

**Enhanced transcription of Alice Ralph speaking March 2008
City Democrats' Panel: "What to do with 415 W. Washington?"**

The 'Findings and Recommendations' of our Allen Creek Greenway Task Force are dated March 16, 2007. Today is March 8, 2008, a year later, and we are talking about what to do with 415 W. Washington in the shadow of a public Request for Proposals that might result in a sale for cold cash. If 415 is sold for cash, we will never have the same breadth of opportunities to secure multiple public benefits with this and the other publicly-owned Allen Creek sites. We don't want to be like the trapped animal whose only escape is to chew off a limb, maiming itself in a hostile world. Blind pragmatism is to be avoided if we want to thrive as a community.

A year ago, generous volunteers produced the Greenway Task Force report, about 90 pages of focused information available on the City website. We need to recognize those who dedicated so much time and expertise to put together this informative report that reflects so many community concerns. We can also honor them by acting *together* on recommendations that serve our community.

Especially worthwhile recommendations meet objectives set out not only in the Greenway Task Force report, but also in the Flood Mitigation Plan adopted a year ago, the PROS plan (for 2006-2011), the DDA Development Plan (for 2003-2033), ongoing Arts and Cultural resources planning and other community-based plans. Most of that information is also available on the web.

Following certain recommendations from the GTF report, 415 can also help address 5 of seven objectives listed in the FMP. The PROS plan devotes several paragraphs to the importance of 415 as part of the ACG that enjoys broad community support.

Two notable strategies from the DDA Development Plan include

- Creation of an Allen Creek Corridor Land Use Master Plan that explores a system of linked open spaces and,

- Recognizing that little property remains within the DDA district for potential future open space, a commitment to plan for it [open space].

The non-profit ACG Conservancy, has also been formed to stimulate and support the long-range implementation of the ACG.

For now, 415 is still publicly owned. If we don't sell it, 415 can still fulfill community objectives set out in our plans. We own it now. We can start to develop it for community benefit now.

If we maintain public ownership, we can add to the impressive GTF report's list of financial resources for greenway projects. We could add the DDA with its TIF and the NTHP grant programs, and tourism, arts, heritage and other grant sources. If we designate this public land as parks land, we could have overlapping DDA and Parks jurisdictions that plan downtown open space and safeguard public ownership in partnership.

[Replaced next two graphs by saying] Without repeating the details available in the RFP and elsewhere, this is a very complicated site.

[The area of 415 is 2.5 acres with nearly 94% of it in the currently defined floodplain subject to various flood risk mitigation regulations. Nearly an acre of 415 is in the floodway, about 1.5 acres is in the flood fringe, and only about one fifth of an acre is upland. These numbers may be revised but the approximate area of upland is not likely to increase. The Railroad ROW bounds the east.

At 415, the former County 'Road Commission' building is vacant. Additionally, this large existing structure is within a designated historic district. As a protected historic resource, rehabilitation of the building would be reviewed for appropriateness by our Historic District Commission.

Rehabilitation of a historic resource attracts both financial and social investment.]

Certainly not least among many other potential public benefits, 415 has enough acreage to begin a regenerative urban greenway. We can exceed sustainability principles with an approach that is

environmentally, politically and financially integrated. Smart money follows sustainable and *socially sustaining* projects. We can choose an option that will lead to a beautifully attractive, healthier, more prosperous and enjoyable environment for both established neighborhoods, visitors and the new near neighbors that are expected to join us at the heart of Ann Arbor.

Of three options described in the ACG report, we can embrace 'Option B' as an approach that maximizes our civic opportunities. Maximum public benefit requires the integration of regenerative rehabilitation, healthfully engaged lifestyles, and prudent stewardship of public assets. *Option B for 415 rehabilitates existing useful construction and mitigates flood risk by dedicating floodway area to more natural function.*

That's a pretty dry summary of a challenging and inspiring concept. This concept *begins* with a new and necessarily multi-dimensional way of thinking about our responses to strained infrastructures and global climate change. The ultimate *result* is community enhancement. [Omitted this- In the last week, we have been rated both as a highly walkable community and as a remarkably 'green' community. The DDA's website has a thought-provoking list of other rankings. With glaring loss of tree canopy and persistent pre-occupation with personal vehicles, you might have to think *hard* about the great qualities and programs that got us these accolades. And it is *worth* thinking hard, both about what we have achieved and how much *farther* we can go.] If used for public benefit, 415 can help us *get* there.

Try looking at 415 as the new ACG arts and cultural welcome center. Let's rehabilitate the old Road Commission building to house a new 'Cultural Crossroads Commission'. Let's give it an additional non-motorized address like 'One Greenway Central'. The re-purposed building could house the 'Arts and Cultural Garage at One Greenway Central'. The Garage could serve as a physical location for coordinated arts and cultural development and promotion. The Garage could house meeting and office spaces for arts and cultural organizations. In high demand, affordable studio spaces could be made available. The Garage might coordinate on-site and other alternative performance spaces.

Let's throw the next chunk of creekshed improvement funds into a greenway project that will serve as a beautiful living demonstration of our commitment to regenerating a functional creekshed. Mostly without private yards, our new downtown neighbors will depend on common open space for the restorative qualities of nature. The Smart Growth model code recommends one acre as a minimum area for an urban park. By combining the regulated floodway area with some of the flood fringe area, one acre of the 2.5 acres at 415 can become the first destination park among others that will bridge between, neighborhoods, downtown and university attractions.

With the investment in arts and cultural enhancements, comes investment in the ACG and vice versa. We can make a safer place and a more beautiful place at the same time. This is our 'responsible fiduciary return' sought by the City's RFP.

With 415 and its sister sites in the Allen Creek floodplain, it is critical to use public land for public purposes. We can only do that by maintaining public control of public land as valuable infrastructure. We can't afford narrow options like selling public land for a one-time stash of cash. With ever-increasing urgency we need creative systematic responses to civic challenges. With public ownership, we can insist on multi-dimensional public purpose. With public ownership, we can accomplish community objectives that reflect our diverse cultural and natural resources. If we own it, we can start now.

[There was not time to refer to these but I expect they may be helpful later]

Greenway Task Force Recommendations, go to the City's Greenway website

http://www.a2gov.org/greenway/Documents/Final%20Report_low%20res.pdf

Current public Request for Proposals, go to the City's website

http://www.a2gov.org/government/publicservices/systems_planning/Pages/415WWashingtonRFP.aspx

Add the DDA Development Plan to the planning and response references listed at the City's RFP website,

For information about the 2010 multi-million-dollar grant for which Ann Arbor is applying, refer to the website for 'Rails to Trails Conservancy'

<http://www.railtrails.org/whatwedo/trailadvocacy/2010Campaign.html>

Go to the RTC page for information about 'Rails-with-Trails and Greenways'

http://www.railtrails.org/whatwedo/trailbuilding/technicalassistance/toolbox/20071126_rails-with-trails.html

Washtenaw Co. Community Success Work Groups process through June

http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/planning_environment/community_success_process/committees