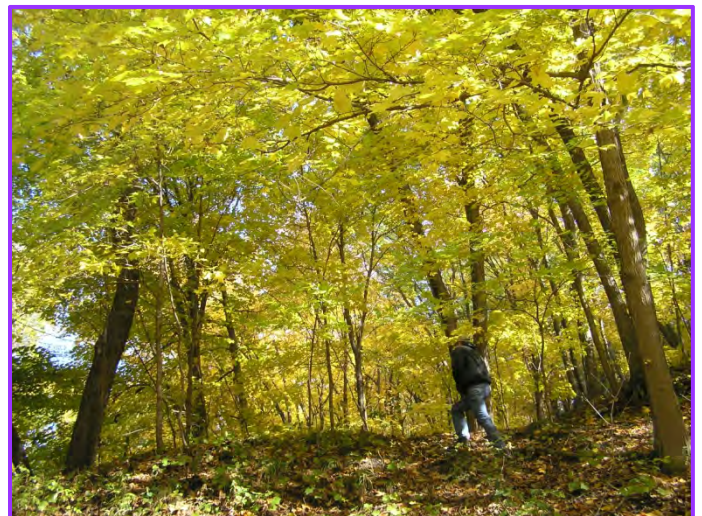
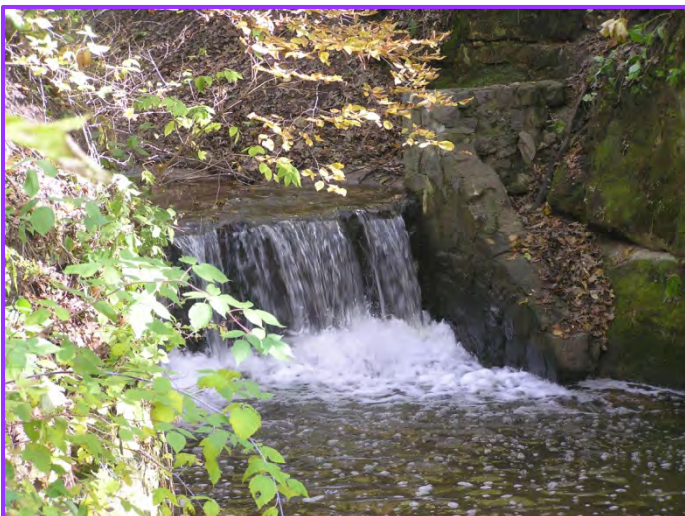




Recommendations and Opportunities for Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway

January 25, 2010

Report to Maplewood City Council from
Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway Ad-Hoc Commission



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January 25, 2010

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Recommendations and Opportunities for Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway

January 25, 2010

Executive Summary

Purpose of Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway Commission

In May 2009, Maplewood City Council established the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway Ad-Hoc Commission to develop recommendations and priorities for protecting natural lands in the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway, and to identify issues and opportunities for passive recreation in the greenway.

Significance of the Greenway

Maplewood's Natural Area Greenways are large contiguous patches of habitat that cross property boundaries, and include both public and private land. The Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway is located in the southern tip of Maplewood and spills into St. Paul and Woodbury. It includes 142 acres of Ramsey County open space, 37 acres of City of Maplewood preserve and parkland, the 150-acre Carver Lake Beach Park in Woodbury, and many more acres of natural land in private ownership. Fish Creek is the heart of the greenway and flows through grasslands and woodlands as it makes its way from Carver Lake to the Mississippi River. There are oak woodlands, a few small pockets of maple-basswood forest, and a few tiny prairie remnants in the greenway. Steep slopes provide dramatic vistas and the area has a very natural character. Portions of the greenway have been used by humans since pre-settlement time and small Depression-era dams along Fish Creek built by the WPA add to the area's cultural heritage. Part of the greenway lies within the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRRA) boundaries. MNRRRA is part of the national park system.

Protection Strategies

There are approximately 329 acres of public land in the greenway (including Carver Lake Beach Park), but many acres of privately-owned natural land may someday be developed. Thirty-six private parcels in the greenway are over two acres and combined these private sites total 238 acres, much of which is in a natural state. The commission's vision is to protect the natural state of as much private land as feasible so 50 years hence the greenway is still intact. We recommend that the city use several strategies for protection.

Acquisition. The commission recommends acquisition of the most important parcels of land. Not only will this protect natural resources and the integrity of the greenway, but it provides significant opportunities for recreation in the area.

Conservation Subdivision. Many landowners will want to develop their land someday and the commission recommends that the city encourages the use of low impact development and conservation design for development in the greenway. For large parcels (over five acres) that cannot be acquired or otherwise protected from development, the city should work closely with developers to use a conservation development approach to preserve the most significant natural features of a site.

Conservation Easement. Some landowners may want to preserve their land. The commission recommends that the city encourages the use of conservation easements by private landowners and supports homeowners in those efforts.

Stewardship. Urban natural areas that are not cared for will degrade over time. Our vision is that in 50 years the natural areas in the greenway will be ecologically healthier than they are today. The

commission recommends that the city encourage and support stewardship efforts on both private and public lands in the greenway.

Ordinance. Existing city ordinances addressing slopes, wetlands, and trees will help protect natural resources in the greenway. The city is currently reviewing and considering changes to the slope ordinance.

Acquisition Priorities

The commission recommends that the city acquire approximately 81 acres of land in the greenway. The core of this is the 70-acre parcel south of Carver Avenue (site owned by Lakeland Construction & Finance, LLC), and surrounded by Ramsey County Open Space. Acquisition of a 9-acre parcel north of Carver Avenue would protect approximately ¼ mile of the creek that is still in private ownership. And an additional 2 acres of acquisition would increase buffers along one section of the creek. Acquisition of these parcels protects significant ecological resources in the greenway and greatly increases access to public lands and recreation in south Maplewood. Priorities for acquisition are: a) remaining private lands that contain Fish Creek, b) 600' creek corridor, c) Mississippi River bluffslands, d) land which provides recreational opportunities, e) land of high ecological quality, and f) land adjacent to existing public lands.

Recreation

The commission envisions this area for local and neighborhood use, with connections to the nearby regional network of trails. We propose creating the Fish Creek Hiking Trail from Highway 61 to Carver Lake. Sections along Fish Creek and through natural areas would be narrow (4'-wide or less), soft-surface trails, restricted to walking and hiking. Other sections would be on sidewalks or coincide with bike trails. Currently, due to terrain and roadways, access to the county open space is limited. If the 70-acre site south of Carver Avenue is acquired, recreational opportunities expand significantly. Not only does that become open to trails but it makes trails possible on the adjacent county lands, as well as connections to local and regional bike trails. With the purchase of these 70 acres, this site would become a premier urban natural area of 158 contiguous acres. Future trails or sidewalks would connect this preserve to another 240 acres of existing public land throughout the greenway (53 acres of Ramsey County Open Space, 37 acres of Maplewood park and preserve lands, and the 150-acre Carver Lake Beach Park owned by Woodbury).

Partners

The commission has talked with many partners and all have been supportive of the project and our vision. Continuing these partnerships will be essential for carrying out the vision for the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway.

Funding

A diverse funding strategy will be necessary to carry out the vision for Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway. The city should seek grants and legislative funds for acquisition. In order to be a serious candidate for grants and legislative funding, the city will need to provide significant seed money to demonstrate the importance of this project to Maplewood. The commission proposes that the city hold a bonding referendum to provide funds for land acquisition and management. We encourage the city to seek the assistance of Trust for Public Land in crafting a referendum.

Photos of Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway

Photos of Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway



Fish Creek flows from Carver Lake in Woodbury to the Mississippi River, through grasslands and woodlands.

Photo taken on Ramsey County Open Space, St. Paul.



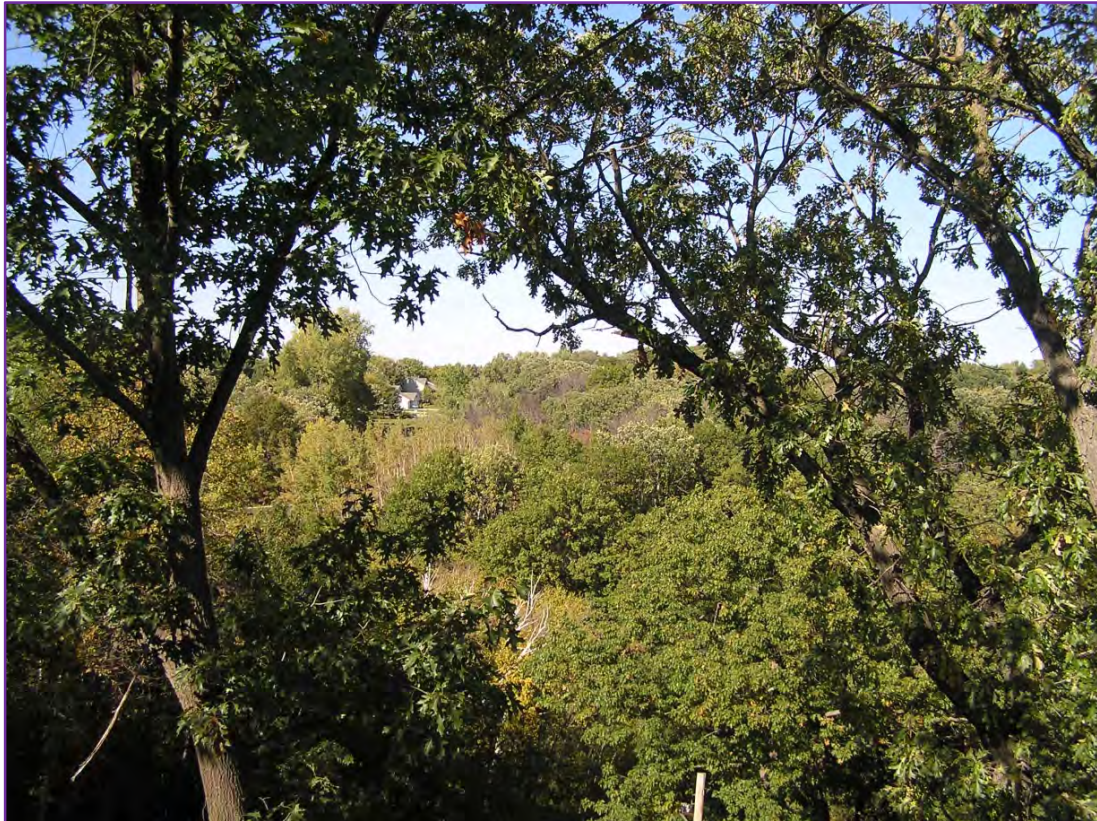
Public hike along Fish Creek.

Photo taken on Ramsey County Open Space, St. Paul.



Fall color in the valley of Fish Creek.

Photo taken on Ramsey County Open Space, Maplewood.



Steep hills and lush woodlands are found throughout the greenway.

Photo taken from ski jump chalet, Maplewood.



Snake creek carves a canyon through the south end of the greenway.

Photo taken from Bailey residence, Maplewood.



Steep hills and open grasslands provide long vistas.

Photo taken from Carver Neighborhood Preserve, Maplewood.



The greenway includes Mississippi River bluff lands, some with open view to the western horizon.

Photo taken from bluff top in Maplewood. Parcel H on map of acquisition priorities.

Photo provided by Michael Bailey.



Part of the Mississippi River bluff top heavily wooded and part is grassland with scattered trees.

Photo of bluff top in Maplewood. Parcel H on map of acquisition priorities.

Section I: Introduction and Background Information

Purpose of Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway Commission

Maplewood City Council established the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway Ad-Hoc Commission in May 2009 to:

- Develop recommendations and priorities for protecting natural lands in the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway, including:
 1. Acquisition of private land;
 2. Conservation easement on private land;
 3. Conservation subdivision options for properties that want to develop;
 4. Funding options.
- Identify issues and opportunities for passive recreation in Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway and develop recommendations for passive recreation that does not degrade the natural resources in the greenway.

Features of Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway

The Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway was mapped in 2008 (see Appendix A: Map of Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway) and incorporated into Maplewood's 2030 Comprehensive Plan. The greenway is a large contiguous area of natural habitat that crosses property boundaries and includes both public and private lands.

Fish Creek is the heart of this greenway, running from Carver Lake in Woodbury to Highway 61 in St. Paul, and then connecting under the highway to the Mississippi River. There is much natural land and the greenway has a very rural and undeveloped character. There are several parcels of city and county public open space in this area and many private parcels have large areas of habitat.

Some of the special features of the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway include:

- **Fish Creek.** The creek runs through woodlands, grasslands, and emergent and open water marshes before cutting through a scenic ravine and tumbling over boulders on its way to join the Mississippi River. Most of the creek lies within Ramsey County Fish Creek Open Space.
- **Snake Creek.** Snake Creek begins on the west edge of the Bailey Nursery property and runs through private lands. Portions of the creek have steep rock cliffs.
- **Woodlands.** The greenway has several stands of oak woodland, some with large patches of native groundcovers including ferns, sedges, and wildflowers. There are a few small stands of maple-basswood forest (mostly in St. Paul), a plant community that is uncommon in Maplewood.
- **Wetlands.** Wetlands in the greenway provide habitat and are important to local hydrology and water quality.
- **Grasslands.** Open grasslands in the greenway contribute to the rural character of the area. Most are old fields with a few tiny remnants of native prairie.
- **Mississippi River Bluffs.** The greenway contains Mississippi River bluff lands and vistas.
- **Ecological Significance.** The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) identifies parts of the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway as part of the *Metro Conservation Corridor*, as a *Regionally Significant Ecological Area*, and as a *Site of Biodiversity Significance* in the Minnesota County Biological Survey.
- **Scenic Views.** The greenway has several steep hills which open to panoramic views, including the Mississippi River valley.

- **Connection to Mississippi River.** The creeks and the greenway connect to the Mississippi River. The highways sever ecological connections for many species, but the greenway is part of Mississippi River flyway.
- **Trail Connections.** The greenway connects to regional and local trail systems.
- **Historic and Cultural Significance.** A 2005 archaeological survey of a site in the greenway found pre-contact artifacts 100' from Fish Creek, which included ceramics, lithics (stone tools or stone artifacts), and faunal remains. The site appears to be a campsite and dates between 2500 and 375 years ago. The archeologist conducting the study recommended the site as "potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places."
- **Mississippi National River and Recreation Area.** Part of the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway lies within the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRAA). MNRAA is a part of the national park system and considered a national park system unit. The MNRRA boundary includes an area of 54,000 acres along 72 miles of the river. The National Park Service (NPS) owns and manages less than 100 acres of land within the MNRAA boundaries but works with other agencies and communities to preserve and enhance the area within the MNRAA boundaries. The NPS has no regulatory authority within the Fish Creek greenway, except it has review authority of any and all undertakings of other federal agencies (permits, grants, etc.) in order to ensure conformance of those activities with the MNRRA Comprehensive Plan. The NPS guidelines on open space protection opportunities for MNRAA ranks portions of the Fish Creek greenway within MNRRA as "high" and "moderate" ecological quality.
- **Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area.** Part of the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway lies with the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA). The MRCCA was designated over 30 years ago by Executive Order 79-19. The National Park Service used the MRCCA boundaries in creating MNRAA and the two share the same boundaries. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has just begun a rulemaking process, which will establish minimum guidelines and standards to protect resources in MRCCA. Once this process is completed, Maplewood will update its ordinances to comply. Local governments are responsible for following the MRCCA guidelines, with state, regional, and federal agencies providing oversight and assistance.

Appendix B shows land cover classifications for south Maplewood.

Land Use Plan

In 2006, Maplewood issued a moratorium on development in south Maplewood in order to study land use of all parcels south of Carver Avenue. Consultants Schoell Madson were hired to facilitate the study. A report outlining options for the area was submitted to Maplewood City Council. This information was helpful in developing the land use plan for this area that is part of the 2030 Comprehensive Plan. The 2030 Plan proposes Rural/Low Density Residential (.5-1.5 units/acre) for most of the undeveloped natural areas in the greenway and Mixed Use (6 – 31 units/acre) for the Bailey Nursery site.

Past Protection Efforts

For over 25 years, residents have advocated for public acquisition of additional land in this area. Land south of Carver Avenue was one of the top priorities for acquisition identified by the Maplewood Open Space Committee after the passing of the 1993 Open Space bonding referendum. At that time the landowner was not interested in selling these parcels to the city, but these parcels are now available.

Commission Process

Commission members included:

- Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway Ad-Hoc Commission members:
Chair Ginny Yingling, Environment and Natural Resources Commission
Vice-Chair Ron Cockriel, Friends of Maplewood Nature
Carolyn Peterson, Parks and Recreation Commission
John Moriarty, Ramsey County Parks
Cliff Aichinger, Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District
Ginny Gaynor, City of Maplewood
- Active Ex-Officio members:
Bob Spauling, Friends of the Mississippi
Jim Von Haden, National Park Service
Mary Beth Block, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Invited guests. In addition, several guests were invited to participate in discussions throughout the process.

The commission held ten commission meetings between July 10, 2009 and December 18, 2009. All meetings were open to the public, posted in advance, and videotaped. In addition, the commission had one field trip to the greenway.

To engage residents and solicit public input, the commission:

- Held one public meeting (11 people attended);
- Held one public tour (20 people attended);
- Published two articles in Maplewood's city newsletter;
- Posted announcements regarding the public meeting and tour in the Maplewood Review;
- Sent two mailings to approximately 220 households in the greenway to inform people about the commission, announce the meetings and tour, and send a questionnaire;
- Hosted a webpage;
- Posted an on-line questionnaire and mailed the questionnaire to 220 households. 60 questionnaires were completed (see Appendix C: Resident Questionnaire Results). This was not conducted as a scientific survey and there was no mechanism to ensure people submitted only one survey, thus the results need to be interpreted with this in mind.
- Commission members provided informal updates of the commission work to their relevant commissions or entities;
- Presented draft recommendations in January 2010 to Maplewood Environmental and Natural Resources Commission, Maplewood Parks and Recreation Commission, Ramsey County's Parks and Recreation Commission, and Friends of Maplewood Nature.

Section II: Protection Strategies

The Need for Protection

The Natural Area Greenway map is a snapshot in time, showing the natural areas that exist in 2008. Much of the natural land in the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway is in private ownership, and owners of some private parcels may someday develop their land. Long-term viability of the greenway depends on protection of natural resources on both public and private lands. Strategies for protection include acquisition, conservation development, conservation easement, stewardship, and ordinance.

Recommendation #1: The commission recommends that the city support a diverse protection strategy for the greenway that includes acquisition, conservation development, conservation easement, stewardship, and ordinance.

Acquisition

Acquiring land for public ownership is an effective strategy for protection. In addition to protecting natural resources, land acquired for public ownership provides new opportunities for hiking and passive recreation. Results of the questionnaire indicated 78% respondents supported acquisition of land in the greenway (10% were not sure, 12% did not support acquisition). The questionnaire did not pose questions on how we would pay for land.

The benefits of acquiring additional public land in the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway include:

- Ensures protection of more land in the greenway;
- Protects core pieces of land that will be essential long-term for maintaining a wildlife corridor;
- Provides new options for hiking and passive recreation. With no land acquisition, there are opportunities to add rustic trails to one county site and one city site. If key parcels are acquired, the opportunities for trails and trail connections are dramatically enhanced. (See Section IV-Recreation).

Ramsey County Park staff is supportive of acquisition of additional public land in this area. The county is happy to partner on protection initiatives for this area. However, if the city wants to acquire land, the city will need to be the lead agency for acquisition efforts.

If land is acquired, the city may not be the best public entity to own and manage it. The intended use of an acquired site should drive the decision on who owns and manages the land. In some situations, a joint management partnership may be ideal. These decisions would be made when a site is purchased and during development of a master site plan.

The questionnaire solicited comments regarding concerns people may have with the city acquiring additional land. The main concerns listed are discussed below:

- **Cost.** Land acquisition in south Maplewood will be expensive and some residents expressed concern about tax increases and the city being able to afford additional land. Section VI-Funding addresses funding strategies.
- **Affect on tax base.** A few residents raised concerns about how acquiring land would affect the tax base. In 2005, the Twin-Cities based non-profit group Embrace Open Space commissioned a report titled *The Economic Value of Open Space: Implications for Land Use Decisions* (Anton, 2005). The study points out three elements that are often overlooked in evaluating the costs of open space:

- Increased property tax revenue due to increase in property values adjacent to and near open space;
- Cost of services and infrastructure required for developed areas;
- Potential cost savings from better storm water management.

The fiscal impacts will differ for every situation, but in some scenarios the costs of infrastructure and public services exceed the tax revenue provided by development. The report provides information on three different tools that communities can use to determine fiscal impact of a given development.

Another study commissioned by Embrace Open Space in 2009 studied the economic impacts of open space on property values in Hennepin County (www.embraceopenspace.org). It found property values increased for homes within 200' of open space, except for homes in high-income areas or homes on lots larger than one acre. There were several interesting conclusions in this study that help provide an understanding of the economic value of open space to residents and to the community as a whole.

- *Ability to manage additional land.* A few residents were concerned that the city could not afford to manage additional land. The Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway currently includes 37 acres of city preserve and parkland and 142 acres of county open space. Acquisition of land requires the ability to manage it. Management costs for natural areas vary tremendously depending on existing site conditions and the level of management desired. At the Maplewood Neighborhood Preserves and premier natural areas in the city, goals include active management of invasive species and where feasible restoring native plant communities. Management goals for the county open space are not as intensive. Providing recreational trails increases costs for installation, maintenance, and for associated services (ex: enforcement). Dakota County addressed the upfront management costs by setting aside 10% of the acquisition and easement funding for management and "site development".

The commission believes the benefits of more public land in this area are worth the costs associated with land management and providing additional opportunities for passive recreation.

- *Impacts of increasing visitors to area.* Some residents expressed concerns that acquiring more public land will bring more people into the area. They cite the potential for trespassing on private land, more degradation of public land due to increased visitation, increased traffic in the area, and more crime.

The commission does not envision Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway as a regional park or regional preserve, with the type of trails and amenities those designations would suggest. We envision the greenway as a local and neighborhood natural area, with regional significance. Acquiring additional public land will enhance opportunities for hiking and passive recreation and we anticipate that use of the area will increase somewhat if access is improved. Impacts of increased use should be addressed in a site master plan. Considerations such as placement of trails (proximity to homes), type of trail, boundary markers, signage, monitoring and enforcement can help lessen impacts. It is important to note that in some situations increased visitation actually helps decrease crime because there are more people using the site and watching out for it.

The Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway Commission believes that the benefits to the community of acquiring public land outweigh the potential negative impacts of increased visitation to the area.

Recommendation #2: The commission recommends that the city acquire additional land in the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway. Priorities for acquisition are presented in Section III.

Conservation Subdivision

Conservation subdivision is a development approach that preserves open space within a development, and typically includes decreasing lot size and clustering homes. The open space in the subdivision may be owned and managed by a homeowner association, a municipality, a non-profit organization or other group. The purpose of the open space and management requirements are set forth when the development is approved. If a homeowner association owns the open space, they may restrict access to homeowners in the subdivision only. If a municipality owns the site, it is typically open to public access.

Conservation subdivision is an important protection strategy for the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway. In 2009, Maplewood City Council approved a conservation ordinance to serve as a stop-gap ordinance until the 2030 Comprehensive Plan is approved and the new Land Use Plan is effective. This ordinance provides density bonuses for developers using conservation strategies.

Conservation subdivision is most effective on larger parcels but the concept of protecting the high quality natural areas and clustering homes can sometimes be implemented on smaller parcels. There are several parcels in the greenway where conservation subdivision could be used to preserve open space if acquisition is not possible.

- **Lakeland Construction & Finance LLC parcels (formerly owned by CoPar Development LLC).** This site consists of six parcels, totaling 70 acres, south of Carver Avenue and west of Henry Lane. If this site is developed, a conservation subdivision approach could be used to protect ecologically sensitive parts of the site (creek and buffer, bluffs, slopes, wetlands, high quality woodlands), while homes could be clustered on smaller lots on the rest of the site. Existing Maplewood ordinances protect slopes, wetlands, and trees and the city should ensure that any development complies with these ordinances.

If a conservation subdivision approach were used on the site owned by Lakeland Construction & Finance, it would be ideal to negotiate an agreement for the open space to be owned by the city or the county. This would greatly improve options for passive recreation and access to existing public lands in the area. In particular, this could provide an opportunity: 1) to have an overlook on the Mississippi River bluff, 2) to connect the existing footpath along Fish Creek to Henry Lane, 3) to have trail access from the development to the county open space to the south, and 4) to create a trail loop through the development. If the open space were owned and managed by a homeowner association and not open to the public, it would help achieve some protection goals but not recreation goals.

- **2591 Carver Avenue East.** The 9-acre parcel owned by the Libby family will be more difficult to develop as a conservation subdivision but there may be some potential to cluster homes, while preserving a creek corridor larger than that required by Maplewood's existing wetland ordinance.
- **Smaller parcels.** Smaller parcels may have some options for preserving open space and using principals of conservation development.

Recommendation #3: The commission recommends that the city not reauthorize the development agreement that the city had with CoPar Development LLC. If the land is to be developed, the

commission recommends the city work closely with the developer to use a conservation subdivision approach which protects the most sensitive natural features of the site.

Recommendation #4: The commission recommends that the use of low-impact development and conservation design principles be explored for all parcels that are developed in the greenway. The commission further recommends that the city take a proactive approach in encouraging the use of conservation development principals including:

- Assemble a packet of information on these concepts and make this available to Maplewood sellers and developers.
- Explore the use of a pre-approval process for working with developers on lands in the greenways to discuss concepts before design phase commences.
- Ensure that Maplewood's land use plan, zoning, and ordinances encourage the use of conservation subdivision.

Conservation Easement

A conservation easement is a binding legal agreement that permanently protects land from development. Sometimes existing buildings and yard areas are exempt from the easement and sometimes provisions are made so a portion of the site can be developed. The commission is aware of two conservation easements in Maplewood: 1) the Haller's Woods development in south Maplewood has a conservation easement on the open space owned by their association, and 2) the city granted a conservation easement to Minnesota Land Trust for the Priory Neighborhood Preserve. The commission believes the best use of conservation easements in the Fish Creek greenway are for private lands and conservation subdivisions.

Many residents in south Maplewood have a strong connection to their land. A few land owners in Maplewood may be in a position where they will not need or want to sell their land. Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) works with landowners to preserve natural lands via conservation easements. Because of the logistics and costs involved, they typically work with larger parcels of land. However, MLT staff indicated that if several owners of small holdings in an area are interested in granting conservation easements, the Land Trust may be able to work with them.

The 18.7-acre parcel at 1230 Sterling Street South (ski jump site) is owned by the non-profit agency St. Paul Education Foundation. This site has steep wooded slopes and would be very difficult to develop. This site could be a good candidate for protection via conservation easement if the owner is interested.

Recommendation #5: The commission recommends that the city encourage the use of conservation easements by private landowners and in conjunction with conservation subdivisions that set aside open space. The commission further recommends that this be achieved through:

- Assembling information on conservation easements and making it available to landowners and developers in the greenway.
- Facilitating a meeting between Minnesota Land Trust and interested landowners.
- Helping developers make the connections necessary to successfully enter into conservation easements on land that will be owned by an association or other group.

Stewardship

Stewardship and management of existing natural areas is essential for the long-term protection of the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway. Without care, most of our natural areas will degrade due to

pollutants, invasive species, altered hydrology, and removal of natural forces such as fire. Because of the large amount of private natural land in the greenway, private landowners can play an important role in stewardship of the greenway. It was gratifying to see the responses in the questionnaire to questions about stewardship. 94% of respondents indicated they would likely or very likely remove buckthorn or other invasive species in their yard.

Recommendation #6: The commission recommends that the city take a proactive approach to managing natural resources on public lands in the greenway including:

- Develop a restoration and management plan for Carver Neighborhood Preserve.
- Develop a restoration and management plan for the natural areas at Pleasantview Park.
- Seek opportunities to partner with and support the county in management efforts on county open space.

Recommendation #7: The commission recommends that the city take a proactive approach to encouraging and supporting private landowners in the greenway to manage natural resources on their land including:

- Continue to present education programs on ecology and stewardship.
- Continue to promote watershed district cost-share programs for implementing best management practices.
- Enhance stewardship information on the city website.
- Explore the feasibility of and develop programs to support residents in enhancing habitat on private lands throughout Maplewood including:
 - Provide education and technical support;
 - Provide technical advice and coordination to help residents combine smaller projects into larger projects to gain efficiencies (ex: neighborhood-wide buckthorn removal);
 - Provide cost-share for habitat enhancement;
 - Help residents make connections with neighbors interested in working together;
 - Facilitate award and recognition programs such as non-binding registries.

Ordinance

Existing city ordinances can help protect some natural resources in the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway. Cooperation will be needed during the development process to ensure planned unit developments and variances approved by council result in as much protection as the ordinances provide.

- *Slopes.* Maplewood's slope ordinance addresses development on slopes. It prohibits development on slopes greater than 18% that are in direct drainage to a protected water; it prohibits development on slopes greater than 40% that are *not* in direct drainage to a protected water. Certain requirements must be met for all development on slopes greater than 12%. In addition, the ordinance requires that, within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area, slopes viewed from the Mississippi River or from the opposite river bank must look natural and undeveloped.
- *Wetlands.* Maplewood's wetland ordinance addresses development near wetlands. It prohibits disturbance and alteration of land and vegetation within 100' of a stream and within 50'-100' of a wetland, depending on the wetland classification.
- *Trees.* Maplewood's tree ordinance helps protect trees and woodlands in the city. It requires a Tree Preservation Plan for any development project that requires land use, grading, or building permits, excluding minor home additions. Tree removal is permitted; however, it must be mitigated by replanting according to the replacement formula in the ordinance.

Section III: Protection and Acquisition Priorities

Several large parcels of land in the Fish Creek corridor are, or may be, available for acquisition. The commission, and the majority of respondents to the questionnaire, support acquiring significant acreage to provide permanent protection for Fish Creek and its adjoining upland areas and to maximize public recreational opportunities in the area. However, recognizing that it may not be possible to acquire all of the potentially available land, the commission recognized the need to identify priorities, both for acquisition and other protection options.

To evaluate and prioritize land in the Fish Creek greenway, the commission developed several criteria:

- Creek crosses the property
- Adjacent to the creek, expands creek corridor to 600' (300' on each side)
- Ecological value
- Water quality improvement/protection value
- Contains Mississippi River bluffs
- Adjacent to existing public lands, provides connectivity
- Access for public passive recreational use
- Scenic value and/or vistas

In the public meeting and through the mail and on-line questionnaire, residents were asked to rate how important these criteria are in terms of protection and/or acquisition of lands in the Fish Creek greenway (see results in Appendix C). Both the commission and public input ranked highest the acquisition/protection of the creek itself and adjoining lands to increase the creek buffer. Accessibility for public passive recreational use and connectivity with existing public lands and trail systems also ranked very high.

Using these criteria and the public feedback, the commission identified and prioritized 10 sub-parcels in the corridor (see map in Appendix D):

- Parcel A (5.3 acres): This parcel has been developed and has lower ecological value, but may become available only as part of a larger property that includes Parcel B.
- Parcel B (4.5 acres): This parcel contains the last major section of Fish Creek in private ownership and may become available only as part of a larger property that includes Parcel A.
- Parcel C (1.1 acres): This parcel contains a segment of Fish Creek and adjoins county land. It could provide a potential access point from Carver Avenue to those lands, but is not currently available for acquisition.
- Parcel D (1.3 acres): This parcel abuts a portion of Fish Creek east of I-494 that is in county ownership but has minimal buffer, but is not currently available for acquisition.
- Parcel E (1.5 acres): This parcel also abuts a portion of Fish Creek east of I-494 that is in county ownership but has minimal buffer, but is not currently available for acquisition.
- Parcel F (3.0 acres): This parcel is located at the bluff edge above the north bank of Fish Creek west of I-494 and could provide additional buffering for the creek, erosion control for the bluff, and trail access to Henry Lane. The parcel contains archeological artifacts (see page 8). This parcel is part of a larger property that also includes parcels G, H, I, and J.
- Parcel G (9.7 acres): This parcel is located at the bluff edge above the south bank of Fish Creek west of I-494 and could provide additional buffering for the creek, protection of upland woods, erosion control at the top of the bluff, and trail access to the upland and Mississippi River bluff areas south of the creek. This parcel is part of a larger property that also includes parcels F, H, I, and J.

- Parcel H (7.0 acres): This parcel includes Mississippi River bluffs and scenic vistas and adjoins county owned land. This parcel is part of a larger property that also includes parcels F, G, I and J.
- Parcel I (31.1 acres): This parcel has rolling upland grasslands and degraded oak savannah and could provide the space for trails that support a variety of passive recreation. This parcel is part of a larger property that also includes parcels F, G, H, and J.
- Parcel J (18.0 acres): This parcel has wetland meadows, which are already protected from development, and some upland grasslands along Henry Lane and Carver Avenue. This parcel is part of a larger property that also includes parcels F, G, H and I.

These parcels were combined to create a “Preferred Acquisition Plan” and four alternatives. The Preferred Acquisition Plan encompasses the priorities identified by public input and commission discussions to create a 158-acre publicly-owned natural area in south Maplewood, managed through a city-county partnership. The Preferred Acquisition Plan would place the entirety of Fish Creek in public ownership, protect large contiguous areas of natural habitat, provide a variety of passive recreational opportunities for residents, and allow for connection to the surrounding network of trails and public lands via local bike and pedestrian pathways. See Appendix E: Vision for Public Lands in Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway.

Acknowledging that acquisition is dependent on many factors that may not be within the control of the city, the commission also created four alternatives to help the city identify priorities for acquisition should the Preferred Acquisition Plan not be feasible, or immediately achievable. The preferred plan and alternatives are described below, with the specific parcels to be acquired for each outlined in the table on page 17.

Preferred Acquisition Plan – Creek and Uplands Protection and Maximize Public Recreation:

- Whole creek in public ownership
- 600’ protected corridor for nearly all Fish Creek (300’ on each bank)
- Fish Creek Hiking Trail from Point Douglas Road to Carver Lake through natural areas and along sidewalks/bike trails
- Public access to scenic vistas along the Mississippi River bluffs
- Connectivity for existing trails and public lands
- Provide large nature park of 158 acres contiguous (requires acquisition of additional 70 acres), with additional public lands along trail
- Protect woodlands, grasslands, wetlands
- Maximize trails and passive recreational opportunities
- Use of low impact development and conservation design principles on developed lands
- Some private parcels with conservation easement
- Residents, city, and county engaged in stewardship activities

Alternative 1 – Creek and Mississippi River Bluffs Protection:

- 600’ protected corridor for nearly all of Fish Creek (300’ on each bank)
- Nearly all of Fish Creek in public ownership
- Provide Fish Creek Hiking Trail from Point Douglas Road to Carver Lake through natural areas and along sidewalks
- Provide public access to scenic vistas along the Mississippi River bluffs
- Work with developers to protect ecologically significant areas within developments

Alternative 2 – Creek Protection:

- 600' protected corridor for nearly all of Fish Creek (300' on each bank)
- Nearly all of creek in public ownership
- Provide Fish Creek Hiking Trail from Point Douglas Road to Carver Lake through natural areas and along sidewalks
- Work with developers to protect ecologically significant areas within developments

Alternative 3 – Conservation Easements and Conservation Development:

- City acquires conservation easements protecting 600' creek corridor
- Negotiate with developer for a trail connection to Henry Lane (this segment is required to have a through-trail from Point Douglas Road to Henry Lane)
- Work with developers to protect ecologically significant areas within developments (see page 12)

Alternative 4 – No Acquisitions (i.e. funds are not available to acquire either property or easements):

- City works with private landowners to identify possible voluntary projects to protect 600' creek corridor and other ecologically significant areas
- Negotiate with developer for trail connecting to Henry Lane
- Work with developers to protect ecologically significant areas within developments (see page 8)

Parcels Recommended for Protection through Acquisition or Easement

The table below indicates which parcels would have to be acquired (A) or have easements (E) in order to accomplish the Preferred Acquisition Plan or alternatives. The map in Appendix D shows location of each parcel.

Parcel	A	B ¹	C	D	E	F ²	G	H	I	J
Preferred Plan	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Alt. 1		A	A	A/E	A/E	A	A	A		
Alt. 2		A	A	A/E	A/E	A	A			
Alt. 3		E		E	E	E	E			
Alt. 4										

A = acquire parcel E = purchase conservation easement

¹Likely requires purchase of parcel A as well

² Likely requires purchase of parcel J as well

Recommendation #8: The commission recommends the city pursue the Preferred Acquisition Plan as this provides the highest protection for Fish Creek and adjoining upland areas, provides the greatest connectivity of public lands and trails, and maximizes passive recreation opportunities.

Section IV: Recreation

Public access and recreational opportunities were a key consideration in the commission's development of the protection priorities and options outlined in Sections II and III. Fish Creek provides Maplewood residents, as well as residents of adjoining communities, with the opportunity to recreate in a unique natural environment. However, there is a downside to increased recreation in the area. Even with careful management, as the number of people using the area increases, so does the potential for damage to the very resources that draw people to Fish Creek. This is particularly important given future development in the area will increase use of parks and open space sites in the greenway.

The vast majority of respondents to the questionnaire and participants at the public meeting supported only minimal development of the Fish Creek area, urging that it be "left alone" and that any management activities focus on restoring or enhancing ecological quality of land. In particular, they urged that trails be either narrow (1'-2' wide) un-maintained footpaths, or narrow, soft-surfaced, graded rustic trails (4' wide). Some respondents also indicated that some amenities, such as benches, parking, and interpretive signage, would improve their experience of the Fish Creek area.

Existing recreation in the greenway includes:

- Pleasantview Park – 14.4-acre neighborhood park owned by Maplewood, full park amenities, including ball fields, tennis court, playground, trail and some natural vegetation;
- Carver Neighborhood Preserve – 22.3-acre open space site owned by Maplewood, with non-maintained foot trails;
- Fish Creek Open Space – 142-acres of open space owned by Ramsey County, with non-maintained foot trails;
- Carver Lake Beach – 150-acre natural resource-based park owned by the City of Woodbury, full park amenities including swimming beach, playground, picnic facilities, and trails;
- In addition, there are numerous existing or planned bike trails in the greenway.

Current Recreation Opportunities

Currently, a non-maintained footpath on Ramsey County open space land provides access for passive recreation along Fish Creek, starting at Point Douglas Road and stopping just west of Henry Lane. Residents report using this area primarily for walking/hiking, bird-watching, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and other passive activities. While some respondents indicated they use the area for mountain biking, such activities are not sustainable on the steep slopes within the county land. The commission felt strongly that anything beyond a narrow trail or footpath in the Fish Creek gorge would damage the resources and the experience provided by the area. However, the existing trail could be improved to address existing erosion problems and provide either an "out-and-back" or loop trail within the county property.

Potential Recreation Opportunities

Appendix E shows the parks, trails and open space possibilities for the greenway. If additional lands are acquired, trail connections could significantly increase the recreational opportunities for residents and help to spread out use to minimize impacts. While specific recreation plans would be developed as part of a larger master planning process that involves the public and land management partners, acquisition of the "Preferred Acquisition Plan" lands could allow for:

- A large natural area consisting of 158 acres contiguous (88 acres of existing county land and 70 acres of newly acquired land). 128 acres of the park would be in Maplewood and 30 acres would be in St.

Paul. The acquired land would provide opportunities for access and recreation that do not currently exist due to the terrain and location of the existing county land.

- Public access to the Mississippi River bluff and grand vistas.
- Opportunities for trails and connections:
 - Walking trail from Point Douglas Road to Carver Lake Beach (along roads these would coincide with bike trail or sidewalk). This trail requires acquisition or easement of a 3.4 acre parcel north of Fish Creek and west of Henry Lane.
 - Extending the existing Fish Creek footpath to Henry Lane, providing a second access point for the public. Routing of this trail extension should be sensitive to the archeological site.
 - Commission members had discussions with representatives from Oakwood Church on Point Douglas Road about the possibility of the church becoming a trail head for the Fish Creek Hiking Trail. The church was very receptive to this. If an agreement could be worked out, this would be an ideal trailhead and would provide parking.
 - Trails in the upland areas south of the creek and west of I-494 could provide for biking, wheelchair access, and a variety of other uses such as snowshoeing and cross-country skiing (ungroomed).
 - Connecting the local trails of the Fish Creek greenway (via Carver, Sterling, and Century Avenues) to the larger network of bike trails in the area, such as those on Bailey Road and the Mississippi River Trail along Point Douglas Road.

While some of these recreational opportunities would exist under the other options outlined in Section III, only the Preferred Acquisition Plan would provide the opportunity for bike and wheelchair accessible trails and the space to reduce impacts to the resource.

Recommendation #9: The commission recommends that there be a narrow (4'-wide or less), soft-surface trail along Fish Creek that is restricted to walking or hiking, in order to preserve the natural experience of visitors. Other types of trails, such as bike paths, could be considered elsewhere in the Fish Creek greenway, where ecologically sustainable.

Recommendation #10: The commission recommends that trails throughout the Fish Creek greenway be considered local trails, with neighborhood bike trails connecting the greenway to the larger nearby trail systems.

Recommendation #11: The commission recommends that, if land is acquired in the greenway, the city and county work together to develop a master park and trail plan.

Section V: Partnerships

Strong partnerships are crucial for successful protection of natural resources and enhanced hiking opportunities in the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway. One legislator indicated to commissioners that a cohesive vision for the greenway that is supported by city officials, residents, adjacent communities, and other partners is critical if the city wants to seek legislative support for acquisition and protection.

Some of the key partners for the city on this project are listed below.

- Ramsey County
- Washington County
- Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District
- City of Woodbury
- City of Newport
- City of St. Paul
- St. Paul District 1 Council
- Friends of St. Paul and Ramsey County Parks and Trails
- National Park Service
- Trails and Open Space Partnership (TOSP)
- Friends of the Mississippi River
- Minnesota Land Trust
- Trust for Public Land
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Environmental and Sports Groups

Recommendation #12: The commission recommends that the city continue developing strong partnerships for preservation of the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway.

Section VI: Funding

General Approach

To carry out the vision for Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway, funding will be needed for:

- Acquisition
- Trail development and maintenance
- Restoration and management
- Education and support programs for stewardship on private land.

To successfully garner funding we need to:

- Have a diverse funding strategy including: legislative funding, grants, donations, partnerships, and city funds.
- Provide seed money for land acquisition to demonstrate to grantors and legislature the importance of this project to the city.
- Seek funding support from partners.
- Explore the possibility of land exchange.

Grants

The city is eligible to apply for various grants. In addition to state and federal grant programs there are many foundations and non-profit organizations that offer grants. Two of the key state funding programs for natural resources grants are explained below.

1. **Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund.** The Trust Fund was established in 1989 and is funded by 40% of proceeds from the state lottery, until 2025. The fund is set up as an endowment and after 2025, 5.5% will be available annually. The Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) administers this grant program. Proposals are accepted once each year. This grant is for “public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, enhancement of the state’s air, water, land, fish, wildlife and other natural resources.” Maplewood is eligible to apply for this grant and could use it for land acquisition, restoration, and management.
2. **Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment.** In 2008, Minnesota voters passed the Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment. The amendment increases sales tax 3/8 of one percent to generate funds to be used as described below.
 - 33% to Sams-Lessard Outdoor Heritage Fund to “restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for game, fish, and wildlife.” Some of these funds are routed to other grant programs such as the Minnesota DNR’s Lessard-Sams Conservation Partners Legacy Grants. Currently, funds for acquisition of public land will only be granted for lands that are open to public hunting and fishing, which makes most of the Twin Cities ineligible. Legislators are working with agencies and citizens to re-evaluate these criteria, so the metropolitan area can also access these funds. The grant is, however, appropriate for restoration and enhancement of natural habitat in Maplewood.
 - 33% to Clean Water Fund to “protect, enhance, and restore water quality in lakes, rivers, streams, and groundwater, with at least 5% of the fund spent to protect drinking water sources.” These funds are distributed through grant programs run by several different agencies. Some of these programs do not take applications from cities, but they do from watershed districts and other agencies so Maplewood could potentially have access to this funding through partnerships.

- 14.25% to a Parks and Trails Fund to “support parks and trails of regional or statewide significance.” Maplewood does not own or manage any regional parks or trails. However, this trail funding can be used to connect local trails and parks to regional trails, so this grant may have some applicability.
- 19.75% to Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund for “arts, arts education, and arts access, and to preserve Minnesota’s history and cultural heritage.”

Recommendation #13: The commission recommends that the city apply for grants for Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway for land acquisition, trails, restoration, and management.

City Funds and Fees

Protection of the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway will require funding from the city. The General Fund, Capital Improvement Program (CIP), Park Access Charge (PAC), and Environmental Utility Fee (EUF) are the primary city funds that could be considered. The table below lists which funds may be most feasible for various activities.

Project	General Fund	CIP	PAC	EUF
Funds to match acquisition grants		X	X	
General maintenance and management	X			X (if water related)
Large restoration and management projects		X		X (if water related)
Install trails and amenities		X	X	
Education and stewardship programs on private lands	X	X		X (if water related)

Recommendation #14: The commission recommends that the city acknowledges that city funds should be part of the funding equation for protection of Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway.

Referendum

If the city wishes to acquire a large amount of land, such as the Lakeland Construction and Finance site, it will need significant funds to match potential grants. A bonding referendum is one option for raising significant funds. Jenna Fletcher from Trust for Public Land addressed the commission and indicated that even with the economic downturn, open space referendums continue to be passed by communities. Maplewood’s 1993 \$5 million bonding referendum runs from 1994-2014.

The commission thinks a referendum is essential if the city wants to acquire the Lakeland Construction and Finance site. To broaden the support for a referendum, it should be coupled with other park, open space, and/or greenway projects in the city, including funds for restoration and management of those areas. If the city pursues a referendum, the commission recommends the city seek assistance and expertise from Trust for Public Land (TPL). TPL has worked on open space referendums and public land acquisition nationwide.

TPL can provide the following support to communities: 1) assist in conducting a public opinion survey to test support for bonding at different levels of funding, 2) develop referendum ballot language, and 3) develop strategies for garnering community support for bonding.

Recommendation #15: The commission recommends that the city hold a bonding referendum to raise funds for open space acquisition and management, that includes but is not limited to the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway, and that the city seek the services of Trust for Public Land to assist with developing the referendum.

Funding from Partners

The vision for the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway is being driven by the City of Maplewood and its residents. Our partners are supportive of the project, but we anticipate the city will need to be the driving force on this project. Partners will provide funding for greenway projects via:

- Existing grant programs (Ex: RWMWD BMP Cost-share program).
- CIP and operating funds (Ex: county manages Fish Creek Open Space).
- Applying for grants that the city cannot apply for directly (Ex: National Park Service funding).

Donations

Donations of land do occur in some communities, but cannot be counted on to happen. More typically, a donation may be a portion of a negotiated land sale. There are tax benefits to sellers that donate a portion of their land. The Trust for Public Land helps facilitate acquisition of land for public use and can help sellers understand the tax ramifications and breaks associated with land donation.

Recommendation #16: The commission recommends that the city encourage individuals interested in selling or donating land to the city to work with the City and with Trust for Public Land.

Land Exchange

One option for land acquisition may be land exchange. A land exchange would require the city having a parcel of land it was willing to give up and an owner/developer willing to trade their land in the Fish Creek area for that parcel. The commission did not study existing opportunities for this type of exchange but encourages the city to be open to this concept. Maplewood's 2030 Comprehensive Plan has a no-net loss policy for land classified as Neighborhood Preserve, but no restrictions on sale or exchange of other city property.

Legislature and Congress

In 2009, Maplewood worked with legislators on bills appropriating funds for land acquisition in the Fish Creek area. Representatives Nora Slawik and Leon Lillie authored the House bills and Senator Chuck Wiger authored the Senate bills. The bills had a first reading and were referred to Environment and Natural Resources Finance Division (House) or Environment, Energy, and Natural Resources Budget Division (Senate).

- House File No. 2055 / Senate File No. 1821 appropriated \$2,400,000 in fiscal year 2010 from the parks and trails fund for acquisition of land along Fish Creek.
- House File No. 2054 / Senate File No. 1822 appropriated \$2,400,000 in fiscal year 2010 from the outdoor heritage fund for acquisition of land along Fish Creek.

Senator Wiger attended the commission's public meeting in October 2009 and indicated to commissioners that he and other legislators would work towards legislative funding for land acquisition

in the Fish Creek area if we develop a strong vision for the area that has support from residents, city council, surrounding communities, and other partners.

As part of the MNRAA corridor, the Lakeland Construction & Finance LLC parcels could be eligible for federal congressional funding. If legislators were to seek funding for protection of land in MNRAA corridor, these parcels might be included.

Recommendation #17: The commission recommends that the city seek funding support from Minnesota Legislature for protection of Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway.

Recommendation #18: The commission recommends that the city continue its partnership with National Park Service and with the Trails and Open Space Partnership to further explore the possibility of funding by congress.

Section VII: Summary of Recommendations for Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway

Protection Recommendations

Recommendation #1: The commission recommends that the city support a diverse protection strategy for the greenway that includes acquisition, conservation development, conservation easement, stewardship, and ordinance.

Recommendation #2: The commission recommends that the city acquire additional land in the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway. Priorities for acquisition are presented in Section III.

Recommendation #3: The commission recommends that the city not reauthorize the development agreement that the city had with CoPar Development LLC. If the land is to be developed, the commission recommends the city work closely with a developer to use a conservation subdivision approach which protects the most sensitive natural features of the site.

Recommendation #4: The commission recommends that the use of low-impact development and conservation design principles be explored for all parcels that are developed in the greenway. The commission further recommends that the city take a proactive approach in encouraging the use of conservation development principals including:

- Assemble a packet of information on these concepts and make this available to Maplewood sellers and developers.
- Explore the use of a pre-approval process for working with developers on lands in the greenways to discuss concepts before design phase commences.
- Ensure that Maplewood's land use plan, zoning, and ordinances encourage the use of conservation subdivision.

Recommendation #5: The commission recommends that the city encourage the use of conservation easements by private landowners and in conjunction with conservation subdivisions that set aside open space. The commission further recommends that this be achieved through:

- Assembling information on conservation easements and making it available to landowners and developers in the greenway.
- Facilitating a meeting between Minnesota Land Trust and interested landowners.
- Helping developers make the connections necessary to successfully enter into conservation easements on land that will be owned by an association or other group.

Recommendation #6: The commission recommends that the city take a proactive approach to managing natural resources on public lands in the greenway including:

- Develop a restoration and management plan for Carver Neighborhood Preserve.
- Develop a restoration and management plan for the natural areas at Pleasantview Park.
- Seek opportunities to partner with and support the county in management efforts on county open space.

Recommendation #7: The commission recommends that the city take a proactive approach to encouraging and supporting private landowners in the greenway to manage natural resources on their land including:

- Continue to present education programs on ecology and stewardship.

- Continue to promote watershed district cost-share programs for implementing best management practices.
- Enhance stewardship information on the city website.
- Explore the feasibility of and develop programs to support residents in enhancing habitat on private lands throughout Maplewood including:
 - Provide education and technical support;
 - Provide technical advice and coordination to help residents combine smaller projects into larger projects to gain efficiencies (ex: neighborhood-wide buckthorn removal);
 - Provide cost-share for habitat enhancement;
 - Help residents make connections with neighbors interested in working together;
 - Facilitate award and recognition programs such as non-binding registries.

Acquisition Recommendations

Recommendation #8: The commission recommends the city pursue the Preferred Acquisition Plan, as this provides the highest protection for Fish Creek and adjoining upland areas, provides the greatest connectivity of public lands and trails, and maximizes passive recreation opportunities.

Recreation Recommendations

Recommendation #9: The commission recommends that there be a narrow (4'-wide or less), soft-surface trail along Fish Creek that is restricted to walking or hiking, in order to preserve the natural experience of visitors. Other types of trails, such as bike paths, could be considered elsewhere in the Fish Creek greenway, where ecologically sustainable.

Recommendation #10: The commission recommends that trails throughout the Fish Creek greenway be considered local trails, with neighborhood bike trails connecting the greenway to the larger adjacent trail systems.

Recommendation #11: The commission recommends that, if land is acquired in the greenway, the city and county work together to develop a master park and trail plan.

Partner and Funding Recommendations

Recommendation #12: The commission recommends that the city continue developing strong partnerships for preservation of the Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway.

Recommendation #13: The commission recommends that the city apply for grants for Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway for land acquisition, trails, restoration, and management.

Recommendation #14: The commission recommends that the city acknowledge that city funds should be part of the funding equation for protection of Fish Creek Natural Area.

Recommendation #15: The commission recommends that the city hold a bonding referendum to raise funds for open space acquisition and management, that includes but is not limited to the Fish Creek

Natural Area Greenway, and that the city seek the services of Trust for Public Land to assist with developing the referendum.

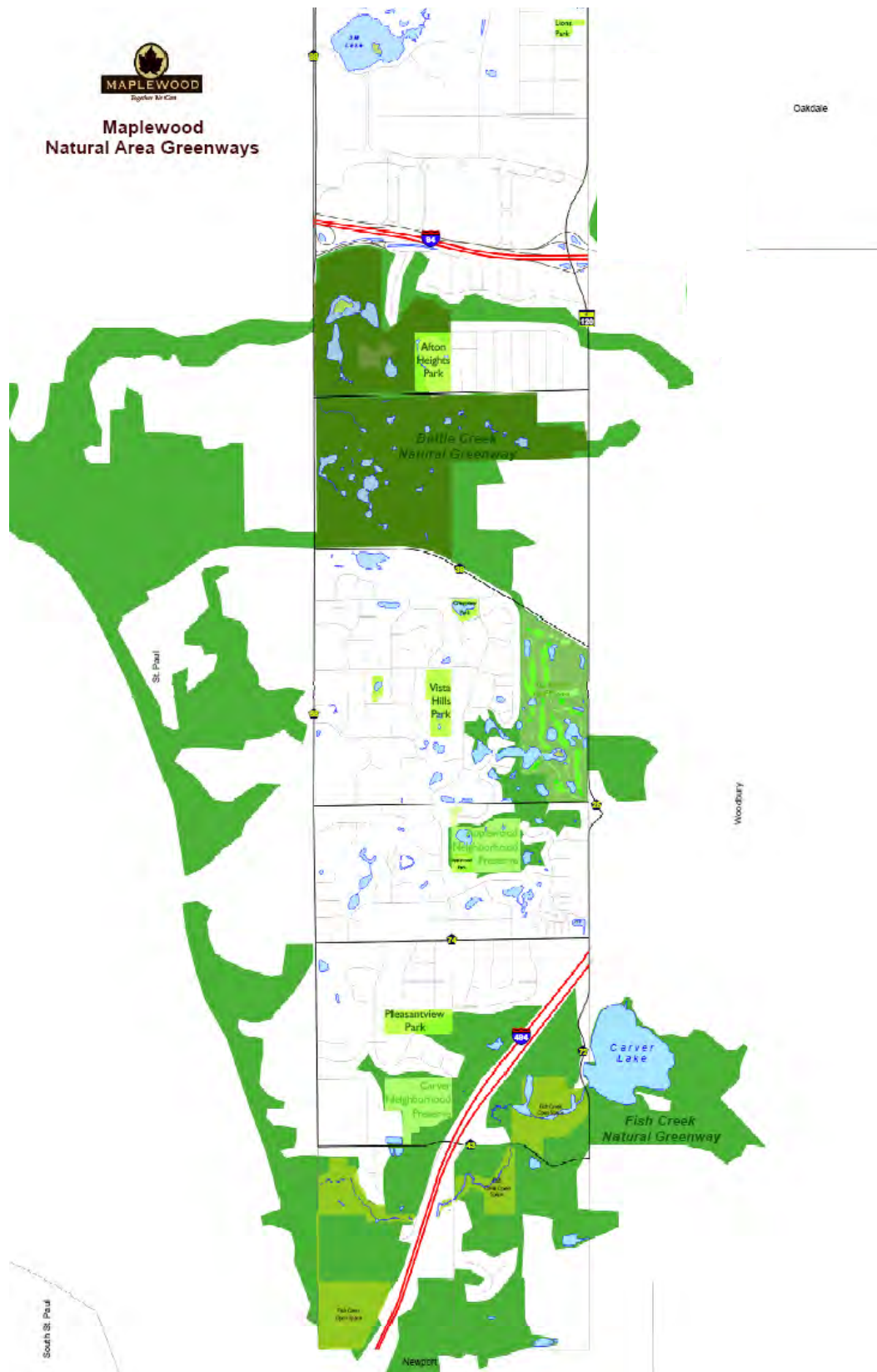
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Recommendation #17: The commission recommends that the city seek funding support from Minnesota Legislature for protection of Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway.

Recommendation #18: The commission recommends that the city continue its partnership with National Park Service and with the Trails and Open Space Partnership to further explore the possibility of funding by congress.

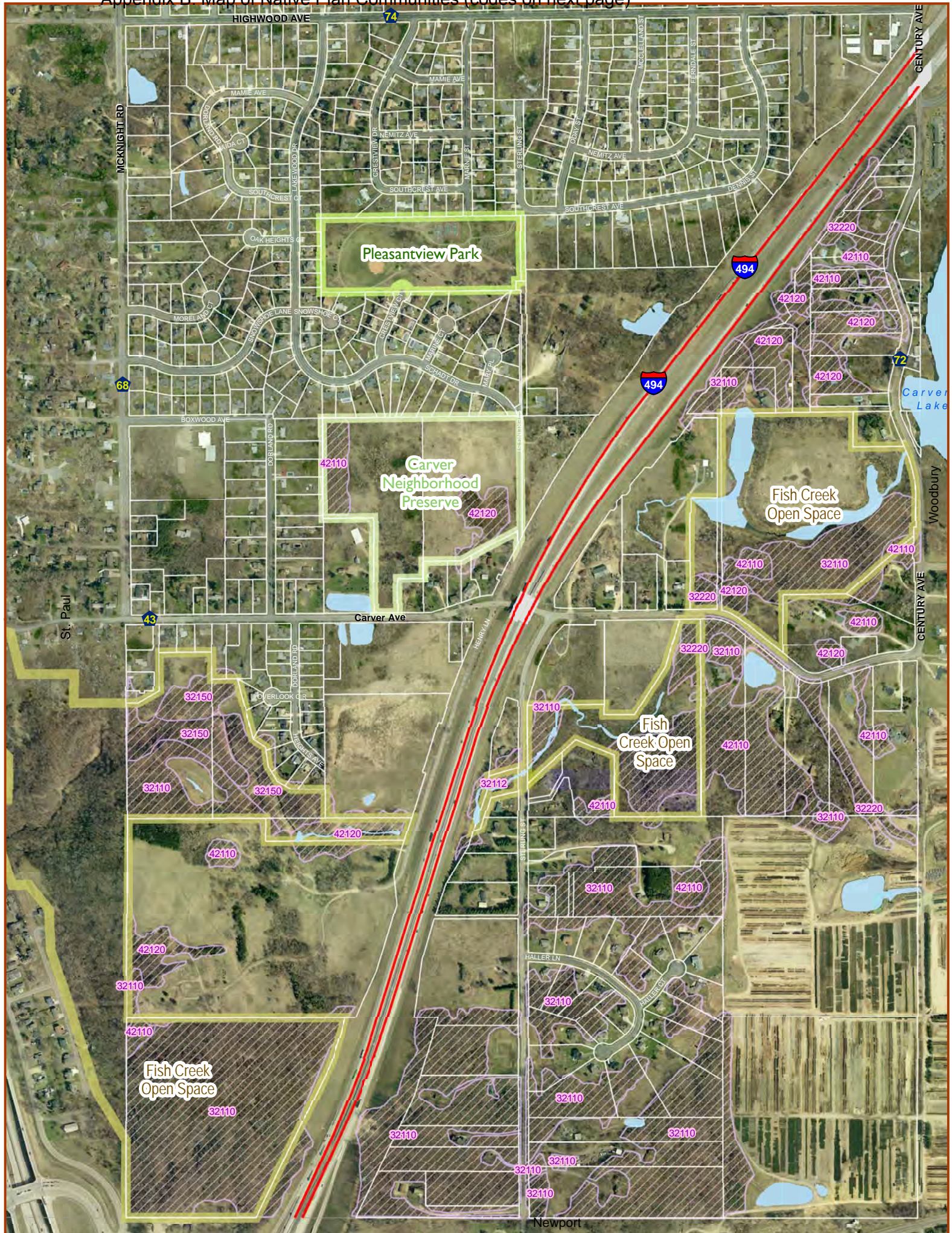
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Appendix A: Map of Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway (with Battle Creek Natural Area Greenway)



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Appendix B: Map of Native Plan Communities (codes on next page)



The Map of Naïve Plant Communities (previous page) shows the native forests in the Fish Creek greenway. Grasslands, wetlands, and highly alternated natural areas are not indicated. In addition, data for the ski jump site was not available for this map but that site is predominantly oak forest.

Code	Type of native woodland
32110	Oak forest
32112	Oak forest mesic subtype
32150	Maple-basswood forest
32220	Lowland hardwood forest
42110	Aspen woodland
42120	Oak woodland-brushland

Appendix C: Resident Questionnaire Results

This is a tally of resident questionnaires received October 1 through December 31, 2009. 45 questionnaires were received prior to November 30, 2009, most of which were in response to a mailing sent to 220 residences in south Maplewood. An additional 15 questionnaires were received in December, after an article in the December 2009 City News. This is not a scientific survey and there were no controls to prevent a person from responding more than one time. TOTAL respondents: 60 (35 on-line, 25 hard-copy)

RESIDENT INFORMATION AND CURRENT USE

1. Are you a Maplewood resident?
54 yes 5 no
2. How far do you live from Fish Creek or from the Ramsey County Fish Creek open space?
17 property is adjacent
20 less than ½ mile
12 ½ mile – 2 miles
10 more than 2 miles
3. How often do you visit Fish Creek or the Ramsey County Fish Creek open space?
15 daily or weekly
17 a few times per month
7 a few times per year
5 rarely
11 never
3 not sure where it is
4. If you use the Ramsey County Fish Creek open space, what activities do you do there? Check all that apply.
45 walking/hiking
25 bird watching
7 cross-country skiing
6 snowshoeing
6 mountain biking
3 other, please describe: (*respondents indicated berry picking, paint ball, photography, animal watching*)
11 I don't use the area

PRESERVATION OF PUBLIC LANDS

5. Do you think the city should purchase additional land in the Fish Creek greenway?
45 yes 7 no 6 not sure
6. Do you have any concerns about having more land in this area in public ownership?
16 yes 39 no 3 not sure
If yes, please explain: *see last page*
7. If funding is available for the city to purchase land in this area, what type of lands should have priority for acquisition? Please select your three top priorities from the list below. Number them with 1= highest priority, 2=second in priority, 3=third in priority.
32 Purchase sections of creek that are in private ownership (with goal of having whole creek in public ownership, currently all but one section of the creek is on public land)

- 32 Purchase land adjacent to creek to expand the creek buffer beyond the current 100' no-disturb area
- 12 Purchase land with highest ecological quality
- 17 Purchase Mississippi River bluff land (there is one section of bluff land in private ownership)
- 25 Purchase land with potential for public access for passive recreation (ex: hiking)
- 15 Purchase land adjacent to existing public lands or that connects existing public lands
- 18 Purchase land with scenic views or scenic value
- 4 Don't purchase any

USE OF PUBLIC LAND IN FISH CREEK AREA

8. How would you like to see existing public land in this area used? Check all that apply.
- 22 Leave it as it is, no further amenities, no change in management activities
- Provide trails:
- 24 Footpaths – 1'-2' wide, not graded, not maintained
- 12 Narrow rustic trail – 4' wide, graded, maintained, soft surface trail (mowed, soil, woodchipped)
- 5 Asphalt hiking/biking trail – 8'-10' wide
- 11 Provide benches
- 8 Provide parking
- 13 Provide interpretive/educational signage
- 26 Restore and/or manage public lands to enhance ecological quality
- Other, please explain:

PRIVATE LANDS

9. Do you own land that has some wildlife habitat (i.e. land that is not manicured lawn or gardens)?
- 39 yes
- 21 no
10. If the city were to provide programs and support, how likely would you be to participate in the following activities?
- | Very likely | Likely | Not likely | |
|-------------|-----------|------------|---|
| <u>14</u> | <u>27</u> | <u>15</u> | a. Attend an educational program on enhancing habitat |
| <u>11</u> | <u>20</u> | <u>23</u> | b. Attend a program on conservation easements |
| <u>1</u> | <u>14</u> | <u>36</u> | c. Attend a program on conservation subdivision (for those considering developing their land) |
| <u>13</u> | <u>24</u> | <u>18</u> | d. Enhance habitat on your land |
| <u>6</u> | <u>26</u> | <u>17</u> | e. Take advantage of technical support provided by city or other entity |
| <u>6</u> | <u>20</u> | <u>24</u> | f. Take advantage of a cost-share program |
| <u>11</u> | <u>26</u> | <u>17</u> | g. Partner with other neighbors interested in enhancing habitat on their land |
| <u>5</u> | <u>15</u> | <u>29</u> | h. Participate in a land registry program (non-binding agreement to care for land) |
| <u>19</u> | <u>22</u> | <u>13</u> | i. Plant native plants in your yard or gardens |
| <u>28</u> | <u>20</u> | <u>3</u> | j. Remove buckthorn or other invasive species in your yard |
| <u>2</u> | <u>7</u> | <u>38</u> | k. Allow a publicly accessible foot trail on your property—if part of larger trail system |

Written comments received on the questionnaire

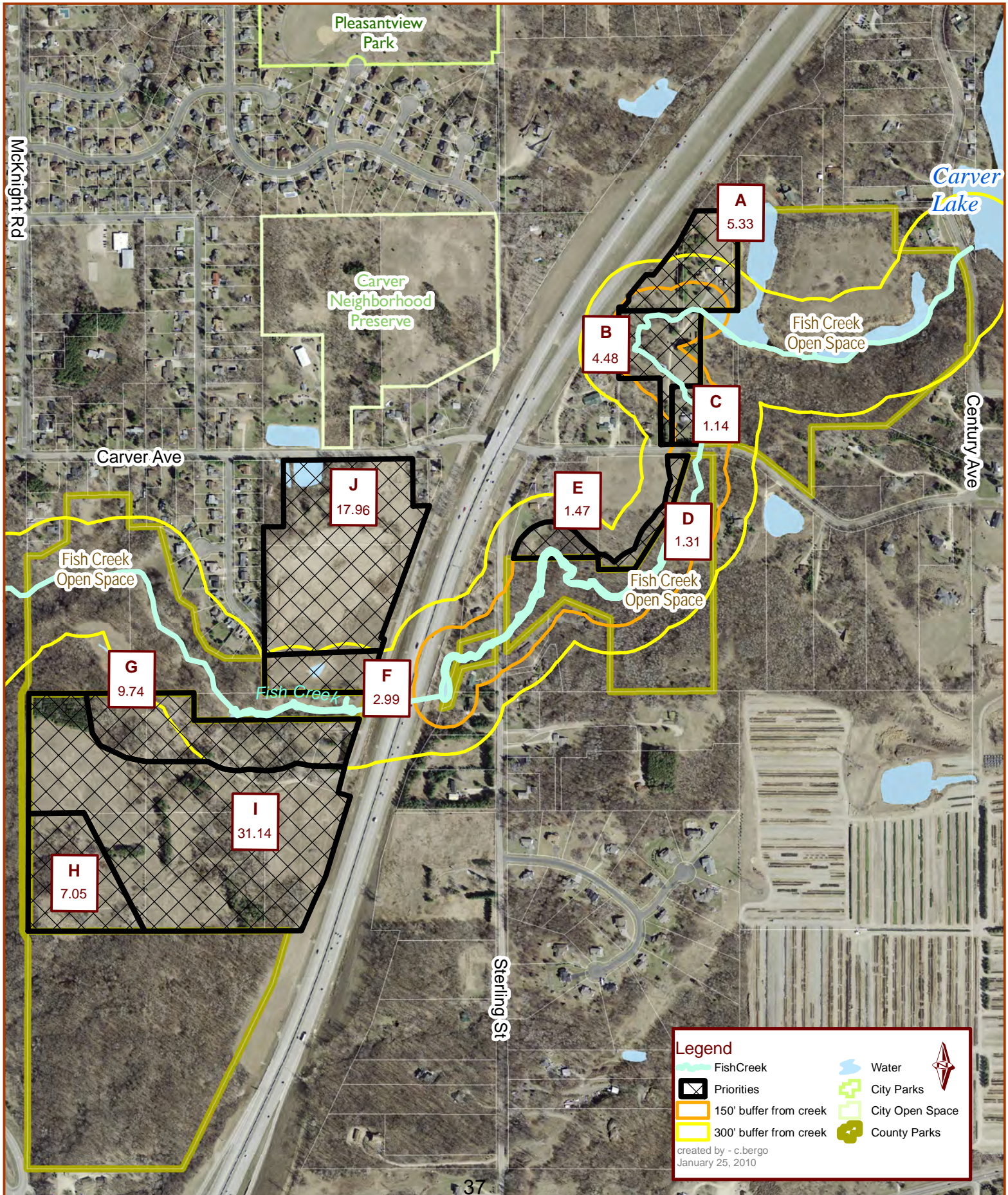
#6 Do you have any concerns about having more land in this area in public ownership?

- Yes. More exposure to public exposes our homes to theft.
- Yes. Main concern is that we take care of the land.
- Yes. More traffic, busier.
- Yes. We like our property the way it is—without more people.
- Yes. It must stay out of the political rip rap.
- Yes. Who would come up with the dollars, the property taxes used to pay the county—or would the tax dollars that were lost be divided among the remaining private property owners?
- Yes. Maplewood should buy Schlomka property!
- Yes. No developments, no parks.
- Yes. Taxes to pay for it. Taxes lost because of it.
- No. I would like to see the Fish Creek area preserved as an undeveloped park.
- Yes. We need more green spaces in Maplewood. Maplewood is almost 100% urban and due to that we travel to other cities to hike. Fish Creek would also be an ideal area for a new elementary or high school, while still preserving the bluffs around it.
- Yes. Please let us develop it the right way for our future generations.
- Yes. More land for which you cannot adequately care. Concentrate on what you already own. I see buckthorn and other invasive species running wild on property you already own. Concentrate on that. Use public property to limit usage on private property.
- Yes. The city should concentrate on lowering property taxes. Removing land from the tax rolls will not help.
- What real benefit does this area have to Maplewood as a whole?
- If the city buys more land, where will the money come from to properly maintain it?

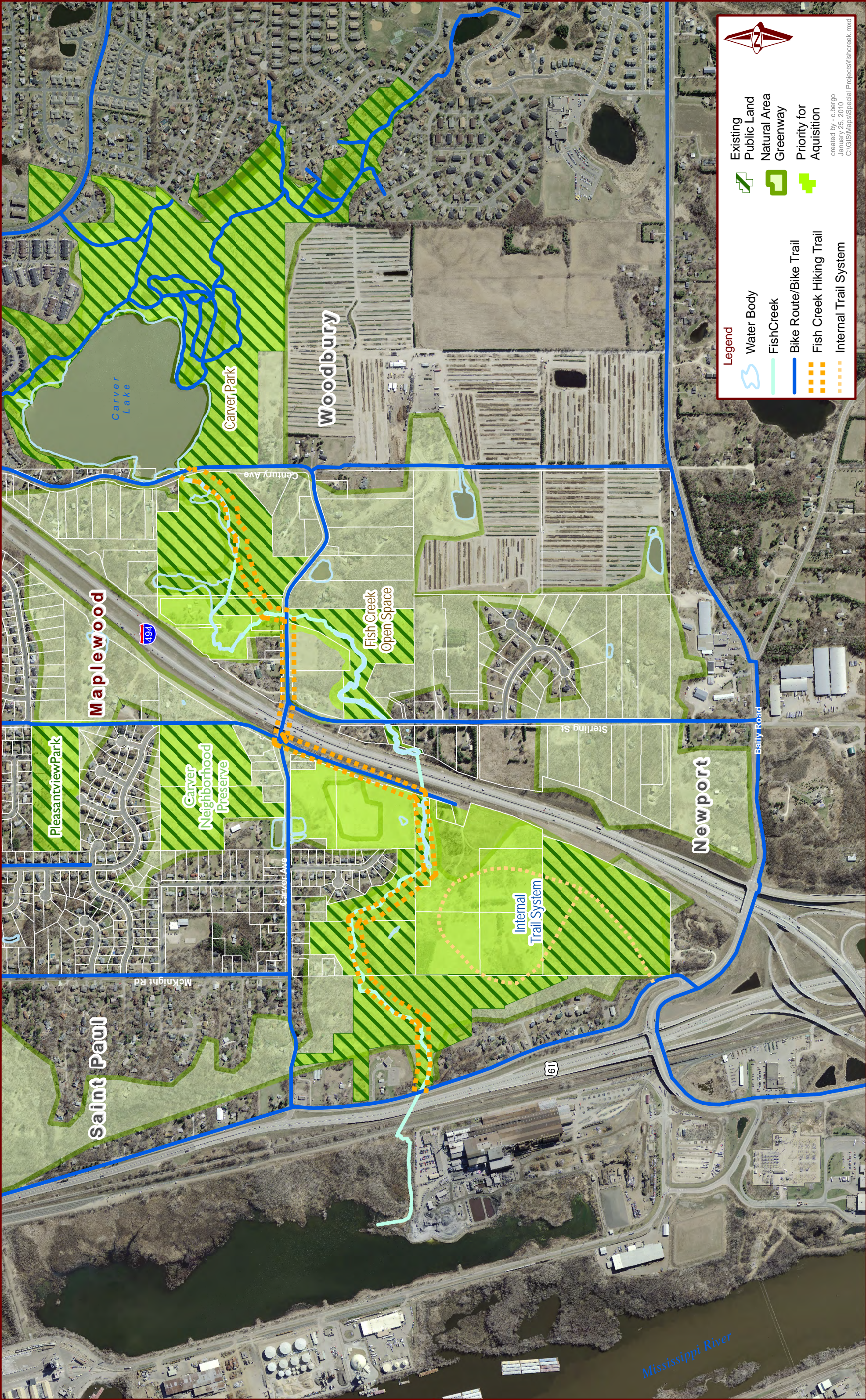
Other General Comments


- The Fish Creek property is abused by operators of ATV's, dirt bikes and snowmobiles. Citizen vigilance along with the cooperation of the city has helped to some degree but the problem still exists. How about some signs and enforcement?
- We want it to stay as is. No need to make a park. There is a nice park ½ mile away—Pleasant View.
- Find ways to fund more land to acquire. Conservation easements for private and public lands. Keep land development in the area to a minimum.
- We've really appreciated the city picking up buckthorn on our street, but we also know that pick ups can be expensive, so we've also appreciated being able to bring the buckthorn to the fire station on Londin Lane.
- We attended the meeting at Maplewood City Hall on October 1st, and we were very impressed with the Commission's caring concern about maintaining the beauty of Fish Creek and also maintaining that beauty for future generations. So, hats off to you all!!!
- Protect, protect, protect—Too many things fall apart as time marches on—plan and protect for the long term.
- Libby property would be a good choice [for acquisition].
- Regarding wildlife in the area—Last week we had turkeys and hawks on our deck railing; possum, raccoon, deer, ground hogs, and I think a weasel all within 50 feet of the house. Don't encourage any more wildlife. Breeding seems to take care of it.
- Should acquire additional land, providing it doesn't increase taxes.
- Leave it the way it is.

- Funding is NOT available. We're short now! We can't afford what we're doing now. In my family budget, if you can't afford it you can't do it. I wish government could understand that!!
- So little open space in metro area and this is one of the few areas locally we can enjoy nature that's undisturbed, not developed, not ruined! It's like being in the country while in the city. It's gorgeous the way it is.
- As far as wildlife habitat on our land, we just own a small tree line, so not much of it could be used for anything. We do live half a block from Fish Creek Canyon and our children used it all the time when they were growing up here. We loved it! I still use it for an occasional walk, but the access has much overgrown brush and weeds, so it is hard to get down there from Dorland Road.
- The Schlumpka property now owned (I believe) by the CoPar company should be purchased by the city in its entirety. Once developed its potential is gone forever. The land would be a jewel of the Maplewood park system and its citizens.
- Fish Creek is a valuable resource to allow future generations to appreciate nature in a more natural state than most parks. I would like to see it remain in a primitive status. It would be good to see some of the invasive vegetation removed, as in buckthorn.
- We need to make hiking and biking safer by providing sidewalks and trails to get off the streets. We need to connect to trails/parks as neighboring cities do. We need to connect to our neighboring city's park so we can safely get to their trails since ours suck.
- We need a sidewalk that runs along with Highwood. My kids have to walk down that dangerous road to their bus stop daily and if there were a sidewalk, more residents would get out and more involved with their surroundings.
- For land adjacent to Fish Creek area, support single-family dwellings on 2-acre plots only and not multiple-family dwellings (e.g. highrises, condos, etc.).
- Do not over step your bounds. Be prepared to properly remunerate adjacent property owners if your policies limit their ability to utilize their property as they see fit.
- Let's concentrate on lowering property taxes.
- Keep new housing at low density, especially on the CoPar development property (1 house/2 acres). I'm concerned with rain runoff and additional traffic in the area, in addition to the rural feel of the neighborhoods south of Carver Avenue. These 3 points would definitely have an effect on the Fish Creek Area.
- Please take advantage of the opportunities that are available in the form of grants (from federal government and other agencies) etc. Money that can support protecting the natural resources in this area. Please research and above all apply.
- [Type of trails] depend on where. If on top of the bluff of CoPar land, where the road goes, then an asphalt trail for a little ways on top for the view. Then when it heads toward Fish Creek and above the creek, a foot-path is appropriate. Where the bluff connects with the Ramsey County open space south (40 acres) a "narrow rustic trail" is good.
- The tracts in our area are a wildlife habitat with most neighbors having a 3-4 acre tract and no plans to develop it. We have lots of deer, 30 plus wild turkey and a variety of small animals. They are enjoyed by the people who walk the trail along the back of our land. So I can understand the concerns residents there might have.











Vision for Public Lands in Fish Creek Natural Area Greenway





Legend

	Water Body		Existing Public Land
	Fish Creek		Natural Area Greenway
	Bike Route/Bike Trail		Priority for Acquisition
	Fish Creek Hiking Trail		
	Internal Trail System		

created by - c.bargo
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