Open Space, Agriculture & Natural Features

Pittsfield Township Parks

INTRODUCTION

The history of Pittsfield Township is rooted in its agricultural legacy. Even today, agriculture comprises the largest land use (28%) in Pittsfield. This cultural landscape mixes with the Township's natural features to create a major and desirable component of the community's overall character.

The 2010 Pittsfield Master Plan emphasizes the importance of ensuring the protection of our most valuable natural resources: open spaces and ecosystem elements such as wetlands, woodlands, and open waterways; and cultural, land-based resources of farms and agricultural operations. It envisions natural open space and natural features (or 'green' infrastructure) as more than amenities but rather as a system that is every bit as necessary to our community's health and success as conventional 'grey' infrastructure systems. It also acknowledges the contribution of our community farms to open landscapes, picturesque views, and locally-produced foods and products.

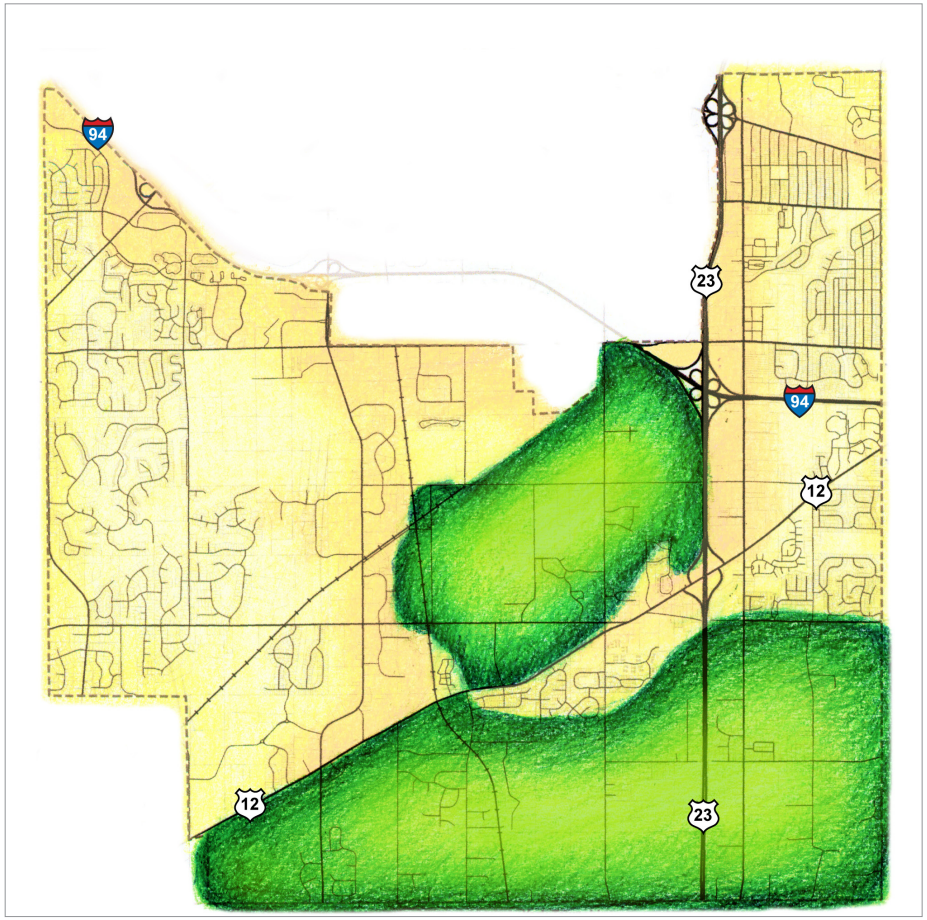
Open space is viewed herein as a system of natural areas and corridors, parkland, farmland and other undeveloped areas that provide recreational opportunities, support plant and animal habitat, protect sensitive environmental resources and ecological processes, and maintain scenic character and natural beauty.

Our future land use policies and plans must strike a balance between development, and preservation of our cultural landscapes and natural resources. This will be accomplished through infill and dense development that relieves development pressures from agricultural and nautural areas. Land use and transportation will be driven by mixed-use dense development nodes that focus growth within specific sub-areas of the Township. Housing policies will be targeted toward reducing sprawl while encouraging diversity within concentrated sections. Conservation and preservation of water and associated natural features is a priority to ensuring a 'greener' and sustainable Pittsfield. And promoting economic viability of agriculture is an integral part of ensuring economic success for our community.

Agriculture can also play a role in promoting Pittsfield as a cultural destination. Given that the majority of Pittsfield's land use is dedicated to agriculture, fostering the creation of agricultural related destinations will help sustain the industry in the community. Agri-tourism is broadly defined as any event or activity designed to bring visitors to a farm. These events or

activities generate much needed revenue for the farm and can include buying produce direct from a farm stand or market, navigating a corn maze, taking a hay ride, picking fruit or vegetables, or feeding animals. For agricultural areas like those found in Pittsfield, including Makielski Berry Farm, this type of tourism can assist in ensuring that agriculture remains a viable business in the community.

AGRICULTURAL & NATURAL OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION MAP

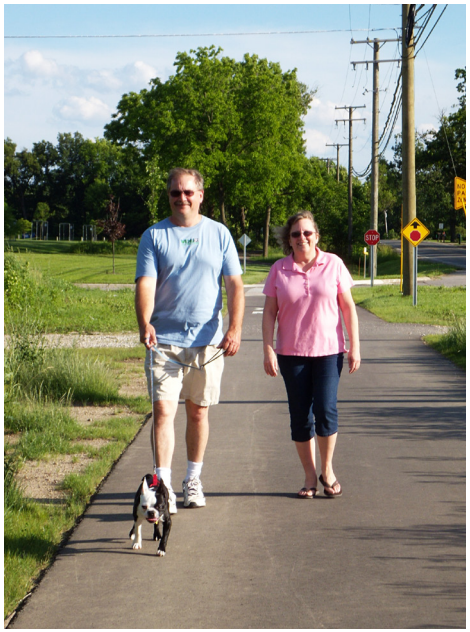


In addition, there must be a specific definition of the areas we want to preserve either through agricultural activity or natural features preservation. A review of the preservation map (*above*) delineates areas, particularly East Central and South Pittsfield, to be preserved as natural open space or agricultural land.

The areas noted on the map are designated with the understanding that our open spaces and natural resources are part of a larger, regional network of wetlands, waterways, and woodlands that are not confined to our borders. The development and preservation decisions made in Pittsfield must attempt to be compatible with this regional network to ensure environmental sustainability within multi-jurisdictional contexts.

With an increased focus on non-motorized transportation, the 2010 Pittsfield Master Plan also provides for increased accessibility not just between developed areas but also to open spaces and natural features via pathways and greenways. For instance, in 2009 the Township created 2.5 miles of mowed walking trails in the grassland/wildflower area of the North Pittsfield Preserve as well as providing nature trails through its forested land. In conjunction with the creation of these pathways, the Township used a $16,000 grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to seed 40 acres of native grasslands and wildlife restoration in addition to creating five seasonal wetland habitats in the North Pittsfield Preserve.

Hence, preserving and increasing access to open spaces, integrating agriculture into our economic and social fabric, along with conserving our natural features are integral to the 2010 Pittsfield Master Plan's overall vision.



Pedestrians on the Platt Road Greenway

PRESERVATION OF AGRICULTURAL AND NATURAL OPEN SPACES

REGIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE COLLABORATION

As noted in the future land use plan, this Plan seeks to preserve agricultural land and natural open spaces in the central part of the Township and south of Michigan Avenue. Pittsfield is committed to preserving our agricultural legacy and being a responsible steward of our environment. This commitment will translate into working with regional stakeholders, such as the Legacy Land Conservancy and the Greenway Coalition, to implement a vision for preserving our farms and natural resources in a deliberate and cohesive manner.

> 88% of community survey respondents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that the Township should protect natural resources and open spaces that contribute to the health of natural systems and the Township's character and quality of life.

In addition to working with regional partners, the Township will work internally with its Stormwater Management Committee and others, to develop and implement specific strategies such as a Township-wide plan for the management of natural features and a detailed natural features inventory. An inventory would build upon existing studies and data and be compiled in partnership with regional stakeholders including Washtenaw County. This inventory would provide detailed information about the quality of each of the Township's natural features, which can be an essential tool when making planning and land use decisions. While all natural features are important, play a role in the health of the Township's environment, and should be preserved, a detailed inventory would assist in prioritizing limited resources and funding for acquisition and preservation. Consequently, such initiatives as the Natural Areas Preservation Program can be leveraged to acquire and protect prioritized open spaces and natural features. Various development guidelines can also be adopted that promote the preservation of our natural open spaces and natural features (*see the box in the next column*).

TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS (TDR)

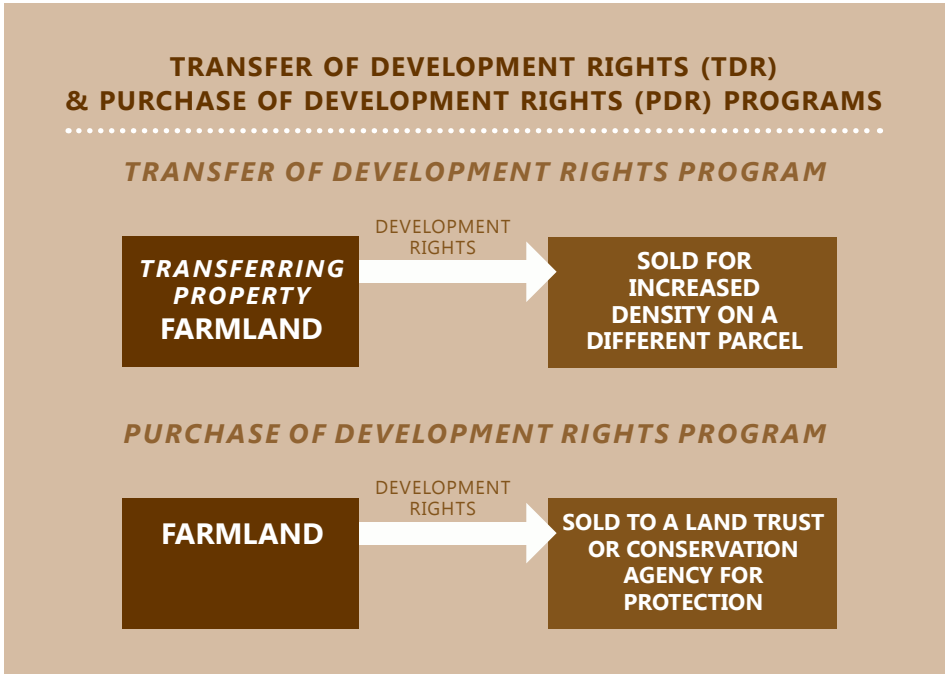
TDR is when the development rights assigned to one parcel of land can be transferred to a different parcel of land. A TDR program in Pittsfield will be used to preserve areas planned for agricultural use, and/or those areas that have significant natural resources. The development rights from the parcels to be protected can then be transferred to the mixed-use dense development nodes thereby providing for increased density in areas of the Township where infrastructure is available. As part of the TDR program the landowner may receive compensation for the development rights of the parcel for which the rights are being transferred away from to the landowner who receives the increased development rights or density. This program is effective in protecting farmland and open space from potential development and directing it to more appropriate areas in the Township.

POTENTIAL GUIDELINES TO PROMOTE PRESERVATION OF OPEN SPACE & NATURAL FEATURES

1. Require developments to set aside lands that provide greenways or access to off-site natural features
2. Require developers to provide sufficient analysis of natural features that are on, adjacent to, or hydraulically connected to the development to ensure no negative impact to them.

PURCHASE OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS (PDR)

A PDR program is similar to a TDR program; it is a method where landowners are compensated for selling their property's development rights to help limit future development of the land. Landowners are compensated for the fair market value of their land, typically based on the difference between what it could be sold for in the open market without restrictions and what it can be sold for once an easement restricting development is placed on the land. The development rights are typically sold to a land trust or conservation agency. This program is voluntary and provides compensation to guarantee the protection of open spaces and farmland in the Township. One example of a PDR program that Pittsfield has participated in is the *Ann Arbor Greenbelt*. It is a specific PDR program that is funded through grants, donations, and a millage paid by residents of Ann Arbor.



The Pittsfield Preserve

The greenbelt program's funds are used to purchase development rights and protect agricultural and open space areas in the communities surrounding the City, including the northern portion of the Township. In Pittsfield, PDR programs will continue to be utilized to purchase the development rights of agricultural lands and those parcels with natural resources that need to be preserved.

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Conservation easements are a legally binding agreement between a property owner and a land trust for the sale of the conservation of the property. In return for the donated or sold development rights, a land trust agrees to ensure the terms of the conservation easement are followed. This is completed by monitoring the parcel, enforcing the terms of the easement, and providing long-term stewardship of the parcel. Easements are drafted to meet the specific needs of a property owner while adhering to the minimum requirements of a land trust.

MINIMIZE DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE ON RURAL & NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS

In order to ensure continued protection and long-term sustainability of the rich rural, agricultural, and natural environments in the Township, this Master Plan accommodates additional growth in areas already supported by infrastructure, offers opportunities for multi-modal transportation and mixed-use areas that are compatible with existing patterns of development. Many people choose to live in Pittsfield because of its rural qualities and it is critical to retain it as part of our diversity of land uses.

> Nearly 30% of community survey respondents stated that its rural character is a positive aspect of living in Pittsfield.

Pittsfield Township has experienced continued growth since its conception in 1824. This growth is expected to continue over the coming decades. Our goal must be to target commercial, retail and business growth within existing areas through infill development and encouraging mixed-use nodes, and reducing sprawl by concentrating housing developments within defined mixed-use and neighborhood sectors. This approach maximizes the use of existing public infrastructure and support services investments, and also minimizes development pressures on rural, agricultural and natural environments.

BENEFITS OF FARMS AND AGRICULTURAL LANDS INCLUDE:

Land Value: While home values declined between 2006-2010, average value per acre of agricultural land increased by 14% in Michigan.

Agricultural Production: Michigan farmers produced $6.67 billion worth of crops and products in 2009.

Local Food: In 2010, Michigan families visited 271 farmer's markets. Michigan ranks forth in the nation for the most markets.

Sources: Michigan Agricultural Statistics 2009-2010 (www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics by State/Michigan/Publications/Annual Statistical Bulletin/stats10/agstat10.pdf). National Farmer's Market Directory (apps.ams.usda.gov/FarmersMarkets).

ENCOURAGE THE ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF AGRICULTURAL LAND

Agricultural land provides aesthetic, cultural, and economic benefits to a community. The farms and farmland in the Township are part of the character and way of life for a number of long-time residents, desired by new and future residents, and add a special value to our community. The Township is dedicated to ensuring that these lands stay in agricultural operations and will seek to provide programs that enhance the affordability of farms and support their economic success. A number of studies (*see the box above*) have reported community-wide benefits of agricultural lands and businesses. Thus, preserving and promoting our local farms will not only maintain our community's charcter – it is also economically beneficial to our community.

This Plan promotes agriculturally driven economic activity by proposing to revise the existing agricultural land use category so that it includes more opportunities for farmers to set up food stands, hold farmers markets, and other activities that will foster a market for our locally grown produce and products. The Township also encourages the production of renewable energy sources (e.g. biomass, wind, solar) in these areas.

PROVIDE NATURAL AREA LINKAGES

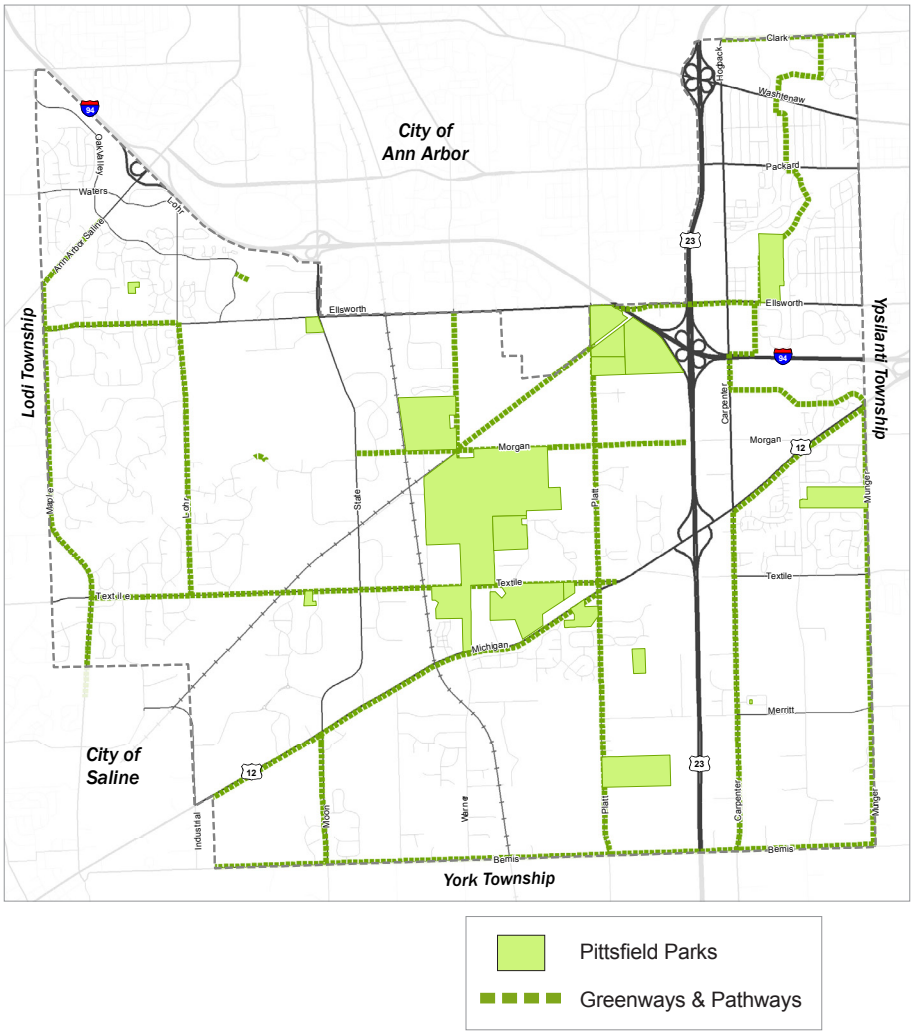
In keeping with the 2010 Pittsfield Plan's vision of inter-connectedness between various land uses through multiple-modes of transportation, it is salient to provide extensive access to our open and green spaces and ensure their integration into the fabric of our community. As noted earlier, all of the three dominant residential personas identified through the community survey: Balanced Bob, Nature Nancy, and Driver Dave, identified construction of new pathways as one of their two main priorities. These pathways enhance our non-motorized network and provide better access to our open, green, and recreational spaces.

> 57.2% of community survey respondents stated that the Township should improve accessibility to open spaces.

The Greenways and Pathways Plan (*shown on the right*) indicates existing and future connections to the Township's open and green spaces via pathways, sidewalks, and greenways.

The first phase of the Platt Road Greenway was constructed in 2009, and marked the first step towards implementing this non-motorized plan in the Township. The Platt Road Greenway provides a connection from Ellsworth Road south to Textile Road on the east side of Platt Road. The Greenway is a 10-foot, paved multi-modal pathway that can be used by cyclists, pedestrians, skateboarders, rollerbladers, etc. Future connections to the Platt Road Greenway include two other parks in the region, Washtenaw County Farm Park and Rolling Hills County Park in Ypsilanti Township. Additionally, the first phase of the Lohr-Textile Greenway is being developed. It will consist of a similar 10-foot wide paved pathway that will connect local neighborhoods to Tefft Park and the Saline Community Recreation Center. Future phases of the Lohr-Textile Greenway will provide access from residential, retail, commercial, and business areas to our largest natural areas (143 acres), the Pittsfield Preserve.

Pittsfield is committed to a transportation network that interconnects our various land uses and ensures safe and easy access to, among others, open, green and recreational spaces both within the Township and the region. This endeavor contributes to larger efforts to provide a continuous system of connected open spaces and parkland throughout all of Southeast Michigan and the State of Michigan.



Preserve Viewsheds

Another feature that can be incorporated to highlight the significance of our open spaces is the concept of preserving viewsheds in areas of particular scenic or historic value that are worthy of protection against development. Viewsheds are often spaces that are readily visible from public areas such as from public roadways and public parks. Pittsfield can protect viewsheds to help preserve the visually and aesthetically pleasing rural and historic landscapes that are of value to the Township, such as the Mastodon 'park' which is found in the Southeastern portion of the Township.

View of the Platt Road Greenway and Lillie Park

KEY CONCEPTS

GOALS

OBJECTIVES

Preservation of Agricultural and Natural Open Spaces

Promote natural resources protection on a local and regional level in a planned and strategic manner.

1. Develop a natural features protection plan to clearly identify sensitive areas in the Township.
2. Pursue grant opportunities for the purchase or protection of land.
3. Coordinate with regional partners to ensure that future land use plans and future development align with regional urban growth boundaries plan, recommendations for growth management, and development along our borders.
4. Explore the establishment of a Township administered Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) and Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program.
5. Continue to participate in the Ann Arbor Greenbelt and other regionally operated Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs.
6. Work with state and regional partners to implement programs so that farmland may stay in the hands of our farming community.

Minimize Development Pressure on Rural and Natural Environments

Ensure development decisions support, protect, and enhance the natural environments and ecosystems in the Township.

1. Update the Zoning Ordinance to reflect an emphasis on natural resources protection where possible through the use of tools such as mixed-use zoning, cluster development, reduced setback requirements, and reduced parking ratios.
2. Study land development practices that help protect natural resources and green infrastructure (e.g. cluster development, low-impact design, on-site storm water management) and incorporate these recommendations into policy documents.
3. The Township should limit expansion of water and sewer utilities into rural areas of the Township.
4. Require open space preservation be coordinated(on and off-site) based on the significance of the natural features (e.g. woodlands, wetlands, viewsheds, water features) present to provide continuity between preserved features.
5. Require a natural features analysis and report for all new developments to demonstrate the impact the developments will have on the land.

KEY CONCEPTS

Encourage the Economic Viability of Agricultural Lands

GOALS

Encourage the protection of agricultural lands that are most productive and suited to agricultural operations, and implement policies that provide additional protection.

OBJECTIVES

1. Partner with farmers and agricultural land owners, Washtenaw County, and surrounding communities to promote farming and agriculture related-businesses.
2. Balance the rights of farmers and adjacent residential property owners.
3. Limit the residential density in developments adjacent to agricultural areas consistent with available infrastructure (roads, public utilities, and public safety) and to help minimize any potential impacts associated with agricultural operations.
4. Encourage the preservation of agricultural lands encouraging infill development and promoting density in areas already served by public infrastructure.

Provide Natural Area Linkages

GOALS

Create connections between natural areas and protect significant viewsheds.

OBJECTIVES

1. Increase availability and use of public transportation and ridesharing.
2. Encourage the development and use of non-motorized facilities and programs within the Township and region.
3. Seek to make strategic connections with non-motorized pathways in our adjacent jurisdictions.
4. Develop scenic easements along the unprotected areas in between protected areas to maintain the rural character of those areas, without requiring acquisition of additional large parcels.
5. Generate a strategy to protect view sheds, open spaces, and natural features on large tracts of land (over 50 acres) in rural areas of the Township.