

A Plan of Action to Preserve Dicken Woods

For Consideration by the Catholic Diocese of Lansing

Prepared by the Friends of Dicken Woods

June 26, 2003



Friends of Dicken Woods

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Executive Summary

The Friends of Dicken Woods propose a partnership among the Catholic Diocese of Lansing, the City of Ann Arbor, and the Friends, in order to preserve Dicken Woods as a natural area within the Ann Arbor parks system. The Friends are raising funds, building a coalition of supporters, and coordinating with the City leadership. It is expected that the city will make significant progress in an acquisition decision by October 2003. The Friends now ask the Diocese to consider the immense benefits that preserving Dicken Woods will accrue to the school children of Dicken Elementary School, the citizens of Ann Arbor, the wildlife inhabiting Dicken Woods, as well as the environment of all residents affected by the Huron River from Ann Arbor to Lake Erie.

June 26, 2003

Paul Garriepy
Director of Properties
Catholic Diocese of Lansing
300 W. Ottawa St.
Lansing, MI 48933-1577

"Francis does something that no other Christian saint has ever done. He doesn't talk about our stewardship over the world. He speaks of our 'creatureliness', that we're not stewards, but we're creatures -- that there's an interdependency between all the elements of the earth, and we're one part of that creation. So it takes it out of the realm of taking care of and attending to creation. It puts it in the realm of co-existing with creation in a peaceful way and in a reverential way."

Franciscan, Father Brian Carroll, interviewed in "The Life of St. Francis by Giotto di Bondone."

Dear Mr. Garriepy:

Per our previous discussions, we are providing you with our progress and an update regarding the ten acres located on the corner of Pauline and Maple, hereafter referred to as Dicken Woods. We have included our proposed timeline formed in collaboration with leadership from the City of Ann Arbor Parks and Recreation Department so that you and others can see the anticipated timeframe for consideration of this property.

We strongly believe that due to our organizational strength, public outreach, and popular support, our proposed plan will come to fruition. We have received encouragement from city council representatives, members of the Ann Arbor Park Advisory Commission, and numerous organizations and individuals. Members of Friends of Dicken Woods have personally pledged monies for this effort in excess of \$30,000 to-date, and are currently engaged in effective fundraising activities scheduled during this summer. The Friends have committed to raise \$50,000 towards the purchase, and we are ahead of schedule in reaching our goal.

Progress to date

The Friends have been extraordinarily productive and extremely active, in the best traditions of an Ann Arbor grassroots campaign. The attached letter of support from Dicken Elementary Principal Kathy Scarnnechia states: "The commitment of this group has been astonishing and reflects the caring nature of the entire neighborhood This opportunity for the community to come together around such a productive and beneficial project has been a positive example for the children of Dicken to witness, as they learn to be responsible and active citizens."

Following is a list of accomplishments to date:

- Formed Friends of Dicken Woods in February 2003 with monthly meetings since formation.
- Walked the land with representative of Washtenaw County Drain Commissioner's Office (March 2003).
- Contacted management boards of Allen's Creek and Mallett's Creek Watershed Groups (March 2003).
- Contacted representatives of Ann Arbor Public School System environmental education coordinator's office (Winter 2002/2003).
- Commissioned independent environmental assessment (March 2003).
- Established web site (March 2003).
- Established mailing list (March 2003).
- Ordered and distributed yard signs (April 2003).
- Conducted neighborhood water-issues survey (spring 2003).
- Met with the Diocese of Lansing to discuss purchase options (May 2003).
- Met with Mayor John Hieftje a number of times (spring 2003).
- Met with Councilperson Margie Teall a number of times (spring 2003).
- Incorporated as a non-profit organization (May 2003).
- Met with Councilperson Wendy Woods (May 2003).
- Met with Ron Olson, Superintendent, City Parks & Recreation Department (May and June 2003).
- Received advice and counsel from Washtenaw Land Trust (May 2003).
- Contacted Councilperson Marcia Higgins (May 2003).
- Ordered and distributed second batch of yard signs (May 2003).
- Planned for garage sale fundraiser (set for June 27/28).
- Planned for concert fundraiser (set for August 21).
- Built mailing lists for neighborhood and for Dicken Elementary School families (May 2003).
- Consulted with fundraising professionals (June 2003).
- Released first Press Release (June 2003).
- Held first annual "Clean Dicken Woods" day (June 2003).
- Presented at City Council Caucus meeting (June 2003).
- Contacted Council member Robert Johnson (June 2003).
- Met with State Representative Chris Kolb (June 2003).
- Ordered and distributed third batch of yard signs (June 2003).
- Filed for tax exempt 501 (c)(3) status (June 2003).
- Began active fundraising with contributions from Friends of Dicken Woods (June 2003).
- Contacted community groups and received letters of support from Huron River Watershed Council, Allen's Creek Watershed Group, Sierra Club-Huron Valley Group, Superintendent of Ann Arbor Public Schools, and the Principal of Dicken Elementary School (June 2003).
- Presented at City Park Advisory Commission's Park Acquisition Subcommittee meeting (June 2003).

- Met with City’s Manager of Natural Area Preservation Division, Parks & Rec. Dept. (June 2003).
- Prepared justification to PAC for how Dicken Woods fits with the City’s park acquisition master plan (June 2003).
- Presented at June 17 PAC meeting.

Proposed Timeline

The Park Advisory Commission (PAC) is charged with recommending to the City Council the disposition of a special millage passed in 2000 by the citizens of Ann Arbor to support the acquisition of park land. The City Council must ultimately approve the recommendations to allow for the purchase to occur. We have presented four times to the PAC, and have made a difference, with growing support due to our outreach efforts and the strength of our arguments vis-a-vis the PAC’s own land acquisition criteria (see Appendix D for details).

As outlined in Appendix A, the Park Advisory Commission (PAC) has approved obtaining an appraisal of your property to establish an estimate of its value as required by city policy. This is only done when there is serious interest in potentially pursuing a parcel of land. While not a guarantee of purchase, it does imply an active interest. The appraisal will be presented in a closed door meeting July 15th to the PAC, which will then deliberate upon this parcel in light of other competing land acquisition priorities. Following these discussions, the city staff will be given guidance about pursuing this property. Should there be successful negotiations, the PAC would recommend to City Council to approve a sales agreement for the property pending a successful class one environmental assessment. If the City Council approves of the purchase, a closing would be scheduled based upon the execution of the approved sales agreement.

Estimated Date	Task
June-July	Appraisal of property
July 15	PAC review in closed door session appraisal and discuss support
July- August	City staff pursue advice and recommendation from PAC regarding the property
September	If successful, recommendation to City Council for approval of a sales agreement contingent upon a successful environmental assessment
October	Close on the property

Community Support

Our efforts have struck a chord in the local environmental and educational communities. We are building a strong coalition of supporters from important organizations that should have a voice in this undertaking.

The Huron River Watershed Council, an influential coalition of watershed residents, businesses and local governments, says:

Preserving Dicken Woods as a natural area would provide many important benefits to the environment, the wildlife, and the schoolchildren and citizens of Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County. Open spaces with natural vegetation, such as Dicken Woods, provide important ecological services including infiltration of rainwater and snowmelt to recharge groundwater, protection against erosion on steep slopes, and evapotranspiration by trees that helps to maintain the hydrologic cycle. This property in its natural condition is unique as it is one of the few locations where Allens Creek flows above ground; the vast majority of this creek is piped underground, which has caused numerous problems for City neighborhoods including flooding. In addition, the site contains wooded wetlands in the headwaters area of Allens Creek and steep slopes with moderate erosion hazard on the northern portion of the Woods.

By preserving the site and enhancing its biological diversity, the Woods will continue to offer the important ecological services mentioned above, and aesthetic and recreation benefits to residents and schoolchildren. By developing the site, the features unique to the site are lost and cannot be mitigated wholly. Development on the site only will exacerbate the problems of water pollution and water quantity that the people of the Middle Huron Watershed must address.

And the Sierra Club – Huron Valley Group says:

For the Dicken Woods site, we are particularly concerned about maintaining open space with water holding capacity. The current woodland and wetland structure of the site provides water retention and water filtration for the surrounding land and creeksheds. The range of slopes on the property, along with the soil conditions, presents drainage issues that would be greatly exacerbated by development on the property, resulting in flooding of adjacent homesites and school property. Development would also negatively impact the already-stressed Allen Creek and Malletts Creek watersheds.

There are now dozens of individuals from a variety of organizations that are aware of our efforts and support our proposed park. We have attached the letters of support in Appendix B for your review. The letters represent environmental groups, our state representative, the Superintendent of the Ann Arbor Public Schools, the Principal of Dicken Elementary School, among others. Below is a listing of the organizations and individuals that have written in support of preserving Dicken Woods as a natural area:

1. Huron River Watershed Council
2. Allen's Creek Watershed Group
3. Sierra Club - Huron Valley Group
4. Dr. George Fornero, Superintendent, Ann Arbor Public Schools
5. Kathy Scarnecchia, Principal, Dicken Elementary School
6. Representative Chris Kolb

Financial Terms

The Friends of Dicken Woods are working diligently to raise private donations as well as to obtain public financial support. The financial terms for an offer on the property will be dependent upon the ongoing evaluation from the City Park Advisory Commission (PAC) and negotiations between the city and the Catholic Diocese of Lansing. The Friends will work to help facilitate this process.

Appropriateness of this Property for a Park

We have collected a large body of information, commissioned an environmental analysis, and examined the City's Master Plan (West Area Plan) and the City's Parks Recreation and Open Space (PROS) master plan. Support for preserving Dicken Woods comes from the Malletts Creek Restoration Plan (produced by a partnership among the City of Ann Arbor, Pittsfield Township and Washtenaw County and approved by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality), the Allen Creek Watershed Management Plan (approved by the Michigan DEQ), the Huron River Watershed Council (a coalition of watershed residents, businesses and local governments), the Allen Creek Watershed Group, the Sierra Club-Huron Valley Group, the Ann Arbor Public Schools, and most importantly the city's own park acquisition master plan (PROS plan).

These woods score exceedingly well based upon an evaluation using the criteria for the PROS plan from *Section C: Park and Recreation and System Wide goals* and *Section E: Land Use: Planning and Acquisition Principles*. (See Appendix D for details.)

There are many reasons, as outlined in the PROS Plan, for preserving different kinds of open space, including frontier woodlands such as Dicken Woods. We further believe Dicken Woods has additional important qualities worth supporting and preserving, especially its unique dual role in the Allen's and Malletts Creeksheds. In addition, as a natural area with trails, Dicken Woods will serve as an invaluable resource for Dicken Elementary School allowing innovative curriculum development, as well as forming a neighborhood and city asset. This land also serves as a source of pride and an anchor for our tightly knit community.

Conclusion

In closing, what appeared to us merely a dream a few months ago is now much closer to fruition. We truly believe that our vision for Dicken Woods is the most logical progression in the use of this land. This is true when one considers the valuable attributes that this parcel will contribute to the City of Ann Arbor, its park system and the Huron River, the dedication of our members, and our commitment to impact the ultimate disposition of this property. We trust that this plan provides you with the updates that you are seeking. We welcome your comments or questions and are available for teleconference or face to face meetings at a time and location of your convenience.

And finally, thank you to the Catholic Diocese of Lansing. Thank you for the opportunity to pursue this effort and for giving us the chance to coalesce the necessary

financial and human resources to ensure all of our satisfaction in the ultimate outcome of this process.

We are on the verge of a wonderful partnership among the Catholic Diocese of Lansing, the City of Ann Arbor, and the Friends of Dicken Woods. The outcome of this partnership will provide a higher quality of life for future Ann Arborites, a cleaner Huron River, as well as a better education, and a stronger bond with the natural world for all future Dicken Elementary School students. This is a vision we hope the Diocese will find worthy of support.

Sincerely,

Erik Stalhandske, President

Tom Ivacko, Vice-President

Naela Jenkins, Vice-President

On behalf of the Executive and Steering Committee
And Members of the Friends of Dicken Woods