



How Lyndon Township moved into the 21st century with the help of Huron River Watershed Council.

Sometimes things that seem small at first can grow huge when times changes.

I am going to tell you a story, the way it happened to me. I am just one small part of a bigger picture, but then lots of things start out looking insignificant.

In 2000, I was single. I decided to look at the activities in the Ann Arbor Observer calendar, highlight anything of interest, and go to one each week. After several months of highlighting I got myself to go to a meeting at Pioneer High school about gardening with native plants for a group called "Wild Ones." For the same reason, I started going to Washtenaw county naturalist led nature walks with Matt Heumann and later Faye Stoner and fell in love with western Washtenaw County parks. I learned a lot of local botany from them in what I call the 'natural resources school of hard knocks.'

One afternoon while waiting in line to make a bank deposit, I picked up an Ann Arbor Observer and saw a calendar event for Suds on the River, the Huron River Watershed Counsel annual fundraiser. That met my quota for that week. Later, I volunteered to help with field assessments for the Bioreserve project to collect data on natural areas in the watershed.

In 2010 I was married and we moved to Lyndon Township (population 2720) I saw a posting for a position at the District Library board in the Stockbridge Sun

Times. I applied. There was already an incumbent for the library slot and I was asked if I would be interested in becoming a Planning Commissioner. Although I am a divorce lawyer, I did take Property law at the University of Michigan Law School in September 1970, and I was sure I could learn to ride that bicycle again.

I was appointed in late 2011, when the Planning Commission had just finished a new Master Plan which described Lyndon as a 'recreation destination' because it is half residential and half parks. Parks don't pay taxes, but you could easily say parklands are our primary 'industry'. Lyndon does not have a city, town or village. We have one gas station-convenience store.

Lawyers are always looking at how other people have done things, so to get started I contacted another lawyer, Peter Flintoff (who was very generous with his time and library) and the Huron River Watershed Counsel. At the Watershed Counsel I met with Elizabeth Riggs and Kris Olsson, who gave me more information than I could possibly absorb in a year.

I learned that my Township's ordinances were a century out of date from a conservation point of view. This was a little daunting. I was the newbie on the Planning Commission and in the township and at that first, I had no idea whether it would even be possible to move us into the 21st century.

Fortunately, it took several years to re-do the ordinances and the Planning Commissioners all learned together. The world had turned on a number of things, not just conservation. For example, the State of Michigan now licenses massage therapists. We just can't zone them out as undesirable home-based businesses!

After a presentation from HRWC's Elizabeth Riggs on lake and riparian edges, we changed the setbacks and buffers in our lake conservation districts.

Was it because we were so far behind the times? Or so small? Or important caretakers for our parks? In early 2012 the HRWC approached the Lyndon Planning Commission about doing a Green Infrastructure Plan. Even though we didn't have to pay for the work, there were still questions about 'why bother?'

Green Infrastructure, HRWC

- Green infrastructure is the interconnected network of open spaces, natural areas and waterways
- Focusing on conservation values and the services provided by natural systems in concert with, instead of in opposition to, land development
- Gives us an opportunity to Identify, Protect & Enhance our Natural Assets

Thanks to funding from the Knight Foundation, HRWC is providing GI planning services



We learned about hubs –larger natural areas, sites – smaller natural areas and links – the connections that hold the network together.

We talked about the special places we knew. No one knew them all, but each of us had our special places. I knew the parks, and also some very special private properties because of the field assessments.

47 mile Waterloo-Pinckney state trail (the longest hiking trail in southern Michigan).

Waterloo 20,000 acres = 600,000 visitor days each year

Pinckney 11,000 acres

Washtenaw County Parks Lyndon North and South, high degree biodiversity

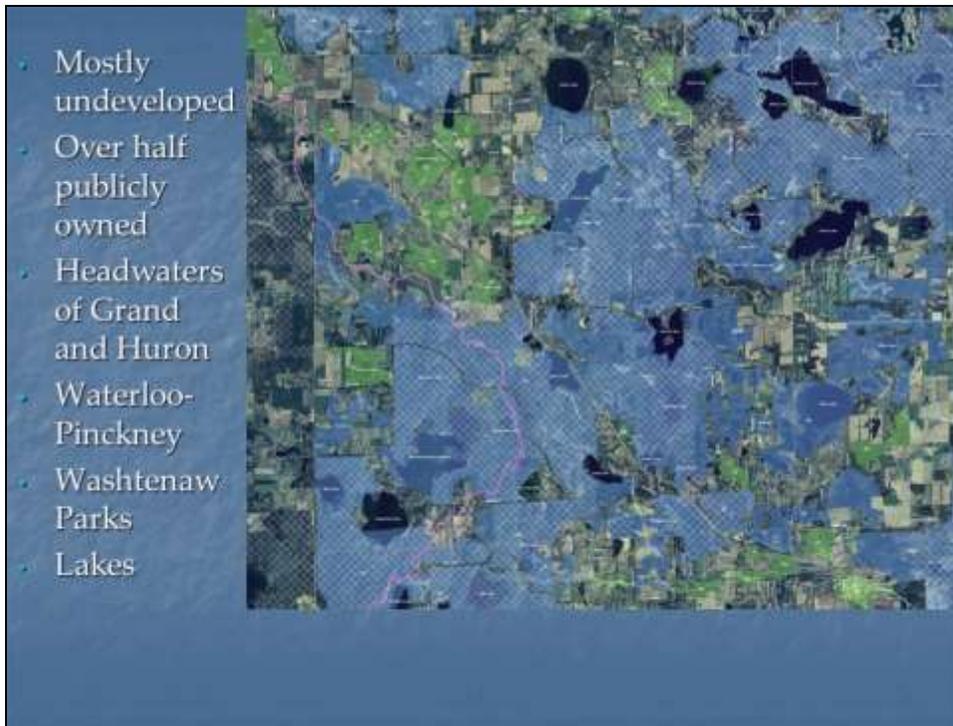
South Lake, Green Lake, Island Lake and Bruin Lake to name the larger ones.



But we agreed, and on June 5, 2012 fourteen Lyndon township residents, including the township supervisor and some members of the Planning Commission, met with Kris.

It isn't as if we didn't 'know' our township. We all lived in Lyndon because we love lakes and trees.

The Green Infrastructure process pulled together what were bits and pieces of knowledge into coherent document with unifying principles.



For example, we learned specifically that Lyndon Township:

Is 61% natural areas.

Over half of natural areas are publicly owned

Headwaters of Huron and Grand Rivers



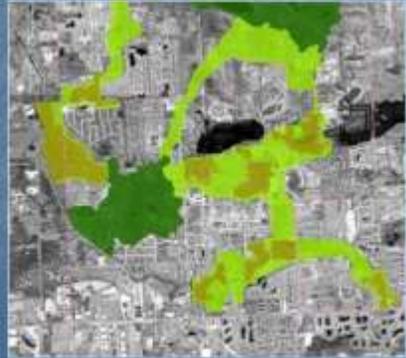
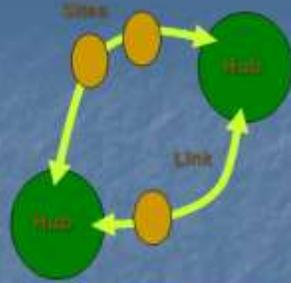
66 species of threatened, endangered or special concern animals and plants.
11 ecosystems of special concern

Green infrastructure networks consist of the following components:

Hubs: Hubs anchor the network and provide an origin or destination for wildlife

Sites: Smaller ecological landscape features that can serve as a point of origin or destination

Links: The connections that hold the network together and enable it to function. Links facilitate movement from one hub to another.



Lyndon Township Green Infrastructure Planning Map

- Hubs
- Links
- Sites
- Streams w/ 100 ft buffer
- Special Features

Hubs are large natural areas that anchor the Green Infrastructure Network and provide origin and destination for wildlife.

Sites are smaller areas that provide habitat and ecosystem services.

Links connect hubs and sites.

Special Features are areas that have a unique connection and importance within the community.

HRWC created the map with the help of Lyndon Township community members who drew hubs, sites, links and special areas onto a draft green infrastructure map.

July, 2012



Restoring the river and land

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June 8, 2012



Stofer Hill, a glacial 'kame' is the highest point in Washtenaw County at 1,150' above sea level.

(FYI: A kame is a steep sided mound of sand and gravel deposited by a melting ice sheet.)

Stofer Hill was on private property owned by the Cunningham family.



Meanwhile, we kept slogging along with our ordinances. We were up to our ears in getting our rural township up to date (what *had* I been worried?), in December 2013 when we got an application for a special land use from the McCoig cement company for a sand mine on the Cunningham property.

This property was zoned Rural Residential and our existing ordinances allowed gravel pits as a special land use. But, the proposal from McCoig was for an industrial sized gravel pit – imagine 100+ football fields! We have areas zoned commercial/industrial but this was residential.

The first public hearing was held in the middle of a snow storm on February 17, 2014. My best friends did not go because the roads were so bad, but 150 people were standing room only in the Sylvan Township Hall that evening. In addition to the Applicant, and the experts for the township, 17 members of the public testified against the sand mine and more were waiting when it was continued to the next month.

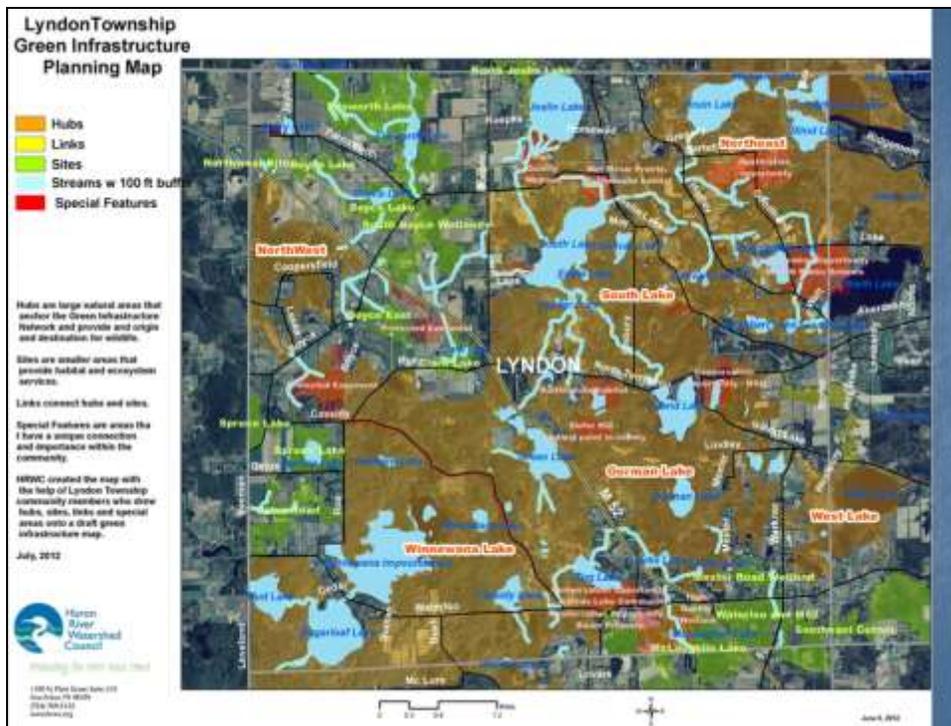
260 people came to the Washington Street Education Center Auditorium, Chelsea on March 13, 2014. Jeff Daniels testified and that made news! 32 other people also testified, and the hearing was again continued to May 19, 2014.

We had a total of 50 people testify. We received e-mails from 640 people (some more than once) and 8 organizations. The City of Chelsea provided a

47 page report full of facts and figures. I made charts and summaries. My Excel spread sheet showed some form of comment or meeting attendance from 1,172 people. We heard from: 7 public officials, 16 government and NGO groups, 20 business owners, 19 scientific professionals and 9 other professionals.

All of the testimony was against granting the special land use.

200 people came to the second continued hearing in May when the application was tabled for the next six months. And continued to be tabled each six months over the next year.



Early in the spring of 2014 I was one of 3 Planning Commissioners who did a site visit. We bush wacked as much of the property as we had the stamina to do (it is, after all a big hill!) My work with the county naturalists and the HRWC field assessments paid off. Even without their leaves and flowers, I could tell native plants from invasive weeds!

Then we went back to the Lyndon township hall and sat down to rest. In front of us was the Green Infrastructure map. We stared at the hubs of Parks Lyndon, Pinckney and Waterloo. The Kame is the center—bull’s eye. We were not a quorum. We did not discuss it further.

I had a college professor who told me that the mark of a good education was the ability to learn see the obvious, especially when the emperor really wasn’t wearing any clothes.

When the first McCoig representative made his presentation, he said “And the land surrounding the proposed site is all vacant.” He thought that meant no one cared about it. He did not recognize the recreational and conservation nature of the parkland or the economic and public interest in maintaining it. He did not understand the value of ecological hubs.

One of those values is human recreation.

The e-mails and testimony identified 22 recreational activities they engaged in:
(Read if time available)

Hiking
Backpacking
Mountain bikes
Road Biking
Motorcycle riding
Bird Watching
Fishing
Camping
Hunting
Skiing
Cross Country Skiing
Mushroom hunting
Kayaking
Canoeing
Boating
Swimming
Washtenaw County Naturalist programs
DNR Stewardship volunteers
MNFI volunteers
Vacationers/tourists
Running
Walking.

This story ends with a whimper.

We completed our ordinances earlier this year.



McCoig withdrew its request for a special land use in October 2016. They will lease another property from the DNR closer to their cement plants.

The Cunningham property will be deeded over to the State of Michigan. That hasn't happened yet.

The Lyndon Township Planning Commission is working on a new Master Plan, we are still a recreation destination.

I never needed to justify to the rest of the planning commission the importance of keeping up to date.

I am grateful to everyone who participated in our process for the special land use.

I am very grateful to the HRWC for our Green Infrastructure Plan.