

Jane Brody, Carolyn Hax, E4  
Personal Technology, E6

Are you phobic? Find out and what to do, E3

# CONNECTION



JUDY MCGOVERN

The Ann Arbor News

## Watch for report on greenway

Last month it seemed certain: Ann Arbor's Greenway Task Force would finish its work on time.

Well, as folks who traffic in gathering and disseminating information know, the latter can sometimes be as tough as the former.

So it's no real surprise that the 10-member group asked for an extra month to complete its report to the City Council... or to hear landscape architect Peter Pollack, chairman of the group, invoking Mark Twain's comment about needing more time to write a shorter letter.

The new target date: a week from Monday.

The ambitions: to provide a document that can help the city make informed decisions about the proposal for a linear park, or greenway, along the Allen Creek corridor. (That stretch, if you're still looking for the creek that's actually contained in drainage pipes, begins around the railroad track on South State Street near the University of Michigan golf course and ends at the Huron River, traveling through the western edge of the downtown area along the way.)

The chance to advance the discussion is welcome.

Since a now-abandoned plan to use one of three city-owned parcels in the low-lying corridor for a new parking deck awakened interest in creating a greenway, it's been a subject of intense debate.

However, that debate has been framed largely in terms of aggrieved citizens and neighbors fending off rapacious interests in and out of city hall. And even if you think there's some element of truth there, that's certainly not a complete picture.

The task force report should help identify all the issues and put them in a broader context.

That will be progress. It will not, of course, be the last word.

The city is still waiting for new Federal Emergency Management Agency maps of the Allen Creek floodplain and floodway, which will have a lot of say about what can and can't be constructed in that area.

And at the end of the day, it will still be up to elected officials to decide:

- What to do with the city property at the corner of First and William streets and city garage sites at 721 N. Main and 415 W. Washington streets.

- The scope of any park.

- And whether, if there is to be parkland, to use traditional, tax-based methods of land acquisition or to work with the private, nonprofit initiative promoted by Ann Arbor businessman Joe O'Neal.

What is clear is that this will be an opportune time for community members who may have been on the sidelines to get some solid information and be in a position to weigh in.



by Catherine Zudak

**O**n a cool evening in mid-August, a young couple approach Ann Arbor City Hall. Finding the doors locked, they hover uncertainly. The man, Daniel Menzo, has come to speak at a meeting of the Allen Creek Greenway Task Force. Fortunately, the next to arrive is Tamara Real, director of the Arts Alliance of the Ann Arbor Area. A veteran of public meetings, Real waves at a police officer inside; she buzzes Real and the young couple in.

The meeting is in the city council chamber, a windowless room on the second floor. The task force is nearing the end of its charge to develop recommendations for a downtown greenway that could intersect with three city properties at First and William streets, 415 West Washington Street, and 721 North Main Street. Over the past year, the group has held many public meetings like this one to gather information from concerned citizens, land use experts, and city officials.

This early, Peter Pollack, task-force chair, is the only member present. Menzo is the second person to sign up to speak. When Pollack opens the floor to comments, the first to rise is Alice Ralph, who narrowly lost the Third Ward Democratic primary a few weeks earlier. Ralph urges the group not to lose sight of the vision of a full-scale greenway by accommodating other interests.

The next two speakers then take their turns—and make the case for those other interests. First, Daniel Menzo says that 415 West Washington would make a wonderful spot for a cultural arts center. Then Robert Klingler encourages the task force to keep the Downtown Kiwanis club in mind for 415 West Washington.

The comments reflect a competition that began before the task force was even created. A group called the Friends of the Ann Arbor Greenway wants to use all three city properties as part of an envisioned greenway corridor, stretching from the U-M Golf Course to Argo Park. The Arts Alliance hopes to convert one of the existing structures, the onetime county road commission garage at 415 West Washington, into a community arts facility with performance and gallery space and artists' studios. The Kiwanis Ann Arbor Foundation wants the same site for its Saturday rummage sale.

At earlier task force meetings, Sonia Schmerl, cochair of the Friends of the Greenway, and Dan Dever, spokesman for the Kiwanis proposal, outlined the social and economic benefits of their plans. The task force is not choosing from among them, however. Pollack says the final report, which will be presented to city council in October, will allow for any one of their three proposals, or some combination of them.

"We had hoped for a single plan for all three sites," Pollack says, "but we could not reach consensus."

That's why the report says that 415 West Washington could become 100 per-



### *The three-way fight over the future of downtown.*



(Top) West-sider Sonia Schmerl organized the Friends of the Greenway to fight a proposed parking structure at First and William. Though Schmerl lost her August council race, it looks as though she'll win the Battle of the Parking Lot—the Greenway Task Force will recommend green space there. Schmerl's group also wants to tear down 415 West Washington (above), but the task force left its future open. That's good news for arts advocate Tamara Real and Kiwanian Dan Dever—who both want the building for their nonprofits.

cent green space—or some of the existing buildings could be retained, or replaced with new architecture. The city yard at 721 North Main could become 100 percent green space—or maintain some building remnants, or add new buildings on the west edge of the site. Though task force members did not concur in a single plan for the flood fringe portion in each property, they did agree that the floodway portions should eventually become a greenway, with rain gardens intermingled along the pathways and seating areas.

Large parts of the three city properties are in the 100-year floodplain of Allen Creek, which passes west of downtown in an underground pipe. In any given year, there is a 1 percent chance that these areas will flood. And parts lie in the floodway,

the area generally given to greater water flow during flood events.

Rain gardens can mitigate the impact of floods by providing more absorbent soil and native plantings and can improve the quality of storm-water runoff. But a greenway that includes only the floodway along Allen Creek would be a big disappointment to Sonia Schmerl. She hopes that city council will embrace the option for 100 percent green space at each site.

"Greenways, parks, water attractions . . . they provide economic benefit to big cities and small towns all across the country," Schmerl says. "Ann Arbor could take this small area, and because of its location in the floodplain, it really should not be the focus of development. It's a question of safety and property protection."

**S**chmerl helped organize the Friends of the Greenway in response to proposals to build new structures in the floodplain—particularly the Downtown Development Authority's plan for a new parking structure at First and William. With the city preparing to vacate two other sites—the city yards on West Washington and North Main—FoG collaborated with existing groups like the Allen Creek Watershed Association to advocate for turning all three properties into parks.

In March 2005 city council members Chris Easthope and Bob Johnson introduced a resolution to support the development of a full-scale greenway running through the properties. The measure was defeated 8–2, but in August 2005, in response to continued public debate, council created the greenway task force.

Though the task force won't back FoG's all-greenway plan, it has, according to Pollack, reached consensus on two important recommendations: that there should be "no architecture in the floodway" and that in the long term, the First and William lot should be used entirely as green space. If it adopts either recommendation, city council will effectively kill any attempt to revive the proposed First and William parking structure. But as Schmerl points out, that's a big if. Council is under no obligation to adopt any of the task force's recommendations.

"Setting up a task force is a time-honored way to kill an idea," Schmerl says. "The real story is what is going on in the minds of the city council members. The task force can do all this work, all this research, write the report, and make recommendations, and the city is perfectly free to ignore it."

Schmerl had hoped to be in a position to make sure that didn't happen. After keeping a close eye on council for several years as part of her responsibilities on the historic district commission (she served two terms, the second as chair), she challenged Chris Easthope in the Democratic primary in August.

Campaigning on the theme "A Real Greenway Now," Schmerl lost to Easthope two-to-one. In the Third Ward, though, FoG supporter Alice Ralph came within a few dozen votes of winning a three-way contest.

"My race for council—it started with the greenway, but it was much broader than that," Schmerl says. "The city council has grown less transparent to the public, less open about its priorities in the last few years. It's very hard to get any city council member to say what they think. . . . In a democracy we deserve a lot more openness."

Council representatives said they wanted the task force recommendations before discussing the disposition of the three city properties. Schmerl, though, suspects their minds may already be made up. "If I were to predict the outcomes for the whole land-use issues downtown, I expect the council intends to sell them to developers," she speculates. "It is so shortsighted. If they establish a greenway, it would be an economic boon the likes of which Ann Arbor has never seen. No amount of downtown density could do as much." ▀





Home

## Greenway Task Force

### Allen Creek Greenway Task Force

Resolution passed by Ann Arbor City Council on August 15, 2005 that created the task force. (pdf)

The City of Ann Arbor's Greenway Task Force is hosting a series of presentations, exhibits, and public interactive sessions throughout April. A component of the Ann Arbor City Council's charge to the Task Force is to seek public input during the planning stages in the development of a greenway recommendation along the Allen Creek area, on the west side of Downtown Ann Arbor.

### Monthly Task Force Meeting Schedule

The Greenway Task Force began meeting Wednesday, September 14, 2005 and has established a meeting schedule (pdf) through September, 2006. The meetings will be carried live on CTN Channel 16 and replayed Fridays at 5:30 pm and Mondays at 10 am. Please note: The regularly scheduled September 20 meeting has been cancelled in favor of a work session. It will not be taped for CTN replay. The work session will be held at Pollack Design Associates at 220 S. Main St.

**Public Comment:** At the beginning of the meetings there will be unreserved time for a maximum of 5 people who are allowed 3 minutes each. At the end of the meeting there will also be unreserved time for an unlimited number of people who will be allowed 3 minutes each. Written comments may be submitted to the Task Force at meetings or to Chairperson Peter Pollack at [pp@pollack-design.com](mailto:pp@pollack-design.com).

### Next Meeting - Agenda (pdf)

### Meeting Minutes

Ways to Participate Today!	Past Events
<p>Please Provide Your Public Comments</p> <p>Attend workshops, lectures, Task Force Meetings</p> <p>Read the web materials (also at the Library)</p>	<p>Presentation and Public Comments: The Greenway to Date - City Sites and Connections. Held August 2, 2006, Courthouse Square Ballroom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slide Show with photos, maps of study area (57-page pdf)</li> </ul>
<p>Use the workbooks (see left)</p> <p>Speak, e-mail, fax, write your suggestions</p> <p>Respond to 6 specific questions on the attached page</p>	<p>Public Workshop 1A: The Big Picture: The Allen Creek Greenway in Context*. Held April 22, 2006, Courthouse Square Ballroom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slide Show with photos, maps of study area (48-page pdf)</li> <li>Workbook(29-page pdf)</li> <li>Small group discussions on 8 questions (3 page pdfs, each)</li> </ul>
<p>Allen Creek Display Exhibit Locations</p> <p>Ann Arbor City Hall, 100 N. Fifth Ave., 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Council Chambers Hall City Center Bldg, 220 E. Huron, Customer Service Center UM School of Natural Resources &amp; Environment, Dana Bldg., 430 E. University, in the Ford Commons Ann Arbor District Library*, 343 S. Fifth Kerrytown Shops*, 110 N. Fourth Ave. by the elevators</p> <p>*The exhibit locations are open during weekday 8-5 business hours unless otherwise noted for extended evening and weekend access.*</p>	<p>Public Workshop 1B: A Closer Look: Site-Specific Potentials for the City's Parcels*. Held April 29, 2006, Courthouse Square Ballroom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revised Slide Show with photos, maps of study area (52 page pdf)</li> <li>Revised Workbook added, new pages (10 page pdf)</li> <li>Participant Brainstorm Summary (12 page pdf)</li> </ul> <p>*Replay times for the Task Force Meetings, public workshops and lecture presentations are periodically scheduled on CTN Cable Channel 16 and posted in the local TV guide. Programs may also be requested to be telecast by phoning CTN at (734) 769-7422.</p>
<p><b>Additional Resources &amp; Materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resource materials may be downloaded from the web.</li> <li>Print copies of the resource materials, workbooks and maps are available at the Reference Desk of the Main Ann Arbor District Library, 343 S. Fifth Ave.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Public Lecture Presentations*</b></p> <p>"Ecological and Community Benefits of Greenways," by Prof. Joan Nassauer, UM School of Natural Resources &amp; Environment (April 11, 2006)</p> <p>"Successful Greenways in SE Michigan," by Tom Woivode, Director, The Greenways Initiative, Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan, (April 25, 2006)</p>

### Task Force Members

- Linda Berauer
- Jean Carlberg
- James D'Amour
- Larissa Larsen
- Sue McCormick
- Barbara Murphy, Vice Chair
- Peter Osler
- Peter Pollack, Chair [pp@pollack-design.com](mailto:pp@pollack-design.com)
- Sandi Smith
- Margaret Wong, Secretary

### Vision, Definition & Principles (Initial and Preliminary) (pdf)

### Contact the Allen Creek Greenway

e-mail: [ACGreenway@ci.ann-arbor.mi.us](mailto:ACGreenway@ci.ann-arbor.mi.us)



Back to the City of Ann Arbor's Home page



# CONNECTION

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NEWS PHOTO • LOU HORVEDI

Barry Lonik, who heads Washtenaw County's Natural Areas Technical Advisory Committee, hopes owners of land along the county's rivers and streams will be among those who want to use a new county program to protect their properties from development.

## The preservationists

They've tramped Washtenaw County's wild places for years. Now, backed by \$27.5 million, 7 county appointees guide the strongest effort yet to keep them wild.

By ANNE RUETER  
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Heading east on Willis Road in York Township, you can see the two faces of Washtenaw County side by side: On the right is Mirage Lake subdivision, where tall, upscale homes are rising beside a bare-banked pond, the site of a former sand pit. On the left, small sandy hills covered with shrubs and trees rise behind a cattail marsh.

Sylvia Taylor can tell you Willis Road cuts through a sand dune, the ancient shoreline of a giant ice-age lake that shrank to become Lake Erie. In this neck of southeast Washtenaw County where farmland is fast becoming suburbia, covering a reclaimed sand pit with homes seems like wise land use. But the wooded hills and marsh on the other side of the road? There's finally a way to preserve the area's few remaining bits of natural heritage, says Taylor, who lives nearby in Augusta Township.

She's one of seven members of the Natural Areas Technical Advisory Committee, the group that will provide advice about how to spend \$27.5 million in voter-approved natural area preservation funds over the next 10 years. The group's ready to guide the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission, which will make the final decisions

to buy or gain easements to protect key natural sites across the county.

In 2000, voters OK'd a 0.25-mill property tax to preserve natural areas. The first revenues, \$2.57 million collected in 2001, are now available.

This week, the committee waits for an official go-ahead to start saving land from accelerating development. The technical committee

hopes plenty of landowners will step up. At stake, they say, are stream valleys, old-growth woods and other "last best places" that make the county a good place to live.

"If we eliminate nature, we're not going to like what we see," says Dave Lutton, another committee member.

It's a precedent-setting venture: The county officials and appointees involved know of no other county in the Midwest where voters have taxed themselves specifically to preserve natural areas. A couple of Michigan townships have started similar efforts, and some parks agencies have increased efforts to preserve natural areas.

"Passage of this millage is a very significant step on a national scale," says Lutton, president of Charles Reinhart Co. Realtors.

### Anxious to walk a new path

Washtenaw County parks director Bob Tetens calls the committee a "dream team." As specified by county commissioners, they were chosen for their expertise in everything from wildlife management to rare plants to conservation easements. Sharply focused like their crisp, catchy acronym, NATAC, the seven say their preparations are complete.

On Tuesday, the committee will ask the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission to approve a report containing its mission statement, goals and objectives and the tools to make the ambitious program work: an application form for landowners and a four-part screening system to evaluate proposed acquisitions.

The key page in the report is the one with the blank spaces: an application form for landowners interested in having their land reviewed for possible purchase or easements. Landowners are key, because they alone can nominate their property for the county to consider. Others cannot propose sites; nor can land be condemned.

Barry Lonik, the committee's chairman, is convinced that once the word is out, the program will strongly appeal to a certain kind of landowner, "one who says, 'I love my land. I hate to see it developed.

But I can't give it away.'" For the first time, Lonik says, the county can say, "You don't have to." The parks commission will pay the value of the land as determined by a certified appraiser.

Committee member Bill Browning is also confident the county will be able to work with preservation-minded owners, many of them farmers who want to sell and recoup their nest egg.

"I think there are plenty of people who do not want to see concrete," he says.

If they get the green light Tuesday, NATAC members hope soon to be out looking at properties landowners have asked the county to consider buying or protecting through easements.

Besides Browning, Taylor, Lutton and Lonik, members are Mike Wiley, an aquatic ecologist, Peter Pollack, a land use planner, and Anton Reznicek, a University of Michigan botanist (see related story on the group).

### What millage will and won't do

The issue of accommodating the needs of farmers who want to sell — they own many of the 40-plus-acre tracts the committee wants — is a ticklish one.

See NATURE, E3

### MEET THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

(See page E2 for more information)





# A venture to save green space

## Committee members gauge future success

The 7 members of Washtenaw County's Natural Areas Technical Advisory Committee offer thoughts on what they hope the natural areas millage will accomplish.



**Barry Lonik** of Dexter Township, land trust/conservation

In the county's contentious 1998 vote on Proposal 1, Lonik was a leader in "Save Our Land, Save Our Future," a group that backed the measure to fund purchase of development rights and other policies to preserve open space. He grew up in Oak Park, attended Albion College, and after earning a master's degree in resource policy at the University of Michigan, worked for an environmental organization in Milwaukee. In the past 5½ years he served as a board member and then staff for the Potawatomi Land Trust, a private nonprofit body founded to preserve open space that became the Washtenaw Land Trust. He's now an environmental consultant.



NEWS PHOTO • LON HORWEDEL

He cites another measure: "We're very fortunate to have a lot of natural land in public ownership. It's concentrated in certain areas. I would certainly want to provide other opportunities for quiet outdoor activities for people who don't have easy access."

### On success in 10 years:

"One measure will be, how many acres did we actually protect? If it's 5,000 acres or more, that would be a notable achievement. If we protect 10,000 or more, it would be wildly successful."



NEWS PHOTO • LON HORWEDEL

**Iam Browning** of Ann Arbor, environmental

retired in 1997 after teaching 38 years in the Ann Arbor Public Schools. He spent most of those years as an environmental educator leading students on field trips in nature areas across Washtenaw County. He was active in a pond project in Ann Arbor's Mitchell-Scarlett Woods. He's a member of the Ann Arbor school board.

### On success in 10 years:

"I'd like for there to be places known to the public and shared with the public that have interesting features that can be shared ... You have to have a track record that is continuing. It's my hope these won't be hidden in a book."



NEWS PHOTO • LON HORWEDEL

**Sylvia Taylor** of Augusta Township, wildlife management

Taylor, now semi-retired, worked as a botanist for the Michigan Department of Transportation and as a district wildlife supervisor for the state in a nine-county region in northern lower Michigan. She is a member and former chairwoman of Michigan Natural Areas Council, a nonprofit that early on began to identify natural areas in the state.

She earned an undergraduate degree at the U-M in plant ecology, and later became certified as a wildlife biologist. She's taught classes in the U-M School of Natural Resources and Environment. She's a former coordinator of the Michigan endangered species program, former member of the Potawatomi Land Trust board and former member of the Augusta Township board.

### On success in 10 years:

"The most important success is to set in motion a good natural areas conservation program in the county ... Good direction is the most important thing we can get." She hopes townships and other governing bodies will follow suit. "It's a mechanism to



NEWS PHOTO • LON HORWEDEL

bring their planning into a natural areas conservation point of view ... (and) we hope other counties will also want to do this."

**Mike Wiley** of Sharon Township, fisheries biology/aquatic ecology

Wiley is a University of Michigan professor in the School of Natural Resources and Environment. He takes students to study aquatic ecology and hydrology in streams across Washtenaw County. He's been involved in the Huron River Watershed Council's Adopt-a-Stream program analyzing water samples for a 1992-99 survey to learn to what degree urban runoff is degrading the river. Wiley also works with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources on management of the state's rivers.

### On success in 10 years:

"The committee will have done its job if the bulk of the people in the county feel proud their county has done something to preserve natural lands."



NEWS PHOTO • ELLI CURFINKE

**David Lutton** of Scio Township, real estate/development

Lutton is president and owner of Charles Reinhart Co., Realtors, the largest real estate company in the county. He advocated passage of the failed 1998 open space proposal, differing with other members of the Washtenaw Homebuilders Association, which vigorously opposed it. He's also chairman of the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation, a board member of Ann Arbor Commerce Bank and former board member of Huron Services for Youth.

### On success in 10 years:

"Done right, the program should enrich the community." And in some cases, he says, "the program should only enrich the natural areas themselves. Success will be being able to demonstrate we have done both on a wide, diverse scale ... Continuation (passing a future millage) will be another sign of success."



NEWS PHOTO • LON HORWEDEL

Real estate businessman Dave Lutton calls the Preserve in Scio Township, an upscale subdivision under construction on the site of a gravel pit, a not-very-common example of 'smart development.' He sees the natural areas millage as one of several strategies needed to keep insensitive development from gobbling up open space.



**Peter Pollack** of Ann Arbor, land use planning  
The Ann Arbor landscape architecture and urban design firm he founded in 1974, Pol-



## CONNECTION

Continued from E1

## NATURE: NATAC group has worked together with no real disagreements, members say

The millage is for natural areas, not the landscape of red barns and fields of corn and soybeans that many people are disturbed to see disappearing. Preserving farmland as farmland is beyond the program's scope, although some voters may not have realized that.

The rules created by the county commissioners defined natural areas this way: "any land, which provides the function of conserving natural resources, including the promotion of the conservation of soils, wetlands and waterways, habitat, and special plants, animals, and plant communities." The lands, they said, could benefit citizens aesthetically and as places for passive recreation such as walking, jogging, bird-watching, nature study and quiet picnicking.

The amount the millage raises each year for acquisition, projected to rise to about \$3.12 million by 2011, will be enough to buy significant "jewels" among the county's natural areas, says Tetens. "There's no reason not to think we could buy 500 acres a year." In 10 years, that would mean county parks and rec would manage nearly five times the amount of land it handles now, 1,377 acres.

Easements may be a key way to make dollars go farther, says Lonik, an ardent advocate for open space preservation and former head of the Potawatomi Land Trust. The group hopes it can team up with area and national land trust groups to protect properties. These groups could steer owners who want to sell valuable natural habitats to NATAC, which could - in turn - tell farm owners about some of the trusts that are geared to protecting farmland.

The natural areas millage, passed by 64 percent of voters, dropped like a small smooth stone into waters roiled and muddied two years before in a bitter political battle in which voters rejected a more sweeping plan that included purchase of development rights to preserve the rural landscape.

The more limited, focused proposal caused barely a ripple. It smoothed out the rancor of the PDR fight, with many former ad-

## WHERE TO GET APPLICATIONS

For information and an application form, landowners can contact the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission, (734) 971-6337, P.O. Box 8645, Ann Arbor, MI, 48107. Forms will be available soon on the county Web site [www.co.washtenaw.mi.us](http://www.co.washtenaw.mi.us)

versaries, publicly at least, joining hands in a show of unity.

Many county residents may have trouble recalling what it was they voted for. But NATAC and the county parks staff have done a lot of talking and planning since the 2000 vote. They feel they've closely followed the words and spirit of the ordinance county commissioners passed to establish the program.

## How properties will be rated

NATAC meetings haven't been dry or plodding. Members have passions for things like river bottomlands rich in unusual plants, bird nesting areas, ground water recharge areas and woods with 170-year-old trees.

You might expect each to zero in on the turf they know best in evaluating what to preserve. They've each spent decades as specialists. But so far, members say the group has clicked and pushed ahead with no real disagreements, driven by a common zeal to protect lands while there is still time for taxpayers' dollars to have a significant impact.

When Lutton heads west off Ann Arbor Saline Road, what he sees doesn't make him happy, though he's a Realtor. "Even on the side roads, we're faced with the five- and 10-acre syndrome incredibly," he says.

"There is so much pressure for development that if we don't turn the direction, we're going to wake up 20 years from now and it won't look like Washtenaw County."

The county parks and recreation commission will send applications from landowners to

NATAC, the county planning commission and the local government where the land is located. NATAC members will screen each application, giving properties check marks if they meet these four criteria:

- Public water resources (river, stream or lake frontage, wetlands, stream headwaters needed to protect water quality, location in a groundwater recharge area).

- Special plants, plant communities and wildlife (sites that support Michigan's endangered, threatened or special concern species, or are adjacent to lands that do, are of special interest).

- Recreation and scientific values (land with access to public waters and trails, or established areas for scientific study).

- Proximity to protected land (sites next to or "otherwise integral" to private and public conservation and recreation lands).

Even though NATAC member Pollack is a designer, he's not bothered that the screening process doesn't rate properties for their scenic beauty. He believes the focus on protecting largely-undisturbed land where a variety of native creatures and plants live is a sound approach. "The issue for us is the health of that area, and if it happens to look fine, that's OK. But it's not the point."

But that doesn't mean that small or isolated tracts will be prime candidates for the money, members say. "The things that are happening have to be visible," Pollack says. "This is not a scientific exercise in finding land for its own sake." He believes the parks commission will need to keep the public informed about each new acquisition and "what needs to happen to take care of it."

"We know it's important to educate people on our natural systems - ultimately, so they'll be interested in protecting them," says Lonik.

When the application process starts, NATAC members are hoping landowners will submit properties that match some of the top priorities they see: land along the largely unprotected Raisin and Saline rivers; missing links between existing preserved lands along the Huron

River corridor; prime plant and animal habitats beside the county's many streams, wetlands and lakes; old-growth woods; fields home to wildlife and native plants.

The county's western half holds much of its intact natural riches. But Browning and others on the committee say they're very aware that the populous eastern portion of the county deserves a share of the millage money.

With county parks commission approval, Tetens and park planning superintendent Tom Freeman plan to present details of the program to regional planning groups in Chelsea, Manchester, Dexter, Milan and Saline.

"We really think local units of government are going to be key to this," says Freeman.

Taylor believes convincing some townships of the value of

building a network of natural areas will be a challenge, especially since purchased lands will leave the tax rolls.

NATAC members hope an informal grapevine of conservation group members will make owners of valuable natural areas aware of the new program.

## More ways to keep the county green

Taylor doesn't think voters will have any regrets about their decision to tax themselves for the program. "They're going to get more than their money's worth." She wants the effort to succeed well enough to lay groundwork for another millage, convincing voters they've gotten something for their money and there's more land to protect.

In the meantime, Lutton would like to see broader measures like the failed Proposal 1

that would protect other types of open space.

"I think many (of the natural areas properties) will be scenic. Many will be strategic relative to what Proposal 1 attempted to do," he says. "But I also believe this (the natural areas millage) is a much weakened version in terms of preserving the open space aesthetic of Washtenaw County."

Pollack thinks another initiative to preserve open space could be timely in five years. Lonik says to stay tuned: More ballot proposals on open space are simmering, and not just at the local level. "The issue is getting far more attention in Lansing than ever before."

Reznicek, like others on the committee, feels it's urgent to act. "It's very possible we'll be the last generation that can contribute to making the county a nice place to live."