

NAPP Application ● Staff Report ● N-15-2007

Washtenaw County Planning Advisory Board

Date Received: Nov 9, 2007

N-15-2007

TOWNSHIP: Sharon

LOCATION: The 145 acre site consists of three parcels and is located along Grass Lake Road, east of Sylvan Rd, in Section 3 in Sharon Township. Clark Spike, the property owner, is applying to the Natural Areas Preservation Program (NAPP), requesting that the County purchase this property under NAPP.

REASON FOR PAB REVIEW: Natural Areas Preservation Program Committee Ordinance No. 128 requires that the Washtenaw County Planning Advisory Board provide an advisory opinion on the applications submitted to the program.

BACKGROUND: The Spike Property site totals 145 acres, made up of three parcels. The first parcel is 73.9 acres, the second is 66.1 ac and the other is 5 acres. The Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission is considering the opportunity of buying these parcels.

STAFF COMMENTS

1. The application's impact on long-range planning

According to the Sharon Township Land Use Plan (Township Plan), the long-range plan for this parcel is Resource Conservation. *A Comprehensive Plan for Washtenaw County* (County Plan) designates this parcel as Open Space. Staff believes that the use of this site for passive recreation and/or open space does not conflict with the long range planning for the area.

2. Existing land use of the property and adjacent properties

According to SEMCOG 2005 data, the western two parcels of the Spike Property are existing woodland, and the eastern parcel is grassland/shrub land. The surrounding land use around this parcel includes grassland to the immediate east and south, active agriculture to the north and east, woodlands to the west and south; and a few smaller parcels with low density residential sporadic in each direction. According to the application, there is one easement on the property which is a "Wolverine" utility pipeline. Staff believes that an open space use on this parcel does not conflict with surrounding land uses.

3. Current zoning of the property and surrounding properties

The zoning designation for the three parcels indicated is A-1 Agricultural District, with the smallest and northern most parcel being within the RC Resource Conservation District. The surrounding zoning designations are Agriculture to the east and west, and Resource Conservation to the north and south.

According to the Sharon Township Zoning Ordinance (Township Ordinance), the intent of the Agricultural District is: "...to encourage and provide opportunities for agriculture and retention of land in Sharon Township which is well suited for production of food and fiber, while also providing opportunities for comparatively low density rural residential lifestyles and development patterns that encourage the preservation of open spaces, agricultural and other natural resources, and the Township's rural character."

The intent of the Resource Conservation District is: "... to protect special and important natural resources, the enjoyment and protection of which is of great public interest to Sharon Township and the State of Michigan. The majority of lands within this District are characterized by wetlands, woodlands, steep-sloped areas and/or floodplain environments. Together, these resources are critical in providing for wildlife habitat, water and air purification, flood control, and recreation opportunities including hunting, and support the overall rural character of the Township. In addition, some of these resources present severe limitations to development. It is the intent of this District to limit the introduction of land uses and development densities that will negatively affect the intent, quantity, quality and value of the resources contained within or otherwise be inappropriate due to the physical limitations of the District." The use of this property either for passive recreation, open space, or a conservation area does not appear to conflict with the Township Ordinance.

4. Compliance with Master Plans

The Washtenaw County Land Use Plan maps the area as Open Space and Rural. Open Space areas, according to the County Plan, "can refer to grasslands, stands of trees, swampy lowland, or a park." Rural areas are "recognized for agricultural operations, parklands and vast open spaces."

Further, the County Plan states that "preserving large tracts of natural ecosystems and linkages between these ecosystems are an important part of developing an open space plan. Preserving these areas has positive impacts on air quality, ecological systems, habitats, natural corridors, scenic vistas and water quality. Corridors and natural connections between ecosystems provide a natural flow that stands in stark contrast to small isolated pockets of open space leftover from developments that disrupt natural water systems or trap wildlife."

According to the Township Plan, the site is designated as Resource Conservation. The category is described as the following: "in addition to presenting severe limitations to development, these resources provide important environmental benefits...and contribute to the Township's overall rural character."

Staff concludes that overall, the passive recreational and open space use on these parcels do not conflict with either the County land use policies or the Township Plan.

5. Impact on fragile lands/natural resources

According to Washtenaw County data, the site includes wetlands, woodlands and steep slopes. A majority of the land is identified as groundwater recharge area by the Township Plan. However, surveys by recognized experts or an environmental assessment by a qualified consultant have not been performed.

6. Impact on infrastructure and community as a whole

The Township and County Plans indicate that this area does not have, nor is it projected to have, water or sewer services. The closest area served by public sanitary sewer and water is the Village of Manchester, 6 miles to the south.

The Township is presently patrolled by the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Department. Sharon Township is served by the Manchester Township Fire Department. The nearest fire station is located in Manchester Village, six miles to the south.

This parcel appears to be significant for its natural feature value and does not appear to impact on public and community services.

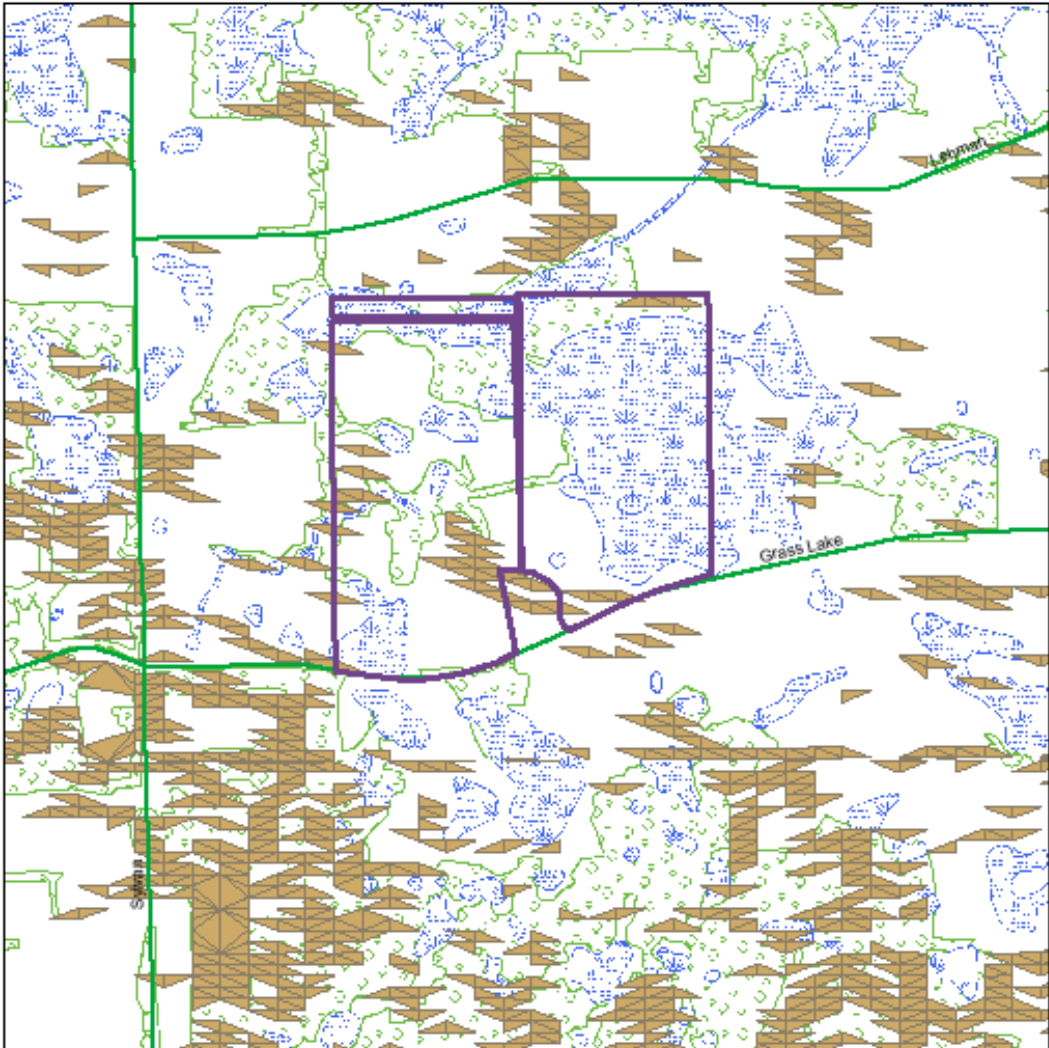
Access to the site would be provided from Grass Lake Road, one of the few paved roads in the township. Traffic counts data have indicated substantial increases in average daily traffic counts on Township roads. As growth and development continues in and around Sharon Township, daily traffic will increase on area roads. If any additional access drives are developed, staff recommends that Access Management Standards, as developed by MDOT or the County Road Commission be consulted.

Conclusion

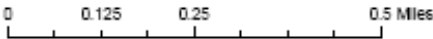
Due to the natural features on site, this area is very important for water quality and stormwater management through protection of wetlands and woodlands.

In conclusion, based on the observations above, it is the opinion of the Washtenaw County Planning and Environment Department Staff that this parcel for the Natural Areas Preservation Program does not conflict with any land use plans nor the zoning ordinance.

Spike Property



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Washtenaw County Department of Planning and Environment
SHARON TOWNSHIP -- NATURAL FEATURES



Legend

-  Roads
-  Steep Slope
-  Wetlands
-  Woodlands

