

LAND PRESERVATION COMMITTEE REPORT

Manchester Township

Washtenaw County

Michigan

December 5, 2024

INTRODUCTION

The Land Preservation Committee (LPC) was established by the Manchester Township Board for a one-year term beginning in September 2023. Attachment 1 is the Charge of Committee that outlines the LPC's responsibilities. At the request of the LPC, the board extended the term of the LPC from September 2024 until December 2024.

The idea for the LPC was spurred by three factors:

- In the first half of 2022 Manchester Township did an online survey of township residents that generated 177 responses. Several of the topics related to the efforts of the LPC. Eighty to ninety percent of respondents believe preservation of agriculture and natural areas is very important or important. No other land uses received nearly as much support. When given a chance to comment on what brought them to Manchester Township, a large number of respondents referred to characteristics associated with rural character, including farmland, recreational opportunities, scenic views and the quiet, peaceful atmosphere.
- An application for a utility scale solar facility in 2022 on Sharon Hollow and Herman Roads generated a response from the local community that the proposed facility was not consistent with a major goal of the township's master plan: to preserve rural character.
- The Manchester Township Board and Planning Commission held a series of "Township Identity" meetings From September 2023 through February 2024. During those meetings there was overwhelming support from community leaders and residents of the need to plan growth in a way that will protect the township's rural character through the preservation of the agricultural and natural resource land base of the township.

Based on these findings, the LPC committee provides the following report with information and recommendations on how Manchester Township should proceed in its efforts to protect our active farmland, abundant natural resources, open space and rural character.

Charge of the Committee

1. Develop a mission statement for land preservation in the township.

STATUS: COMPLETE

MISSION

The mission of the Land Preservation Committee is to gather and consider information to determine the best methods available to preserve the township's natural and agricultural lands in order to ensure that the **rural character** of the township will be protected for future generations.

Rural Character:

Rural character refers to the patterns of land use and development where natural landscapes, farmland and vegetation are predominant over the built environment.

2. Consult with surrounding townships to determine their interest in land preservation and what involvement they could have with Manchester township's efforts. Townships should include Sharon, Freedom, and Bridgewater. Discussion should also include Norvell Township.

STATUS: ONGOING – Continued effort recommended

- a. We added Franklin Township, to our south in Lenawee County. Cambridge Township in Lenawee County is at our southwest corner and has also been consulted.
 - i. Officials from Sharon, Freedom, Franklin and Norvell townships were consulted. None of them had any recent efforts of significance but all were interested in what we are doing. We note that Freedom Township implemented sliding scale zoning twenty or more years ago to protect their agricultural base which seems to have been instrumental in the preservation of their farmland. The LPC believes there are opportunities for collaboration and we should continue to interact with them.
 - ii. Bridgewater Township has a Farmland Preservation Board that was authorized by a PDR ordinance in 2002. The chairman of the FPB, Dan McQueer, came to a recent LPC meeting to provide background. Their group meets quarterly and directs interested landowners to land conservancies for conservation easements. Their PDR ordinance does not include a provision for funding through a millage.
 - iii. Cambridge Township has experienced recent citizen involvement due to a proposed gravel pit adjacent to US-12 which would be between and adjacent to several lakes that contain numerous homes and seasonal cottages. A lawsuit is now pending regarding

the gravel permit application. There are indications that land preservation is a likely future interest.

- b. The Township Board and Planning Commission should continue their involvement in the Southwest Washtenaw Council of Governments and the Greater Irish Hills Region Intermunicipality Committee and encourage both groups to discuss cooperative land preservation methods.
- c. Dexter Township was contacted regarding their PDR ordinance. Dexter and Northfield townships passed millages to support PDR in 2022, joining Webster, Scio, Augusta and Ann Arbor townships, which had previously passed PDR ordinances that are also supported by millages. The LPC recommends that Manchester Township continue to seek input from these entities.

3. Identify features within the township that should be targeted for preservation.

STATUS: ONGOING – Continued effort recommended

These are general categories; additional categories should be considered as identified. Within each of these categories there are subcategories that can be used to evaluate parcels that are eligible for preservation and are voluntarily nominated for preservation by the owner/s. Criteria for evaluating parcels in the township for preservation should be based on this evaluation.

Land features for preservation:

- a) Large tracts of fertile, prime, open farmland, including irrigated fields.
- b) Historic agricultural sites, including historic barns and homes.
- c) Ecologically significant areas.
 - i. Riparian zones
 - ii. Flood plains
 - iii. Woodlands
 - iv. Wetlands
 - v. Groundwater recharge
 - vi. Contiguous to other preserved areas/parks/preserves
- d) Scenic corridors

Preserving scenic corridors, including farm fields and natural areas, is an important way to remind residents and visitors that Manchester Township values its rural character and is committed to preserving it for future generations. Our less traveled gravel roads are ideal for biking and Sunday drives, where slowing down to appreciate the view can be done safely. Establishing more Natural Beauty Roads can assist with that effort and is mentioned in our recommendations under #6.

- i. Mahrle Road – only designated Natural Beauty road in Manchester Township
- ii. Noggles Road
- iii. Mulvaney Road
- iv. English Road
- v. Van Tyle Road
- vi. Many others could be considered

4. Identify specific parcels in the township that should be targeted for preservation.

STATUS: INCOMPLETE

We have identified significant natural features in several areas of the township and along the Iron Creek corridor. Parcels of at least ten acres can be considered, but larger parcels are favored (some landowners have multiple parcels).

After consultation with the Township Board, the effort to map the areas and parcels that should be targeted for preservation has been postponed. The township is in the process of creating a new master plan and will require many of the same maps that are needed for preservation purposes. In fact, the implementation of any of the recommendations in this LPC Report will need to have its actions grounded in the township's master plan.

The LPC requests that members of this committee be involved in that mapping process.

5. Develop a list and contact information of organizations that could partner with the Township in its effort to preserve land.

STATUS: ONGOING – Continued effort recommended

See Attachment 2 for additional information about how Manchester Township can work with these organizations on land preservation methods.

Other organizations to partner with will likely be identified and should be added as needed.

- Washtenaw County Land Preservation Program
- Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
- Legacy Land Conservancy
- Washtenaw County Conservation District/NRCS programs
- US Fish & Wildlife Service
- River Raisin Watershed Council
- Michigan Natural Features Inventory
- Ducks Unlimited

- Pheasants Forever
- Washtenaw County Historic District Commission
- Michigan State Historic Preservation Office
- Michigan Historic Preservation Network
- Michigan Barn Preservation Network

6. Develop a comprehensive list of land preservation methods and programs that Manchester Township could employ to preserve targeted land.

STATUS: ONGOING – Continued effort recommended

The following list is ordered by ease of implementation. The initial steps are preliminary and are generally not permanent methods of land preservation but are integral to ongoing preservation efforts and can help maintain Manchester's rural character. Subsequent steps will take more time and can ensure permanent protection of significant portions of the township's agricultural and natural resource land base. The success of this effort will be dependent on helping our residents understand how land preservation can help maintain and improve their quality of life and the rural character of our township.

- a. The Township Board should send a letter to township residents and property owners with information on the LPC report and publicize it in local media and social media.
 - i. The letter should also inform landowners of existing land preservation programs that are currently available.
 - ii. The letter should also schedule a series of meetings to inform residents about the efforts and seek their input about the LPC's recommendations.
- b. The Township Board should adopt policies and procedures to encourage stewardship of agricultural and natural lands.
 - i. Manchester Township, possibly in cooperation with surrounding communities, could seek funding to enhance and promote the recreation and local foods economy that goes hand in hand with our rural character. This could include development of a branding strategy that would help residents within and outside the township to identify Manchester Township as a community that is committed to preserving its rural character.
 - ii. Support and encourage owners of farmland and natural areas to enroll in programs to conserve soil and water quality and wildlife habitat as outlined on the township's Land Preservation webpage.
 - iii. Support and encourage landowners to enroll their agricultural and open space (natural areas) lands in the state PA 116 program that requires the landowner to maintain the practice for a period of years in return for a lower tax bill.
 - iv. Support and encourage landowners to voluntarily establish permanent conservation easements on farmland and natural areas

(some properties will likely qualify for funding to compensate the landowner for doing so.).

- v. Support and encourage eligible landowners to voluntarily establish historic districts as allowed by Washtenaw County.
 - vi. Support and encourage residents to petition the WCRC to establish additional Natural Beauty Roads in the township on appropriate sections of roads.
- c. Various planning tools have been discussed that could be adopted by the Planning Commission to limit development of selected areas of the township that contain large parcels of agriculture and natural land/open space.
- i. Improve the existing cluster development ordinance
 - ii. Provide incentives for developers to preserve open space
 - iii. Establish overlay areas in targeted areas
 - iv. Adopt a natural features ordinance
 - v. Consider sliding-scale zoning to help preserve larger blocks of land.
 - vi. There are likely more
- d. The Township Board could add restrictions to the state Land Division Act. This could limit and slow down the partition of parcels compared to the minimum requirements in the state law.
- e. The Township Board should adopt a purchase of development rights ordinance.
- i. This would allow for a possible land preservation millage and other funding sources for Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) that would provide for permanent preservation.
 - 1. Six townships in Washtenaw County have enacted PDR ordinances as discussed in 2.c. All of these townships include a board or committee established by their township to manage the land preservation effort. If the Township Board decides to go forward with a PDR ordinance, and even if they don't, the LPC recommends that such a board be established in the near future to help the Planning Commission and Township Board to focus on this effort.
 - ii. It is important that any such ordinance meets the requirements of the State of Michigan and Washtenaw County, which each have funding mechanisms that Manchester Township could use to obtain additional funds for land preservation.
 - iii. The LPC reviewed a few of these ordinances and recommends the Dexter Township PDR Ordinance be used as a starting template.
 - iv. There are many additional sources of funds for permanent preservation that can be leveraged if there is a local match.
- f. The Township Board should consider adoption of a Transfer of Development Rights ordinance that would allow development rights in areas designated for protection to be transferred to areas where development can be better supported, such as near the City of Manchester.

- i. This tool has not been used very much in Michigan and would normally include a much larger “sending” and “receiving” area than a single township. However, this method could provide a unique opportunity for equalizing the gains and losses of various property owners, whose property value would be affected by the township’s decisions. For example, areas that are slated for preservation could receive a financial benefit by “selling” their development rights to areas where more development is desired.

7. Research and acquire several other existing township land preservation plans

STATUS: INCOMPLETE

- a. We have determined that few townships have extensive land preservation plans and we were unable to find one that is relevant to Manchester Township. The LPC believes we can incorporate the language necessary to support land preservation into the Master Plan which is currently in the process of being updated.

8. Research, Identify and list possible revenue sources to aid in land preservation.

STATUS: COMPLETE

- a. A dedicated purchase of development rights millage that would need to be approved by township residents
- b. Proceeds from any sale of development rights, as may be allowed in a purchase of development rights easement.
- c. Grants
- d. Private donations
- e. Contributions from federal, state and county programs as well as from land conservancies and other nonprofits who we would partner with on specific projects
- f. General appropriations by the Township Board.

9. Based on research, identify a suggested amount of “seed” money necessary to begin a land preservation program.

STATUS: COMPLETE

Permanent protection through permanent conservation easements should be the goal of any land preservation funding effort by Manchester Township. To compensate a willing landowner for giving up the development rights on their farmland and natural areas can easily require 50% of the market value of the property. A twenty-acre parcel worth \$10,000 per acre (\$200,000) could require

payment of \$100,000 to the property owner in return for giving up their right, and the rights of future owners, to develop the property. It is likely that the proposed \$50,000 seed money could leverage other available funds, therefore increasing the value of an initial \$50,000 contribution.

- a. A minimum of \$50,000

10. Provide monthly updates to the Manchester Township Board and Planning Commission. Request any feedback required from the Board and Commission to assist in preparing the final report so that the information can be used in the implementation of the land preservation plan.

STATUS: COMPLETE

- a. Monthly reporting and requests for feedback were completed. The final LPC Report will be presented to the Township Board at their regular board meeting on December 10, 2024.

ATTACHMENT 1

LAND PRESERVATION COMMITTEE REPORT

Manchester Township

Land Preservation Committee

September 7, 2023

Charge of the Committee

Convene the committee and elect a chairperson and a secretary. The Chair shall set an agenda for each committee meeting and the Secretary shall keep minutes of each meeting.

The Land Preservation Committee shall sunset one year from the date of the first meeting, unless further work is requested from the Township Board.

Research and compile the following information, to be presented in a final written report, to the Manchester Township Board and the Manchester Township Planning Commission.

1. Develop a mission statement for land preservation within the Township.
2. Consult with surrounding Townships to determine their interest in land preservation and what involvement they could have with Manchester Township's efforts. Townships should include Sharon, Freedom and Bridgewater. Discussion should also include Norvell Township.
3. Identify and list land features within the Township which should be targeted for preservation.
4. Identify specific parcels within the Township that should be targeted for preservation.
5. Develop a list and contact information of organizations that could partner with the Township in its efforts to preserve land.
6. Develop a comprehensive list of land preservation methods and programs that Manchester Township could employ to preserve targeted land.
7. Research and acquire copies of several other existing township land preservation plans.
8. Research, identify and list possible revenue sources to aid in land preservation.
9. Based on research, identify a suggested amount of "seed" money necessary to begin a land preservation program.
10. Provide monthly updates to the Manchester Township Board and the Manchester Township Planning Commission. Request any specific feedback required from the Board and Commission to assist in preparing the final report and so that the information can be used in the implementation of an official land preservation program.

ATTACHMENT 2
LAND PRESERVATION COMMITTEE REPORT
Information and Contacts for Land Preservation Partners

Washtenaw County Land Preservation Program (NAPP)

<https://www.washtenaw.org/939/Protect-Your-Land-Natural-Areas-Preserva>

Parks & Recreation Commission

2230 Platt Road

Ann Arbor, MI 48104

PO Box 8645

Ann Arbor, MI 48107

Ginny Leikam 734-971-6337 ext. 320 leikamg@washtenaw.org

NAPP was established in 2010 by Washtenaw County. Residents of the county have approved a county-wide ¼ mil millage three times. The program funds acquisition of conservation easements through purchase of development rights (PDR) as well as acquisition of natural areas to preserve agricultural and natural resource lands.

Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development -
Agricultural Preservation Fund Grants

<https://www.michigan.gov/mdard/business-development/grantfund/agricultural-preservation-fund-grants-applications-and-qualifications>

Environmental Stewardship Division

P.O. Box 30449

Lansing, MI 48909

Chip Kraus, Program Manager 517-284-5663 MDARD-PA116@michigan.gov

The Agricultural Preservation Fund and associated Agricultural Preservation Fund Board provides grants to eligible local units of government and their qualified Purchase of Development Rights programs (PDRs) which allow landowners to be compensated for limiting development on their land.

Legacy Land Conservancy

<https://legacylandconservancy.org/protect-your-land/>

Land Protection

6276 Jackson Road, Suite G

Ann Arbor, MI 48103

Susan LaCroix, Land Protection Director 734-302-5263

slacroix@legacylandconservancy.org

Legacy is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit accredited by the Land Trust Alliance and works with individuals and townships to place permanent conservation easements on the agricultural and natural lands of landowners who want their property to remain largely undeveloped. Legacy may obtain grants and partner with other entities who can provide some compensation to landowners who limit the development of their land. Legacy can contract with a township to assist in the administration of a purchase of development right ordinance.

Washtenaw County Conservation District/NRCS programs

<https://www.washtenawcd.org/>

Washtenaw County Building

705 N. Zeeb Rd – Suite 201

Ann Arbor, MI 48103-1560

Summer Roberts, Executive Director 734-302-8716 summer@washtenawcd.org

WCCD administers several programs focused on stewardship of agricultural and natural areas and assists County residents through countywide resource assessments, conservation resource distributions, conservation education, and one-on-one technical assistance.

US Fish & Wildlife Service – Partners for Fish & Wildlife

<https://www.fws.gov/program/partners-fish-and-wildlife>

Michigan Ecological Services Field Office

2651 Coolidge Road Suite 101

East Lansing, MI 48823-6360

Jim Hazelman 517-351-4230 Jim_Hazelman@fws.gov

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program provides free technical and financial assistance to landowners, managers, tribes, corporations, schools and nonprofits interested in improving wildlife habitat on their land. Projects are voluntary and customized to meet landowners' needs. Participating landowners continue to own and manage their land while they improve conditions for wildlife.

River Raisin Watershed Council

<https://www.riverraisin.org/>

804 N. Evans St

Tecumseh MI 49286

320 Springbrook Ave, Suite 102

Adrian, MI 49221

Sean Dennis, Executive Director 517-662-8755

executivedirector@riverraisin.org

RRWC's mission is to inspire behaviors that promote stewardship, improve water quality, and encourage public participation to protect, preserve and enhance the River Raisin Watershed. RRWC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and has partnered with the Washtenaw County Conservation District and others to provide assistance to landowners interested in land stewardship and preservation.

Michigan Natural Features Inventory

<https://mnfi.anr.msu.edu/>

1st Floor Constitution Hall 525 W. Allegan St.

Lansing, MI 48933

PO Box 13036 Lansing, MI 48901-3036

Michael J. Monfils, Director 517-284-6205 monfilms@msu.edu

MNFI provides high quality scientific expertise and information on the location and condition of Michigan's rare species and habitats that are used by public and private partners to identify, manage and protect important natural areas.

Washtenaw County Historic District Commission

<https://www.washtenaw.org/1943/Historic-District-Commission>

Office of Community and Economic Development (OCED)

415 W Michigan Avenue, 2nd Floor P.O. Box 915

Ypsilanti, MI 48197

Kat Slocum, Historic Preservation Specialist

(734) 544-2954 slocumk@washtenaw.org

WCHDC implements the county's historic preservation program through which a property owner can establish a local historic district to protect qualifying historic structures. Any designation is permanent and applies to future owners; the owner qualifies for a 25% tax credit for qualifying maintenance and upgrades.

Michigan State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)

<https://www.miplace.org/historic-preservation/programs-and-services/>

300 N Washington Square

Lansing, MI, United States, 48913

Nathan Nietering, Project and Website Coordinator

517-331-6024 nieteringn1@michigan.gov

SHPO evaluates, protects and promotes Michigan's historic built environment and archaeological sites by helping property owners, developers, and local and state agencies identify and rehabilitate historic places. They administer the National Register of Historic Places for the state and many other programs that could be of benefit to Manchester Township.

Michigan Historic Preservation Network

<https://www.mhpn.org/>

313 E. César E. Chávez Avenue

Lansing, MI 48906

Cindy Bruntjens, Office Manager 517-371-8080 cbruntjens@mhpn.org

MHPN is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that provides training and resources to support historic preservation in Michigan. They host an annual conference. Recordings of their monthly webinars cover a wide array of topics and are available on their website. They administer predevelopment and intervention loans to support restoration or reuse of historic resources.

Michigan Barn Preservation Network

<https://mibarn.net/>

P.O. Box 614

Mt. Pleasant, MI 48804-0614

Tom Irrer, President 989-640-1868 info@mibarn.net

MPBN is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit committed to the rehabilitation of traditional barns for agricultural, business, public and residential uses. They provide resources for barn restoration and host an annual conference. They work to raise awareness and aid in the continuing presence of barns in our communities and on the landscape.

Ducks Unlimited – Great Lakes/Atlantic Regional Office

<https://www.ducks.org/michigan#resources>

7322 Newman Blvd., Bldg. 2, Ste. 200

Dexter, MI 48130 734-623-2000

Max Lehman, State Chair 989-620-6791

Ducks Unlimited is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit that conserves, restores, and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. They host an annual convention and other events and offer resources to support their mission. One of DU's programs offers farmers in the Western Lake Erie Basin incentives to use cover crops on their fields to improve soil and water quality.

Pheasants Forever – Washtenaw Chapter #151

<https://washtenawpf.org/>

Julie Griswold-Jansen, Chapter President

734-320-9243 washtenawpf151@gmail.com

Pheasants Forever operates in North America but relies on local chapters to determine how to focus their efforts. The Washtenaw County Chapter is focused on creating, preserving and restoring habitat that benefits pheasants and other upland wildlife. Their activities include improving habitat, informing the public about land management and educating future generations of hunting enthusiasts.