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TO: Al Robinson, Chair
Ways & Means Committee

THROUGH: Robert E. Guenzel
County Administrator

FROM: Curtis Hedger
Corporation Counsel

DATE: August 2, 2000

SUBJECT: Placing a One Quarter (0.25) of a Mill Millage Increase on the
November 7, 2000 General Election Ballot to Fund the County's
Purchase of Natural Areas

Board Action Requested:

It is requested that the Board of Commissioners certify ballot language to be submitted to the Washtenaw County Clerk for the November 7, 2000 general election calling for a one quarter (0.25) mill millage increase to fund the County's purchase of natural areas.

Background:

Urban sprawl is seen as a major problem in Washtenaw County. In spite of the defeat of Proposal 1 in 1998, many members of the community are anxious to address this problem and have brought forth to the Board of Commissioners a proposal to preserve natural areas as a means of mitigating urban sprawl. There appears to be some consensus among diverse groups, from the environmental community to developers and homebuilders that something should be done to control urban sprawl.

Discussion:

Washtenaw County's Agricultural Lands and Open Space report of 1998 noted, "Washtenaw County's landscape is undergoing dramatic change. Existing federal, state and local laws and the lack of coordinated planning have contributed to an inefficient use of land. The resultant pattern of sprawl, coupled with the increasing population growth rate is threatening the fabric of the community and is rapidly consuming the landscape." These trends have many negative environmental, economic and quality-of-life consequences for County residents.

It appears that there is no consensus in Washtenaw County to use a tool like purchase of development rights as part of a countywide program to preserve agricultural lands. However, the other three components of the 1998 proposal, urban revitalization, planning and natural areas acquisition, were widely supported, even attracting public support from the proposal's strongest opponents.

The County has moved forward on two of these three components. Last year, the County addressed the issue of urban revitalization by creating a Brownfield Authority, which holds out the promise of redeveloping blighted urban areas. Also, in the last year, regional planning initiatives have taken root throughout the County. Local governments in the western part of the County have started inter-municipal planning discussions; the County has participated in the LIAA (Land Information Access Association) program; in addition, the County is also now embarking on an update of its comprehensive land use plan.

During the last six months, various groups in the community have been meeting and talking about a prospective proposal for a natural areas preservation initiative. There has been a positive response, agreeing in concept, from the environmental groups such as the Ecology Center, the Huron River Watershed Council and the Sierra Club, as well as from the Home Builders Association, the Board of Realtors and the Washtenaw Smart Growth Initiative.

The ballot proposal, if approved by the electorate at the November 7, 2000 general election, would increase the County's millage rate by .25 mills for 10 years beginning with the December 1, 2001 levy. This millage increase would raise approximately \$2,500,000 in the first year. The County's purchase of natural areas would be managed by the County's Parks and Recreation Department with assistance from a technical advisory group to be appointed by the Board of Commissioners. This advisory group would evaluate those properties being considered for purchase by the County.

Impact on Human Resources:

If the millage increase is approved, the County Parks and Recreation Commission, along with Parks and Recreation personnel, would be responsible for administering the program.

Impact on Budget:

The funds to purchase the natural areas and to administer the program will be raised from the approved millage increase. No County general fund money will be used for this program.

Impact on Indirect Costs:

There are no indirect costs associated with this request.

Impact on Other County Departments or Outside Agencies:

The County Clerk will incur expenses in preparing and placing the proposed question on the ballot. Moreover, if the millage is approved, the County's Parks and Recreation Commission will administer and the program to purchase natural areas and maintain those areas once they are purchased.

Conformity to County Policies:

This Resolution conforms to County policies and procedures.

A RESOLUTION SUBMITTING TO THE WASHTENAW COUNTY ELECTORS A QUESTION OF WHETHER THE TAX LIMITATION SHOULD BE INCREASED BY ONE FOURTH (.25) OF A MILL FOR TEN (10) YEARS, BEGINNING WITH THE DECEMBER 1, 2001 TAX LEVY, TO PROVIDE FUNDING FOR THE COUNTY'S COMPREHENSIVE LAND PRESERVATION STRATEGY TO INCLUDE THE PURCHASE OF NATURAL AREAS

WASHTENAW COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

JULY 5, 2000

WHEREAS, the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners declares that Washtenaw County is a desirable place to live, work and visit in large part because of the existence of natural, scenic and other open space within the County; and

WHEREAS, natural areas have aesthetic as well as practical benefits for County citizens; and

WHEREAS, the purchase of natural areas can be used to protect fragile lands, historic resources and scenic areas; and

WHEREAS, preserving such land within the County will further these public benefits; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners has proposed that one fourth (.25) of a mill, if approved by the Washtenaw County voters, will be used to purchase natural areas as outlined in the Natural Areas Ordinance; and

WHEREAS, this program will be housed in the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission, who will decide what lands should be purchased upon recommendation from the Natural Areas Technical Advisory Committee, as outlined in the Natural Areas Ordinance; and

WHEREAS, this matter has been reviewed by Corporation Counsel, Bond Counsel, Finance, County Administration and the Ways and Means Committee.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners, State of Michigan, as follows:

1. There shall be submitted to the Electors of Washtenaw County at the General Election to be held on the seventh (7th) day of November, 2000 from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. prevailing time the following proposition:

"Shall the limitation on the amount of taxes which may be imposed each year for all purposes on real and tangible property in Washtenaw County be increased as provided in Section 6, Article 9 of the Michigan Constitution and the Board of Commissioners authorized to levy a tax not to exceed one fourth (.25) of one mill (\$.25 per \$1000 of state equalized valuation) on the taxable value of such property for a period of ten years beginning with the levy made on December 1, 2001 (which will generate estimated revenues of \$2,500,000 in the first year) for the purpose of funding a land strategy for the purchase of natural areas in order to preserve them?"

YES

NO

2. The election shall be held in accordance with Chapter XXVII, the General Election Laws of State of Michigan.
3. The Washtenaw County Clerk is hereby instructed to carry out all appropriate statutory duties as set forth in this Resolution and the general election laws of the State of Michigan so that the question of adoption may be submitted to the voters on November 7, 2000.

4. The Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners hereby certifies to the County Clerk the following question as:

PROPOSITION TO INCREASE THE TAX LIMITATION FOR THE PURPOSE OF FUNDING FOR THE COUNTY'S COMPREHENSIVE LAND STRATEGY TO INCLUDE THE PURCHASE OF NATURAL AREA LANDS AND ADOPTING THE NATURAL AREAS ORDINANCE

Shall the limitation on the amount of taxes which may be imposed each year for all purposed on real and tangible property in Washtenaw County be increased as provided in Section 6, Article IX of the Michigan Constitution and the board of Commissioners authorized to levy a tax not to exceed on fourth (.25) of a mill (\$0.25 per \$1000 of state equalized valuation) on the taxable value of such a property for a period of ten years beginning with the levy made on December 1, 2001 (which will generate estimated revenues of \$2,500,000 in the first year) for the purpose of funding a land strategy for the purchase of natural areas in order to preserve them?

YES

NO

5. Each city and township clerk shall be given appropriate notice of the submission of the aforesaid proposition as provided by law, which notice shall contain the statement of the Washtenaw County Treasurer as to previously voted tax limitation increases affecting property in Washtenaw County.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners directs that upon passage by the voters, the one fourth of a mill (.25) increase shall be allocated to purchase natural area lands.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners requests that the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission report annually on the progress of the Washtenaw County Natural Areas Preservation Strategy.