



Western Reserve Land Conservancy

land • people • community

Proposal to the City of Akron, Office of Integrated Development Conservation of City-Owned Property, Theiss Road in the Merriman Valley

March 31, 2021

Western Reserve Land Conservancy respectfully submits the following proposal to the City of Akron for purchase of the 45-acres of city-owned land on Theiss Road in the Merriman Valley for the purpose of total conservation. The Land Conservancy plans to partner with Summit Metro Parks to create a long-term vision for the property, as Summit Metro Parks owns and manages the contiguous natural areas surrounding the Theiss Road property and would be well suited to own and manage this land, as well.

Western Reserve Land Conservancy (“the Land Conservancy”) is prepared to help the City of Akron realize comparable value on the land through conservation, while also furthering local and regional ecological outcomes, reducing future maintenance obligations on additional infrastructure, and demonstrating true commitment to urban renewal and revitalization.

Project Proposal

Overview

Through a combination of public funding and philanthropic contributions, the Land Conservancy will raise funding to purchase the Theiss Road property (“the Property”) and place it under permanent protection through conservation restrictions or a conservation easement. The Land Conservancy understands that the City is exploring both development and conservation options for the Theiss Road property, with the land being offered at a discounted rate for development. This discount assumes that future tax revenue will offset the bargain sale. However, the Land Conservancy takes the position that between the tax exemptions given on new construction and the future obligations for infrastructure maintenance, equal if not greater total value can flow to the city through a conservation sale.

Following acquisition, the Land Conservancy will work with other conservation organizations to determine opportunities for public use of the Property as a park or preserve. Summit Metro Parks has already assisted the Land Conservancy in assessing the Property’s conservation value. After acquisition and further exploration of the Property with Summit Metro Parks, the Land Conservancy plans to ultimately transfer ownership and maintenance of the Property to Summit Metro Parks through a donation. The Land Conservancy will provide a full range of services for the Property, including acquisition, conservation planning, and preserving the land in perpetuity.

The Property’s proximity to existing, highly-used assets held by Summit Metro Parks and Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP) demonstrate the area’s natural resource value and popularity. Further, COVID-19 has increased public use of outdoor spaces for recreation, exercise, and renewal in record numbers, and we believe these trends will continue, necessitating the creation of additional park assets and greenspaces. Additionally, the enormous amount of feedback we have received from the community, particularly due to the efforts of the Preserve the Valley coalition, indicates there is strong public support for conservation of the Property. Developing this valuable Akron greenfield into housing would be a tremendous loss of natural assets – which currently provide wildlife habitat, remove air pollution, manage

stormwater, and much more – that could never be undone. Outward development also continues to threaten the health and vibrancy of Akron’s core by allowing urban vacancy trends to persist, in addition to expanding the city’s infrastructure maintenance obligations. For all of these reasons, we believe conservation is the highest and best use for the Theiss Road property. Summit Metro Parks and the Conservancy for CVNP concur and support our proposal.

Conserving Plants and Wildlife

The 45-acre Theiss Road property is contiguous to other land owned and managed by Summit Metro Parks. The Property contains a mix of terrains, including the flat relief on the northern third of the Property as well as several small stream ravines and wetland terraces across the southern boundary, which merge and flow south beneath Hardy Road into a pond. The eastern boundary of the Property was formerly an orchard and agricultural fields, with historical records indicating the site was once home to Quine Fruit Farm.

Since the Property’s agricultural purposes were abandoned 30-50 years ago, much of the site has reverted back to successional forest. Wetlands also exist along the southern border of the property. A healthy and relatively undisturbed six-acre mature oak and hickory forest, estimated to be approximately 110 years old, exists on rolling hills in the southeast portion of the Property, which has the potential to contain rare and unique native species that can be identified in the spring and summer months. Two small intermittent (small drainage warm water) streams lie within shallow ravines bisecting the forest and adding about 2,400 feet of waterways to the Property. Although no National Wetland Inventory or Summit County wetlands are formally recorded, about five acres of Category 2 jurisdictional wetlands received the drainage waters on Caneadea silt loam and Bogart loam soils along the southern flat terraces.

Even though much of the site has been disturbed by past anthropogenic land use and is in a state of recovery, its landscape context provides it extremely high ecological value. The Theiss Road property abuts conservation land owned by Summit Metro Parks and West Creek Conservancy along both Hardy and Theiss Roads, respectively. These adjacent natural areas are known to contain numerous endangered plants and animals – several of which (bats and smooth green snake) are dependent on large, well-connected habitats and are likely to be inhabiting the Theiss Road property. In turn, these abutting parks are also connected to the greater Cuyahoga Valley National Park natural areas system, one of the most regionally important conservation areas.

Notable bird species observed in the area include the cerulean warbler, Virginia rail, American bittern, sora, and common moorhen. Total conservation of the Property would ensure valuable plants and wildlife can continue to populate the area in an age of significant habitat loss due to development pressure. Habitat fragmentation remains one of the largest threats to native Ohio species, particularly birds, which according to recent studies have seen an approximately 25% decline in population since the 1970s. Several notable bird conservation organizations (i.e. Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Audubon Society) cite development and parceling of intact habitats as key threats to certain bird species’ survival, including several migratory bird species observed on the property. Acquisition and protection of the Property helps to establish a regional conservation corridor in the Mud Creek subwatershed, augmenting already protected natural areas—both large and small—along Mud Creek’s tributaries and headwaters. Such a corridor provides essential habitat for species, particularly for birds that utilize stream corridors as migratory flyways, offering habitat for feeding, breeding, nesting, and “recharging.”

Additionally, both the mature forest and the younger, successional forest on the Property provide significant ecosystem services that benefit the surrounding areas, both natural and developed. Preliminary calculations estimate that these 45 acres of forest intercept approximately 23,526 cubic meters of rainfall (over 6 million gallons) annually, avoiding an estimated \$49,725/year in costs associated with stormwater collection and treatment, as well as flooding. This forest is also estimated to remove over 1.6 tons of pollutants (including ozone (O₃), nitrogen oxides (NO_x), particulate matter (PM₁₀) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs)) from the air on an annual basis, improving air quality and related human health outcomes. Furthermore, there is tremendous carbon sequestration potential in the forested areas of the Property, with the mature forest having stored significant amounts of carbon that would be released should it be timbered, and with the successional growth forest being at or near its peak active carbon sequestration stage given the age and rate of growth of the trees. Collectively, the forest on the Theiss Road property is estimated to currently have a total stored carbon stock of 6,174 tons, and an i-Tree Canopy (v7.1) analysis estimated that the forest is currently sequestering an additional 215 tons of carbon per year. At such a pivotal moment in the global climate crisis, it is imperative that existing natural carbon sinks however big or small are protected and left to age and grow.

Public Attractions

As stated previously, the Land Conservancy envisions the Property to ultimately be owned and managed by Summit Metro Parks. Development of the Property for public recreation will be explored, within the parameters of the restrictions conditioned by any public funding sources the Land Conservancy utilizes for acquisition. The Theiss Road property is close to existing public parks operated by Summit Metro Parks, including Hampton Hills Metro Park (with a designated mountain bike area), Sand Run Metro Park, and O'Neil Woods Metro Park, as well as the greater Cuyahoga Valley National Park system. All of these public parks are highly popular with residents and visitors, and we expect that if park development were possible at the Theiss Road property, it would attract similar levels of visitation.

In the immediate future, Summit Metro Parks has indicated their willingness for naturalists to lead public walks and tours of the Property, and would likely include the site in their archery program for deer.

Both Summit Metro Parks and Western Reserve Land Conservancy are highly committed to issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. This commitment includes the belief that conservation and restoration work will be served best when people of different backgrounds, experiences, and identities come together to develop and advance a shared vision. The Land Conservancy aims to better reflect the diversity of the communities we serve and will involve minority populations and communities of color in developing a vision for the Theiss Road Property, as we have for similar initiatives in our previous work in Akron (under Experience section, see Adam's and Haley's Run), in Euclid (see Euclid Waterfront Trail), in Cleveland (see Brighton Park) and Youngstown (see McKelvey Lake). Summit Metro Parks is also prioritizing connecting Akron's refugee community to its assets as a component of its strategic plan. Youth engagement with the Property, specifically with Akron Public Schools, could be explored through the Land Conservancy's new Conservation Education and Outreach program.

Allowable Activities

The standard land protection tools used by the Land Conservancy are conservation restrictions and conservation easements. In general, allowable activities will align with a typical passive use public park. This includes activities which enhance environmental quality, provide sanctuary for native plants and

animals, avoid degradation of soils, wildlife, plant habitats, and water quality, and limit physical alteration of the protected Property to creation and maintenance of trails or similar future improvements.

Economic Benefits

Local governments have a big say in what gets built, where, and how. Decades of studies confirm that low-density, sprawling developments like the proposed development along Theiss Road cost more than development that adheres to smart growth principles. It would be a disservice to the community for this project to be discussed without focusing on the principles to achieve and sustain local prosperity through smart facility planning and financing.

The 2020 Budget Plan for the City of Akron states that as of 2019, there were 75,634 sewer accounts served by the City. 2020 sewer fund gross revenues were listed at \$109,890,550, with \$87,057,160 (79%) of those revenues coming from sewer service charges. 2020 sewer fund gross expenditures were \$123,446,010. This means that the City generates approximately \$1,151/account/year in sewer service charges, and spends approximately \$1,632/account/year in sewer expenditures. This means that each sewer account costs the City approximately \$481/year.

For water, the 2020 Budget Plan for the City of Akron states that as of 2019, there were 81,055 water accounts. 2020 water fund gross revenues were listed at \$41,866,710, with \$33,801,070 (81%) of those revenues coming from water service charges. 2020 water fund gross expenditures were \$41,250,990 in 2020. This means that the City generated approximately \$417/account/year in water service charges, while spending approximately \$508/account in water expenditures in the same year. This means that each water account costs the City on average \$91/year.

Keeping these average expenses to the City per year per account in mind, let's consider the additional expense to the City in water and sewer service alone entailed in two development scenarios at Theiss Road, operating under the assumption that the units will be accessing city water and sewer services. The lowest number of single family units proposed by a developer in response to the RFP for development was 65 units. At 65 units, the additional expense to the City in water and sewer service alone would be \$37,180/year. The highest number of units proposed was 110; at 110 units, the additional expense to the City would be \$62,920/year, for water and sewer service alone. Though the Land Conservancy's offer price is less than the minimum bid price for conservation, it would take the City only between 2 and 3.5 years to recoup the difference through expenditures saved for service to a new development's water and sewer accounts alone. That timeline may be slightly longer if the units built by developers are not immediately filled, which is a risk worth considering given that the neighborhood fact sheet included in the RFP for development clearly states that 13% of existing housing units in the Merriman Valley are vacant, and no new units have been built since 2004, indicating that the demand isn't there to support this development.

Western Reserve Land Conservancy staff members are not public finance experts, and we recognize that these values are relatively broad generalizations and include many implicit assumptions. However, this analysis was conducted on the basis of publicly available documentation and in consultation with several engineering firms and professionals. We believe that these are actually conservative estimates of added expense to the City that the development of Theiss Road would entail, given that this does not take into account the service to the additional water, sanitary sewer and storm sewer lines that would need maintained once in City ownership, nor do these calculations take into account any other infrastructure

such as the roadways and sidewalks (with much shorter lifespans than water and sewer infrastructure) that would need to be maintained. In fact, the most expensive unfunded liability component of these types of development is for roadway infrastructure. According to Ohio Department of Transportation cost calculations of recent projects, a two lane asphalt road costs \$580,000/mile with a life expectancy of 14 years. Curb and gutter work costs \$29/linear foot with a life expectancy of 20 years. Sidewalks are an additional \$43/linear foot with a life expectancy of 25 years. Even if the developers pay this initial cost, the ongoing maintenance will fall to the City of Akron in perpetuity. Unlike water and sewer accounts, roadway infrastructure does not have a usage fee associated with it, which means that replacement costs will come from the general fund¹.

While it is not common practice to quantify or monetize the value of natural areas in the same way as built infrastructure, it is important in this type of analysis to consider the costs avoided by allowing the natural systems to continue to provide their valuable ecosystem services. Costs relative to flooding should be a major concern for development of the Theiss Road property. A portion of the Property is largely composed of wetlands, and is in close proximity to tributaries of the Cuyahoga River, including Woodward Creek and Mud Brook. During periods of intense rainfall, which are expected to increase due to climate change effects, flooding has already been a concern on Theiss and Hardy roads. Steep slopes are characteristic throughout the Merriman Valley and Cuyahoga Valley. If the Property is developed and trees are removed, there are sure to be significant and frequent costs related to flooding for the city, homeowners, or both. Indeed, the preliminary calculations discussed above estimate that the over 6 million gallons of rainfall intercepted by the Property's forest avoid over \$49,000 in annual costs related to flooding and stormwater capture and treatment. Additionally, preliminary calculations provided by a third party carbon credit agency indicate that depending on the valuation of carbon credits (one credit = one ton CO₂ sequestered), the current carbon stored in the existing forest of the Property of an estimated 6,174 tons could be valued between \$92,610 and \$185,220.

Lastly, the City of Akron is offering a 15-year tax abatement on the proposed residential development. While the Land Conservancy understands the need to incentivize new housing construction in areas experiencing high levels of vacancy, subsidizing this type of low-density development in an area without existing infrastructure is an imprudent investment. Subsidizing high-cost development that does not cover its associated infrastructure maintenance costs will lead to higher fiscal burdens that reduce money for local economic development, leading to local fiscal stress and lower quality of life overall. The analysis of the liability of depreciating infrastructure assumes tax generation from each property commensurate with the assessed value of the improvements. However, by abating the property tax revenue for the first 15 years while the infrastructure is performing optimally, the City of Akron is forgoing that tax revenue which is critical for creating a nominal maintenance endowment to cover long-term expenses.

There is a myth that higher density development provides lower value to a city's tax base. However, if the City of Akron were to analyze where highest value per acre exists, it will be in the densest part of its urban core. See the chart below to better understand this dynamic.

¹ National Cooperative Highway Research Program. (2012). Report 713: Estimating life expectancies of highway assets, volume 1: Guidebook. Washington, DC: Transportation Research Board. Retrieved from https://nacto.org/docs/usdg/nchrp_rpt_713_thompson.pdf.

Units per Acre	Assessed Value per Home	Value per Acre
2	\$450,000*	\$900,000
6.5	\$334,000**	\$2,171,000
15	\$336,000**	\$5,040,000
25	\$353,000**	\$8,825,000
40	\$290,000**	\$11,600,000

Source: *Principles for Achieving Local Prosperity Through Smart Facility Planning and Finance*. Arthur C. Nelson

*Assumed based on developer proposals

**American Housing Survey for 2019

Akron is well aware of the civic difficulties associated with urban population loss, sprawling infrastructure, and greenfield development. Local, state, and federal tax dollars cannot support maintaining legacy infrastructure, addressing continued abandonment of urban neighborhoods, and maintaining and building additional infrastructure in newer, outlying communities – all for the same number of, if not less, people. The peak of Akron’s population was in 1960 at 290,000, and it has since fallen to approximately 199,000. Recent trends show population stabilization but not growth in both the City of Akron and outlying Summit County suburbs. In an essay on his blog *Notes from the Underground* entitled “Today is Yesterday’s Tomorrow,” Director of Planning and Urban Development Jason Segedy once wrote, “It is not the maintenance and replacement costs that will be our ultimate undoing. It is the fact that we are doubling, tripling, and quadrupling-down on this unfunded liability, by continuing to build outward. No one in human history has ever attempted to do what we are doing. That is, to build a modern, urban infrastructure at what is, in-effect, a semi-rural scale.” The City of Akron is fortunate to have such pragmatic leadership, and to continue with this project before a larger plan for the Merriman Valley is established is to continue a path of short-sightedness and fiscal irresponsibility. We urge the City to create a comprehensive plan for the Valley before proceeding with a developer’s proposal.

The Land Conservancy is committed to standing beside the City of Akron in urban renewal efforts. A property inventory the Land Conservancy conducted in the City of Akron in 2015 indicated that approximately 18% of the city is vacant lots (approximately 17,000 parcels). We understand Akron’s need to reverse population loss trends and compete for new residents with nearby suburbs such as Bath, Cuyahoga Falls, and Fairlawn. We recognize that city neighborhoods like East Akron, Middlebury, North Hill, Summit Lake, and Kenmore cannot be revitalized and repopulated overnight. In the absence of environmental equality, there can be no human equity. As we refine our “clean and green” strategy and develop relationships with neighborhood associations and CDCs, we wish to help the City of Akron take concrete steps in removing distressed properties, monitoring neighborhood conditions and enforcing code compliance, and initiating land reuse strategies that restore the city’s tree canopy, strategically create new greenspaces, and make neighborhoods vibrant and livable once more. Pursuing these efforts with the help of other partners is a path towards lasting urban revitalization, tax revenue, and economic benefits for Akron.

This ambition is connected to the commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice mentioned in the previous section. Environmental burdens and benefits are not distributed equitably throughout our region, as we know the City also recognizes. The Land Conservancy believes we can begin to address these historic and current disparities alongside the City of Akron through a variety of creative efforts, aligning our policies, practices, programs, and resources so that all people have genuine and equal opportunities

to thrive, and so that each of us can realize and enjoy a healthy and inspiring world. We look forward to the opportunity to partner with the City of Akron for the benefit of all people of our region.

Site Plan

Western Reserve Land Conservancy intends for the Property to be used for passive recreation and light use trails. This could include hiking, nature observation, hunting, and fishing. Mountain biking, disc golf, horseback riding could be explored as possible uses. Pavilions, small foot-print playgrounds and similar stationary park structures also would be possible for the Property. The Land Conservancy plans to engage conservation partners like Summit Metro Parks in developing a long-term vision for the Property.

Project Implementation Timeline and Land Transfer Structure

The Land Conservancy expects that after arranging a contract for the Property, the Property could be closed in a 12-month time period, including due diligence. The Land Conservancy conducts substantial due diligence on all of its projects. This includes environmental assessments, consideration of structural issues for both land and buildings, title review, legal issues, zoning consideration, as well as general site concerns.

The City of Akron would transfer the Property to Western Reserve Land Conservancy with the potential for the Property to be donated to another conservation organization such as Summit Metro Parks after permanent conservation restrictions or easements were placed on the site.

Project Budget

Given thorough evaluation of the Property’s merits, the Land Conservancy’s conservation plan, our partnerships, and the economic analysis undertaken in this proposal, Western Reserve Land Conservancy respectfully bids \$410,000 for the Property.

Western Reserve Land Conservancy Project Budget: Theiss Road			
Program Expenses			
Cost		Total	
Property Acquisition: Purchase Price		\$410,000	
Title Review and Closing Costs		\$5,400	
Appraisals		\$3,200	
Natural Resource Assesements		\$5,500	
TOTAL PROGRAM EXPENSES		\$424,100	

Significant Project Partners and Team

Western Reserve Land Conservancy

Founded in 2006, Western Reserve Land Conservancy is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization with the mission to provide the people of our region with essential natural assets through land conservation and

restoration. Our vision is to create thriving, prosperous communities nourished by vibrant natural lands, working farms, and healthy cities.

In 2011, the Land Conservancy established Thriving Communities, a program designed to revitalize Ohio's urban centers. The Land Conservancy takes a holistic approach to conservation. By making cities healthier and more attractive places to live, we also address the root cause of natural land loss: urban sprawl. As people move away from underserved urban areas for the suburbs, poorly planned development consumes more and more family farmland as well as pristine and ecologically important natural areas. Further, the environmental, financial, social, housing, and other inequities that exist in cities like Akron and Cleveland are clear, and problems that were exposed during the foreclosure crisis and Great Recession are only being magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, Thriving Communities strives to address the challenges faced by cities in our region through several key strategies: removing vacant and dilapidated homes to make communities livable again, reforesting neighborhoods to enable the benefits realized by a healthy tree canopy, and creating parks and new green spaces in urban areas.

Parks and greenspaces are important community assets, making neighborhoods vibrant and desirable by offering spaces for community gathering, fostering social cohesion and connections among residents, and encouraging outdoor recreation, personal relaxation, and renewal. By creating more opportunities for people in urban environments to experience nature, the Land Conservancy strives to enhance the health and wellness of these communities, while also realizing ecological benefits like cleaner air and water, cooler city temperatures, protected wildlife habitat, reduced violence and crime, increased property values, and improved climate resiliency.

The Land Conservancy believes the intersection of our conservation and restoration strategies and programs may prove useful to the City of Akron as it navigates the challenges of revitalizing its downtown and existing residential neighborhoods while preserving the city's connections to nature that make it such a unique and desirable place to live.

Summit Metro Parks

Founded in 1921, Summit Metro Parks is the second oldest park district in Ohio and is celebrating its centennial in 2021. Summit Metro Parks conserves, sustainably manages and values natural resources for the health and enjoyment of its community, and inspires people to connect with nature through clean and safe parks.

Summit Metro Parks manages 14,000 acres, including 16 parks, several conservation areas and more than 150 miles of trails, including 22 miles of the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail. Public engagement with these resources is high: annual Summit Metro Parks attendance in 2020 was comprised of 6 million visits.

If plans for Summit Metro Parks to assume ownership and maintenance of the Theiss Road property in the long-term are realized, Summit Metro Parks will provide ranger patrol, public walks and tours, and an archery program for deer population control, while long-term public access plans for the Property are explored alongside Akron and Cuyahoga Falls residents, community leaders, and other partners.

Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park

The Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP) enriches people's lives and enhances our region by inspiring use, preservation and support of the park. CVNP is the only national park in the state

of Ohio, covering 33,000 acres along the Cuyahoga River. Managed by the National Park Service, CVNP connects people to the natural beauty and rich history of northeastern Ohio. Founded as a result of citizen and government advocacy for the value of protecting the natural world, the park is a refuge for native plants and wildlife, and provides routes of discovery for visitors.

Conservation of the Theiss Road property will promote the continued ecological health of CVNP, and if opened to the public as envisioned, would likely contribute favorably towards visitation of all area park assets.

Project Financing

Western Reserve Land Conservancy would pursue public and private fundraising opportunities to purchase the Property from the City of Akron. The Land Conservancy works through more than 50 projects per year, including dozens of acquisitions. At any given time, the Land Conservancy has more than 20 projects under contract. The Land Conservancy has the in-house legal capacity and transactional expertise to structure deals that provide the maximum benefit to the seller and the partner. Adequate funds are then raised from private and public sources to close and complete the project.

Experience

In order to conserve the region's cherished local landscapes, the Land Conservancy relies on a number of sophisticated legal tools, funding sources, and real estate principles to guide our work. Often, the Land Conservancy will act as a pre-acquisition agent to support public partners like Summit Metro Parks. That means that the Land Conservancy provides a full range of services, including conservation planning, purchase of real property interests, short-term financing and long-term funding, and ongoing stewardship. It takes true partnership to create and protect these public spaces, and we celebrate everyone who helps create the parks that families throughout our region enjoy every day.

Examples of public parks near urban centers that the Land Conservancy has helped to create include:

- Adam's and Haley's Run in Akron: From 2006 to 2010, the Land Conservancy worked with Lockheed Martin to restore a polluted ditch into a beautiful trail and greenway, Haley's Run. Our partnership also enabled remediation of 1.2 acres of wetlands that enhance the quality of the Cuyahoga River watershed. Later, the Land Conservancy worked with the City of Akron to add an additional 3.2 acres to Adam's Run with a greenway that connects to the Towpath Trail, constructed in 2018. The Land Conservancy is currently making improvements to provide greater awareness of these projects among Akron residents, in order to increase their access to greenspace for recreation and exercise. Funding to support these projects was secured from public, corporate, and foundation sources.
- Brighton Park in Cleveland's Old Brooklyn neighborhood: This new 25-acre greenspace was created through a significant restoration process of a former construction and demolition debris landfill. Located near the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, Brighton Park provides significant greenspace with public access trails for hiking, biking, walking, birding, and other outdoor recreation activities. Brighton Park is owned by the Land Conservancy and will be managed day to day by Cleveland Metroparks. Western Reserve Land Conservancy raised considerable funds from public and private sources to support the land acquisition and construction of Brighton Park,

including the Clean Ohio Conservation Fund, National Fish and Wildlife's Save Our Great Lakes program, United States EPA, Cuyahoga County, and area corporate and community foundations.

- **Euclid Waterfront Trail:** The City of Euclid's Waterfront Improvements Plan has earned extensive media coverage and praise as being a model for expanding public lakefront access in the Great Lakes region – something that is notably lacking, with private ownership of shorefront property the norm throughout the region. The vision of the Waterfront Improvements Plan is to increase equity in public accessibility of the Lake Erie Waterfront, to stimulate economic development by creating a regional waterfront destination, and to protect the eroding shoreline and restore habitat. Through negotiating the sale of nearly 6.5 acres of lakefront property from a developer and securing funding for the City of Euclid to acquire and protect this property with a permanent conservation easement, the Land Conservancy helped expand public access to this regional amenity. Following the successful acquisition of this property, the City of Euclid will be able to expand the adjacent Sims Park and provide additional access points to the Lake Erie shoreline and its new waterfront trail.
- **McKelvey Lake in Youngstown:** After years of planning and coordination, the Land Conservancy successfully completed the acquisition, protection and transfer of the McKelvey Lake property. This project was completed in cooperation with the City of Youngstown and the sellers, Aqua Infrastructure, LLC. The City of Youngstown now proudly owns the approximately 125-acre lake surrounded by 275 acres of green space that sits within three miles of downtown Youngstown in Mahoning County. The property, formerly purchased as a private water source, surrounded by fence and completely inaccessible for people to enjoy, will now be open to the public for passive recreation including fishing and non-motorized boating. The location of the property is key in providing access to greenspace to the underserved residents of the City of Youngstown and Mahoning County which is known to contain one of the lowest percentages of conserved land compared to all of Northeast Ohio. Future improvement plans for the property may include a parking area, boat launch, and installation of trails and a scenic overlook.

Further, Summit Metro Parks has a rich history in conserving natural spaces and creating outdoor recreation sites for the region's residents and visitors to enjoy. The 16 public parks currently operated by Summit Metro Parks includes several popular destinations in the Merriman Valley, including Hampton Hills Metro Park and Sand Run Metro Park. Recreation opportunities and park programming invite everyone to find an adventure, from hiking with naturalists, fishing in streams and ponds, mountain biking, snowshoeing, and photography opportunities. The park district is well-versed in creating public assets for Summit County residents to safely enjoy, while also protecting the region's vital natural resources for the benefit of wildlife and human populations.

Assistance Requested from City of Akron

This proposal has outlined economic, ecological, and social justifications for the City of Akron to choose permanent conservation for the Theiss Road property. Western Reserve Land Conservancy would be pleased to have the opportunity to work with the City of Akron to enable the highest and best use for the Property to be pursued alongside the comprehensive plan developed for the Merriman Valley. We urge the City to pursue the right course for its long-term fiscal and environmental health to pursue a vibrant and sustainable future for all Akron residents. Thank you for your consideration of our proposal.