



Legislation Text

File #: 24-1050, **Version:** 1

Resolution to Approve Participation in a Proposal to the USDA-NRCS FY 2024 RCPP for up to \$3,000,000 in Grants for Conservation Easements

This Resolution authorizes the City of Ann Arbor to partner with Legacy Land Conservancy, the primary RCPP applicant, in their submission of a proposal to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) FY 2024 Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). This proposal is in partnership with multiple other governments to secure funding for the purchase of USDA-NRCS RCPP conservation easements in Washtenaw, Jackson, Livingston, Wayne, and Lenawee Counties.

This RCPP proposal provides an opportunity for the City of Ann Arbor to expand upon the success of two prior RCPPs in the Southeast Michigan region: the \$1.8M “Huron River Initiative” RCPP (FY 2017, R-16-358, \$1M City commitment) and the \$1M “Ann Arbor Greenbelt: Saving Michigan Farms” RCPP (FY 2018, R-18-200, \$326K City commitment). Combined with City, local partner and NRCS RCPP funds, those RCPPs represent over \$5.6M deployed for conservation in under 5 years. With the success of those prior RCPPs surpassing target deliverables and with continued interest from landowners eager to participate, this proposal represents the continuation of the land preservation partners’ critical work of protecting agricultural and natural resources.

If Legacy Land Conservancy’s proposal is successful, the City would receive up to \$3,000,000.00 in NRCS funding and the City would contribute up to \$3,000,000.00 of Open Space and Parkland Preservation (Greenbelt) funds for acquisition of conservation easements over the 5 years. The City of Ann Arbor would commit contributing funds in the amount of \$85,000.00 for due diligence activities (appraisal, survey, title work, environmental assessments, closing costs, etc.), and \$15,000.00 for administration and staff time over the five-year RCPP period. These values would cover the City’s work on approximately 8 conservation easements covering 800 acres. Individual easement projects will still seek City Council approval on a project-by-project basis. These RCPP funds allotted to the City could be used in both the traditional Greenbelt boundary as well as within the new sourcewaters “bluebelt” boundary.

In addition to Legacy Land Conservancy and the City of Ann Arbor Greenbelt, other contributing partners to this RCPP proposal include the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission (WCPARC), Ann Arbor Township, Webster Township, Scio Township, Dexter Township, and the Washtenaw County Conservation District (WCCD). The full RCPP proposal requests \$25,000,000 from USDA-NRCS, divided amongst these partners, to predominantly fund conservation easements, but also to continue funding for the WCCD-managed land-linking website MiFarmLink, expand land preservation millage toolkits, as well as to jumpstart conservation entity coordination outside of Washtenaw County.

Approval of participation in this proposal to the USDA-NRCS FY 2024 RCPP was recommended by the Greenbelt Advisory Commission at their June 6, 2024 meeting, and by staff.

Prepared by: Rosie Pahl Donaldson, Land Acquisition Supervisor

Reviewed by: Derek Delacourt, Community Services Area Administrator

Approved by: Milton Dohoney Jr., City Administrator

Whereas, Chapter 42 of The Ann Arbor City Code establishes the Greenbelt District and enables the City to purchase conservation easements on property within the district;

Whereas, Limited funds are available through the County Natural Area Preservation Program, Legacy Land Conservancy, and Township land preservation funds;

Whereas, The Greenbelt Advisory Commission goal is to leverage the City's millage funds to protect as much land as possible throughout the 30-year life of the millage;

Whereas, The Greenbelt Advisory Commission strongly recommends a minimum of 25% matching funds on Greenbelt purchases, provided by either grant funds, other local matching funds, or landowner donations;

Whereas, The Greenbelt Advisory Commission recommended City Council approve participation in Legacy Land Conservancy's application to the USDA FY 2024 Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to secure funding to complete conservation easements and committing up to \$3,000,000.00 of Open Space & Parkland Preservation Millage funding as match at their June 6, 2024 meeting; and

Whereas, The City would be eligible to receive matching funds of up to \$3,000,000.00 from the USDA-NRCS towards the purchase price of conservation easements over five years;

RESOLVED, That City Council approves submitting a proposal to the Regional Conservation Partnership Program to the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service; and

RESOLVED, That the City Administrator be authorized to take all appropriate actions to implement this resolution.