

# Hidden Waters: The Secret Life of Silver Creek

Plaster Creek Stewards Fall Event, 2013

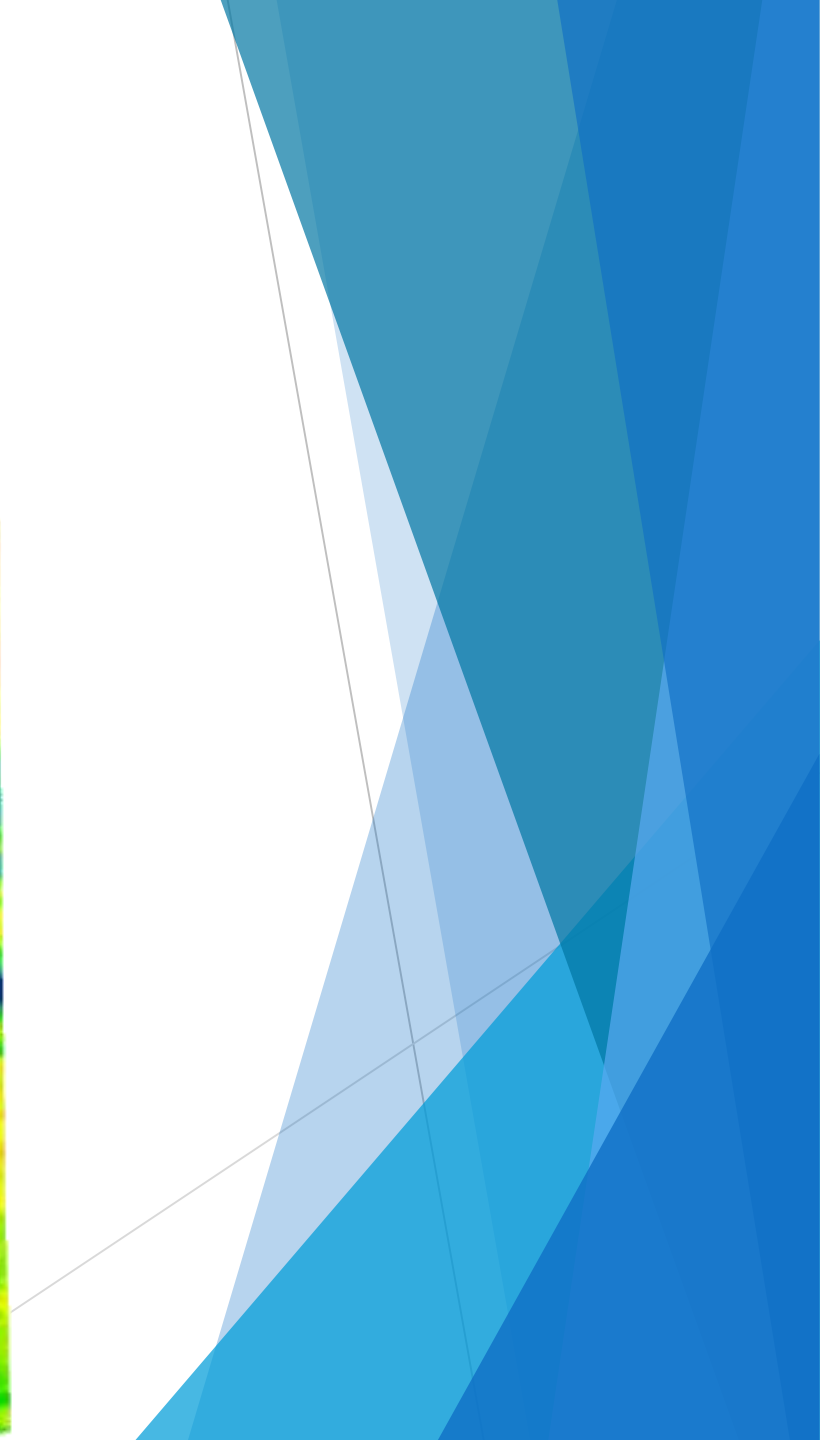
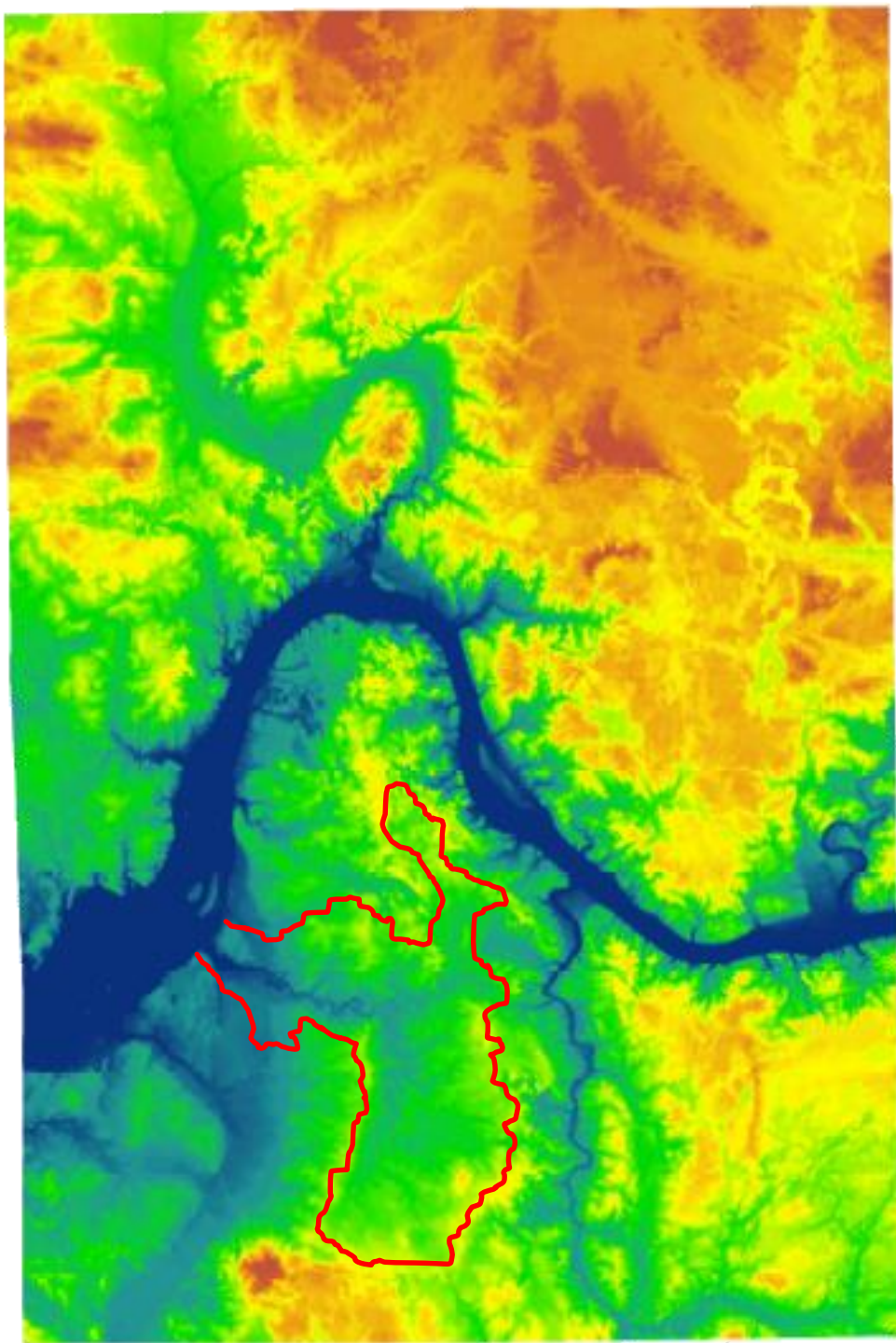


## **A Brook In The City**

The brook was thrown  
Deep in a sewer dungeon under stone  
In fetid darkness still to live and run --  
And all for nothing it had ever done  
Except forget to go in fear perhaps.  
No one would know except for ancient maps  
That such a brook ran water. But I wonder  
If from its being kept forever under,  
The thoughts may not have risen that so keep  
This new-built city from both work and sleep.

Robert Frost

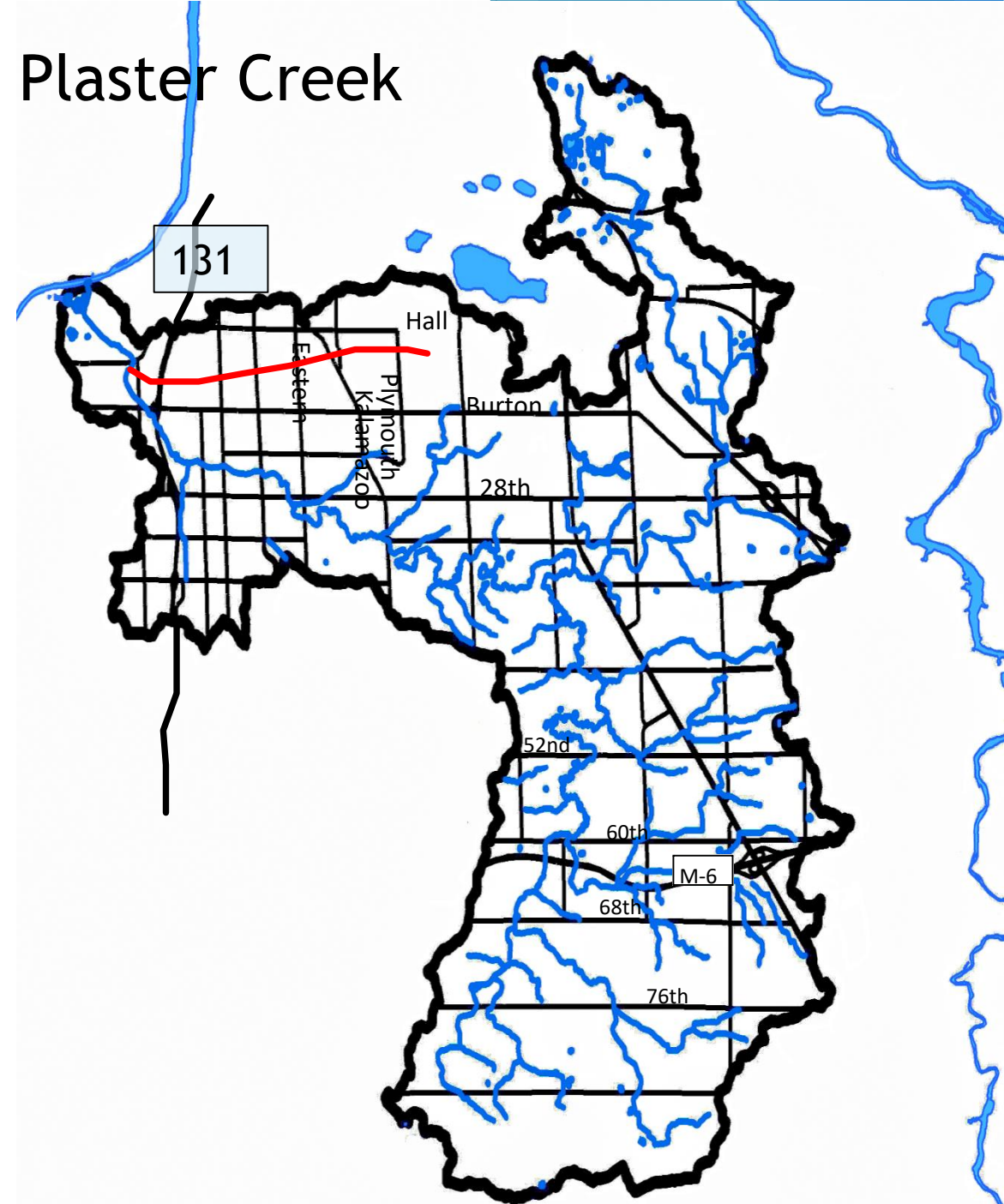




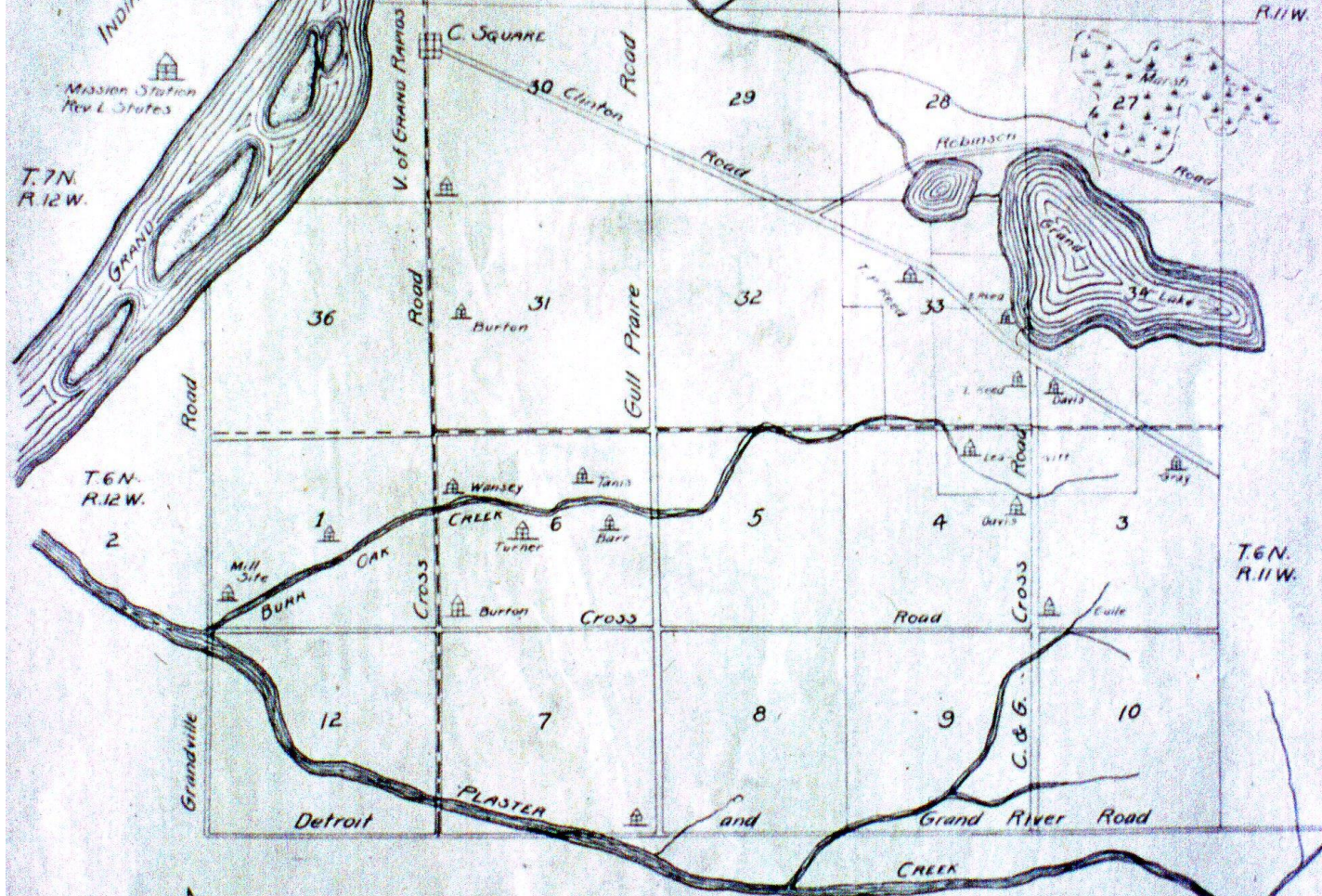
# Location of Silver Creek within the Plaster Creek Watershed

## SILVER CREEK BRANCH OF PLASTER CREEK

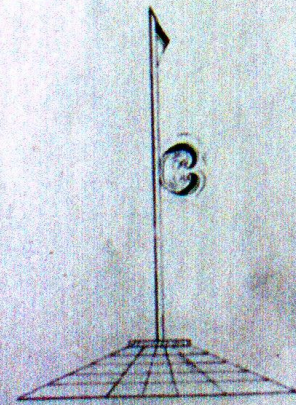
- The Silver Creek watershed is a sub-basin of the Plaster Creek Watershed which drains approximately 3,160 acres (5 sq mi) of the south side of Grand Rapids.
- The vertical drop of the watershed is approximately 160 feet.
- Headwaters are in East Grand Rapids, flows past Ottawa Hills, through Oakdale neighborhood, through an industrial area near Madison Square.
- Empties into Plaster Creek at Clyde Park and Grandville Ave (Roosevelt Park).







The squares represent one mile.  
 Double lines the different roads  
 Figures denote the numbers of the Section  
 Dotted lines are Town Lines  
 The Village now includes about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles in length and  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile in breadth.



GRAND RAPIDS - JUNE 10<sup>th</sup>, 1836. By D. T. LEAVITT.  
 Traced from the original map. March 8, 1920.

Received from  
 W. S. REED  
 LITTLE FALLS, N.Y.



# GRAND RAPIDS FLORA.

A  
CATALOGUE

OF THE

## Flowering Plants and Ferns

GROWING WITHOUT CULTIVATION  
IN THE VICINITY OF  
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN.

BY  
EMMA J. COLE.

GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.  
A. VAN DORT, Book and Job Printer.  
1901.





204. *C. cephalophora* Muhl.  
In dry shaded places; common. June-July.
205. *C. communis* Bailey.  
*C. pedicellata* (Dewey) Britton.  
Frequent on rich shaded banks. May-Mid-June.
206. *C. communis Wheeleri* Bailey.  
*C. pedicellata Wheeleri* (Bailey) Britton.  
S. B. Smith's woods, Sec. 14, Grand Rapids. May-Mid-June.
207. *C. comosa* Boott. (*C. Pseudo-Cyperus Americana Hochst.*)  
Frequent on lake margins. June-July.
208. *C. conoidea* Schkuhr.  
In wet ground along Silver Creek, near Oakdale Station (Prof. C.F. Wheeler); scarce. May-June.  
In the M. A. C. Herbarium.
209. *C. crinita* Lam.  
A common sedge in marshes. June-July.

of Grand River between the  
(F.). Last of May-June.

Mid-July.

; infrequent. June-Mid-July.  
Harrington, Sec. 2, Walker;  
Alpine.

e.  
Lamberton Lake.



776. *P. paucifolia* Willd. Fringed Polygala.  
Moist soil under tamaracks; local. May.  
Swamps north of Burton Ave., just east of the G. R. & I. Ry.,  
City (B.E.L.); along the south branch of Lamberton Creek  
(S.O.L.); Diamond St. Swamp, City (O.H.). A low plant with  
large rose-purple flowers.
777. *P. polygama* Walt.  
Light sandy soil; infrequent. July.  
John Ball Park and vicinity (O.H.); in fields south of Hall St.  
(M.&C.); Vergennes; woods on the hillsides along the Upper  
River Road. This species bears subterranean flowers which fruit  
abundantly.
778. *P. sanguinea* L.  
*P. viridescens* L.  
In moist soil; local. Aug.-Sept.  
Silver Creek at Hall St. and at East St. (O.H.); south of Masonic  
Home; between Kalamazoo Ave. and Burton Ave. (M.&C.); Sec.  
32, Vergennes; Campau Lake (Edward Campau).
779. *P. Senega* L. Seneca Snakeroot.  
Frequent in tufts on banks. Mid-May-Mid-June.  
Abundant in Orchid Swamp; banks of Lamberton Creek at  
Soldiers' Home; Indian Mill Creek.
- EUPHORBIACEAE. SPURGE FAMILY.  
ACALYPHA L. THREE-SEEDED MERCURY.
780. *A. Virginica* L.  
Fields; variable and common. Aug.-Sept.
- EUPHORBIA L. SPRUCE.
781. *E. commutata* Engelm.  
Light soil along the banks of streams; infrequent. May-J  
Along Plaster Creek at the Paris Town Hall (Lloyd Ford  
Madison Ave. (Miss Amy Conger); along Sand Creek in A  
and in Wright (Roy Tucker); Grand River at Plainfield Vi





## SENECIO L. GROUNDSEL.

1225. *S. atriplicifolius* Hook. (*Cacalia atriplicifolia* L.)  
*Mesadenia atriplicifolia* (L.) Raf.  
Frequent on the margins of oak openings. Aug.
1226. *S. aureus* L. Golden Ragwort. Squaw-weed.  
Open swamps; frequent and variable. Mid-May-Mid-June.
1227. *S. aureus obovatus* Torr. & Gray.  
Dry soil; common. Mid-May-Mid-June.

## SILPHIUM L. ROSIN-WEED.

1228. *S. terebinthinaceum* Jacq.  
In oak openings; local. Aug.-Sept.  
D. G. H. & M. Ry. at East St.; bank of Grand River below the  
Lower Swing Bridge; north side of Fisk Lake (O.H.); Silver  
Creek at Jefferson Ave., City. Infrequent in the State.

## SOLIDAGO L. GOLDEN-ROD.

1229. *S. bicolor* L.  
Dry banks; local. Sept.  
Hogadone Creek region (O.H.). It is only known to occur at  
two other stations in the State.
1230. *S. bicolor concolor* Torr. & Gray.  
*S. hispida* Muhl.  
Dry woods and fields; frequent. Last of Aug.-Sept.
1231. *S. caesia* L.  
Common in rich woods. Aug.-Sept.
1232. *S. caesia axillaris* Gray.  
Found with the type. Aug.-Sept.
1233. *S. Canadensis* L.  
Common and variable. Sept.-Oct.
1234. *S. juncea* Ait.  
Not uncommon in open places. Mid-July-first of Aug.
1235. *S. lanceolata* L.  
*Euthamia graminifolia* (L.) Nutt.  
Common in wet places. Aug.-Sept.





# ‘There’s something about being outside’

▶ We played there a lot. So having those woods... you could go down that hill, and walk through the woods and there was a creek running down there that we would sometimes jump across... I think now about how, how wonderful it was that we had this, we would refer to it as “the woods” — “we are going to go play in the woods.” And it seemed a lot bigger to us at the time than I am sure it is now...it seemed like the kind of thing that was just vast growing up. And it seemed like the kind of thing you could get lost in. Of course, you couldn’t, you could walk up anywhere and you know, find yourself on a street and get home. But our parents, we were up in an age and I think it was an era where our parents would just let us go and we would do this and we would be expected to be home by, you know, by supper time. I think there’s probably less and less of that kind of thing today as kids are more scheduled and parents are just more concerned about the safety of kids, you know, going out by themselves. But that was not really a factor for us and the times that we had down there, you know, just being able to walk around and discover and explore, I will always have that. And I think that was a great part of growing up. And having that in that neighborhood was a wonderful thing. I appreciate it even more now as an adult than I did at the time. And I think that the time that we had down there and the time with friends both helped me appreciate the natural world in a firsthand way that I would not have been able to do otherwise...that independent time, that time with friends out there both helped me come to an appreciation of that and those were formative times for those friendships...But we will always have those times in the woods. And I think, it was part of becoming an adult for me and part of coming of age, because these were things that were planned and done by us as kids and there are ways that we all have to learn to do that in life and those experiences were part of that for me...There’s just things that kids can think up and try and do when given some freedom and opportunity to have experiences like that, and as I think about it, the kinds of memories that come from experiences like that, you know, *there’s something about being outside*. These experiences, you know, the subtotal of these experiences contributed to my formation as a person and my learning how to have a friend, be a friend. And being outside was the ideal and best place for those kinds of experiences to happen. *And much of that happened right by the creek.*

# 'They put it underground'

- ▶ I: So where did you grow up? What was your house growing up?
- ▶ R: On Colorado Avenue. Which is, runs off of Boston Street. R2: What about the bottom of Colorado by Hall Street, wasn't there a little crick down there?
- ▶ R: Oh, yeah, there was a little creek called...What was it called, "Silver Creek"? It was a little creek, you can't see it anymore. Well, you can see it, if you go to Plymouth and Hall Street, that's where it starts, it starts back in them woods back there.
- ▶ I: Do you remember what happened to that creek?
- ▶ R: Yes, *in the '40's they put it under ground.* It starts underground right by the [Congregational] Church, right in their back yard. You can look in there and see the creek about this wide, and it gets wider and wider and it runs down to that valley and comes out at Standards Lumber...so, but it's all underground. Oh, yes. I was down there a lot when they were...Yes, they had a lot of, well not bulldozers, but... diggers and they dug the big trench and later put in foundations and built the walls. And it's a covered area, the whole thing is cement. You can walk down there...All poured cement. High enough you can walk it, well, then I was smaller. But your guy could walk in it, could walk down the creek. Walk down underground.
- ▶ I: Did you ever try it?
- ▶ R: Yeah, I tried it. We went down about to Calvin, I guess, Calvin Street. And then it got too scary. Right. So it is just a drainage, really a drainage more than anything... I was always crossing the creek. We had a lot of fun in that creek. We'd dam it up, you know, get shovels and throw it in there and make it as big as I can...the whole area changed when they developed it. You know they took away the big hills and kind of flattened them out, we always used to go sliding down...a steep hill on sleds...So, water's always attractive you know. Particularly to kids, they love to horse around near water. And so we had a good time going in Silver Creek and I remember very clearly a bunch of people working on it. Pumping the water out all the time ...







**Plymouth and Hall 1920**



















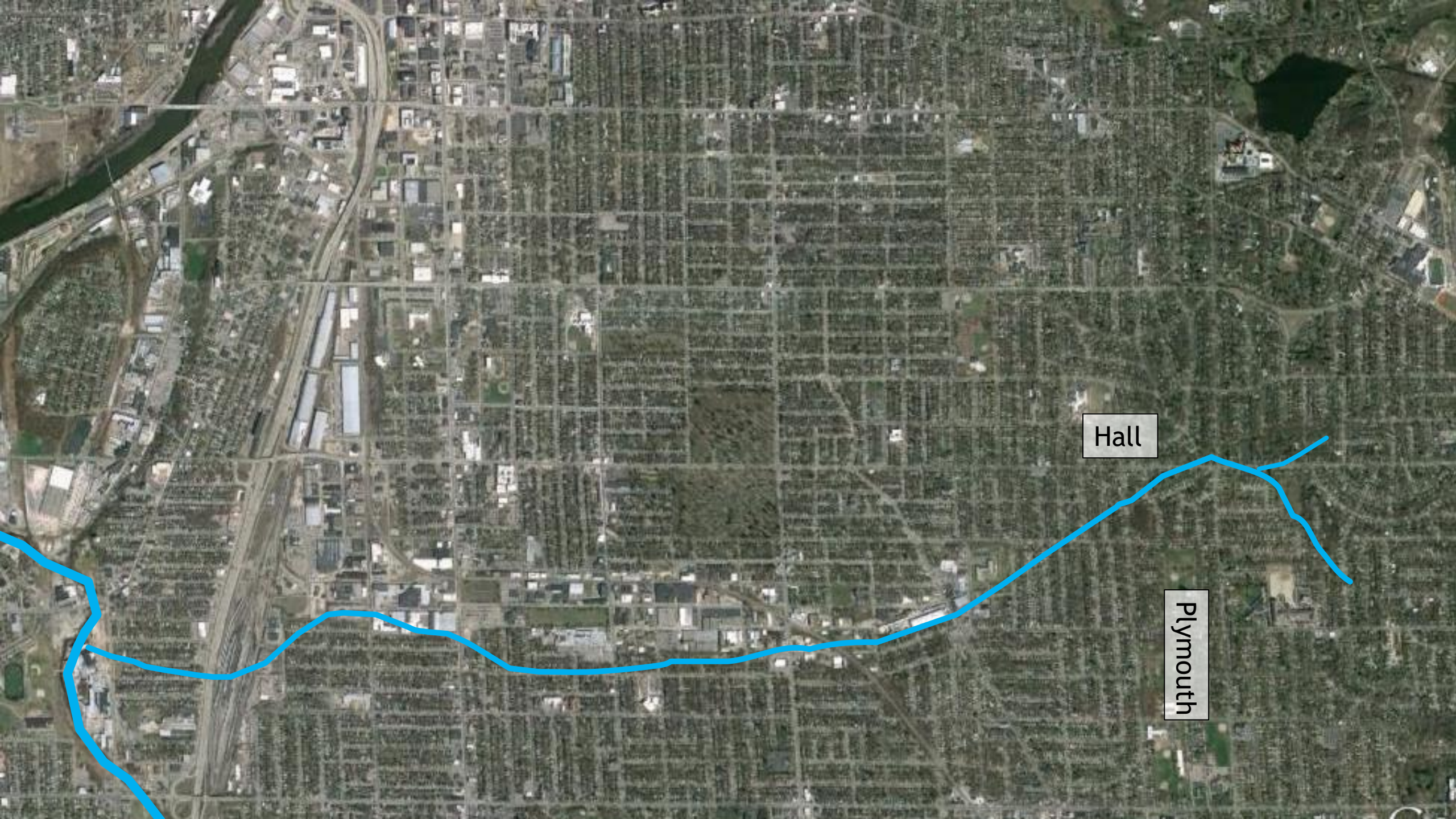




# ‘...geysers would come out of them’

- ▶ I’m talking about a field that was near our previous home. And, this field used to be an asparagus farm, I’m told. And I lived on Hutchinson, reached off Adams off Plymouth. And this was also a field that was connected to the intersection of Hall and Plymouth. But we first noticed this was a field our children would play in...and then we noticed the water in the field. When there would be a severe storm, or maybe even not so severe, *the manhole covers in front of our house ...would pop off and geysers would come out of them.* But the water entered the field right there from the storm sewer. Anyway, that was the field side. Then, the actual area of the ditch, which was dry most of the time, would become a raging river/stream, and which would then proceed to flood that intersection, which is why the city was very concerned about it. But our children just enjoyed it very much; they would get out in their raincoats and bare feet and get out in the street, you know, because the street itself would be flooded, and have a good time. Anyway, then the city, in trying to remedy this situation, decided to put huge cement conduits under the field...And then, ironically, a church that we were thinking about joining was going to build in the field, called Church of the Servant...Then, we heard that the city had reclaimed the property, the church could not build there, because the city was now finally going to make a retention pond so that, as we know is now ideal, that the water stays as close to where it lands as possible.

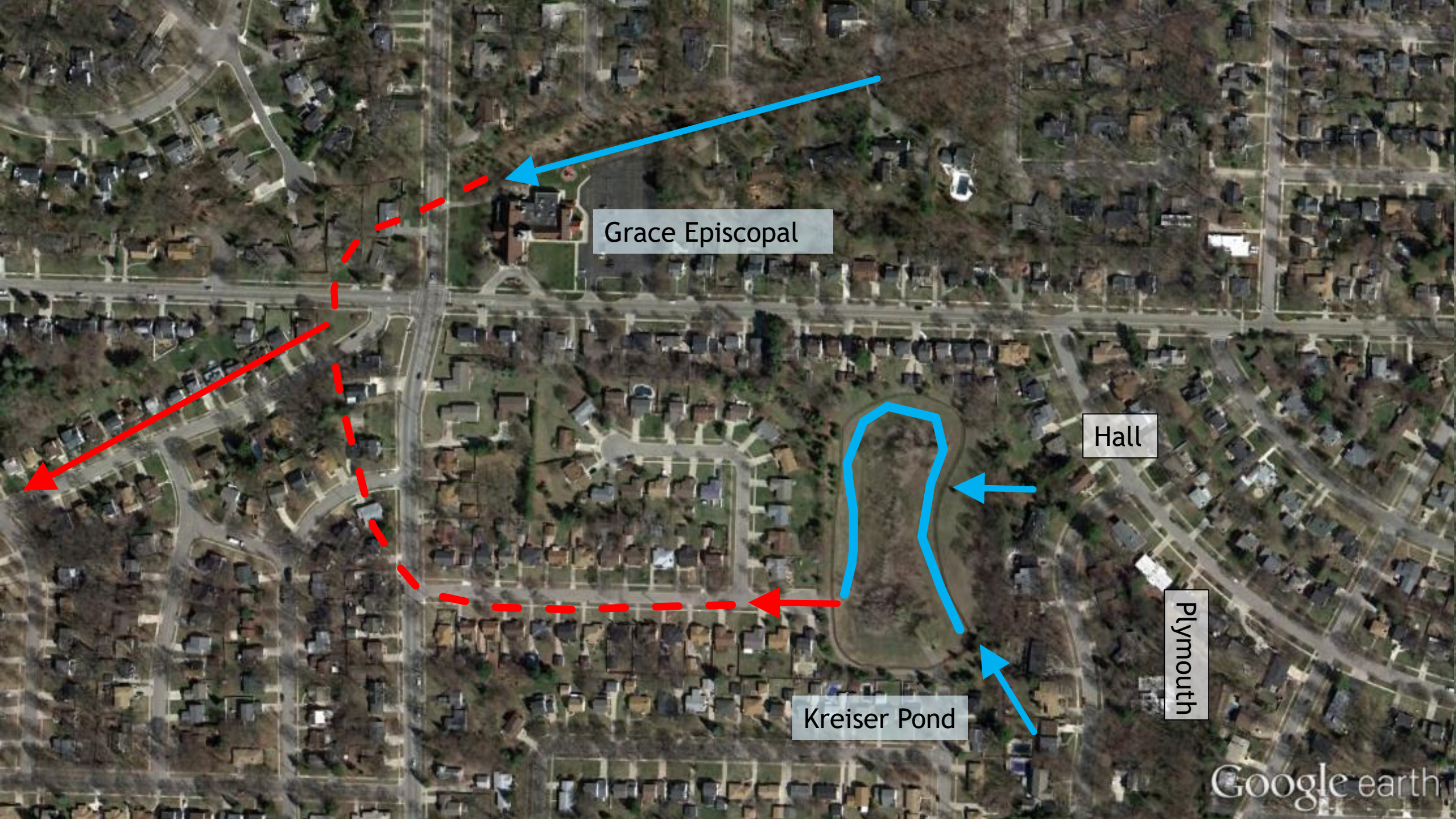




Hall

Plymouth





Grace Episcopal

Hall

Plymouth

Kreiser Pond

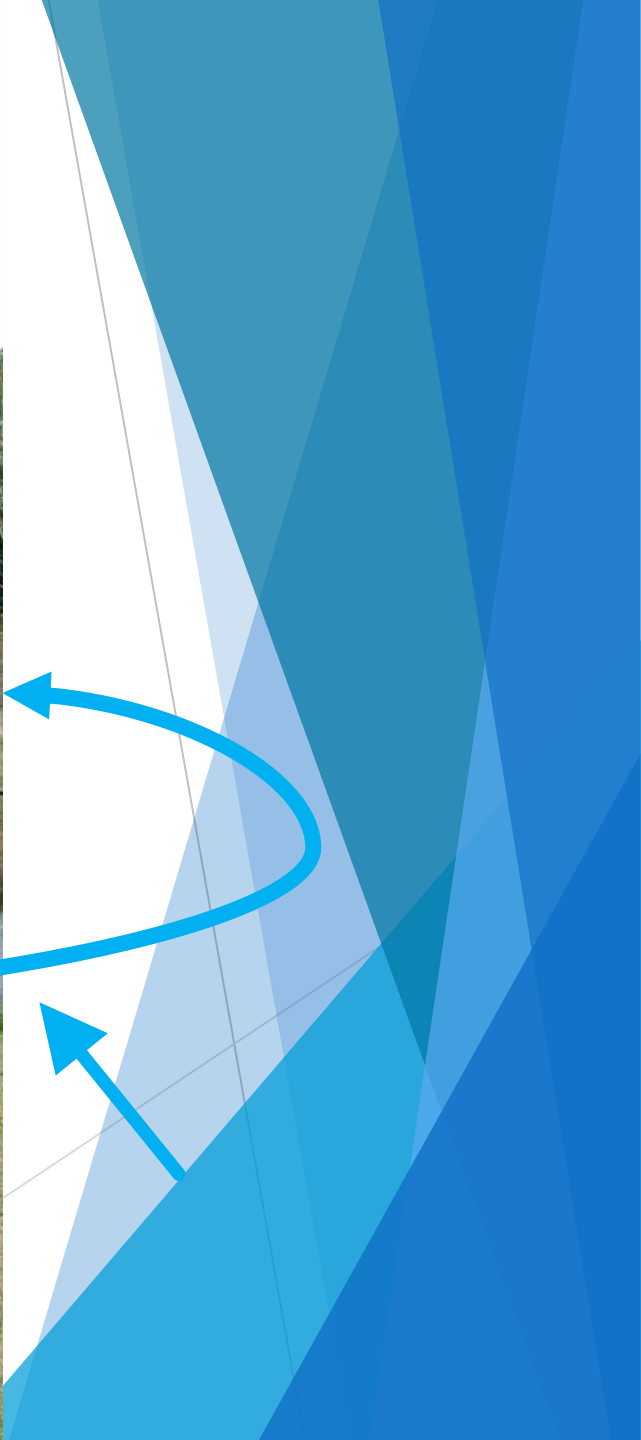


















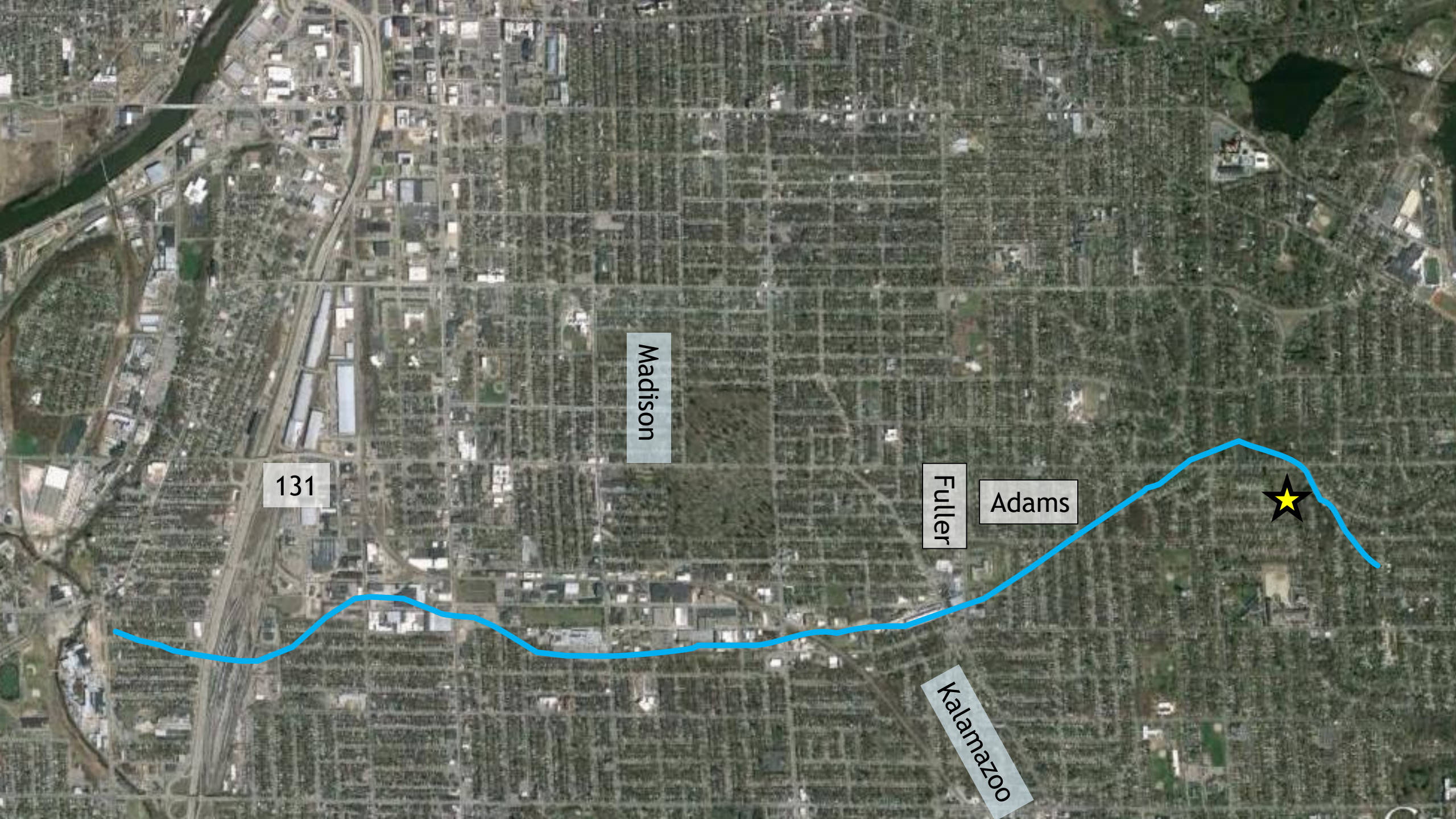




# ‘There is still some visible Silver Creek...’

- ▶ R: Well, you’ve got a whole generation that has much more sense to this than my generation. We paid no attention to it...We dumped stuff in... what’s the creek that runs, that once ran...parallel to Hall Street? I grew up a block away from it, I should remember. Anyway, we used to dump stuff in it.
- ▶ I: Parallel to Hall? Was that, that wasn’t Silver Creek, was it?
- ▶ R: Silver Creek! Yes! You see, Silver Creek was turned into, uh... a covered conduit by the WPA in 1934/35/36. That’s a work progress organization that Franklin Roosevelt developed. And we, we had a lot of fun watching those guys toting wheel barrels. No bulldozers, everything was...Shovel and wheel barrel... And then they built this, uh... concrete square container for the creek, which extended from Fuller Avenue all the way to Burton (pause). No... It was all the way, all the way to Burton, I think Silver Creek joins Plaster Creek at Burton and Division, along that neck...
- ▶ I: It now, now it empties out into the creek way down by that Kelvinator plant.
- ▶ R: Way down there?
- ▶ I: That’s where it comes out now. Yes. Maybe when you watched them build that section, that’s where it went.
- ▶ R: After they built it, then we got flashlights and walked it.
- ▶ I: (Gasp) You did?
- ▶ R: Yep...Walked all the way to Division Avenue. Uh...It was... It was frightening.
- ▶ I: I bet!
- ▶ R: We had been told not to light matches, for example, because it might be methane. So that was a great trip...  
*There still is some visible Silver Creek, by the way, at Calvin and Ramona, if you want to see it.*





Madison

131

Fuller

Adams

Kalamazoo







Adams

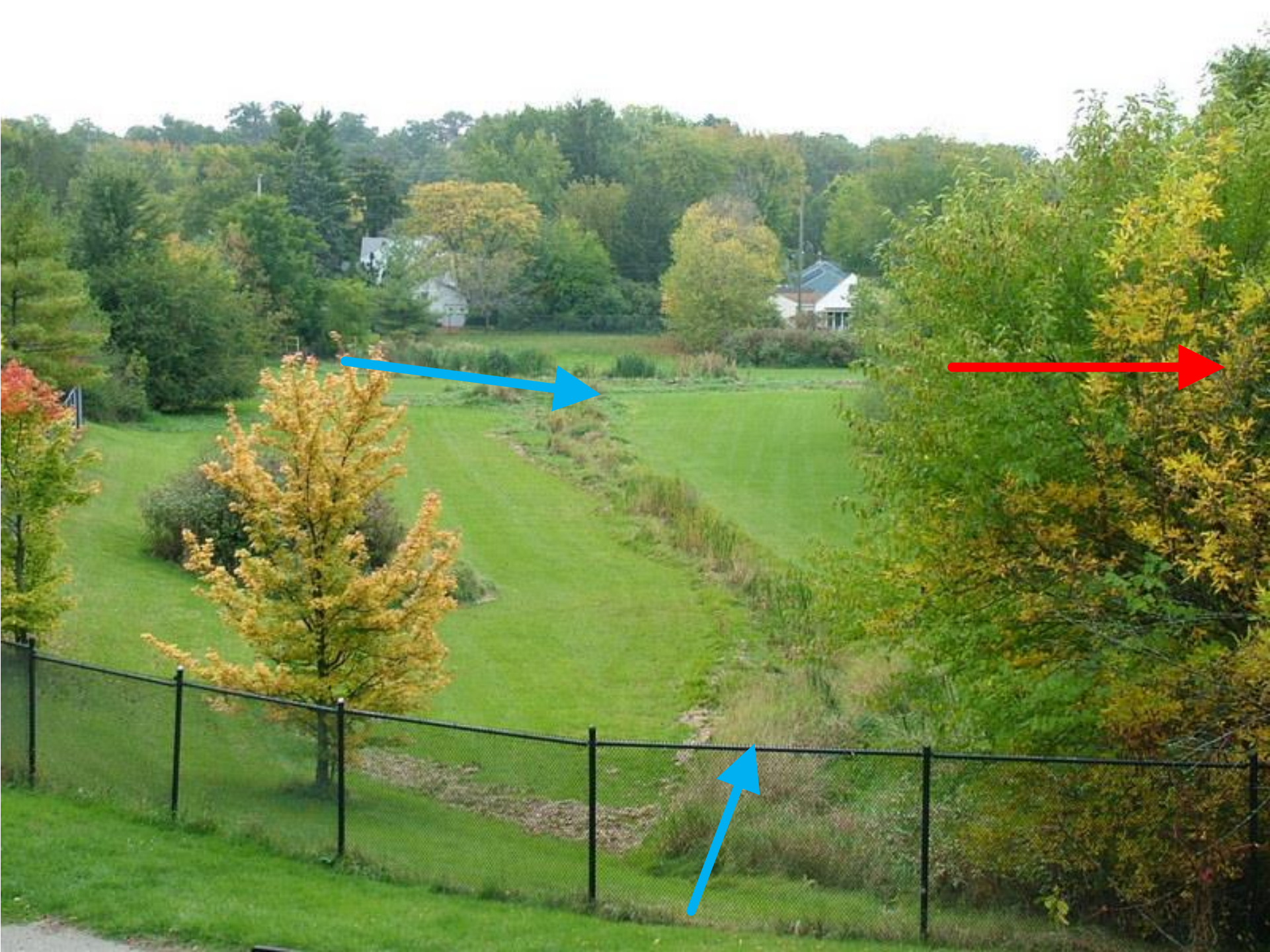
Fuller

Kalamazoo

Calvin

Google earth























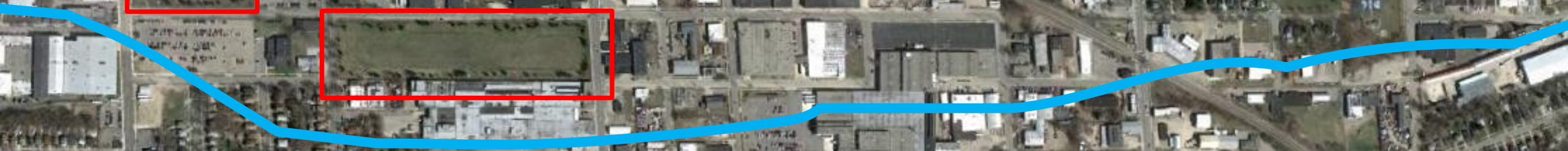
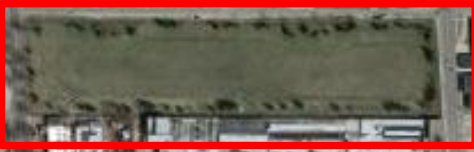




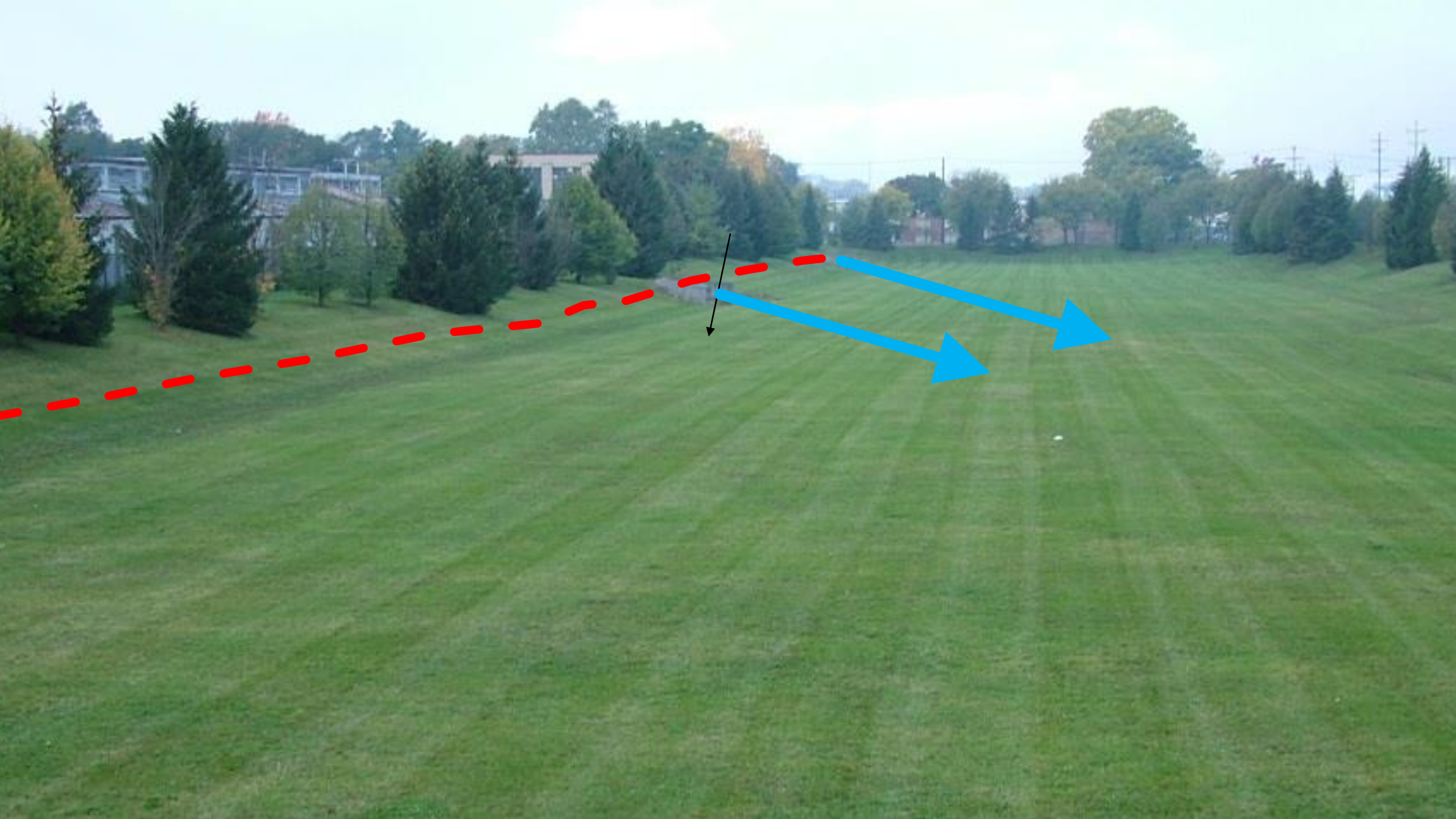
Madison

Eastern

Oakdale











**DANGER  
NO  
TRESPASSING**















# Lessons Learned

Conservation is two sided  
(‘con - service’)

History can inform restoration

Memories enliven history

Shortsighted behavior buried Silver Creek . . . What behaviors today will we regret in the future?

The story of Silver Creek is sad but not yet finished . . . There are still opportunities to show the creek some love







# What Can be Done for Silver Creek Today?

- Reduce Stormwater Runoff with rain gardens, rain barrels, more trees (especially Bur oaks!), green infrastructure practices . . .
- Identify and eliminate illicit dumping.
- Carefully restore and manage areas where Silver Creek sees daylight (Kreiser Pond, Calvin Ave Pond).
- Create new areas of daylighting in overflow basins (South Pond, Oshtego Pond).
- Tell the Silver Creek story, build awareness, recognize what has been lost, learn from past mistakes.
- Begin the conversation of daylighting all of Silver Creek.





Off to Kreiser Pond!

