute walk of commercial corridors and hubs. Parks are another key amenity. Ann Arbor boasts a strong park system, with a higher ratio of park acres to residents than comparably-sized cities. According to the Trust for Public Land, a vast majority of Ann Arborites (92%) live within a 10-minute walk of a park, compared to 55% in all U.S. urban cities and towns.¹ Nevertheless, not all parks are equal with regard to size and amenities, and some areas of the city have less park access. As the city grows, it should be strategic and value-driven about parkland and natural features to support equity, sustainability and population growth.

¹ Trust for Public Land ParkServe



Beloved neighborhood commercial spaces, like Jefferson Market, are rare within Ann Arbor's residential fabric.

source: Current Magazine

18Ann Arbor for All - Comprehensive Plan

“Aside from downtown, most residents do not live within a 10-minute walk of commercial corridors and hubs. Parks are another key amenity. Ann Arbor boasts a strong park system, with a higher ratio of park acres to residents than comparably-sized cities. According to the Trust for Public Land, a vast majority of Ann Arborites (92%) live within a 10-minute walk of a park, compared to 55% in all U.S. urban cities and towns”

DRAFT

Community Engagement and Outreach Process

Engagement Approach

Over the course of two years, the comprehensive plan team sought to gather a wide range of voices to help shape the city's future. To achieve this, the public was engaged through various formats designed to collect input from a diverse cross-section of residents, explore specific topics in depth, and ensure that many voices and experiences were represented. These formats ranged from individual surveys and one-on-one conversations to neighborhood meetings and large citywide events.

Open houses were held at public library locations across the city to maximize accessibility and encourage public participation. Additionally, targeted outreach and small group meetings were organized in collaboration with neighborhood partners to engage underrepresented communities. Depending on the preferences of each organization, these meetings included tabling, interactive activities, and group discussions.

All public meetings were facilitated by city staff, project consultants, and other stakeholders, who moderated activities, engaged in one-on-one conversations with residents, and answered questions about the process.



March 2024 Open House at the Ann Arbor District Library.



October 2024 Open House at the Ann Arbor District Library

"October 2024 Open House* at the Ann Arbor District Library" = First appearance of Ann Arbor using TPL's incorrect data as the basis for its parkland ratio (13.9 acres / 1000) for community engagement activities.

Note - Page 33 of PLAN on Engagement, "3,100+ resident surveys, both in paper and online¹"; Footnote ¹:

"The resident survey was not designed to be statistically representative and should not be interpreted as such. Its purpose was to gather general input and perspectives from community members, rather than to serve as a scientifically valid sample of the entire population." (Engagement survey was self-seeking, lacked controls for multiple submission, is biased, included non-residents and SHOULDN'T be used).

DRAFT

Housing & Neighborhoods

Rationale

Key Considerations:

Parks:

- Ann Arbor has a high ratio of parks to population: 13.9 park acres per 1,000 residents compared to 8.9 acres for cities of a comparable population.⁵
- 92% of Ann Arbor residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, but factoring for park size and vehicle ownership, there are still areas with limited access, as shown in the map on page 57.⁶ The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)'s Open Space Guidelines set a minimum of 5 acres for Neighborhood Parks and 5 acres per 1,000 residents for Community Parks, both designed to offer passive and active recreational opportunities for all ages serving a single community or multiple.
- Current metrics for appropriate park space have expanded to include other indicators, such as walkability and available amenities.
- Given the large quantity of public owned land and aging facilities, maintenance and capital improvements are a challenge for existing parks and protected natural features. Over the next 30 years, the Parks Department has identified \$19M in park system ADA barriers that need to be addressed and \$200M+ in capital assets that have an expected end of life within the 30 year time span. The parks millage supports between \$2-2.5M annually for capital projects, which over 30 years amounts to between \$60-75M compared to the \$219M+ in identified capital improvements needed.
- Equitable access to parks and recreational spaces is an important part of the city's land use planning and considerations for acquisition and capital improvements. As the city grows, it will be an important consideration for new development.

EXISTING CITY PROGRAMS

Open Space and Parkland Preservation Millage

Also known as the Greenbelt Millage, this was approved in 2003 and is a 30-year, 0.5 mil tax levy to provide funds for the preservation and protection of open space, natural habitats, agricultural lands, and the City's source waters outside of City limits, and the purchase of parkland within City limits.

Parks Maintenance and Capital Improvements Millage

Ann Arbor voters renewed the 2025-2044 Parks Maintenance and Capital Improvements Millage in November 2024 for the next 20 years. The annual millage funds support city park maintenance activities and city park capital (larger-scale) improvements.

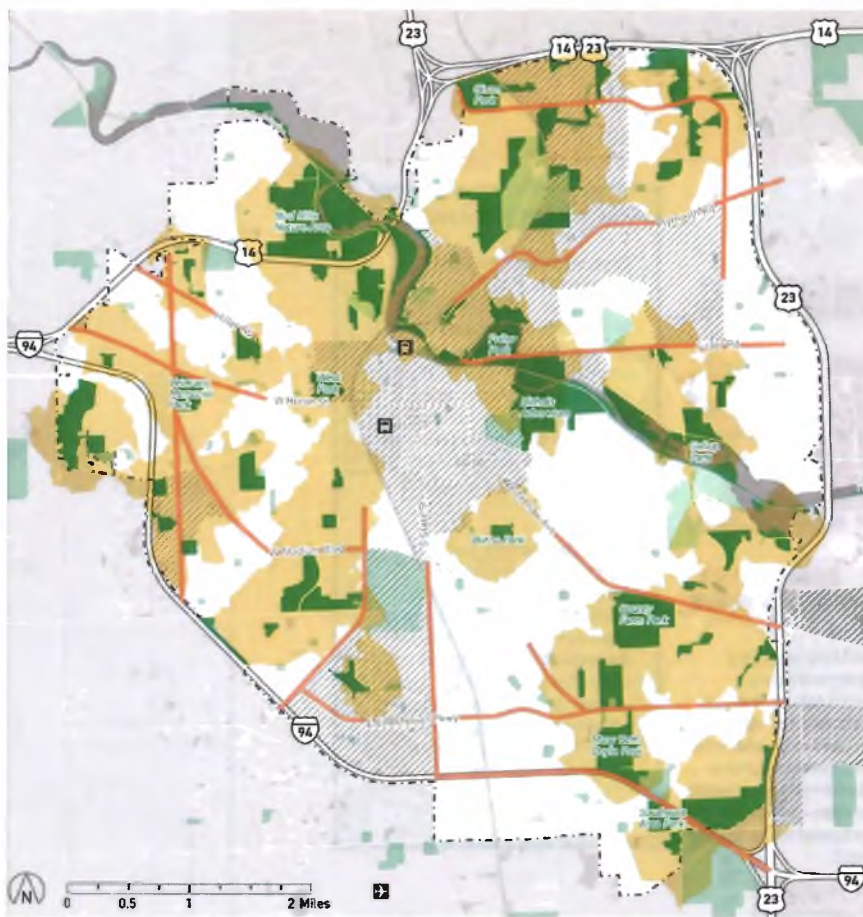
⁵ Trust for Public Land Park Serve, NRPA Agency Service Review (2023)
⁶ Trust for Public Land Park Serve

“Ann Arbor has a high ratio of parks to population: 13.9 park acres per 1,000 residents compared to 8.9 acres for cities of a comparable population.”

“92% of Ann Arbor residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, but factoring for park size and vehicle ownership, there are still areas with limited access, as shown in the map on page 57. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)'s Open Space Guidelines set a minimum of 5 acres for Neighborhood Parks and 5 acres per 1,000 residents for Community Parks.”

“Current metrics for appropriate park space have expanded to include other indicators, such as walkability and available amenities.”

DRAFT



Map
Access to Community
Parks & Car Ownership

- Major walking barriers (thoroughfares of at least four lanes)
- Community parks (over 5 acres, excluding cemeteries & golf courses)
- Other parks and open space
- 10% or more households have no car
- 10-minute walkshed from parks over 5 acres

source: City of Ann Arbor GIS,
US Census, 2020

Goals and Strategies

57

“Community parks (over 5 acres, excluding cemeteries & golf courses)”

“Other parks and open space”

“10-minute walkshed from parks over 5 acres”

DRAFT

Goal 03:

**Provide
high-quality,
accessible
parks, trails, and
recreation areas**

Strategies:

3.1

Continue to maintain high-quality parks and recreation areas and align with land use patterns

The city has a high ratio of parks per resident, and most residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, which is an essential neighborhood amenity. Nevertheless, not all parks are equal with regard to size and amenities, and park access is not evenly distributed across the city. Some of the densest areas of the city, such as downtown, have limited park and recreational space, highlighting the need to strengthen activity hubs and connections along the Huron River Corridor as both a downtown asset and a citywide destination. Recent investments, such as the Border to Border Trail tunnel and the proposed Treeline Trail, are important steps toward improving these connections.

As the city continues to grow, it will be essential to align parks and recreation planning with evolving land use patterns. Maintenance and capital improvements also present a challenge due to the large amount of publicly owned land and the aging condition of many facilities. The city will need to prioritize quality of amenities and maintenance over quantity, focusing investments in areas with high usage to maintain quality as well as areas with historic underinvestment and/or limited park access to support equitable distribution of parks. This may include identifying and redistributing underutilized land and facilities to better serve neighborhoods with fewer park resources. Utilizing recreation trends should be considered when evaluating the quality, equity and ecological benefit of new or existing park spaces.]

“The city has a high ratio of parks per resident, and most residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, which is an essential neighborhood amenity.”

“This may include identifying and redistributing underutilized land and facilities to better serve neighborhoods with fewer park resources. Utilizing recreation trends should be considered when evaluating the quality, equity and ecological benefit of new or existing park spaces.”

DRAFT

3.2

Focus on quality, equity and ecological benefit in the development of new open space

As the city grows, it will also need to ensure open space can meet the needs of new residents, particularly in higher density areas that do not currently have park space. While larger parks or natural areas may not be feasible in areas identified for growth, such as downtown and transit corridors, reimagining the definition of parks and open spaces to include non-traditional spaces and public-private partnerships can help expand the opportunities to provide open space.

New open space can be created through targeted acquisition as well as through private development. The city should consider recreation trends and critical, high priority natural features and adjacencies to existing open space, parks, and neighborhood connections in the targeted acquisition of new open space and the creation of greenways [see also Infrastructure and Services 10.1]. For new development, the city should incentivize quality, rather than quantity, in open space requirements within the zoning code to encourage private development, maintenance and management of high quality open space that is publicly accessible.

PLANS TO RETAIN

This plan does not replace the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan and the Treeline Allen Creek Urban Trail Master Plan. As regular updates are made to those plans, there should be coordination with strategies of this plan to ensure alignment.

Parks and Recreation Open Space PROS Plan:

The Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan (PROS) is the City's vision for parks and recreation in Ann Arbor and is officially part of the City of Ann Arbor Comprehensive Plan. The PROS Plan provides an overview of the park system, including a physical description of the City, administrative structure and budget information, and a detailed inventory of existing parks, facilities and programs. It identifies parks and recreation needs and deficiencies, proposes major capital park projects for existing and new parks, and develops goals and objectives for future planning guided by public input. The plan is updated every 5 years, as required by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to be eligible for grants.

Treeline Allen Creek Urban Trail Master Plan:

The 2017 Treeline Allen Creek Urban Trail Master Plan is a planned urban trail through the heart of Ann Arbor that aims to connect people and places across Ann Arbor. The Treeline plans to connect City-owned properties, neighborhoods, and downtown businesses while linking to the Huron River and the regional Border-to-Border trail (B2B Trail). The project extent connects to the B2B Trail along the Huron River at the north end of the study area and connects to the South State Street and Stimson Street intersection on the south end.

“reimagining the definition of parks and open spaces to include non-traditional spaces and public private partnerships can help expand the opportunities to provide open space.”

“New open space can be created through targeted acquisition as well as through private development.”

“the city should incentivize quality, rather than quantity, in open space requirements within the zoning code to encourage private development”

DRAFT

Goal 04:

Encourage walkable, connected neighborhoods with access to basic needs and amenities

Strategies:

4.1

Leverage public and institutional land to accommodate growth in walkable neighborhoods and historically underinvested neighborhoods

The city has an opportunity to repurpose underutilized public and institutional land to contribute to plan goals for growth in complete, walkable neighborhoods that are well-served by transit and community amenities. The city should evaluate its public land in alignment with land use and focus on underutilized spaces (such as parking lots, school and institutional lawns, low quality open spaces and natural features such as lawns that require maintenance but do not provide ecological benefit) to explore strategic disposition for the development of housing as well as the necessary public assets for a growing population, including city services, public safety, libraries, and schools.

4.2

Promote "complete neighborhoods" with neighborhood-level retail and service hubs

While the plan identifies transit corridors and hubs as areas of the city that have the most opportunity for dense mixed-use development, all neighborhoods can move toward "complete neighborhoods" that are able to meet basic needs without a car. This will entail allowing for small-scale commercial space in residential districts and improved mobility options for neighborhoods where commercial amenities are unlikely.

"4.1 Leverage public and institutional land to accommodate growth in walkable neighborhoods and historically underinvested neighborhoods"

"The city has an opportunity to repurpose underutilized public and institutional land to contribute to plan goals for growth in complete, walkable neighborhoods that are well-served by transit and community amenities. The city should evaluate its public land in alignment with land use and focus on underutilized spaces (such as parking lots, school and institutional lawns, low quality open spaces and natural features such as lawns that require maintenance but do not provide ecological benefit) to explore strategic disposition for the development of housing as well as the necessary public assets for a growing population, including city services, public safety, libraries, and schools."

DRAFT

Goal 10:

Balance development with protection and integration of critical natural features to foster a healthy, biodiverse ecosystem

Strategies:

10.1

Protect, enhance and manage critical natural features or open space that provide ecological benefits

The city's existing natural features protections will be maintained to mitigate the impacts of development on critical natural features, including woodlands, steep slopes, endangered species habitats, and waterways. The City Council has also provided a mandate to reduce carbon emissions and supporting denser, compact development for efficient use of land and infrastructure will be one of the most important ways the city can reduce carbon emissions.

To support higher-density development, the city should prioritize the quality and ecological function of open space over sheer quantity in its planning processes and regulations. Promoting compact, concentrated development can help preserve ecologically valuable areas, such as woodlands and tree canopy, which offer far greater environmental benefits than lawns. The city should consider updating its natural features review standards to reflect current ecological understanding and introduce natural features alternatives earlier in the site review process. Emphasis should be placed on maximizing ecosystem benefits—such as preserving woodlands, restoring degraded critical features, or protecting landmark trees of a certain size—rather than relying solely on dimensional standards. Performance metrics and incentives should be aligned with these ecological priorities.

Additionally, the city can encourage community greening and sustainability practices to strengthen natural features on private land, including supporting education on sustainable landscaping and property management, and technical assistance and incentives for rain gardens, native plantings, wildflower pollination lawns, and other ecological enhancements.

“To support higher-density development, the city should prioritize the quality and ecological function of open space over sheer quantity in its planning processes and regulations.”

DRAFT

Transit

A key component of the city's future land use vision is shifting away from automobile-centric development toward more walkable, transit-served communities. Achieving this goal will require retrofitting incompatible development patterns alongside planned transit improvements, such as new bus rapid transit lines, increased service, and enhanced bike routes and infrastructure. TheRide (AAATA) has identified numerous rapid transit routes in its long-range strategic plan and will need to coordinate efforts to bring these projects to fruition. Additionally, a recently completed Downtown Circulation Study recommends various improvements to create a more walkable, pedestrian- and transit-friendly environment. A similar level of investment will be needed to replicate this experience in other Hub districts originally developed for automobile-centric use. New development should contribute to an improved street network, and streets may need to be redesigned to accommodate multiple modes of transportation and enhanced walkability.

Open Space

While most residents currently have convenient access to parks and open spaces within their neighborhoods, the future land use plan envisions adding new residential areas in parts of the city where people have not historically lived. This is especially true in Hub areas like State/Eisenhower/Briarwood and Plymouth Road, as well as in Transition Districts along South Industrial and North Main. To realize the vision of walkable neighborhoods with accessible amenities, the city will need to make thoughtful, strategic investments in parks and open spaces as redevelopment occurs over the coming decades.]

“Open Space: While most residents currently have convenient access to parks and open spaces within their neighborhoods, **the future land use plan envisions adding new residential areas in parts of the city where people have not historically lived...** the city will need to make thoughtful, strategic investments in parks and open spaces as redevelopment occurs over the coming decades.”

APPENDIX D: METHODOLOGY & MATHEMATICS

D-1 DATA SOURCES

- **Primary:** City of Ann Arbor Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan (PROS) 2023-2027, reporting 2,210 total acres across 164 properties
- **Comparison:** Trust for Public Land ParkServe "City Statistics" panel, reporting 1,726 acres for Ann Arbor

D-2 ACCOUNTING FOR THE 484-ACRE GAP

Component of gap	Acres	Why absent from ParkServe	Notes
Golf courses (Leslie 207 ac + Huron Hills 116 ac)	323	City never uploaded polygons	Eligible under TPL rules
Nature-area expansions & other in-city parcels (Hickory, Willow, Buttonbush, Oakwoods exp., Ruthven exp., Mary Beth Doyle exp., 2570 Dexter Rd., Leslie Science Center, Fairview Cemetery, etc.)	≈ 33	Same as above	Eligible
Edge nature areas > ½ mi outside city line • Marshall 87 ac ¹² • Brokaw 24 ac ¹³ • Forest 17 ac ¹⁴	128	Deliberately dropped per TPL ½-mile rule (see §C-3)	Ineligible
TOTAL GAP	≈ 484		

D-3 TPL'S ½-MILE BOUNDARY RULE

ParkServe instructs cities to "create service areas for all parks *inside and within ½ mile* of the region boundaries" when generating city-wide statistics.¹⁵ Parks beyond that buffer are ignored. Ann Arbor's line jogs south of Plymouth Rd on the east side and north of Huron River Dr on the far west; the three edge nature areas fall outside the permitted zone and therefore disappear from the 1,726-acre total used in the draft CLUP.

D-4 SERVICE-STANDARD RECALCULATION

- **Current PROS Plan ratio:** 2,210 acres ÷ 123,000 residents × 1,000 = 17.96 acres/1,000 residents
- **Draft CLUP ratio (TPL data):** 1,726 acres ÷ 123,000 residents × 1,000 = 13.9 acres/1,000 residents
- **Corrected ratio (excluding only edge parcels):** (2,210 - 128) acres ÷ 123,000 residents × 1,000 = 16.9 acres/1,000 residents
- **Percentage reduction:** (17.96 - 13.9) ÷ 17.96 = 22% total reduction; (17.96 - 16.9) ÷ 17.96 = 6% legitimate reduction due to boundary methodology

D-5 TAKEAWAY

Even if one accepts TPL's ½-mile cut-off, the city-controlled omissions inside the border still slash its per-capita parkland ratio by 18%. The policy story therefore does not turn on geography; it turns on selective data upload.

FOOTNOTES

¹ City of Ann Arbor, Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan 2023-2027, p. 8, <https://a2gov.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=11336921&GUID=89F5F91F-AF9E-4096-AB3A-DD006D721596>; Draft Comprehensive Land Use Plan, June 2025, pp. 56-57.

² Trust for Public Land, Our Mission, <https://www.tpl.org/our-mission>.

³ Trust for Public Land, ParkServe Documentation 2025, p. 4, https://parkserve.tpl.org/downloads/ParkServe_Documentation_2025.pdf.

⁴ Trust for Public Land, "Nation's mayors launch groundbreaking 10-minute walk to a park campaign," <https://www.tpl.org/media-room/nations-mayors-launch-groundbreaking-10-minute-walk-park-campaign>.

⁵ Trust for Public Land, Letter of Opposition to California Assembly Bill 1910, March 30, 2022, https://www.scga.org/images/uploads/about/19736/ab_1910_letter_of_opposition_-_scga_-_33022.pdf. Trust for Public Land, "When Private Golf Courses Land in the Rough, Communities Can Tee Up Public Parks," <https://www.tpl.org/blog/when-private-golf-courses-land-rough-communities-tee-public-parks>.

⁶ Draft Comprehensive Land Use Plan, June 2025, p. 66.

⁷ Id.

⁸ Id. at p. 68.

⁹ City of Ann Arbor, Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan 2023-2027, p. 8.

¹⁰ Id. at p. 1.

¹¹ Trust for Public Land ParkServe mapping, <https://parkserve.tpl.org/mapping/#/?CityID=2603000>; City of Ann Arbor Parks and Recreation, Parks and Places, <https://www.a2gov.org/parks-and-recreation/parks-and-places/>.

¹² City of Ann Arbor, Marshall Nature Area, <https://www.a2gov.org/parks-and-recreation/parks-and-places/marshall-natural-area/> (visited June 24, 2025).

¹³ City of Ann Arbor, Brokaw Nature Area, <https://www.a2gov.org/parks-and-recreation/parks-and-places/brokaw-nature-area/> (visited June 24, 2025).

¹⁴ City of Ann Arbor, Forest Nature Area, <https://www.a2gov.org/parks-and-recreation/parks-and-places/forest-nature-area/> (visited June 24, 2025).

¹⁵ Trust for Public Land, ParkServe Documentation and How-To Guide 18 (PDF May 2025) (emphasis added).

¹⁶ Trust for Public Land, ParkServe Documentation 2025, *supra* note 3.

¹⁷ TPL polygon layer data showing Madison updates, https://server7.tplgis.org/arcgis7/rest/services/ParkServe/ParkServe_ProdNew/FeatureServer/2/query?where=park_place_fips=%275548000%27&outFields=*&returnGeometry=true&f=json.

- ¹⁸ TPL polygon layer showing Ann Arbor updates with Unix epoch timestamp (1619032415000), https://server7.tplgis.org/arcgis7/rest/services/ParkServe/ParkServe_ProdNew/FeatureServer/2/query?where=park_place_fips=%272603000%27&outFields=*&returnGeometry=true&f=json.
- ¹⁹ City of Ann Arbor Parks polygon layer (REST svc. ID 7), <https://a2mapscw.a2gov.org/a2arcgis/rest/services/Cityworks/CWSParksAssetCapture/MapServer/7>.
- ²⁰ Ann Arbor City Council Meeting, March 4, 2024, video at 1:34:18, <https://www.youtube.com/live/-HUniluKjgQ?feature=shared>.
- ²¹ Id. at 1:35:00.
- ²² Id. at 1:37:48.
- ²³ Id. at 1:40:00.
- ²⁴ Id. at 1:38:48.
- ²⁵ MLive, "Should Ann Arbor keep its city golf courses? Officials ponder new uses for land," March 4, 2024, <https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2024/03/should-ann-arbor-keep-its-city-golf-courses-officials-ponder-new-uses-for-land.html>.
- ²⁶ Ann Arbor Planning Commission Comprehensive Plan Subcommittee Meeting, Sept. 24, 2024, <https://youtu.be/sUGMBX68Q84>.
- ²⁷ City of Ann Arbor GIS, 3C BOARD Goals Infrastructure & Services (Oct. 21, 2024), <https://a2compplan-a2-mi.hub.arcgis.com/documents/046a50444286413985e153b7a011d759/about>.
- ²⁸ Washtenaw County Elections, Official Election Results, Cumulative Report, November 2008, <https://electionresults.ewashtenaw.org/electionreporting/nov2008/cumulativereport.html>.
- ²⁹ City of Ann Arbor File #12-0958, Charter Amendment Sec 14.3(b) Prohibition on Use of Parkland (July 16, 2012), <https://a2gov.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=1153211&GUID=F4F775FC-9E89-4810-9B23-566E9A7E9531&Options=&Search=&FullText=1>.
- ³⁰ Ann Arbor Independent, "Mayor and Council to Ask Voters to Repeal 2018 City Center Charter Amendment," March 7, 2025, <https://a2independent.com/2025/03/05/mayor-and-council-to-ask-voters-to-repeal-2018-city-center-charter-amendment-and-approve-sale-of-public-parcel-once-valued-at-10m-for-1/>.
- ³¹ Ann Arbor City Council Meeting, March 4, 2024, *supra* note 20.
- ³² Draft Comprehensive Land Use Plan, June 2025, p. 68.
- ³³ Id. at p. 58.
- ³⁴ Washtenaw County Elections, Official Election Results, November 2024, <https://electionresults.ewashtenaw.org/electionreporting/nov2024/index.jsp>; City of Ann Arbor, "Voters Renew Ann Arbor Park Maintenance and Capital Improvements Millage," <https://www.a2gov.org/news/posts/voters-renew-ann-arbor-park-maintenance-and-capital-improvements-millage/>.
- ³⁵ Draft Comprehensive Land Use Plan, June 2025, p. 68.
- ³⁶ City of Ann Arbor, Developer Contributions for Parks and Open Space Guide, <https://www.a2gov.org/media/mifdjbie/developer-contributions-for-parks-and-open-space-guide.pdf>.
- ³⁷ Based on Plan's proposed housing units × \$107,000 average infrastructure cost per unit. See Federation of Canadian Municipalities, "New Research: Canada's Housing Challenge is Also an Infrastructure Challenge," <https://fcm.ca/en/news-media/news-release/new-research-canadas-housing-challenge-also-infrastructure-challenge/background>.
- ³⁸ MLive, "Despite water and sewer challenges, Ann Arbor needs to grow, city admin says," June 2025, <https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2025/06/despite-water-and-sewer-challenges-ann-arbor-needs-to-grow-city-admin-says.html>.

³⁹ City of Ann Arbor, VISIONS 2025 Plan (June 4, 2025), <https://www.a2gov.org/media/cikmhbms/2025-visions-a2pr-transition-plan.pdf>.

⁴⁰ MLive, "15 Award Winners Honored for Contributions to Ann Arbor's Historic Charm," May 2025, <https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2025/05/15-award-winners-honored-for-contributions-to-ann-arbors-historic-charm.html>.