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## Preserving Farmlands and Open Spaces: Twenty-Year Report

In 2003, 77% of voters in Ann Arbor Township supported a 20-year millage to fund a Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program, to keep areas of the township undeveloped forever. After the successful vote, the township Board of Trustees appointed a seven-member Farmland and Open Space Preservation Board to implement the program and hired local land preservation consultant Barry Lonik to serve as staff to the Preservation Board. Together, everyone worked to educate landowners, attract applications, apply for matching funds and bring land preservation projects to fruition.

The first completed project was in November 2006 on the Kapp farm, located on the east side of Nixon Rd. between Warren Rd. and Pontiac Trail. The Kapp family farm was acquired in 1931. They ran a dairy operation from 1935 to 1995 and now raise commodity grain crops.

Since then, 13 other projects have closed using the township's dedicated millage funds, bringing the total amount of protected land to 1,702 acres.

The township has been successful in attracting matching funds from a federal grant program, the City of Ann Arbor Greenbelt program and the Washtenaw County Parks Natural Area Preservation Program. So far, almost \$4 million of township millage funds have been expended; more than twice that amount has been matched by other sources. About 45% of the protected lands are natural features (woods, wetlands, streams).

When development rights are purchased, the remaining value of the land is significantly lower as the ability to build a residential subdivision is

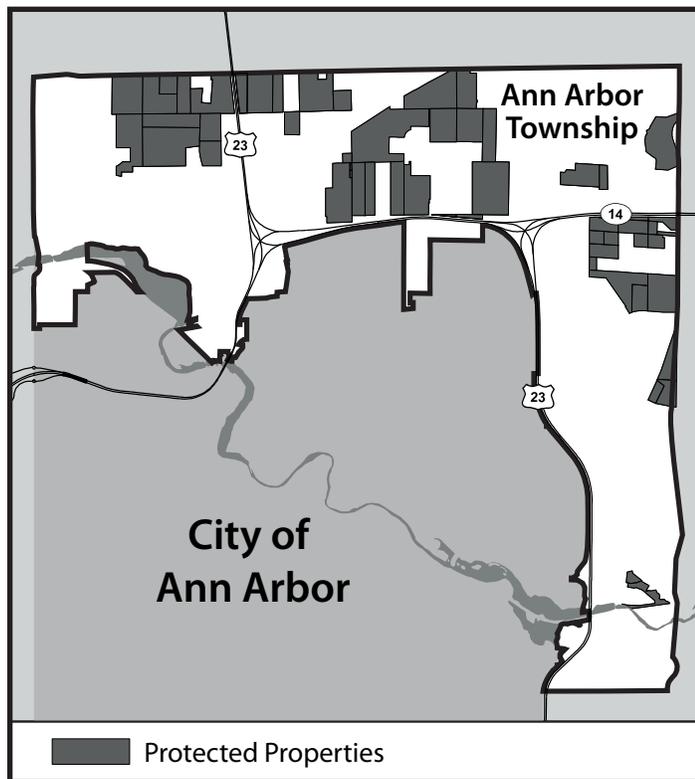
no longer possible. That makes the land more affordable for a prospective farmer to purchase. One of the positive outcomes of conserving farmland in Ann Arbor Township is the establishment of small-scale organic food production operations:

- Nate and Jill Lada purchased 64 acres on the west side of Nixon Rd. between Warren Rd. and the freeway and established Green Things Farm.
- Kim Bayer purchased 187 acres located on both sides of Whitmore Lake Rd. and US-23 south of Joy Rd. and established Slow Farm, a fruit and vegetable u-pick operation with large areas planted with native grasses and spots with created wetlands.
- Cindy Stiles and Eric Kaldjian purchased 161 acres on both sides of Warren Rd. and established Cloudberry Farm, clearing land that had been overgrown with invasive trees and shrubs.
- Alex Cacciari and Mark Nowak purchased 30 acres on the south side of Warren Rd. and established Seeley Farm.

These new operations are contributing fresh food to the local marketplace and are welcome additions to the farming economy of Ann Arbor Township.

At the program's outset, the township set a goal to protect 2,000 acres with the millage funds. Twenty years in, we are less than 300 acres away from our goal. The Preservation Board recently distributed a mailing to the owners of eligible properties with information on the process and benefits of PDR. A new round of outreach to landowners is underway.

For more information on the township's land preservation program, or if you would like to become a member of the Preservation Board, please contact township supervisor Diane O'Connell at (734) 663-3418.



## A Sunny Future in the Township

If you've driven around the township lately, you may have noticed some big changes popping up on your neighbors' roofs and yards. Rooftop solar installations had a record-breaking year in 2023; experts believe this trend will continue. National residential solar adoption has risen to 32.8 gigawatts of installed capacity, according to new estimates from the US Energy Information Administration, with 2023 holding the record for the most small-scale solar capacity units added in one year (6.55 gigawatts)! In fact, 2022 and 2023 marked the first period in which a renewable electricity source accounted for over half of capacity additions to the national power grid. Here in Ann Arbor Township, we saw 12 permits related to residential solar installation in 2023.

One big misconception is that Michigan lacks solar resources. You may be thinking to yourself, isn't Michigan's weather bad for solar? While yes, Michigan does experience more cloudy days than some states, solar panels still produce energy even in overcast weather! In fact, Michigan solar projects have a good return on investment, and residential solar typically has a payback period of around 10.5 years. According to data collected by the Solar Energy Industries Association, solar installations in Michigan have grown dramatically. As of the end of 2023, there are 1,444 megawatts of installed solar energy capacity, enough to power over 255,000 homes.

Ann Arbor has developed a program called Ann Arbor Solarize, a community bulk-buy solar program, to encourage adoption of residential solar installations. Participants in the program can get discounts of 10% to 15% depending on the size of the group, and there are always new groups forming. This program is open to Township residents. Former Township Trustee Rodney Smith installed solar in February 2021 with this program. According to Smith, "This was an easy way to get a vetted contractor to do the work. They looked at one year's electricity bill to size the installation appropriately and installed the unit in a day. With DTE's demand pricing on electricity, the benefit is even greater, since the high-rate period is also the same time as the solar energy production."

If you are interested in solar for your home, please visit the Ann Arbor Solarize webpage at [www.a2.gov/solarize](http://www.a2.gov/solarize).

## Protecting Your Potable Water from Backflow: What are CROSS CONNECTIONS?

Ann Arbor Township routinely inspects commercial and residential properties for potential cross connections to ensure drinking water remains safe. Property owners are required by

plumbing code to have backflow prevention devices installed, inspected, and maintained by licensed plumbers.

**What is a cross connection?** Any piping arrangement which allows a potable (drinking) water system to be connected to a non-potable system. For example, a home's water connection to a pool or, in a business, to a fire sprinkler system.

**What does backflow mean?** The undesirable reversal of the flow of water or other substances into the potable water distribution supply. It can be caused by backpressure, back siphonage or a combination of both.

**Did you know...** Hose bibs are the most common type of backflow source at residential properties. How do you protect yourself from backflow situations?

- Keep all hoses and faucets away from direct contact with possible contaminants.
- Never submerge hoses in buckets, pools, tubs, or sinks.
- In the event of loss of water pressure, you need an air gap otherwise the hose will act like a straw and suck the liquid backwards
- Protect yourself by installing inexpensive backflow protection devices on all hoses and threaded faucets in your home. These devices are available at hardware and home improvement stores for about \$4-10 each. Backflow vacuum breakers provide safety valves that prevent liquids from flowing backwards into a hose or faucet.

See images: Unprotected Hose Bib (left); Properly Protected (center); Hose Bib Vacuum Breaker (right)



## Just Some Bison?

The sprawling complex of Domino's Farms is not just the largest multi-tenant office complex in Ann Arbor, it is also a beacon of conservation efforts for preserving the American bison. Within its grounds, a remarkable initiative has been underway for over 30 years, championing the resurgence of this majestic animal, once on the brink of extinction.

The United States national mammal, bison hold a profound significance in American history and culture. These creatures once roamed the vast plains of North America in the millions, serving as a vital resource for indigenous peoples and early settlers alike. However, rampant slaughter and habitat destruction decimated their populations, pushing them perilously close to extinction, with less than 1,000 animals alive, by the late 19th century.

According to the scientific report published in Nature.com, the current population of American bison comes from lineages of the final seven surviving herds.

I was taken on a tour by John Petz, Director of Real Estate and Public Affairs at Domino's Farms, and Todd Crocker, Grounds and Ranch Manager, to see the bison in their pasture. Petz relayed some of the history to me as we joined Crocker at the pasture entrance. The herd started at Domino's Farms in 1993 with two bison and, since its inception, Crocker has led the herd operations.

Crocker's goal is to produce the best genetic representation of the American bison. Although considered livestock, the bison is wildlife, and requires entirely different methods to care for and grow a herd. Nearly 100 acres of Domino's Farms has been dedicated to bison pasture and the animals roam and graze throughout the property.

Research has demonstrated that introgression of the cattle genome into bison occurred with nearly every post slaughter-era herd. Crocker's

*(continued on Pg 4)*

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## Just Some Bison?

(continued from Pg 3)

efforts to approximate the original American bison requires diligent breeding practices. He and his staff have spent more than three decades growing the herd to where it is today. To maintain strong gene diversity, he brings in new bison that test low for cattle allele introgression and they become part of his herd.

The National Bison Association, of which Domino's Farms is a member, maintains the North American Bison Registry which records the lineage and origin of North American bison. Through 5 different DNA tests, the registry helps herd managers with knowledge, stewardship, and to preserve the integrity of the species. In March of 2024, Domino's Farms won eleven awards at the 27th annual Eastern Bison Association's "Show and Sale."

Fifteen calves have been born this year so far, and the herd currently stands at 58 bison. The size

of Domino's Farms' herd is kept to 60 - 75 head. Crocker reports that they move in the pasture according to the herd leader. Each day the herd selects a leader from amongst the adult females.

The herd can frequently be seen from the corner of the US23 and M14 freeways, or by riding along Ave Maria Drive on the Domino's Farms campus. When you see it, you will remember that this herd is much more than, "Just some bison."

