

# WASHINGTON COUNTY LAND AND WATER LEGACY PROGRAM

## PROJECT EVALUATION CRITERIA

**The following criteria will be used to evaluate proposals for the Washington County Land and Water Legacy Program. At its sole discretion, the county reserves the right to reject any or all proposals.**

### I. GENERAL

For parcels to be considered for the acquisition and improvement of the land or an interest in the land through the Land and Water Legacy Program it must meet one of the program purposes: improving water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams; protecting drinking water sources; purchasing parklands, including trail corridors; preserving wetlands and woodlands; and protecting land along water bodies from development. The following factors should be present for a parcel to be considered for the Land and Water Legacy Program.

#### A. Purchase of Parkland and Trail Corridors

Acquisition of land or interests in land within the mapped boundary of actively developing county parks and trail corridors will be considered outside the competitive process. For these parcels, the county's highest priority is for fee acquisition. When the landowner is not willing to sell fee title, the county may pursue a partial interest in the property through the purchase of a conservation easement.

#### B. Competitive Purchase of Development Rights Process

A voluntary application is submitted by the landowner or on the landowner's behalf. The applicant is willing to sell or place a permanent conservation easement on the parcel. The criteria contained herein will be used to prioritize applications and determine which projects to pursue.

#### C. Opportunity Purchases

The county may act upon a proposal needing immediate action without going through the Competitive Purchase of Development Rights Process. These projects must have time constraints such as a limited time to purchase an interest in the land due to imminent sale or development or a limited time to use or apply for outside funding.

#### D. Local Matching Grant Program

The following criteria shall be met for a local unit of government to receive funds from the Purchase of Development Rights Local Matching Grant Program:

- (1) The county will approve funding on a parcel-by-parcel basis; and
- (2) The funds are to be used to protect property consistent with an officially adopted land protection plan or policy; and
- (3) To be eligible for the funds, the local unit of government must demonstrate a commitment to raising funds to cover at least 50% of the cost of the project (eligible costs include interests in property as well as any real estate transaction costs); and
- (4) The owner of the property must be willing to have the county or another unit of government hold a perpetual conservation easement over the parcel that limits future development of the parcel; and

- (5) Payment to the local unit of government shall be made after the costs are incurred and paid for upon receipt of an invoice and proper documentation of the costs.

## II. ECOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS

Natural areas and other open spaces provide a wide variety of environmental benefits to people. Potential parcels, if protected, could improve surface and ground water resources, stabilize soils, preserve woodlands and create natural flood storage capacity. Current and anticipated use of lands adjacent to the site should not, over time, significantly diminish the ecological quality of the site.

### A. Shoreland Frontage

The parcel is located adjacent to an intermittent or perennial stream, river or lake.

*Ravine drains into water body: low*

*Less than 1/4 mile of frontage: medium*

*More than 1/4 mile of frontage: high*

### B. Ground Water Sensitivity

The parcel is located within an area identified on the Washington County Geologic Atlas as sensitive to ground water contamination.

*High sensitivity to ground water contamination: medium*

*Very high sensitivity to ground water contamination: high*

*Within a wellhead protection area: high*

### C. Erosion-prone Soils and Steep Slopes

The parcel is identified as being erosion prone or a steep slope according to the Natural Resources Conservation Service classifications. These are soils with a class greater than or equal to "5e".

*Some coverage: low*

*About 50% coverage: medium*

*100% coverage: high*

### D. County Biological Survey Sites

The parcel contains one or more native plant communities, is relatively undisturbed and provides habitat for a wide variety of resident and/or migratory wildlife. The presence of a "state listed" species is an added value. These areas are identified on the National Areas Map created by the Department of Natural Resources Minnesota County Biological Survey project.

*County Biological Survey Site: low*

*County Biological Survey Area: medium*

### E. Forest Interior

The parcel is a relatively large tract with a high interior to edge ratio. The parcel is located within a large block of forest interior, as shown on the "Forest Interior Criteria" map of the Green Corridor Project analysis.

*Some woods: low*

*About 50% woods: medium*

*100% woods: high*

## III. LOCATION

### A. Parcel Size

Relative size is considered in the ranking. Multiple contiguous parcels under single ownership or a single application would be considered together.

*< 10 acres: low*

*10-40 acres: medium*

*> 40 acres: high*

- B. **Connectivity**  
 The parcel is near or adjacent to other land which has already been permanently protected from development through a conservation easement, deed restriction, or public ownership. The parcel provides a corridor that promotes the movement of wildlife.  
*Within 1/2 mi of private conservation easement or public protected land: low*  
*Adjacent to protected land and creates a corridor of local significance (shorter): medium*  
*Adjacent to protected land and creates a corridor of county significance (longer, contained in a state, regional or county land protection plan): high*
- C. **Buffer**  
 The parcel adds value to an existing public facility by buffering the facility from encroaching development. The parcel protects the adjacent natural areas, important open spaces, rivers, streams and lakes by reducing current or future negative impacts.  
*Some visual or ecological buffer: low*  
*Significant visual or ecological buffer: medium*  
*Adjacent to a county park: high*
- D. **Imminence of Threat**  
 The parcel is threatened by development pressure and fragmentation. Only a short period of time may be available to protect an area from being permanently lost or degraded.  
*Is in no threat of development: low*  
*Only a short period of time may be available to protect the area from being permanently lost or degraded: medium*  
*Has been offered for sale; other offers have been made on the property: high*
- E. **Showcase**  
 The parcel, because of its size, location, ecological characteristics, or history, can further natural resource protection and provide attention, identity and stature to the Land and Water Legacy Program. The parcel is a good ‘showcase’ for the program e.g. it is visible to and/or useable by the public; it creates ecological connections and corridors of natural space; or it demonstrates good water quality practices.  
*No opportunity to showcase the program: low*  
*Has one of the ‘showcase’ characteristics: medium*  
*Has more than one of the ‘showcase’ characteristics: high*

#### **IV. PUBLIC PURPOSE**

Many natural areas have the potential to serve many public purposes. In order to maximize the public investment, propriety will be given to parcels that meet the needs of multiple partners.

- A. **Public Use/ Access**  
 Applicants who are willing to provide public access to the parcel for purposes of education, stewardship or recreation will receive additional consideration.  
*Public use allowed but will not be in public ownership: low*  
*In public ownership but will offer limited recreational or educational opportunities: medium*  
*In public ownership allowing unrestricted use, and enhances current recreational or educational opportunities: high*

- B. **Multiple Public Purpose**  
 The parcel has ability to serve multiple public purposes, such as water management, recreation, environmental education, etc.  
*One purpose: low                      2 purposes: medium                      3 or more purposes: high*
- C. **Preservation Plans**  
 The parcel is within an area that is included in a land preservation program or plan (e.g. wild and scenic river district, local greenways plan, conservancy zone district, historic preservation district, scenic roadway, county park, etc.). The parcel is located within a corridor designated as scenic by congressional or state legislative action, by local unit of government resolution or ordinance, or some other formal method. Existing corridors include St. Croix Riverway, Mississippi National River Recreation Area and County Road 21.  
*Within a local plan: low*  
*Designation is in place: medium*  
*Regulation or other tools such as zoning in place to protect the surrounding area: high*
- D. **Historical Characteristics**  
 The parcel is listed as a historical site on the State Register of Historic Sites or the parcel has been registered as a Century Farm.  
*Preserves a segment of the county's cultural landscape: low*  
*Century farm or other historical feature: medium*  
*On national or state register: high*
- E. **Local Support**  
 Protection of the parcel is supported by the local community and other governmental agencies, and other interested groups.  
*Some support: low                      moderate support: medium                      great amount of support: high*

**V. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

Additional factors may warrant consideration in evaluating the project. Such factors will be reviewed, evaluated, and documented on a case-by-case basis.

**VI. FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

Some parcels may qualify for other financial resources such as contributions of in-kind services or matching funds from other public agencies; private or non-profit sources of funds; or a landowner willing to accept a payment of less than the value of the property or development rights. If other resources have been committed, a letter or other documentation of the commitment must accompany the application. If other resources will be available at a future time, a statement describing the availability of the resources should accompany the application.

- A. **Likelihood for Leveraging**  
*No opportunity for leveraging funds has been identified: low*  
*Funding may be available from another organization: medium*  
*Funding has been committed by another organization: high*
- B. **Percent of Leverage**  
 A portion of the total project cost is contributed from non county sources.  
*More than 0 but <50%: low                      51% - 75%: medium                      >75%: high*

C. Technical Assistance

Another organization is contributing staff time to complete the real estate transaction activities, the project documentation or the landowner negotiations.

*Some county staff time is reduced by the assistance of others: low*

*County staff time is needed to coordinate the activities to ensure completion: medium*

*Minimal county staff time is needed: high*

**VII. LIABILITY/TIMELINESS**

The parcel will not become an unacceptable legal or financial liability due to known public health or safety concerns (e.g. pollution concerns, abandoned wells, open dump sites, hazardous waste, unoccupied or degraded structures), or real estate problems or issues which would prevent reaching an agreement (e.g. title problems, survey problems, property encroachments, boundary disputes).

*The parcel has known public health or safety concerns: high concern*

*The parcel has problems that will create difficulties in reaching an agreement: medium concern*

*The project is ready to go and the acquisition can be expedited sooner than expected because some of the work is done, e.g. Phase 1, appraisal, draft conservation easement, etc.: low concern*