

THE CHARGING STATION

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF A²ZERO AND
THE ANN ARBOR OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATIONS



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ABOUT THE EDITOR



Michelle Bennett (she/her), City Planner in the City's Planning department, supports the city's long-range land use planning efforts, including the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. She's looking forward to implementing the plan's strategies with other city departments to advance its sustainability goals. Reach out to mbennett@a2gov.org for more any questions about the planning process.



A resident leaves feedback at an open house, March 2024. Source: Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority.

WELCOME

Welcome from the City of Ann Arbor's Office of Sustainability and Innovations (OSI). In this special issue of the Charging Station, OSI is delighted to share details about the third draft of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. If you are interested in learning more about any of the topics mentioned in this edition, see more detail online at a2gov.org/sustainability and a2gov.org/planning. As always, thank you for your interest in sustainability activities in Ann Arbor!

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Equity and justice are at the center of A²ZERO and staff in OSI are continuing to ground our work in these critical principles. In that light, we'd like to take a moment to honor the geographic and historic space we share. We acknowledge that the land the City of Ann Arbor occupies is the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary lands of the Anishinaabe and Wyandot peoples. We further acknowledge that our city stands, like almost all property in the United States, on lands obtained, generally in unconscionable ways, from indigenous peoples. The taking of this land was formalized by the Treaty of Detroit in 1807. Knowing where we live, work, study, and recreate does not change the past, but a thorough understanding of the ongoing consequences of this past can empower us in our work to create a future that supports human flourishing and justice for all individuals.

SUSTAINABILITY AND LAND USE

THE COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN IN ITS THIRD DRAFT

The city's planning department is working through its third draft of **the Comprehensive Land Use Plan (Comp Plan)**, a long-range planning document that outlines a vision for development across the city for the next 25 years. One of its primary purposes is to provide direction for updating the City's Unified Development Code (UDC). City Council's resolution directed the Comp Plan to carefully consider and implement portions of the A²ZERO Carbon Neutrality Plan where applicable through land use and development. The planning team has taken that charge seriously in our three goal areas: Housing and Neighborhoods, Economy and Opportunity, and Infrastructure and Services. In fact, sustainability is one of the plan's core values, along with affordability, equity, and dynamism.

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS: WHY THE PUSH FOR DENSITY?

The strategies in this section call for permitting increased residential density across the city's neighborhoods, including our corridors and hubs. Density is the antidote to sprawl that has historically and indiscriminately depleted farmland and natural features on a regional scale. With almost 80,000 commuters coming to Ann Arbor daily, the Comp Plan calls for providing more housing options for those who want to live closer to work. This strategy supports the A²ZERO Carbon Neutrality Plan's goal of reducing vehicle miles traveled by 50%. The Housing Appendix shows that Ann Arbor's annual tons of emissions by auto ranks the second lowest (after Detroit) when compared to the cities where many of these commuters live. While it may feel counterintuitive that density is a practice of sustainability, research around cities' energy efficiency is well known. Due to greater transportation options, smaller units and yards, and newer energy-efficient construction, cities generally consume less per capita than their suburban or rural counterparts.

Table 1: Auto Emissions

Commuter Cities	Emissions From Auto Use, by Tonnes
Detroit	3.53
Ann Arbor	4.05
Ypsilanti	4.15
Westland	4.81
Livonia	6.00
Saline	6.36

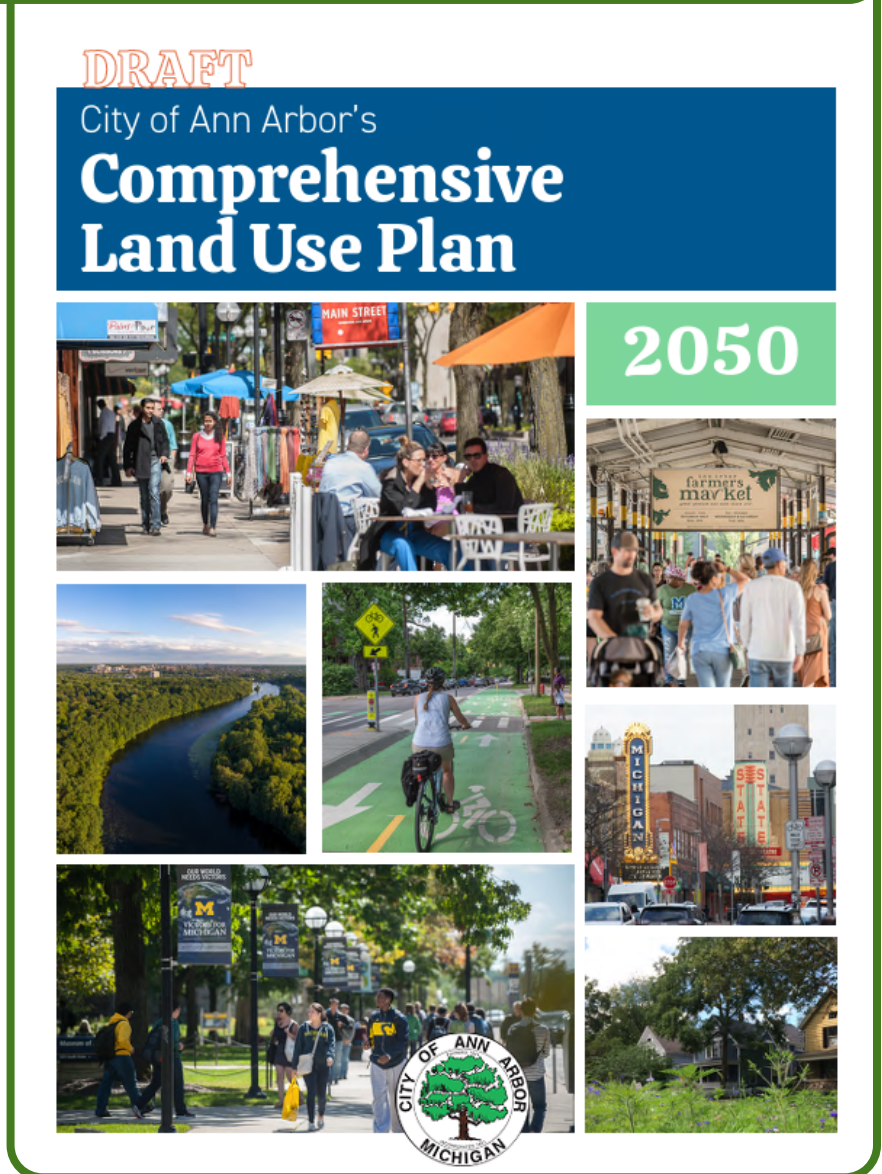
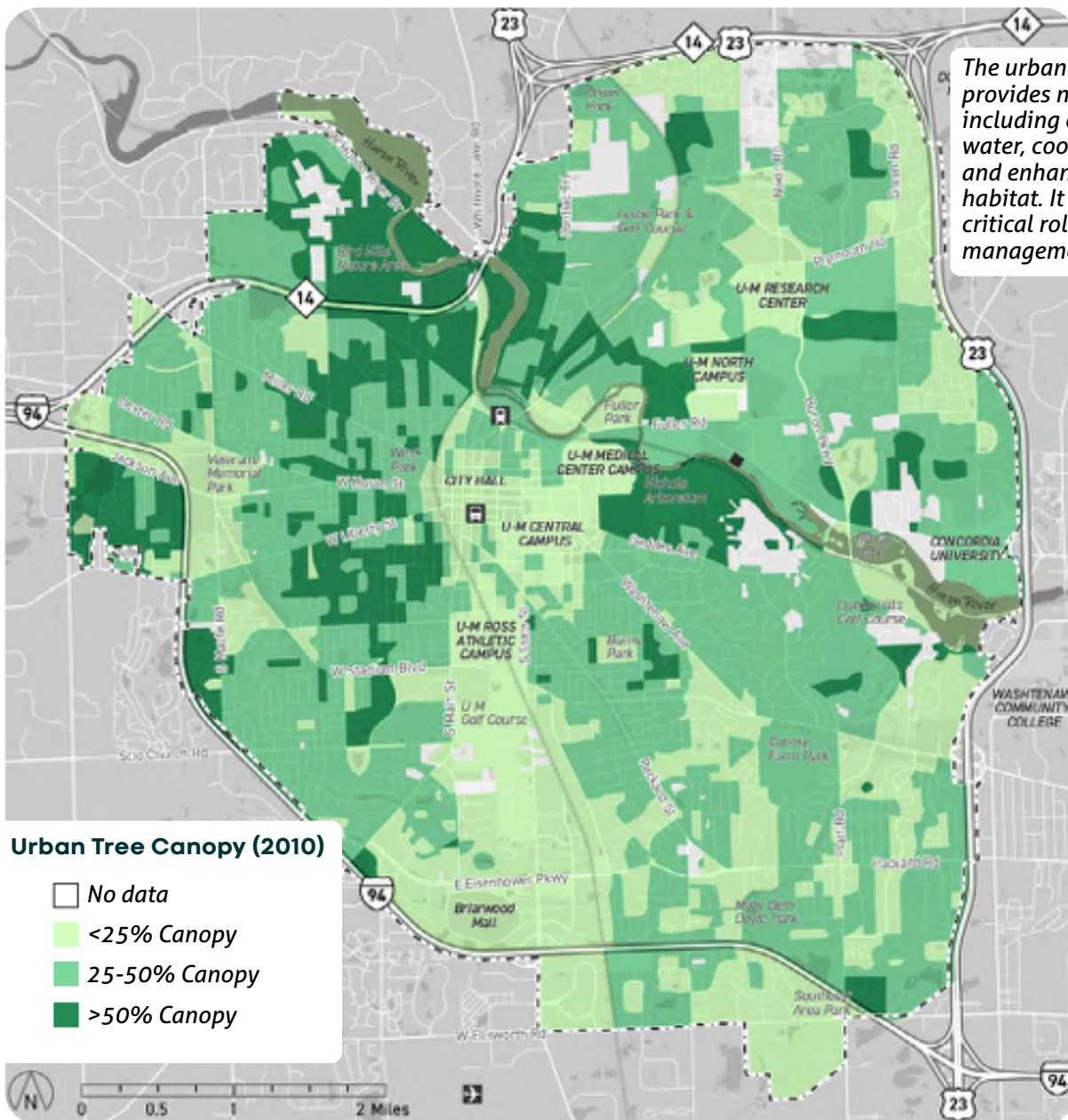


Table source: Center for Neighborhood Technology

COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE AND CIRCULARITY

STRATEGY FIVE OF A²ZERO: CIRCULAR ECONOMY



The urban tree canopy provides numerous benefits, including cleaner air and water, cooler temperatures, and enhanced wildlife habitat. It also plays a critical role in stormwater management.

ECONOMY AND OPPORTUNITY: LET'S GET CIRCULAR!

One of the A²ZERO Carbon Neutrality Plan's goals is to move toward a circular economy. One input of an economic system that reuses, repairs, shares, and lends to extend an item's life is land. "Messier" land uses may be required to enable uses like repair shops, re-use centers, and storage facilities across the city without causing conflict with nearby residences. The Office of Sustainability and Innovations (OSI) has invited planners to participate in the development of the city's first Circular Economy Plan to reinforce our shared commitment to this goal.

Economic development at the local level is closely tied to land use planning. The Comprehensive Plan re-envisioned major shopping centers as "hubs" (e.g. Arborland, Westgate, etc.) to see if their redevelopment can more effectively align with our values. Can they be less car-dependent destinations? Can they generate more tax revenue for the city to use for affordable housing or sustainability projects? Can they be places to live that put people closer to their daily needs and lower households' transportation costs? Promising planning practices say that mixed-use and multi-modal hubs help to increase walkability and bikeability, support business, and maintain a high quality of life.

STRIKING A BALANCE

NATURAL FEATURES AND NATURAL FEELINGS



Nature-based solutions such as rain gardens can both help address stormwater run-off and beautify the streetscape.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES: THE NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Natural features are an important part of Ann Arbor. Throughout the Comp Plan, they're recognized as providing valuable services and support. Protections for seven natural features are already a part of the UDC for site-planned developments: steep slopes, landmark trees, wetlands, woodlands, water courses, floodplains, and endangered species.

One of the largest concerns the public has shared is potential tree canopy loss if denser development is prioritized. Notably, mapping the city's natural features shows that most of them are within public control. In addition to maintaining existing regulations for private development, the Comp Plan supports other city efforts to increase tree canopy. Many of these initiatives are led by OSI, including the 10,000 Trees Initiative, the grant-funded Tree Equity project that focuses plantings in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and [1,000 new trees planned for public streets](#). The city remains committed to enhancing the resilience of our people and our natural systems.

The Comp Plan supports the transition to clean energy. Legally, requirements that exceed the state of Michigan's Building Code cannot be enforced – the city can only incentivize greener building practices. As technology advances, the planning team in coordination with OSI continue to develop incentives for higher performing buildings and full electrification to reduce carbon emissions. Moreover, tracking metrics for new builds in terms of energy efficiency and renewable energy will help inform to the refinement of incentives over time.

"THIS ISN'T AS TERRIBLE AS I THOUGHT"

This is a direct quote from an attendee at an engagement event regarding the draft plan. It captures the complex emotion around a plan that attempts to reconcile many divergent and valid ideas to prepare for an unpredictable future. In a plan with such a large scope, no one will be completely satisfied with its direction. That's true of most things in local democracy. And that's the tension that underpins many long-range planning exercises: how to be flexible enough to stay nimble in the face of potential systemic shocks while providing enough clarity for local support and concrete next steps. It's not an easy task but one that motivates the planning team to seek an equitable balance.

Read the third draft of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan at a2gov.org/planning

COLLABORATOR SPOTLIGHT: THERIDE

CATCH THERIDE AND THIS INTERVIEW!



TheRide

The Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority (TheRide) is the public transit system serving the greater Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti area. TheRide provides safe, reliable, and accessible public transportation. TheRide offers a variety of services including fixed-route, paratransit, and demand-responsive services among others. TheRide's goal is to connect people to the places that matter most, whether that be work, school, health services, or community events. This month we spoke with Jeff Pfeifer, Manager of Public Affairs and Community Engagement at TheRide.



One of TheRide's buses as it drives past Michigan Stadium.

How have you been working towards your organization's goals recently?

We've been focused on expanding mobility options, improving service reliability, and investing in cleaner, more efficient infrastructure. Our Long-Range Plan, TheRide 2045, has allowed us to increase service frequency, enhance rider amenities, such as bus stop shelters and benches, and upgrade our technology to make it easier for riders to plan and track their trips in real time. Beyond operational developments, TheRide has begun planning and designing for various capital projects, such as the renovation and expansion of our Ypsilanti Transit Center and bus rapid transit lanes.

How does sustainability factor into TheRide's goals and projects?

Sustainability is central to everything we do. Public transit is one of the most effective ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and congestion, and TheRide is focused on long-term environmental sustainability. In July 2024, TheRide was awarded a \$25m Low-and-No Emission grant by the FTA, which included a pilot program for hydrogen buses. Additionally, our getDowntown program, which is a partnership with TheRide, Ann Arbor DDA, and the City of Ann Arbor, that provides commuting programs and services to downtown Ann Arbor employees and employers, holds annual challenges, such as the winter Conquer the Cold and May Commuter Challenge, incentivizing individuals living or working in downtown Ann Arbor to choose sustainable transportation over driving alone.



COLLABORATOR SPOTLIGHT: THERIDE

CATCH THERIDE AND THIS INTERVIEW!

What are some projects you're excited to share with the community?

One of the most exciting ongoing projects is the rebuilding and expansion of the Ypsilanti Transit Center. After extensive analysis and engagement on how to upgrade the 30+ year old facility, we received federal approval this summer to proceed with a concept to triple the size of the transit center. We will begin design and other steps to prepare for construction while we aggressively pursue funding to complete the project. The new Transit Center will be the heart of Ypsilanti's expanded transit services for decades to come, and we're excited to provide riders and the community with a new transit center with enhanced comfort, convenience, and safety in the core of Downtown Ypsilanti.

How can residents take advantage of everything TheRide has to offer if they're unfamiliar?

If you're looking to learn, visit TheRide.org for more information on fares, how to plan your trip, and schedules, or stop by one of our transit centers to pick up a physical RideGuide with all our route details. We've got How-To-Ride videos for new riders to learn from and provide travel training, as well. We consistently go out into the community to interact with existing and potential riders so be sure to follow us on our social media to learn more or visit our Events page on our website.

What is something frequent riders may not know?

Many riders are surprised to learn that TheRide operates more than just fixed-route bus service; we also provide accessible services like A-Ride for individuals with disabilities and Late Night and Holiday Service through FlexRide.

Is there anything else you'd like to share about what TheRide has got going on in 2026?

In 2026, we're excited to continue our Ridership campaign, which focuses on reconnecting our community to the many benefits of public transit from saving money and reducing carbon emissions to strengthening access across the region. We're also looking forward to our team growing and hiring Motor Coach Operators (MCOs) who want to make a direct impact within our community.

Learn more and Catch TheRide at www.TheRide.org!

TheRide staff host an engagement session about the rebuilding and expansion of the Ypsilanti Transit Center.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Food assistance. With the pause of SNAP Benefits in effect as of Nov. 1, [the Ann Arbor Supportive Connections Program](#) is sharing the [Food Gatherers Food Finder resource](#) for the most up-to-date information about food resources available in Washtenaw County. [The Food Gatherers website](#) also states if you have questions about the directory of resources, to please call 734.761.2796 to speak to a staff member to help you find the program that best meets your needs, or if you're looking for help outside of Washtenaw County to call the United Way hotline at 2-1-1 for assistance.

Additionally, the Ann Arbor Farmers Market has shared the following food access update regarding the Double Up Food Bucks program:

"Effective immediately through December 31, 2025, the Double Up Food Bucks Program will make the following changes:

- The daily earning limit is lifted, meaning shoppers can now earn unlimited Double Up dollars per day (it was previously capped at \$20).
- If you have a Double Up Food Bucks card, the 90-day expiration window is removed - your earned Double Up dollars will now be valid through the end of the year.
- Both fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables with no added salt, sugar, or oil - are eligible at all participating locations.

For more information, visit www.doubleupfoodbucks.org."

Double Up Food Bucks participants can also receive a limited-time Double Up Bonus Bucks voucher of \$40. No matching SNAP purchase is required. It can be used exclusively on fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables and will be distributed onto your Double Up Cards at participating sites, or as printed vouchers for shoppers using tokens or coupons.

Ann Arbor City Council Votes Unanimously to Accept \$11 Million for District Geothermal System. Ann Arbor City Council on October 7, 2025, voted unanimously to accept nearly \$11 million (\$10,788,167) from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to implement a district-scale geothermal heating and cooling system in the Bryant neighborhood. To learn more about this project, visit [the City's geothermal heating and cooling website](#).

New All-Electric Refuse Trucks Debuted at Public Works Open House. On October 25, the City's four new all-electric refuse trucks made their debut to the public at the Public Works Open House. Residents were invited to get up close with the trucks as well as learn about the impacts these electric vehicles are having in our community. To learn more, read [the press release about the new trucks](#).

Ann Arbor Launches Air Quality Map and Alert System. The City of Ann Arbor Office of Sustainability and Innovations (OSI) is announcing a partnership with Clarity Movement (Clarity), the manufacturers of its city-wide network of 10 air quality monitors, to launch a new map displaying the current air quality index (AQI) at each of 10 monitoring locations. The new map can be found at www.a2gov.org/airquality and features a way to sign up for email alerts when AQI reaches an "unhealthy" level.

Business Rebates for Electric Leaf Blowers. [Business rebates for electric leaf blowers](#) have been reinstated through September 30, 2026, or until funding is expended. Designed to help lower the cost of transitioning from gas to electric leaf blowers in accordance with Ann Arbor's leaf blower ordinance, these rebates will be available to businesses that provide lawn care or landscaping services to properties located in Ann Arbor.

City Awards Sustaining Ann Arbor Together Grants to 10 Local Community Projects. The City of Ann Arbor held an event Oct. 7, 2025, to celebrate and present 10 local winners with Sustaining Ann Arbor Together grants, totaling more than \$80,000 in funding for community-led projects. To see the list of awardees and learn about their projects, read [the press release about the event](#).

Ann Arbor Awarded \$250,000 Grant to Advance Sustainable Energy Utility. The City of Ann Arbor has been selected to receive a \$250,000 grant from the Municipal Investment Fund (MIF) to advance its newly created Sustainable Energy Utility. The City of Ann Arbor will use the MIF grant to prepare an operational plan and financial strategy to launch a newly created, innovative and renewable energy-centered Sustainable Energy Utility (SEU) that accelerates the city's clean energy transformation while simultaneously fostering economic development and enhancing climate resilience. To learn more about the SEU, please visit a2gov.org/a2seu.

UPCOMING EVENTS

WATER@MICHIGAN COFFEE TALK - COPPER: MINING, RECYCLING, DEVELOPMENT, AND ELECTRIFICATION
Nov. 6, 3-4:30 PM | Michigan League, Hussey Room

Coffee Talks provide a monthly opportunity for those interested in water to connect with colleagues, learn about pressing and/or emerging water-related issues, and meet new partners. [Learn more at Water@Michigan's website.](#)

CHILDREN'S WINTER SWAP: CLOTHING & MORE! Nov. 8, 10 AM - 1 PM | Green Apple Upper School, 503 Miller Ave

Find new-to-you winter gear for your child at the Children's Winter Swap: Clothing and More. Tour Apple Playschool's Upper School facility, experience a community rooted in inclusion and environmental stewardship, meet local families, discover sustainable ways to share resources, and learn more about Apple Playschool and A²ZERO programs! All are welcome. [Learn more and RSVP for the swap online.](#)

VEGMI PLANT-BASED MEETUP Nov. 13, 5-7 PM | Blue Nile Ethiopian Restaurant

Join us for an all-you-can-eat fixed-price meal at Blue Nile served with injera (a spongy, sour, fermented flatbread)! Blue Nile is providing an authentic, traditional Ethiopian dining experience and the food is served family style. [Please reserve your spot by Thursday, November 6th](#), by submitting payment for your meal. The cost is \$29 per person, which includes tax and gratuity.

ELECTRONICS COLLECTION, Nov. 15

Unwanted electronics? This program collects unwanted electronic devices from the Ann Arbor community and prevents them from becoming waste by facilitating reuse, refurbishment/repair, and—as a last resort—recycling. Register to reserve your spot at a2gov.org/electronics.

BUILDING RESILIENCE IN MICHIGAN: STRATEGIES FOR A CHANGING CLIMATE Nov. 19, 1:30-6 PM University of Michigan, Walgreen Drama Center

Join the US Green Building Council (USGBC) Michigan for an inspiring afternoon focused on resilience. Hear leading-edge examples, best practices, and practical tools to accelerate your goals. USGBC's Building Transformation Forums convene industry leaders, practitioners, and sustainability professionals to learn and engage around specific, locally relevant topics. To learn more, see the agenda with session descriptions, speakers, and continuing education information, please visit [USGBC's page about the event](#).

CINEMA & SUSTAINABILITY SERIES: ALL TOO CLEAR

Nov. 19, 7-9:30 PM, State Theater

Free admission - Please reserve tickets in advance for an accurate attendance at marquee-arts.org/cinema-and-sustainability/. Directed by the husband-and-wife filmmaking team, Zach Melnick and Yvonne Drebert, the immersive film uses cutting-edge underwater drones to explore how quadrillions of tiny invasive mussels, known as quaggas, are re-engineering the ecosystem of the Great Lakes at a scale not seen since the glaciers. Part scientific exploration, part natural history adventure - the film showcases freshwater wildlife and environments like never before.

SFBC INPUT SESSION ON SUSTAINABLE FOOD PURCHASING PROGRAM Nov. 20, 2-3 PM | City Hall

Please join us for this input session designed specifically for restaurants and caterers to share insights and ideas on creating practical sustainable dining standards. Your expertise is vital to developing policies that support our community's sustainability goals while meeting the needs of the food service industry. For more information and to RSVP, visit <https://forms.office.com/g/zdcHZzxr8M>.

SPECIAL EDITION HOLIDAY GIFT SWAP, Nov. 20, 4-7PM

Please bring up to 5 items of any kind (beyond clothing) that are in excellent 'gift giving' condition. Keep the spirit of circular economy going through the holiday season and come ready to find the perfect gift for friends and family. Learn more and RSVP at u.ma/a2zeroclothingswaps

OSI PARK WORKDAY November 21, 3-5PM | West Park

Show some love to West Park! Join the Ann Arbor Parks Volunteer Program for an afternoon of stewardship at one of Ann Arbor's busiest parks. West Park is a vibrant green space offering walking paths, a playground, and open fields just blocks from downtown. We'll be focusing on light maintenance and general beautification tasks to help keep the park looking great for all who visit. Specific projects will be determined based on park needs at the time, but may include activities like litter pickup, garden care, mulching, or invasive removal.

For more information on our upcoming events, please visit www.a2gov.org/sustainability/events.