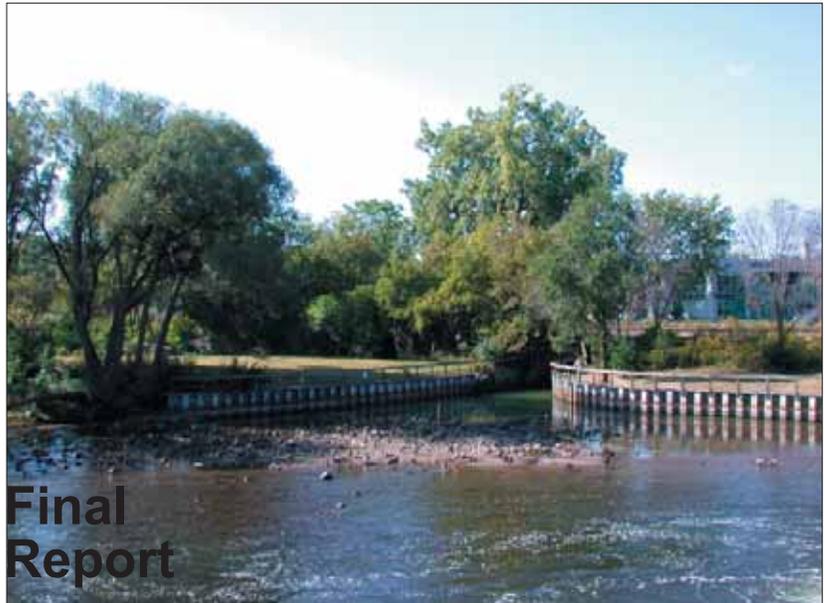




# **The Allen Creek Greenway ~**

## **Findings and Recommendations**



Allen Creek outlet to the Huron River

**Allen Creek Greenway Task Force**  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

**16 March 2007**

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# **Findings and Recommendations**

**A  
Report  
by**

**Allen Creek Greenway  
Task Force**



## **Members**

**Linda Berauer  
Jean Carlberg  
James D'Amour  
Larissa Larsen  
Barbara Murphy  
Peter Osler  
Peter Pollack  
Sandi Smith  
Margaret Wong**

**and  
Sue McCormick  
City Liaison**

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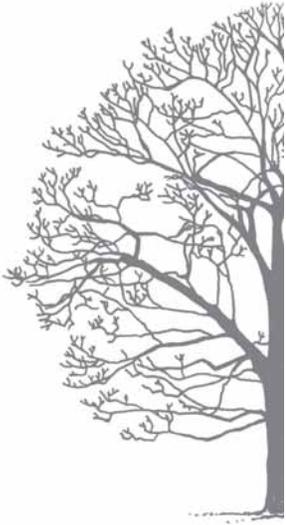
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## Section 1. Introduction



**Help shape the Allen Creek Greenway**



**A Lecture Series**

**Joan Nassauer**  
Professor, School of Natural Resources and Environment

**Ecological and Community Benefits of Greenways**

Tuesday, **April 11, 7pm**  
Detroit Edison Center Ground Floor Community Room (southeast corner of Main and William)  
Prof. Nassauer specializes in landscape ecology, landscape perception, design and planning, watershed planning and management.

**Tom Woiwode**  
Director, The Greenways Initiative  
Community Foundation for Southwestern Michigan

**Successful Greenways in Southeastern Michigan**

Tuesday, **April 25, 7pm**  
Location TBA

The Greenways Initiative is a five-year project that has helped communities create and expand greenways in seven counties in Southeastern Michigan.

**Public Workshops**

**1A Saturday, April 22; 8:30 am to Noon**  
**1B Saturday, April 29; 8:30 am to Noon**  
2nd Floor Ballroom, Courthouse Square  
100 S. 4th Ave. at E. Huron

This advertisement was paid for by the Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority in demonstration of their support for alternative transportation and an Allen Creek Greenway

**Help shape the Allen Creek Greenway**



**Community Events**

**Public Workshop 1A**

**The Big Picture: Allen Creek Greenway in Context**

Saturday, **April 22, 8:30 am to Noon**  
2nd Floor Ballroom, Courthouse Square  
100 S. 4th Ave. at E. Huron

**Tom Woiwode**  
Director, The Greenways Initiative  
Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan

**Successful Greenways in Southeastern Michigan**

Tuesday, **April 25, 7pm**  
Cobblestone Farm Barn, 2nd Floor  
2781 Packard St.

The Greenways Initiative is a five-year project that has helped communities create and expand greenways in seven counties in Southeastern Michigan.

**Public Workshop 1B**

**A Closer Look: Site Specific Proposals for the City's Parcels**

Saturday, **April 29, 8:30 am to Noon**  
2nd Floor Ballroom, Courthouse Square  
100 S. 4th Ave. at E. Huron

This advertisement was paid for by the Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority in demonstration of their support for alternative transportation and an Allen Creek Greenway

**Help shape the Allen Creek Greenway**



**Public Workshop 1B  
A Closer Look:  
Site Specific  
Potentials for the  
City's Parcels**

Saturday, April 29, 2006

**AGENDA**

- 8:30 a.m. Registration and information displays**
- 9 a.m. Presentation**
- 10 a.m. Break**
- 10:15 a.m. Facilitated brainstorming and discussion of three city-owned sites**
- 11:55 a.m. Adjournment**

**OBJECTIVE:** To consult the public on the potential of the Greenway and specifically on how to incorporate the city-owned properties that are a part of its path.

This workshop was funded by the Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority in demonstration of its support for alternative transportation and an Allen Creek Greenway

**Help shape the Allen Creek Greenway**



**Presentation and Public Comment  
The Greenway to Date ~  
City Sites and Connections**

**6:30 pm  
Wednesday  
August 2**  
2nd Floor Ballroom, Courthouse Square  
100 S. 4th Ave. at E. Huron

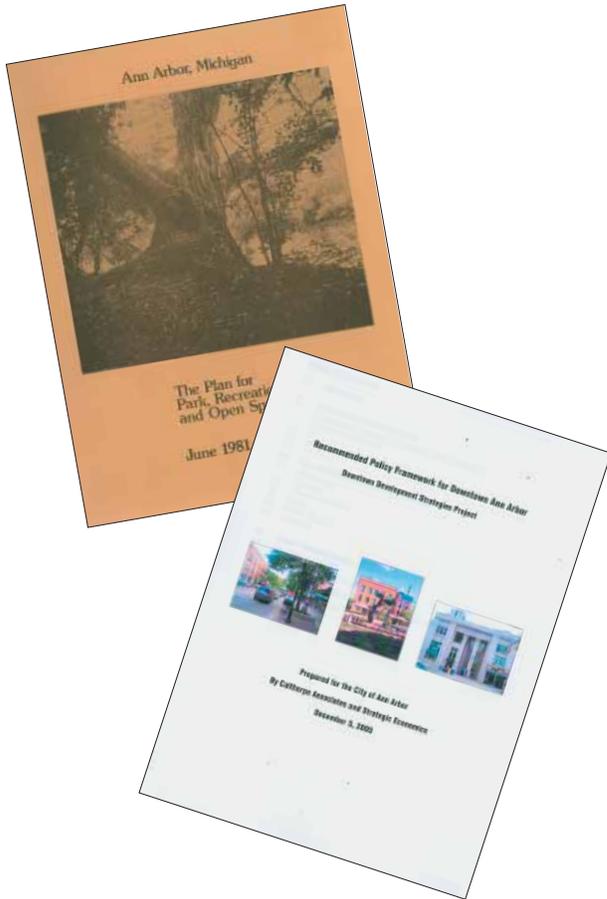
**Agenda**

- 6:30 pm Registration and information displays**
- 6:45 pm Presentation**
- 7:45 pm Q & A**
- 8:00 pm Public comment**
- 9:30 pm Adjournment**

**OBJECTIVE:** To hear reactions from the public on the evolution of the Greenway to date. More specifically, to discuss preliminary proposals for the treatment of city-owned properties in the Allen Creek valley and the connections between them.

For more information:  
[www.a2gov.org/greenway](http://www.a2gov.org/greenway)  
and  
[ACGreenway@ci.ann-arbor.mi.us](mailto:ACGreenway@ci.ann-arbor.mi.us)

This advertisement was paid for by the Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority in demonstration of its support for alternative transportation and an Allen Creek Greenway



## Section 1: Introduction

This report and its supporting documentation are products of an effort, guided by the Allen Creek Greenway Task Force (ACGTF), to substantiate the potential for an Allen Creek Greenway. The idea of an open space and pathway generally following the Allen Creek storm drain has been discussed for decades. The topic's presence in the City's planning documents can be traced back to the 1981 *Plan for Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces*.

The pattern of community events and City studies over the last few years involving urban development in general, and potential impacts on the downtown in particular, include the Downtown Residential Density Task Force (citizen volunteers, Sept. 2004) and the Recommended Policy Framework for Downtown Ann Arbor (Calthorpe Associates, Dec. 2005). These studies and supportive citizen advocacy helped lead to City Council action establishing this task force to consider the Allen Creek valley as a greenway. Council's enabling Resolution, R-285-6-05, can be found on page 6 of this Introduction.

### Work of the Task Force

Since its beginnings in September of 2005, the ACGTF has been gathering data in the attempt to define and frame key factors to consider; evolve options for the three City-owned sites and the connections between them; seek comment from the Ann Arbor community; and pursue consensus within the Task Force so as to present recommendations consistent with Council's enabling resolution. This report summarizes these activities and the process leading to the Task Force's findings.

As a final report to Council and the community, it is intended to accomplish two primary purposes:

1. **objectively present key considerations, and,**
2. **offer recommendations and options based on clearly defined priorities.**

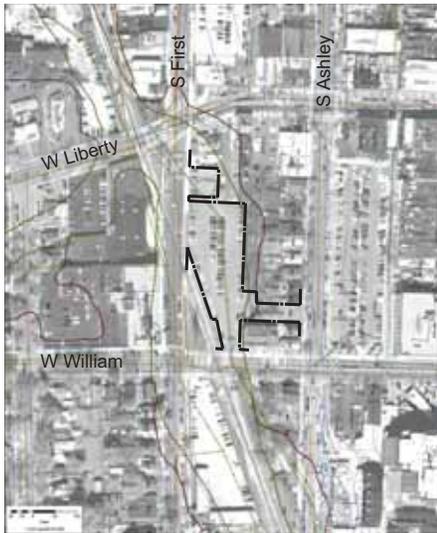
The Task Force reached consensus on several aspects of establishing a greenway in the Allen Creek valley.

**First**, and most significant, is agreement that there can and should be an Allen Creek Greenway, and that, at a minimum, it should occupy the floodway portion of the City's sites in the Creek's floodplain.

**Second**, the Task Force authored a Vision, Definition and 12 Planning Principles to help guide community discussion.

Three City sites

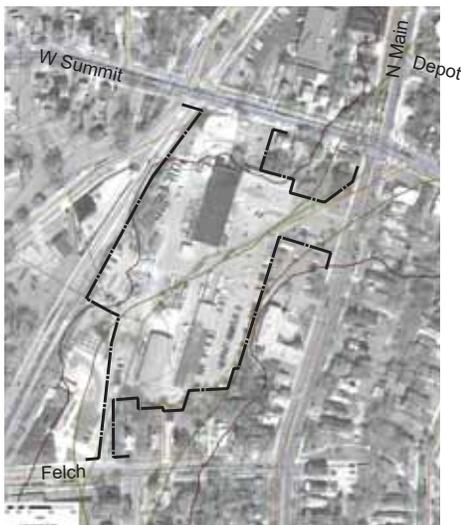




Site #1 First and William



Site #2 415 W. Washington



Site #3 721 N. Main

**Third**, the community should take a long term view toward continuing to refine the vision along with short term actions to begin implementation.

The Task Force also reached consensus about how to treat one of the three sites listed below that the City owns along the route of the Greenway. The three sites are:

- **First and William Streets** parking lot, a Greenway garden recommendation
- **415 West Washington** City maintenance yard, with alternatives A, B & C
- **721 North Main** City maintenance yard, with alternatives A & B

### Findings and Recommendations

This report is presented in six sections to facilitate use of its content:

1. **Introduction** ~ the background and approach to this study
2. **Context** ~ a discussion of both area-wide and site specific considerations
3. **Recommendations** ~ a description of possibilities
4. **Implementation** ~ next steps and conclusions
5. **Appendix** ~ information related to the findings
6. **Supplemental appendix** ~ additional background and general information.

As suggested above, the Task Force has attempted to collect, consider and communicate findings in 2 categories: key factors, which tend to be objective by their nature; and, recommendations, which are based on the interpretation of facts and tend toward opinion.

**A note of appreciation** is offered to City staff who kept ACGTF members informed as our discussions proceeded to evaluate and prioritize data. We wish to thank Council for giving us the opportunity to work together, and to thank the citizenry who attended regular meetings, lectures and the 3 workshops, who sent email, and who care so deeply about this community.

Lastly, as a City Task Force, the focus by necessity has been on existing City or other publicly owned property, including streets, sidewalks and easements. While we are aware of the implications of this study on adjacent privately owned land, that specific discussion must be left for others as part of next steps.

City Council Resolution, 15 August 2005

R-258-6-05

D-8

RESOLUTION CREATING A TASK FORCE TO PLAN A NEW GREENWAY

Whereas, The City of Ann Arbor has expended considerable resources over a period of years in the creation of a beautiful and scenic Greenway along the Huron River that is used yearly by thousands of walkers and cyclists;

Whereas, The Huron River Greenway will extend "border to border" across the City along the river and link up to riverfront parks and other greenways that will stretch out beyond the City limits connecting to still more greenways;

Whereas, This great Huron River Greenway is nearing completion and will require further staff work and investment and must remain a priority even as plans are developed for the new Greenway addition;

Whereas, The opportunity and desire exists to create yet another Greenway along the Ann Arbor Railroad tracks that will connect to and complement the Huron River Greenway and allow still more City residents to enjoy the benefits of walking and cycling on green pathways;

Whereas, This new Greenway could place a pathway along the western edge of Downtown and beyond to the South and to the North to the Huron River Greenway;

Whereas, If this new addition to the Greenway system of Ann Arbor is to become a reality, work needs to begin soon, the Ann Arbor Railroad needs to be further engaged in conversation with the goal of obtaining an easement or easements, and grant funds need to be pursued;

Whereas, The path of this new Greenway could intersect with three City owned parcels: the current City Garages at 415 W. Washington and 721 N. Main, and the City owned surface parking lot at First and William;

Whereas, Any Greenway path shall include the possibility for future rail transit use;

Whereas, The City is building a new maintenance facility and plans to vacate all or some of the City owned land at 415 W. Washington and 721 N. Main when garage operations are moved to the new site;

Whereas, The First and William site will be needed for parking for at least three years as new parking is developed;

Whereas, A task force made up of City residents, residents who serve on City boards, and City Council, will be needed to work with City Staff to develop a recommendation to City Council for the development of the new Greenway that will complement and connect to the existing Huron River Greenway;

D-8

Whereas, A planning effort for the downtown area is underway and the City has engaged Calthorpe Associates to work with residents, City Staff, the Downtown Planning Steering Committee, the Planning Commission, the Downtown Development Association and City Council; and

RESOLVED, The City Administrator shall begin substantive discussions with the Ann Arbor Railway to gain their cooperation in the creation of a Greenway along the Railroad Right of Way;

RESOLVED, That City Council will, no later than September 6, 2005, appoint a nine member task force that will serve until September 30, 2006, to work with City Staff and others involved in the Downtown planning process to develop a recommendation for a new Greenway that will follow roughly along the Ann Arbor Railroad Right of Way to the west of Downtown and connect with the existing Huron River Greenway;

RESOLVED, The New Greenway Task Force will include one member of the Parks Advisory Commission, one member of the Planning Commission, one member of the Downtown Development Association, one member of City Council and other City Residents.

RESOLVED, The New Greenway Task Force will develop a preliminary recommendation to be delivered to the Downtown Planning Steering Committee no later than November 1, 2005, and a final recommendation to be delivered to the Planning Commission, The Parks Advisory Commission and City Council no later than October 1, 2006. To assist the Task Force in making its recommendations, it shall conduct a series of public workshops, and consult with independent design, parks, and watershed professionals, in addition to its work with City Parks and Planning Staff and Commissions;

RESOLVED, That the area of the City properties at 415 W. Washington and 721 N. Main within the floodway will be included in the new Greenway. The remaining portion of these sites will be reserved for mixed use, which could include additional park or Greenway area, space for non profit organizations, art, housing, and/or commercial entities; and

RESOLVED, The New Greenway Task Force will include in its final report a recommendation for the eventual use of the City owned property at First and William that is currently used as a surface parking lot.

Sponsored by: Mayor Hieftje and Council Members Johnson, Easthope, Woods, Greden, Teall, Lowenstein and Carlberg

As Amended August 15, 2005

APPROVED BY ANN ARBOR CITY COUNCIL

August 15, 2005

CITY CLERK ANN ARBOR, MI

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## Section 2. **Context**



721 N. Main

The three City sites seen from the Southwest



415 W. Washington

First and William

## Section 2. **Context**

The process of collecting, understanding, evaluating and using data was key to reaching closure for the Task Force's report. Determining what was available was the initial step; judging its relevance was the next step. Data that was out of date, incomplete or unavailable soon surfaced. Contemplating the role and significance of missing information was an exercise in moving forward with care; resolving how to use mixed levels of data was critical to issuing this report with clarity and transparency.

The time frame given the Task Force to provide recommendations required use of currently available specific data and of the conceptual level implications of data not yet available. Uneven information could not be treated as an inhibitor to decision-making; it was but another factor to evaluate.

### **Considerations**

The information that follows has been gathered into categories to objectively present key factors both individually and as one item might influence the others. Findings are a synopsis of each subject covered. More complete documentation of data can be found in the attached Appendix and Supplemental Appendix.

Categories used to consider and frame recommendations for the Greenway in the Allen Creek valley include:

- City setting
- A brief history of Allen Creek
- On-going policy efforts
- The valley as City landscape
- The valley as Greenway
- The floodplain and water management
- Open space and recreation
- Safety
- Economic impacts
- Changes in time

### **City Setting**

The role of a downtown today is different from that of the past. Downtown was the place for a community's economic, social, cultural, educational and recreational activities. Post World War II's automobile use and new development patterns changed the very nature of urban life in the United States by spreading and diversifying the locations where people could live, and where goods and services could be found. Today, use of the "electronic highway" (the internet) is changing social, cultural and economic patterns once again.



Activity along Huron Street, c. 1908



A summer's eve on Main Street, c. 1990



Allen Creek's industrial past, c. 1895

Ann Arbor's center has evolved, too, and remains a place where people work, go to school, play and, to a lesser degree, live and shop. Efforts are underway to increase Central Business District (CBD) activity by changing zoning to encourage a more residential downtown. Adjacent residential neighborhoods, several with historic district designations, also contribute to the numbers of people living within easy walking/biking distance of downtown.

The experiences one has in and adjacent to our downtown are derived from the sum total of its interior and exterior spaces, and its various venues for events and activities. Downtown is also the product of human actions over time. Its character evolves from the combination of daytime and nighttime, weekday and weekend, academic season (grades K-12 and The University's calendar), the natural cycle of spring-summer-fall-winter seasons, and the cultural calendar including University Musical Society, Ann Arbor Symphony, Summer Festival, the Art Fairs, parades, etc. Audiences for this rich and eclectic menu vary as much as the events themselves.

At the same time, urban and built amenities are incomplete without a complementary natural infrastructure that includes, but can go beyond, a typical suburban park. The Huron River, while not distant in miles, is outside the typical perception of Ann Arbor's downtown. The Allen Creek Greenway can help to change that current reality.

### A Brief History of Allen Creek

Named in 1824 after one of Ann Arbor's founders, John Allen, Allen Creek helped form the City's identity. Settlements were built along the creek to take advantage of a ready source of water. As the 19th century progressed, industries that required water located there, too: a flour mill, tanneries, a foundry, and breweries, among others. The flat, floodplain topography of the valley, and the industries within it, led the Ann Arbor Railroad in 1878 to lay its tracks parallel to the creek. By century's end, the pastoral nature of the lower Allen Creek valley had changed to an industrial one, and the water quality and ecosystem of the creek diminished.

Residential development in the late 19th century immediately to the west of the main branch resulted in the continuing increase of impervious surface in the creek's catchment area. That area is now the historic neighborhood known as the Old West Side. By the early 1920's, the creek's water quality was such that property owners demanded the City put the creek into a storm sewer.