

# WHITE POND COMMUNITY INPUT REPORT

Report created by Save White Pond organizers and neighbors. Please contact [SaveWhitePond@gmail.com](mailto:SaveWhitePond@gmail.com) for any questions or follow up.

**DELIVERED VIA EMAIL ON DECEMBER 7TH, 2022 TO:** City Council Members, City of Akron Administration, community members that participated and signed in with their email at the November 29th Community Meeting and members of the media.



## WHAT TO EXPECT IN THIS REPORT

- Summary and Preface
- Themed Community Concerns/Questions Summary Pages
- Petition Information
- Email Attachments
  - November 2nd Community Meeting Summary PowerPoint
  - November 29th Community Meeting Agenda
  - Alternative Uses for the Property shared at the November 29th Community Mtg.
  - Full list of transcribed community questions/concerns from the November 29th Community Meeting
  - AMATS 2021 Annual Report on Roadway Traffic Congestion (see page 1) and the AMATS 2018-2020 High Crash Intersection by Community Report (see page 16, “White Pond through the I-77 Interchange” congestion intensity listed as “Severe”)

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## SUMMARY

The preparers of this report feel that overall the City of Akron has performed poorly in being transparent with its citizens and failed to include them in the decision-making process regarding publicly owned land. To date, the city has not demonstrated a convincing argument to suggest that the proposed development is the best-use scenario for this parcel of land. Moreover, as demonstrated by this report and its attachments, there remain far too many valid concerns and unanswered questions from community members about the development of White Pond Reserve to proceed as planned. It is hereby strongly recommended that Akron City Council delay any voting regarding the sale of White Pond Reserve until at least April 30, 2023 to allow City officials to work with residents to inform the entire community about the development proposal and allow for a series of community meetings to be hosted so Council members can listen to and understand the many community concerns being raised. We humbly ask City officials to take time. Or, should a vote occur, that Akron City Council vote against the sale of White Pond Reserve for similar considerations.

## PREFACE

In early September, Akron's City Council unanimously voted to approve the initial permit for a luxury housing and retail development, which would negatively impact 60+ acres of forested and historical wetlands in the White Pond neighborhood. Since then, concerned citizens have been attending council meetings, organizing their neighborhood, and speaking up.

In response to citizens' growing concerns with the development, neighbors and local organizers led a meeting on November 2nd, where around 60 attendees gathered in the Northwest Library to express their concerns as a community.

Neighbors have led community actions — like the community hike — and have written open letters, editorials, and countless emails. While many citizens have been blocked from speaking at numerous committee meetings, so many others have attended these regular Monday meetings, spending more than 400 minutes participating in public comment, collectively.

Residents started a petition asking for a six-month pause on the White Pond vote. As of December 5, this petition had collected 650 signatures overall. 317 of those signatures came from Akron, mostly from Wards 1, 4, and 8. 470 signatures came from Ohio overall, from people in Copley, Kent, Stow, Tallmadge, Ravenna, and Cleveland— all areas that would be affected by the wetland's destruction, as climate change honors no human-made boundaries.

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## **PREFACE (continued)**

On November 29th, some 200 people gathered to learn about the development and to share their questions and concerns. They filled out more than 250 sticky notes with information, questions, and concerns under different categories: environment, construction, traffic, infrastructure, economy, and history.

What follows is a combined summary of the concerns raised and the notes collected at the meetings on November 2nd and November 29th.

In each section you will find a bullet summary of the concerns by content area. You will also find a word cloud and some summary statistics about the concerns. As noted above, there will be an attachment with all comments.

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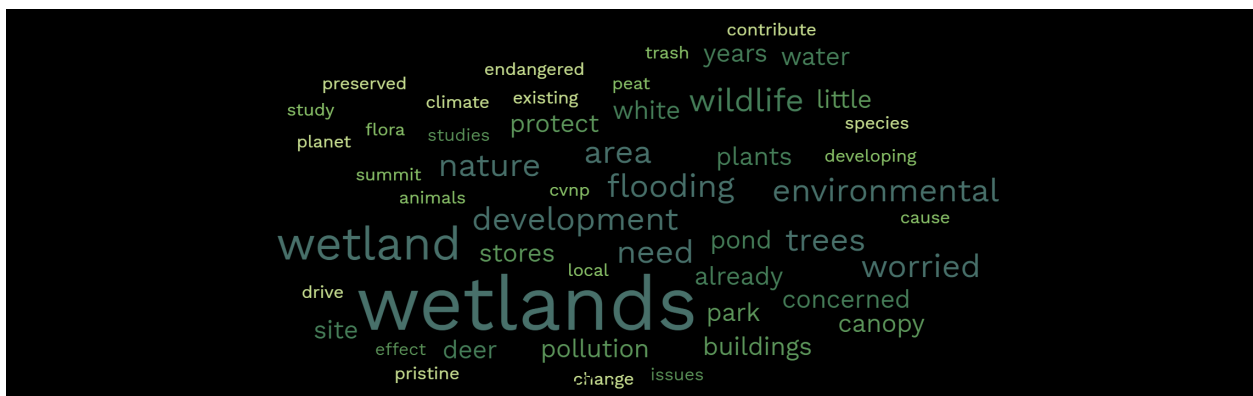
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## ENVIRONMENT

### November 2nd Community Meeting Summary Concerns:

- Environmental studies and surveys are out of date.
- No recent evaluation of local flora/fauna that could assess the presence of species including spotted turtles & wood turtles (nearly endangered)
- Original EPA 401 permit issued in 2009
- Wetlands are biodiversity hubs and support many threatened and endangered species
- Destruction of valuable habitat, wetlands, and trees, having unintended consequences for humans/wildlife
- Deer, owl, fox, opossum, coyote, Indiana bats (endangered), dozen of bird species, and possibly bald eagles on the property
- Concern about existing gas wells, soil testing, and lack of current full geotechnical studies (only preliminary study 9/2021)
- Concern about wetland protection during development, including buffer zones, litter, run-off/pollution, general disturbance
- \$425k wetland credits used in Copley, not Akron
- Citizens disturbed by increased sound, light, and noise pollution while losing green space, shade, and natural refuge

November 29th Community Meeting Word Cloud: *The below word cloud is a visual summary of the notes left by residents. The more frequently that a word occurs relative to others, the larger it appears.*



54 unique concerns/questions related to the environment were collected at the November 29th Community Meeting (view full list in the Appendix). Common topics included concern for the current biodiversity, loss of tree canopy, and wetland preservation, as well as development causing flooding issues. Citizens voiced their concerns about the still unknown impacts that the White Pond Reserve development would have on the environment. Questions still remain about

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the oil wells on the property, relevant environmental and species studies, and what constitutes an acceptable balance between development and greenspace.

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## HISTORY

### November 2nd Community Meeting Summary Concerns:

- No survey has been performed to investigate possible artifacts, cultural significance, or history related to local indigenous people
- Additionally, a history of landscape use and abuse does not justify further development. Instead, restoration can and should be pursued

### November 29th Community Meeting Word Cloud



15 unique concerns/questions related to history were collected at the November 29th Community Meeting (view full list in the Appendix). With topics ranging from Akron's history of preservation to the archeological importance of the property, citizens voiced their concerns about the still unknown impacts of the White Pond Reserve development. Citizen questions still remain about possible Native American archeological sites on the property and what an Archeological/History survey of the land would cost.

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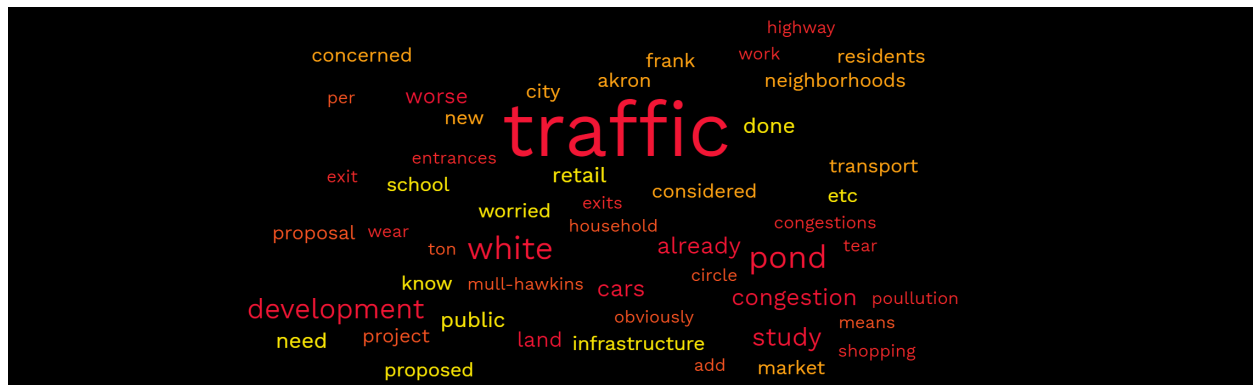
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## TRAFFIC

### November 2nd Community Meeting Summary Concerns:

- Traffic is already overwhelmed from W Market Street to I-77, Frank Boulevard, White Pond, Mull Ave. and other major and secondary roads
- Wheeling and Lake Erie Rail line cause additional concern for traffic congestion
- Increased White Pond Drive traffic may lead to neighborhood short-cutting
- Large construction vehicles worsen traffic
- New residents commute to work and take children to school
- Traffic study should not be limited to immediate White Pond intersection

### November 29th Community Meeting Word Cloud



37 unique concerns/questions related to traffic were collected at the November 29th Community Meeting (view full list in the Appendix). Citizens voiced their concerns about the still unknown impacts that the White Pond Reserve development would have on local traffic. Topics ranged from concerns about current traffic congestion and traffic pattern alterations, elevated tempers of drivers, and increased noise pollution. Questions still remain about the current highway entrance/exit issues and how they will be addressed, how adequate one entrance/exit into the proposed development is, and if a full traffic study was completed in advance of initiating this project.

**\*\*Addendum:** While this report was crafted, the city shared a document described as a “traffic report”. This “Traffic Report” was a three page letter from AMATS describing results from a study of the White Pond Dr/I-77 area. The preparers of this Community Input Report question the veracity and validity of this letter, which does not seem to reflect peak traffic level concerns and has contradictions when compared with the *AMATS 2021 Annual Report on Roadway Traffic Congestion* (see page 16, “White Pond through the I-77 Interchange” congestion intensity listed

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as “Severe”) and the AMATS 2018-2020 High Crash Intersection by Community Report (p. 1). The letter provided by the city describing their assessment fails to provide details on their methodology beyond that it was done in November using radar. We have no idea what days in November and for how long this assessment was performed. It should also be noted that in spite of being made aware that the Fairlawn Heights neighborhood is especially concerned about cut through traffic, the city and/or AMATS did not assess the impact this development would have there.



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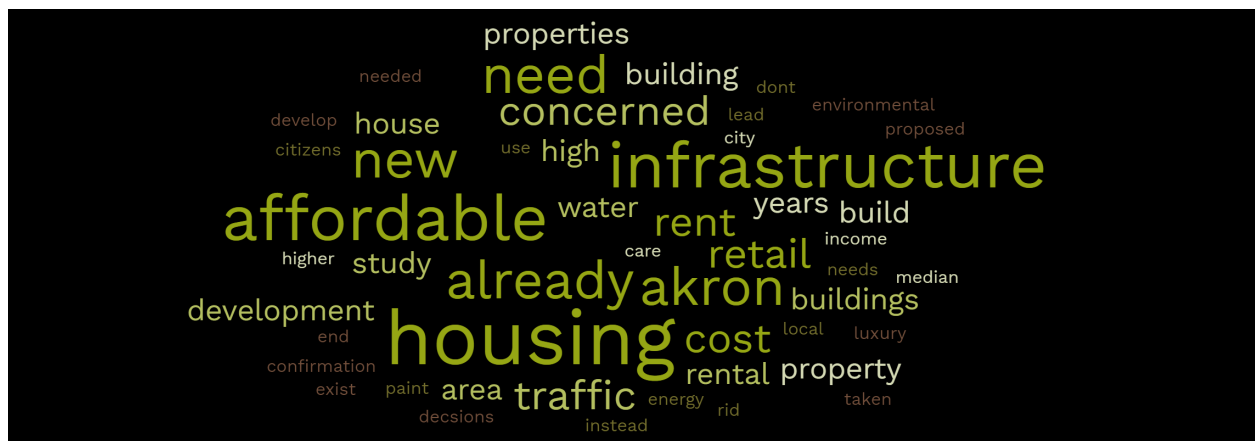
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## INFRASTRUCTURE

### November 2nd Community Meeting Summary Concerns:

- Affordable housing is needed in Akron; this housing is very unaffordable
- Rents range from \$19,200/year (\$1,600/month) to \$27,600/year (\$2,300/month). Median Akron income: \$24.5k/yr individuals \$40k/yr family
- Improvements/modifications to current infrastructure may be needed to support additional traffic/utility costs. Paid by increased property taxes of citizens, not the developer or any occupants of the rental units
- Increase in runoff and storm water from wetland destruction, contribute to pollution and flooding onsite, on streets, adjacent neighbors, and downstream

### November 29th Community Meeting Word Cloud



29 unique concerns/questions related to infrastructure were collected at the November 29th Community Meeting (view full list in the Appendix). With topics ranging from needing publicly funded infrastructure improvements for the development to concerns for children’s safety due to the lack of sidewalks in the surrounding neighborhoods, citizens surfaced comments about the unknown impacts that the White Pond Reserve development would have on the City’s infrastructure. Citizens asked outstanding questions like, “How do we know that the construction stays local (i.e., taxes stay in Akron)?” and, “Who will occupy the retail spaces?”.

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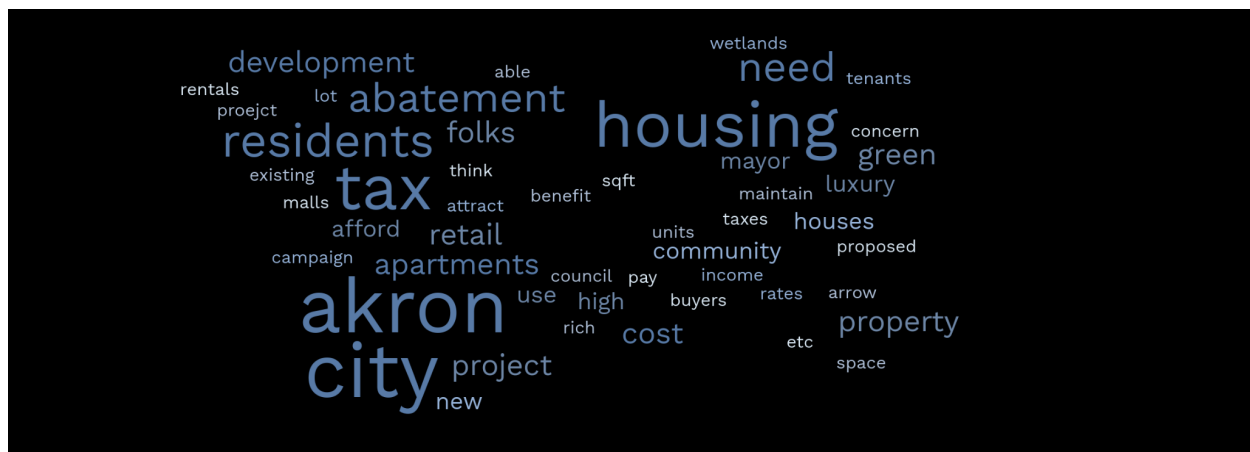
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**ECONOMIC/SALE**

### November 2nd Community Meeting Summary Concerns:

- Triton is self-funded, high likelihood of failure or backing out
- Area is not accessible or desirable for development of a high-traffic shopping destination with limited ingress/egress
- Lack of transparency for citizens due to rushed sale, poor communication, virtual meeting, and limited public comment during “troubles” of summer 2022
- Private sale of public land prevents all citizens from enjoying and appreciating it, limiting it to only a well-off few in the gated community
- Tax abatement benefits developer while putting additional burden on citizens

### November 29th Community Meeting Word Cloud



57 unique concerns/questions related to the economics/sale of the property were collected at the November 29th Community Meeting (view full list in the Appendix). Topics included disapproval of the 15-year tax abatement, disapproval of making the new housing exclusively for rent, disapproval over the stated rental rates of \$1,600-\$2,300/month, and questions about Triton's qualifications to lead such a large project. Under this banner, citizens voiced additional concerns about the still unknown impacts that the White Pond Reserve development would have on the environment. Citizen questions still remain about the proposed size of the retail space, contributions to the Mayor from individuals associated with the developer, and whether it is wise to build luxury housing during an affordable housing crisis.

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## CONSTRUCTION

### November 2nd Community Meeting Summary Concerns:

- Lack of faith in Triton and the development team regarding the lack of current surveys, testing, planning, experience
- Experienced citizens stated development on this land would be extremely difficult. Supported by preliminary geotechnical survey 9/2021
- Peat moss provides an additional challenge
- Construction will impact residents with noise, closures, pollution, and overall disturbance

### November 29th Community Meeting Word Cloud



18 unique concerns/questions related to construction were collected at the November 29th Community Meeting (view full list in the Appendix). Concerns ranged from construction noise to sinking housing due to the soggy land to not having visibility into the developer's track record. Unanswered citizen questions still remain about how new Akron residents might come to live on toxic soil, retail zoning and the style of the proposed development, and the decision to build on a wetland while there are other areas of Akron that are blighted or in need of development.

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## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS/CONCERNS

### November 2nd Community Meeting Summary Concerns:

- How does 15-year tax abatement benefit citizens?
- As stated during public comment at the 11/7/22 city council meeting, the council may yet be required to vote on the final sale of the property. Is that true? Will citizens be considered and included?
- What can citizens do to prevent this sale?

### November 29th Community Meeting Word Cloud



46 unique notes were collected under the additional questions/concerns topic during the November 29th Community Meeting (view full list in the Appendix). Topics included dismay at the lack of community engagement in the process, questions about the developer's record and its connection to the Mayor (e.g., backroom deals), disapproval that there has been no mention of a transfer of mineral rights, and concerns about developing undeveloped land when vacant developed land exists. Citizen questions still remain like "How do we know this is the highest and best use?", "Should Akron have green design standards?", and "What considerations were made to include affordable housing as well as high-end housing?".

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On behalf of the many concerned Akron residents and the entire attached list of petition signers, we are pleased to share the following.

On Sunday, November 27th our "Save White Pond Drive, Halt the Vote!" petition went live on [change.org](https://www.change.org/p/save-white-pond-drive-halt-the-vote?redirect=false) (<https://www.change.org/p/save-white-pond-drive-halt-the-vote?redirect=false>) The petition, created by Akron residents, states:

**The undersigned citizens of Akron, Ohio petition Akron City Council to POSTPONE ANY VOTE on any White Pond Reserve Development legislation UNTIL APRIL 30, 2023. In that extended time, City officials can work with residents to inform the entire community about the development proposal and allow for a series of community meetings to be hosted so Council members can listen to and understand the many community concerns being raised. We humbly ask City officials to take time.**

**The following summary highlights the composition of the petition signatories:**

- Total Number of Signatures: 606
- Total Number of Ohio Signatures: 470 (77%) with many non-Akron signatures coming from Copley, Kent, Stow, Tallmadge, Ravenna, Cleveland, Cuyahoga Falls, etc.
- Total Number of Akron Signatures: 317 (52%)
- Total Number of Akron Signatures by Ward (table below)

Akron Ward	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8	Ward 9	Ward 10	TOTAL
Ward Total	54	21	7	42	3	11	17	139	11	12	317

Attached, you will find the petition signature report. We also invite you to view the online petition comment section to view the many reasons why your constituents signed and are asking you, Akron City Council members, to **POSTPONE ANY VOTE on any White Pond Reserve Development legislation UNTIL APRIL 30, 2023.**

Thank you for reviewing this email and its attachments. And thank you to the council members who attended the Tuesday, November 29th Community Meeting held at St. Sebastian. More than 250 questions/concerns were collected during the Community Input sticky note Activity and as promised, in the coming days we will be sharing a summary report for you to review.

With hopes of a shared future,  
Save White Pond

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### EMAIL ATTACHMENTS

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- November 29th Community Meeting Agenda
- Alternative Uses for the Property shared at the November 29th Community Meeting
- Full list of transcribed community questions/concerns from the November 29th Community Meeting
- *AMATS 2021 Annual Report on Roadway Traffic Congestion* (see page 16, “White Pond through the I-77 Interchange” congestion intensity listed as “Severe”) and the *AMATS 2018-2020 High Crash Intersection by Community Report* (see page 1)