

**Subject:** Monroe Public Comment - Opposition to Transition Zone Designation Adjacent to Argo Park and Nature Area 7-1  
**Attachments:** Monroe Public Comment - Opposition to Transition Zone Designation Adjacent to Argo Park and Nature Area 7-1.docx

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**From:** Gregory Monroe  
**Sent:** Tuesday, July 1, 2025 11:22 AM  
**To:** Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>  
**Cc:** Briggs, Erica <EBriggs@a2gov.org>; Cornell, Jenn <JCornell@a2gov.org>  
**Subject:** Monroe Public Comment - Opposition to Transition Zone Designation Adjacent to Argo Park and Nature Area 7-1

Hello,

Please find attached my public comments for this evening's City Planning Commission meeting.

Thank you,  
-Greg

## **Public Comment: Opposition to Transition Zone Designation Adjacent to Argo Park and Nature Area**

**To:** Ann Arbor Planning Commission

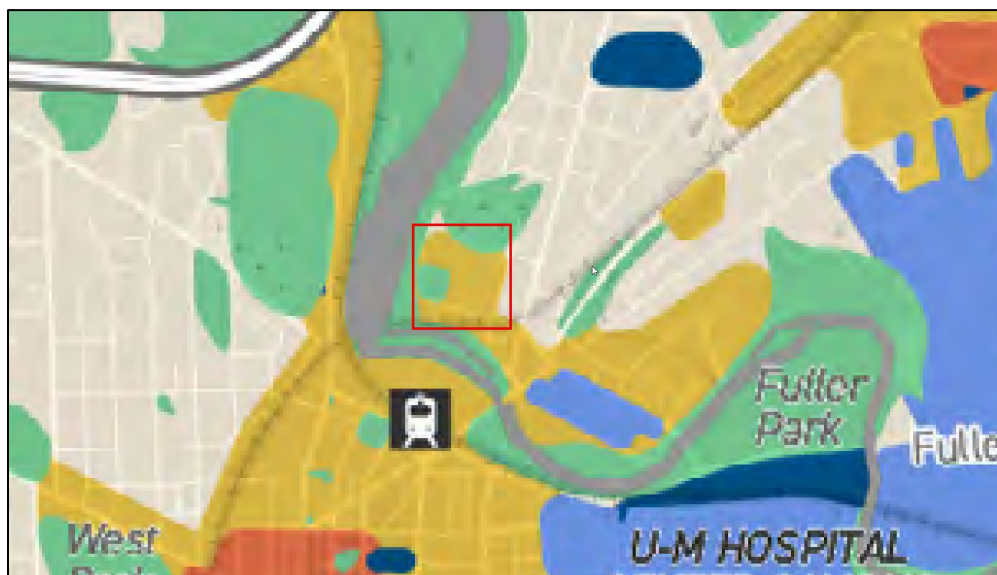
**Re:** Comprehensive Land Use Plan Draft 2 – Argo Park Area Zoning

**Date:** July 1, 2025

Dear Planning Commissioners,

I am writing to express strong opposition to the proposed Transition District designation for the area directly bordering Argo Park and Nature Area. This zoning proposal stands contradicts to both the City Council's adopted goals and the Comprehensive Plan's own guiding principles—which call on Ann Arbor to “respect, protect, and improve its natural landscape and ecosystems for future generations.”

Instead, I respectfully urge that this area be rezoned as Residential District under the Plan's “gentle density” framework. This designation would better preserve the natural features of the area and offer a thoughtful buffer zone between Argo Park and higher-intensity development. Transition District zoning should instead be concentrated in areas already characterized by commercial and industrial uses—west of the Huron River, along North Main, south of the river in the newly created Broadway Park West, and to the east, along the Plymouth Road corridor.



Transition District per Comprehensive Plan Draft 2 near Argo Park that should be zoned Residential District.

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**Argo Park Is a High-Value Natural Refuge for the Entire City**

Argo Park and the surrounding natural area represent one of Ann Arbor's most beloved and ecologically significant landscapes. Encompassing 22 acres along the east side of the Huron River, Argo features diverse native ecosystems that support a rich array of wildlife. This area also heavily comprised of Comprehensive Plan natural feature designations woodlands and steep slopes. These are functioning ecosystems, not merely green spaces. They contribute directly to clean water and air, erosion control, biodiversity, and storm resilience.

The park is also an essential community resource, offering year-round access to a great many residents who walk, run, paddle, ice skate, birdwatch, and explore its trails. Its trails connect to a 2.2-mile loop around Argo Pond and extend into the Border-to-Border Trail, seamlessly linking Argo to other parks like Bandemer, Fuller, and Gallup. With amenities like the Argo Canoe Livery, a public boat launch, a fishing pier, and the popular Argo Cascades, the park provides dynamic access to recreation and nature.

But what makes Argo truly invaluable is its ability to offer a wild, immersive natural experience in the heart of the city. As Ann Arbor increases residential density to address housing needs, accessible wild spaces like Argo become even more essential. They serve as sanctuaries where residents can decompress and reconnect with nature.

Argo and its surrounding natural features cost nothing to use and enjoy. Countless studies have shown the benefits of enjoying nature for mental health and well-being, which make it one of And Ann Arbor's most valuable public assets.

This is why I am deeply concerned that introducing a Transition District—permitting commercial and industrial uses—directly adjacent to this sensitive area could irreversibly degrade not only its ecological function but also the public's ability to experience it fully.

Once we lose the sense of quiet immersion and wild, natural experience that makes Argo special, we cannot get it back. Preserving Argo's natural integrity is a necessary investment in Ann Arbor's long-term health, resilience, and quality of life. As we grow, we must grow wisely—and that means protecting the places that make our city livable.

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### **The City's Own Directives Call for Natural Feature Protection**

The recently approved City Council resolution (25-0633), based on the Environmental Commission's recommendation, establishes clear priorities for sustainability and protection of natural features, including woodlands and steep slopes. The resolution states that these features:

- Improve air, water, and soil quality

- Buffer noise and pollution
- Support wildlife habitat and biodiversity
- Reduce storm hazards
- Preserve scenic vistas and natural beauty for residents

The resolution also explicitly extends protection to **both public and private lands**, making it clear that preservation must occur citywide—not only on land owned by the city.

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### Development Has Already Damaged Natural Assets Near Argo Park

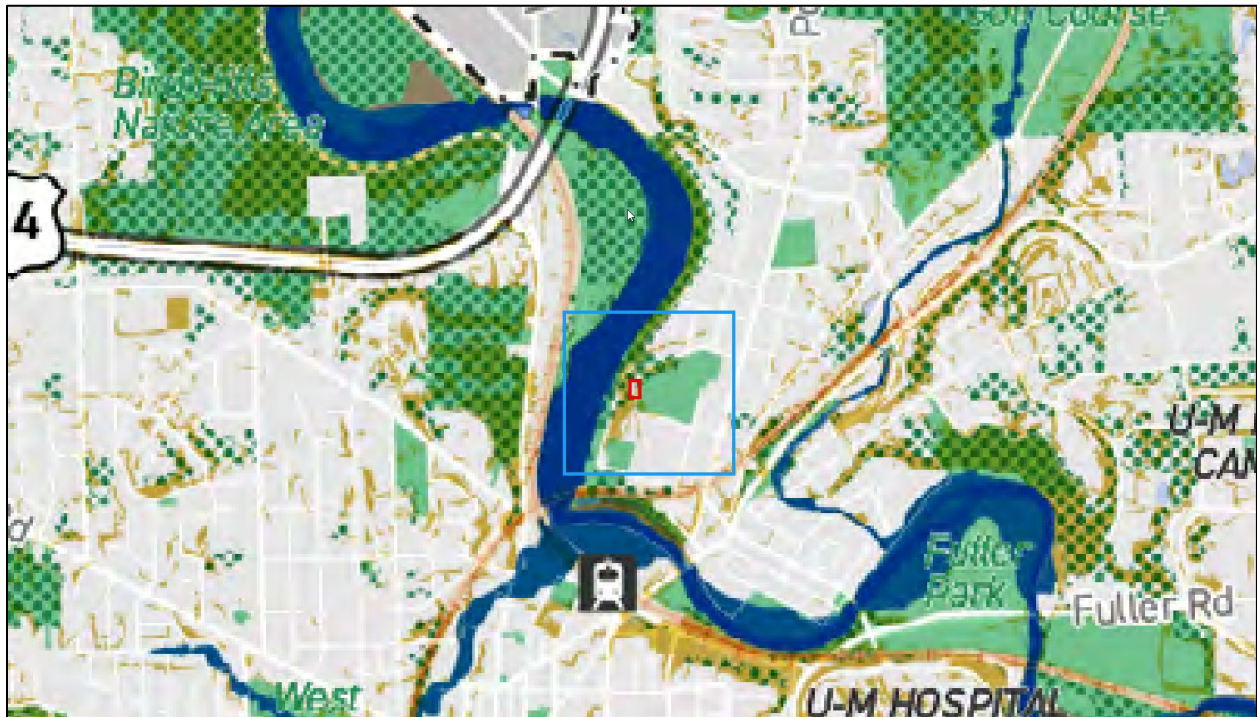
Despite the City’s intent, recent development projects—such as RiverNorth a2—have already caused significant degradation to the natural landscape near Argo. This project:

- Clear-cut close to an acre of mature woodland previously identified in the City’s natural features inventory
- Excavated hundreds of feet of steep slope frontage previously identified in the City’s natural features inventory
- Will pave a dirt road which will prevent water from infiltrating the soil and increase stormwater runoff and sediment into the nearby Huron River

Such developments highlight the urgent need for stronger zoning protections, not greater land use flexibility.



Image of RiverNorth a2's build site after clear cutting close to an acre of mature woodland previously identified in the City's natural features inventory. The excavation of the steep slope continues today.



## Map Natural Features

source: City of Ann Arbor GIS,  
Washtenaw County GIS, US Fish &  
Wildlife Service

- Hydrology (Rivers and Other Water Bodies)
- Floodplain (FEMA Flood Map)
- Park/Open Space
- Woodlands
- Wetlands
- Steep Slopes

Rough location of the damaged natural assets near Argo Park in red.

## Transition Zone Uses Threaten Adjacent Natural Areas

The proposed Transition District borders Argo Park, its surrounding woodlands and natural features, and that proximity matters when considering the negative impact of invasive noise and light, traffic congestion, and increased foot traffic.

The Transition Zone permits a broad spectrum of uses, including:

- Commercial retail complexes

- Light industrial and warehousing
- Research and development facilities
- Manufacturing
- Even a hypothetical automotive repair shop was used as an example use for the Transition District at a recent City Planning Commission meeting.

But these are not hypothetical risks. Once these uses are allowed by zoning, there is no procedural mechanism to prevent them from being built. Assuming that only residential or low-impact development will occur does not protect Argo Park and the surrounding natural areas.

Even moderate-scale development can severely impact the area. According to Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) data:

- Retail developments generate 8–12 vehicle trips per 1,000 sq. ft. daily
- Multi-family housing generates 6–10 trips per unit daily
- *Sources: ITE Trip Generation Manual, 11th edition; ITE Land Use Code 820, Shopping Center; ITE Land Use Codes 220 Low-Rise Apartments; 221 Mid-Rise; 222 High-Rise*

This means a small commercial plaza of 10,000 sq. ft.—less than an acre—could introduce 100+ additional car trips per day, significantly increasing traffic, noise, emissions, and strain on the natural areas. And that increase will exceed any potential offsets from internal trip capture from density or mixed use.

Argo Park already faces saturation on weekends—overflowing trash cans, bathrooms in disarray, and litter scattered throughout trails and the riverfront. The space is there to be enjoyed by all. However, adding commercial or industrial uses to this area, or even significantly increasing residential density, risks pushing these natural places over their threshold.

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### **The Comprehensive Plan Calls for Protecting High-Value Natural Areas and Affordable Housing—Both Exist Around Argo**

The recently approved City Council resolution (25-0633), instructs the City to include the following statement under goal 10.1 of the Comprehensive Plan, clearly favoring development that avoids high-value natural features. It calls for:



“Incentivizing development in areas with low natural features but high in other desirable values such as walkable/bikeable access and employment.”

Given its high natural features value, the land around Argo Park should be protected, not targeted for higher-intensity use. Additionally, the residential area adjacent to Argo that is being designated for Transition District is currently zoned Townhome / Multifamily Residential—which fits the newly defined criteria for a Residential District.

The area also already includes naturally occurring affordable housing (rents of \$1,715 – \$1,745 for 2 bedroom, 1 bath per Apartments.com), something the Plan seeks to preserve—not displace.

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### **Better and Abundant Transition District Locations Exist**

The west side of the Huron River, along North Main, already features industrial and commercial uses that are buffered from the natural features of the park by a railway, and offers ample redevelopment opportunity without risking detriment to natural assets and the enjoyment of residents. Additionally, the newly chartered Broadway Park West, a former brownfield along the south shore of the Huron, as well as the Plymouth Road corridor both present better-suited alternatives.

The current draft of the Comprehensive Plan designates numerous new Transition and Hub Districts throughout the city—there is no justification for forcing a Transition District designation directly against one of Ann Arbor’s most valuable ecological spaces that provides residents year-round access to nature.

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### **Recommendation**

**Rezone the area adjacent to Argo Park and Nature Area as a Residential District.** This action will:

- Align with the City Council’s Resolution on Natural Features
- Enable gentle density while preventing intensive development that could negatively impact ecological assets and residents’ enjoyment of nature
- Preserve naturally occurring affordable housing
- Maintain the woodland buffer that safeguards air and water quality
- Ensure sustained public access to a unique, high-value natural resource

The City has ample opportunity to meet its housing and growth goals without compromising natural spaces like Argo that make Ann Arbor special.

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## **Conclusion**

Argo Park and the surrounding natural area are not just scenic backdrops—they are ecologically beneficial, community assets, and essential to the city's climate resilience and livability.

This is a moment for leadership to balance growth with protecting natural spaces for residents.

I urge you to preserve this vital area and assign it a Residential Designation that reflects both its ecological importance and the City's stated priorities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

Greg Monroe

1261 Bending Rd