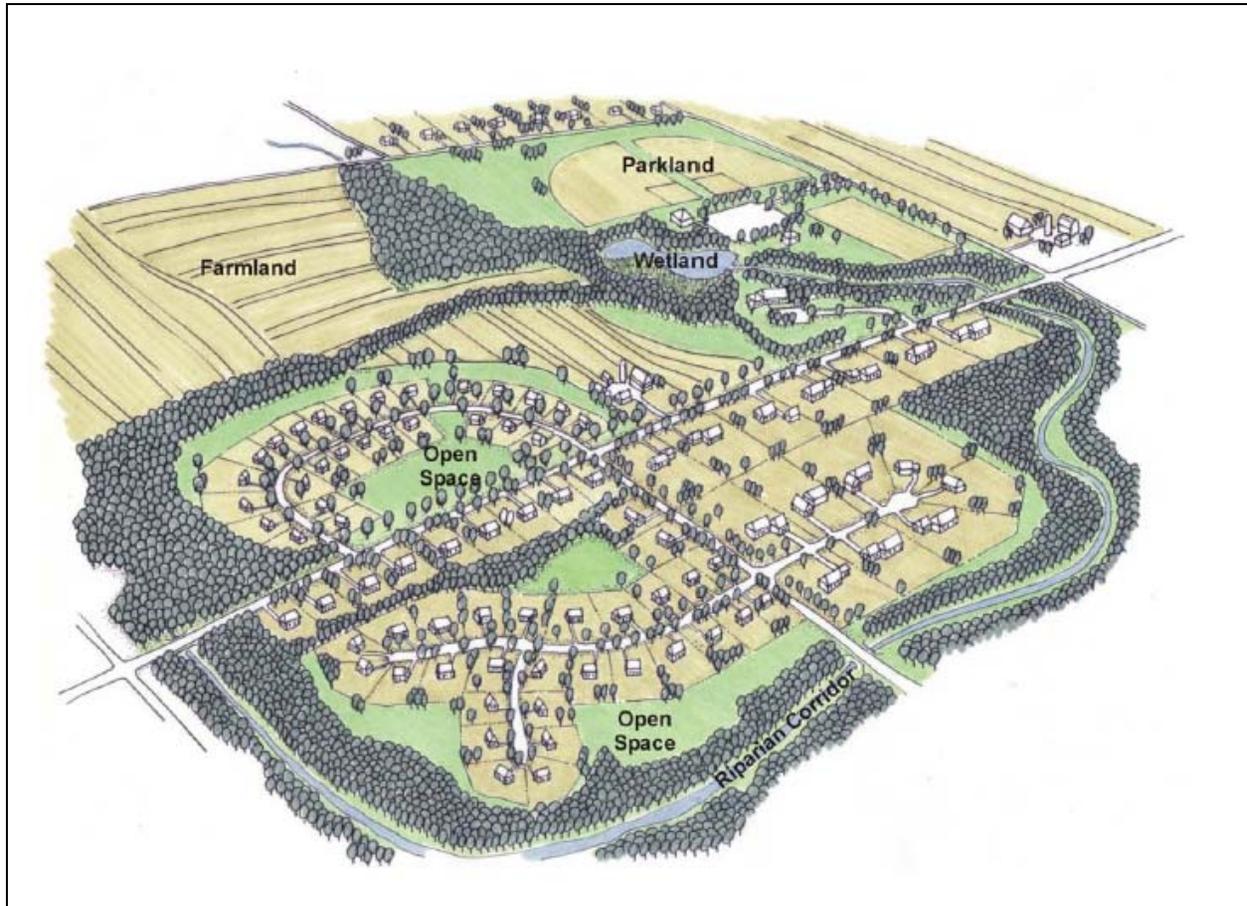


Open Space, Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee



Committee Members:

Sue Lackey, Legacy Land Conservancy

George McCalla, Broadview Farms

Coy Vaughn, Washtenaw Co. Superintendent of Park Planning

Dennis Wojcik, Washtenaw Co. Assistant Drain Commissioner

Dan Cooperrider, Pittsfield Twp. Director of Parks and Recreation

Cleveland Chandler, Pittsfield Twp. Parks Commission

Fred Flynn, Chairperson, Pittsfield Twp. Resident

Committee Charter:

- Focus on the protection and enhancement of strategically located underdeveloped land within Pittsfield Twp.
- Importantly, to identify open space, substantial woodlands, water features (streams and wetlands), as well as farmland within the township.
- Explore ways that land development policies can affect various natural features
- Assist the township in land development policies that can be used as a guide to evaluate development decisions.
- Ultimately create a code that will integrate environmentally responsible development practices.
- Our subcommittee is expected to provide direction in outlaying and Open Space Preservation Plan that will be part of the final plan documents.

Overview:

The Concept of “green infrastructure” is a contemporary approach to the issue of community open space. It looks at open space as more than a mere amenity, but as a system that every bit as necessary to a community’s health and success as conventional “grey” infrastructure systems. By repositioning the issue of open space in this way, emphasis is placed on creating healthy and functional networks of open space that are based on ecological or other rational and scientific principals. This approach results in systems of open space that exhibit connectivity, rather than isolated parcels and preserves.

Open Space:

Open Space can be viewed as a system of natural areas and corridors, parklands, 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.

Description and Issues

There are many natural corridors and flood plains identified by preservation groups, trail networks, county alliances, state planners, environmental committees and collaborations, throughout the township. These corridors provide linear park opportunities connecting subdivisions and the greater community via walking, biking and in-line skating. Safe opportunities such as this provide for healthier, vibrant communities.

Recent township surveys show residents want passive trails and greenways and an interconnectedness, places for social interaction, competition, physical development and 'engaging life' are extremely important attributes of a healthy place to live.

The 'quality of life' in a community cannot be over emphasized enough by its ability to massage fundamental land use with innovative and creative practices regarding park land, open space, agriculture, natural features and community connection corridors into a cohesive, understandable and living document.

Provide a simple and logical connector plan to tie in all of our existing parks with a vision to the future with adding more open spaces along the way. Establish a Green Way plan with clear vision to what is done to date but to add what is planned for the future. Additionally form a partnership with Greenways Coalition and other groups that are working the same action plans in their communities such that Pittsfield Twp. can benefit from there knowledge.

Importance of View Sheds

Our community character needs to be protected with appealing *view sheds*, such as the glacier marsh area to the south of Michigan Ave going over the approaching Fosdick Rd. at the R/R overpass.

Policy Recommendations

- Have a clear vision as to what benefits provided by open space are most important to the Township.
- Goals must be identified and criteria developed so properties can be evaluated as to their importance in reaching these goals.
- Develop *scenic easements* along the unprotected areas in between to keep the rural feel of those areas, without necessarily requiring the acquisition of additional large parcels.
- Continue developing the 1026 acres of township owned park land as funding becomes available. Actively pursue various grant opportunities to stretch the township dollar and connect to populated township areas.
- Priority should be given to parcels greater than 50 Acres, explore ways to secure properties in partnership with conservancy.
- Identify lands that enhance the Township's park system.
- Pursue grant opportunities for the purchase or protection of parkland or natural features.
- Procure lands that provide access from populated areas to parks and natural features.
- Look into R/R right-a-way as a way to connect the south side of the township under US-12/Michigan Ave/Fosdick Rd with Pittsfield Preserves to the north side.
- There are many acres of protected land in the central part of the township, either through private easement, township acquisition or non profit preserves. Bike/walk trails need to link these properties.
- As Michigan Ave grows and widens, promote the importance of pedestrian/bike path built in to the new R/R overpass.
- In order to provide public access to parks and greenways provide a provide a pedestrian crossing markers, hatched white road markers and island, such in the case of Montibeller Park on Ellsworth Rd.
- Post "Pittsfield Charter Township" signs at all major gateways into our township. Signs may have our Bur Oak logo to the left to promote the green image. One of key areas would be the US-23 exit onto Michigan Ave. A nice approach would be a rock garden style sign with native grasses as such.
- Add sidewalk provisions to all future plans for the community. At major exchanges add the new rubberized non-skid type material with a non curbed transition to the road area. This also provides handicap, including those citizens that may be blind, access as well as pedal biking through the community.

Agriculture

Description and Issues

It is inevitable that some agricultural land will be lost to development. It is important to understand where the lands that are most productive and suited to agricultural operations are located and implement policies that provide additional protection. The key is to identify the prime tillable grounds vs. others that are just OK, thus a priority approach can be used as a guide and an Agriculture Strategy set into place.

Policy Recommendations

- Look into State of Michigan PA. 116 as it applies to existing agriculture lands in Pittsfield Twp, such that farmland may stay in the hands of our farming community.
- Look into rolling back property tax's to the farming community. The farming price per sq acre could be rolled back per acre.
- Taking a good look at the open space assets that we currently enjoy by either capping the tax burden to agriculture sensitive properties or shift the burden to the actual crop production/yield. This would benefit the land owner to retain these open spaces well into the future. Like land conservancy efforts, rolled back taxes must be advertised and understood.

Natural Features

Description and Issues

Although there are many regulations that govern these activities they do not fully protect natural features and allow encroachment and impacts

For example, most regulations allow discharge of storm water into wetland areas but in some cases the additional water discharged to wetlands can negatively affect their health and effectively drown them. So even if the new development does not encroach into the wetland there are still impacts that need to be considered.

Many developments have been built without taking the groundwater into consideration. Although water and sewer systems play an important role in master planning storm water runoff and infrastructure is rarely considered when a master plan is being developed. A master plan should be developed that identifies issues and limitations of the existing hydrology. This can give a clearer understanding of how development may impact the natural hydrology and identify open space and natural features that are critical to protect.

Development is the cause of large increases in runoff. Stormwater runoff carries up to 70% of the pollution that is in our streams, rivers and lakes. Additional runoff overtaxes our waterways causing erosion, sedimentation and flooding.

Policy Recommendations

- Require developments to set aside lands that provide greenways or access to off-site features.
- Develop standards/ordinances that do not allow encroachment or negative impacts on these natural features.
- Require developers to provide sufficient analysis of these natural features that are on, adjacent or hydraulically connected to these natural features. The outcome of the analysis must show no negative impact or benefits to the identified natural feature.
- Provide a linking network to open space areas in subdivision development to provide real play spaces and real green space. Properties that adjoin a park, green area, are more expensive than ones that do not.
- Work with subdivision developers to leave land available/donated for public/private recreation use as parks, not unbuildable sites, wetlands, or retention basins. Example: Adjacent developers would donate a determined amount of land, such as 2 ½ acres each for a total of 5 acres. Any percentage as a standard factor will work here. The property would allow for more than a mere playground, you would be able to have a baseball game, a pick-up football game, have a tennis court, picnic area, maybe a pavilion, and a walking trail. It would be an active community gathering place.

- Develop a storm water master plan for the Township that includes:
 - ✓ Identification of watersheds and an understanding of their hydrology.
 - ✓ Determination of runoff standards for individual watersheds.
 - ✓ Identification of enhanced drainage systems installed for agricultural purposes that may be impacted by development.
 - ✓ Identification of water table depth and the impact of this on development.
- The Township's Master Plan should clearly identify the natural features of substantial importance that they are slated for protection. An additional recommendation is to prepare a map that shows the natural features, agricultural lands, parks of the township and lay out the plans to connect these open spaces.