

THE HURON RIVER CORRIDOR

**THE CONNECTION OF YPSILANTI AND
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN**

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CHAPTER 1 ABSTRACT

This study explores the creation of a trail and linear park along the Huron River corridor linking the Gallup Park trail and Grove Road trail. The corridor is about 6.2 miles long and will link the two cities of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, Michigan. The objective of this study is to develop a master plan for this segment of the Huron River Trail. The study will revive a portion of the 1937 plan for a parksystem which would encircle the Detroit Metropolitan area. The findings of this study will be presented in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2 INTRODUCTION

Public open spaces are being developed across the country. These linear open spaces, called greenways, are making their way along natural corridors, such as riverfronts, stream valleys, and ridgelines, or overland along railroad right-of-ways converted to recreational use, canals, scenic roads, or other routes (Schwartz preface). These Greenways are providing connections between public parks, natural areas, historic sites, and other open spaces. (Schwartz foreword). In addition and most importantly, these greenways influence the image, viability, economic development, and quality of life of our cities.

CHAPTER 3 BACKGROUND

The Huron River is one of southeastern Michigan's outstanding natural features. This corridor has been the subject of many studies in both past and present years. In the 1930's Henry S. Curtis, Secretary of the National Recreation Association, and Professor Harlow O. Whittemore, Chairman of Landscape Architecture at the University of Michigan, saw opportunities for recreational development along the Huron River. They foresaw recreational opportunities extending to the Clinton River that would serve all of southeast Michigan.

The vision Henry Curtis and Harlow Whittemore foresaw was first published in 1937. The original 1937 plan proposed a series of parks connected by a long parkway extending from Lake St. Clair along the Clinton and Huron rivers to Lake Erie below the mouth of the Detroit River (Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority 6). The 1937 plan is shown in Figure 1.

The plan, as proposed in 1937, led to the development of the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority. This organization was charged with the responsibility for thirteen parks along the Huron and Clinton Rivers. These parks, combined with many city and county parks, have preserved large portions of the Huron River Corridor. The complication of city, township, county, and state agencies

working together, along with the problems of funding, have caused the 1937 plan to fall short of its goal.

Opportunities still exist today to resurrect the idea presented in the 1937 plan for the Huron and Clinton Rivers.

CHAPTER 4 LITERATURE REVIEW

"How people live with, recreate in, manage, and perceive those close-to-home resources is critical to the health and well-being of both, people and natural resources" (Little 36). This statement comes from the article titled, "Greenways and Rambling: Ideas for Healthier Cities." Charles Little talks of the importance of greenways as a means to beautify harsh metropolitan landscapes, to provide a new kind of recreational amenity, to protect and enhance natural features, and to rekindle pride of place by bringing citizens of all classes and cultures together (Little 37).

The term, "Greenways," dates back to the 1920's. It came into common use in the mid-1970's when money for public open space projects was difficult to generate. This led to the discovery of underutilized riverfronts, abandoned railroad right-of-ways, semi-public lands such as water-company holdings, and scenic transportation routes as possible recreational amenities. The result has been the development of greenways for recreation, for the protection and enhancement of historic amenities, to serve as ecological corridors, to foster species interchange and genetic diversity, to protect distant scenery, and to operate at a regional scale (Little 40).

Frederick Law Olmsted was one of the first to recognize the importance of open space and greenways. He wrote, "a connected system...is manifestly far more complete and

useful than a series of isolated parks" (Grove 89). This observation emphasizes the importance of a river corridor, or greenway, not just a series of parks. The importance of a greenway can also be summed up in a statement by Anne Lusk, "People are different on a path. On a town sidewalk strangers may make eye contact, but that's all. On a path like this they smile, say hello, and pet one another's dogs. I think every community in America should have a greenway" (Grove 90-91).

Ann Lusk's statement begins to address social attitudes and other social issues. Greenways can make a difference. "They interrupt the monotony of strip development and tie neighborhoods together" (Grove 85). They can not only tie neighborhoods together, they can even tie cities together. The Huron River can be this link between Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor. It may become a link on an even larger scale and become part of a, "national system that might connect in a giant spiderweb across the United States" (Grove 84-85).

There is much planning involved in the design of a trail system. The planning process is described and outlined in Greenways: A Guide to Planning, Design, and Development and Trails for the Twenty-First Century: Planning, Design, and Management Manual for Multi-Use Trails. These two resources provided a background of information needed to begin the planning process for this projects. Two case studies, the Ventura River Trail study and the Sacramento River Greenway, were used as guidelines

for the development of this project. These two studies are examples of rail to trail master plans. The Huron River Trail is not a rail to trail project. The issues, however, are very similar and can be applied to many trail planning projects. These sources provided the majority of the trail planning background that was necessary to begin the Huron River Trail project.

CHAPTER 5

THE HURON RIVER VALLEY HISTORY

The Huron River begins at Big Lake in west-central Oakland County. The river flows in a southerly and southwesterly direction through Oakland and Livingston counties. In Washtenaw county, the river turns southeasterly and flows through the Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti urban area. The Huron River continues its southeasterly course through Wayne County before flowing into Lake Erie.

The Huron River served Indians, explorers, and trappers as a highway more readily than it has any occupants of the region since the 1830's. Numerous Indian traces, including the Potawatomi trail that paralleled the Huron River, indicated heavy foot traffic occurred along the river. There was an abundance of flat boat activity by American settlers until the 1830's when land routes improved. As the settlers established their residences along the river many mills and dams developed for economic activity. As new sources of power were developed and economic times changed, many of the mills fell into ruins (McLennan and Nazzaro).

The 1900's brought numerous economic opportunities to this area. The invention of the automobile and the industry it created was perhaps the most significant. Southeastern Michigan became synonymous with words such as Model A, Ford, Detroit, and the automobile. The Huron River corridor is rich with history and it's story is waiting to be told.

CHAPTER 6 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Rivalries often exist between "sister" cities.

Universities, economic power, schools, and many other factors can create both positive and negative attitudes, feelings of competition or superiority, and rivalries amongst communities. The cities of Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor, Michigan, are examples of this condition. Due to a population increase, there is a shortage of open space in both communities. Proper planning, years ago, would have provided a solution which would deal with these current problems.

The challenge is to develop a comprehensive master plan which integrates the existing development with future development. The intent of the proposed master plan is to influence and change the attitudes among the residents of the neighboring cities of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti. This can be accomplished by providing a greenway interlinking the residents of both communities. The residents can use the greenway for recreational purposes and to expand their ideas of the natural beauty and historic significance of the region. In addition, this open-space plan will reintroduce the 1937 proposal for the development of the Huron-Clinton-Parkway in the Detroit Metropolitan Region, establishing the Huron River as a natural and cultural feature of southeast Michigan.

CHAPTER 7 GOALS

The primary goal of this project was to learn the process of master planning for the development of a trail design. As a result of this process, a master plan for the Huron River Corridor linking Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti was developed. Goals that were met included:

1) The development of a safe and uninterrupted trail, following the Huron River, which minimizes pedestrian, bicycle, equestrian, railroad, and automobile conflicts.

2) The establishment of connections to parks, schools, residential and commercial areas, cultural, historic, and natural features along or near the corridor.

3) The establishment of the corridor as a reflection of the regions history. Showcase cultural, historic, and natural features of the corridor and provide opportunities for education and interpretation.

4) The development of a multi-purpose trail for non-motorized users which will provide diverse experiences and activities, establish the corridor as an amenity to the community, and serve as a resource which can educate, provide happiness, health, and quality of life for the residents of the region.

5) The development of a corridor that will become the catalyst which brings the two "sister" cities closer together and helps break down many of the misconceptions held by individuals in both communities.

CHAPTER 8 ASSUMPTIONS

Due to the tremendous scale of the project, spreading over 100 miles in length, all facets of a trail and river corridor design could not be addressed in the allotted time period of 15 weeks. Therefore, several assumptions were made for the 6.2 mile stretch of the Huron River corridor. These assumptions were:

1) Land acquisition, easements, and property use agreements were attainable. Land owners and property lines were not required for this phase of the project. Open parcels of land were identified as being important because of their cultural, historical, or natural value to the region and because of their value as connectors adjoining lands.

2) Water quality would be improved as interest and support are generated for the Huron River corridor project.

3) Maintenance and ownership of the trail would be resolved at a later time. The area covered involves at least three different government bodies and these issues need to be dealt with by all involved. Perhaps in the future, the 6.2 mile stretch through Ypsilanti will join a larger system of trails that will fall under the supervision of one agency.

4) The failure of the 1937 proposal was due to funding and problems related to the working relationships of the city, county, and state agencies involved in the

project. These problems would be overcome and would not affect the development of an updated master plan.

5) Interpretation areas could be identified, but their interpretation would not be planned. Botanists, naturalists, and historians all have specialties and the cultural and natural landscapes are open to their interpretation.

6) The fears of neighboring residents was recognized, but this case study has not dealt with this issue. Screening, lighting, and patrolling are issues that would have to be dealt with after the master planning process was resolved.

CHAPTER 9

SITE LOCATION / STUDY AREA

The study area, referred to as the greenway or river corridor, extends approximately 6.2 miles from the Ann Arbor city limits at Dixboro Road to the southern edge of Ypsilanti's city limits at Ford Lake. The greenway connects with the Gallup Park Trail at Dixboro and the Grove Road bikeway at Ford Lake.

This 6.2 mile stretch of the Huron River Corridor brings to life the hopes envisioned in the 1937 master plan for the Huron and Clinton Rivers (Figure 1). With the development of this 6.2 mile stretch, Ann Arbor's existing trails, future additions to the Ann Arbor trail system, and the Grove Road bikeway expansion, one of the largest gaps in the 1937 plan would be connected.

CHAPTER 10 INVENTORY

An inventory for a project of this size could become a long laundry list of features on or along the Huron River. The 6.2 mile stretch of the Huron River Corridor has numerous historic, cultural, and natural features. Highlights of the historic or significant sites are Parker Mill and Peninsular Paper Company. These are the last two mills that are still standing, along this stretch of river, since the damming of the Huron River. Other historic features include historic districts, museums, and old foundation ruins.

The Huron River is within walking distance of many of Ypsilanti's cultural features. The two most notable areas are Depot Town and Downtown Ypsilanti. Other areas less recognizable are Vivian Farms, Harry Bennett's Castle, and former Indian trails. Several schools including Eastern Michigan University are within walking distance of the river. A connection could also be made to the Mathaei Botanical Gardens. Several other examples of cultural features can be found within this 6.2 mile stretch of the Huron River.

The Huron River is an outstanding natural feature along which exists natural areas for wildlife habitat and several types of native vegetation. Outstanding examples of

forests, prairies, and wetlands are all visible along the corridor. The formation of an oxbow lake and the work of glaciers centuries ago are also visible.

CHAPTER 11 ANALYSIS

The Huron River Corridor has tremendous opportunities for education and recreation. Schools and users can learn from the interpretation of the natural, cultural, and historic features along the corridor. The history and story of the Huron River, Ypsilanti, and their inhabitants can be told along the 6.2 mile trail.

The trail is ready to be placed. A large portion of the lands adjacent to the river are public, semi-public, or lands that are vacant and currently for sale. Agreements, easements, and land purchases will secure the possibility of the trail along these portions of the river. The trail has the potential to follow along these public and semi-public lands and only have to cross onto private lands in two locations.

The main constraints of the development of this trail is the number of river, road, and railroad crossings needed. This will involve several improvements to existing bridges and underpasses, as well as the construction of new crossings. The railroad provides an opportunity for segments of a rail with trail. Safety is the main concern when looking at the constraints associated with this 6.2 mile section of the trail.

There are two significant pieces of property that are currently owned by private residents that are not up for sale. The first piece of property known as, Harry Bennett's

Castle, is rich with history. Harry Bennett was a hitman for Henry Ford in the 1930's and early 1940's. The castle is unique in architecture and in character. His home has potential for becoming a museum, open for tours, and become a landmark along the trail.

The other piece of land was known as Harry Bennett's Island. This large piece of land is bordered by the river and the railroad with restricted access by way of a private bridge. The island is home to equestrian activities and a private residence. This piece of land can become a valuable resource for the trail. Day camps, additional equestrian activities, a canoe livery, and a campground are possible activities for this site. The island can provide support facilities and draw a large number of users to the trail.

CHAPTER 12 PROGRAMMATIC STATEMENT

A study of the Huron River corridor provided information that led to the development of a programmatic statement. The listing below are activities and opportunities that were deemed important to the development of the trail Master Plan.

Trails

- bicycle/ pedestrian trails
- equestrian trails where possible
- existing trails
- self guided nature trails
- on-street connections

Significant trail corridor land acquisitions

- Vivian Farms
- Harry Bennett's Castle
- Bennett's Island
- Superior Road Land Parcels
- North Park Nature Preserve

Interpretive sites

- cultural
- historic
- natural

Recreational areas and activities

- picnic areas
- fishing areas
- playgrounds and playfields
- equestrian facilities
- cross country ski rental location
- fishing platforms
- canoe livery
- camping areas
- nature preserve and nature center
- lodging/day camps

Support facilities

- trail parking and access points
- emergency telephones
- toilets
- drinking water

Significant employment locations

Dam sites

Schools

Visitors center

CHAPTER 13

THE MASTER PLAN DESIGN PROCESS

The master plan for the Huron River Corridor was developed in a series of steps. An inventory and analysis of the corridor was the first step in this process. Photographing and walking the river provided important information that was used to identify significant cultural, historic, natural, and visual features along the river. A study of the rivers context identified other connections that could be made by the use of secondary trails. Discussions with Dave Davis, chairman of the Riverfront Utilization Task Force, provided additional background information that was used to identify current and past proposals for the development of portions of the 6.2 mile stretch of the Huron River. These interviews along with the site inventory, and analysis completed the first step of the design process. A summary of the findings is illustrated in Figures 2,3,and 4.

The second step began with identifying possible locations for the trail spine and its tributaries. Land use plans and land ownership information were assembled to accomplish this. The trail's location was the key to the project. To make the trail feasible, the majority of the trail needed to be located along public or semi-public land. This would allow agreements and easements to be made more easily. The land use findings are illustrated in Figures 2, 5, and 6.

Two other goals helped outline the trails location. The trail had to follow as close to the river as possible. The second requirement of the trail was to follow the most scenic route along the river. Previous studies had focused on trail routes along roads and had ignored the scenic value of the Huron River. These goals, along with safety and topographic restraints, limited the possible locations of the trail within the areas designated as public or semi public land.

The third phase of the design process focused on the connections and opportunities that presented themselves as the trail moves northwest to the southeast along the corridor. Figures 7, 8, and 9 show the complete master plan for the Huron River Trail.

The Gallup Park Trail currently ends at Dixboro Road. At this point the trail splits. The northern route follows the railroad right of way to Parker Mill Park, and the proposed Flemming Creek Trail. Parker Mill Park is one of two historic mills along this stretch of the Huron River. The Flemming Creek Trail allows access to equestrian users, joins the existing Hewitt road trail, and becomes a north/south route connecting the Mathaei Botanical Gardens, Forest Park, Catherine McAuley Health Center, Eastern Michigan University, residential neighborhoods, and several surrounding public schools.

The spine of the trail follows the southern edge of the Huron River as it travels along the regions varying

topography. The trail passes through and connects with a wetland interpretive area, the proposed Vivian Farms Visitors Center, Washtenaw Community College, Catherine McAuley Health Center, and Forest Park where it reunites with the northern route.

The joining of the two trails takes place at Bennett's Island. Harry Bennett's island provides facilities for camping, canoeing, cross-country skiing, lodging, picnicking, and other trail support facilities. The museum proposed at Harry Bennett's Castle sits on the ridge north of the Huron River. Access to the museum is made along the northern trail and gives equestrian users access to the proposed Flemming Creek Trail.

The trail continues westward as it crosses the river north of Superior Dam and the proposed Superior Dam Park. Here it passes the location of what was once another working mill. The trail crosses Superior Road and passes through the ruins of an old farmstead. (Figure 12). The interpretive site and park area provide for an interesting stopping point.

Once again, the trail crosses the river along the railroad right of way avoiding both residential neighborhood conflicts and trail routes following busy roads. A brief series of boardwalks lead users to another river crossing. A series of bridges, connecting man made islands, allows the river to be spanned and prevents the trail from leaving the Huron River Corridor.

Pen Park is located just north of the Peninsular Paper Company. This is the second historic mill that currently exists along this stretch of the river. Connections to residential neighborhoods, commercial areas, and Eastern Michigan University can be made from this location. The trail passes under LeForge Road and into the proposed North Park Nature Preserve, where the trail follows the ridge line to Frog Island Park.

The trail continues it's path south towards Michigan Avenue. On its way it passes and connects historic districts, Depot Town, Eastern Michigan University, Riverside Park, Downtown Ypsilanti, and numerous historical museums. The trail can no longer follow the Huron River once it reaches Michigan Avenue due to low bridges and privately owned residential land.

The trail follows the sidewalk along Michigan Avenue to an intersection at Cross Street. The trail follows Cross to Catherine Street where it connects with Water Works Park, Rivers Edge Park, and Gilbert Park. The trail crosses a railroad line used for the Ford Motor Company and follows the railroad right of way where it can connect with the Grove Road Trail.

The trail has made several connections to existing trails, schools, residential and commercial areas, and to cultural, historical, and natural features. Opportunities to purchase Harry Bennett's Castle and Harry Bennett's Island are part of a long range plan developed for this

trail. The proposed land acquisitions are of cultural and historical significance. The master plan has reduced the constraints found in this urban area and has taken advantage of the numerous opportunities presented along the Huron River corridor.

The final step of the project identified various cross sections of the trail to illustrate how the trail would fit into the landscape and how the trails would be constructed along the corridor (Figures 10 and 11). The Superior Road access point was then chosen to show how signage, road crossings, railroad crossings, interpretive areas, and rail with trail issues would be handled. The site was typical of what could be found along the Huron River trail and could begin to give the trail corridor an identity (Figures 12 and 13).

Criteria used in the design of this area were the sites history, views, comfort, maintenance, and safety. The history of the site could be identified from the presence of an old fence row and the foundation remnants of an old farmstead. These elements were preserved and used as interpretive opportunities on the site. The fence row was used as a gateway to the park. Users would make their way from the parking area along the walk lined by the old fence row to the old ruins. Here groups could gather and learn about the history of some of the first settlers of the region and their journeys westward toward Chicago.











Some views of the river were opened over the river and other views were channeled by the use of vegetation and berms toward the old foundation and chimney. Shade was provided for the parking area, picnic, and sitting areas. Open fields allow for active recreation such as frisbee and playing catch. By incorporating fields with few trees and trails with mown edges of less than twelve feet, mowing and maintenance issues are made much easier. Safety concerns were handled by the removal of some evergreens and underbrush. This removed hiding places for criminals and vagrants near active and passive areas. Removable barrier posts keep unwanted motor vehicles out of the park and provides access for emergency and maintenance vehicles. With the completion of this detailed study area the final step of the master planning process was concluded.

CHAPTER 14 CONCLUSIONS

The Huron River Trail has the potential to bring the communities of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti together. It also has the potential to make connections at an even larger scale. The vision Henry Curtis and Harlow Whittemore foresaw in their plan published in 1937 should not be forgotten. The completion of this portion of the Huron River Trail will take a step toward the completion of a parksystem that will encircle the Detroit metropolitan region. The trail is ready to be placed and there will be thousands of users waiting for it's completion.


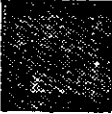

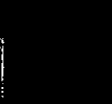
INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS LEGEND

LEGEND FOR FIGURES 3 AND 4

	PARKLAND		INTERPRETIVE OPPORTUNITY
	HISTORIC OR SIGNIFICANT SITE		WETLANDS
	EQUESTRIAN FACILITIES		SIGNIFICANT TOPOGRAPHY
	PRAIRIE		CULTURAL AREAS
	DANGEROUS INTERSECTIONS		WOODLOT

LAND USE PLAN LEGEND

LEGEND FOR FIGURES 5 AND 6

	COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL AREAS
	RESIDENTIAL
	PARKS, LAND FOR SALE, AND UNDEVELOPED LAND
	GOVERNMENT, INSTITUTIONS, AND UTILITY LAND

**LAND USE PLAN
SOUTHERN HALF OF SITE**





























FIGURE 5

**LAND USE PLAN
NORTHERN HALF OF SITE**

FIGURE 6

TRAIL MASTER PLAN LEGEND

LEGEND FOR FIGURES 8 AND 9

	BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN TRAILS		DRINKING WATER
	EQUESTRIAN TRAILS		EMPLOYMENT LOCATION
	EXISTING TRAILS		SELF-GUIDING NATURE TRAIL
	ON-STREET CONNECTIONS (BIKE LANES & SIDEWALKS)		DAM
	TRAIL CORRIDOR		PLAYGROUND
	BICYCLE ROUTE		EQUESTRIAN FACILITIES
	PEDESTRIAN ROUTE		CROSS COUNTRY SKI RENTAL
	EQUESTRIAN ROUTE		FISHING DECK
	TRAIL PARKING		CANOE LIVERY
	PICNIC AREA		CAMPING
	EMERGENCY TELEPHONE		SCHOOL
	TOILETS		LODGINGS
	INTERPRETIVE SITE		VISITORS CENTER
	FISHING		NATURE CENTER

**SUPERIOR ROAD
ACCESS POINT**

FIGURE 12

**SUPERIOR ROAD ACCESS POINT
DETAILS**

FIGURE 13

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