



Agenda Action Form Overview

The Board is requested to approve the final budget for Billy and Toni Stevens' Conservation Easement and approve Capital Project Amendment No. XXXXXXXX decreasing the Open Space & Farmland Preservation Capital Project (4730DC083) by \$115,000, and Budget Amendment No. XXXXXXXX transferring \$115,000 from the Pay-As-You-Go Capital Project Fund to the General Fund, as well as Recognizing \$330,000 from the Army National Guard's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program to support the purchase of this conservation easement. These funds support the purchase of a conservation easement on 41 acres of the D.C. Umstead Farm owned by Billy and Toni Stevens and located at 3500 Bahama Road, Rougemont.

The Board approved this land protection project and easement in January 2025 contingent on securing outside funding. Since then, funding for 75% of the easement price has been secured through Army National Guard (ARNG) funds to protect a buffer around Camp Butner from dense residential development. Durham County has a 2021 Cooperative Agreement with ARNG through the [REPI](#) (Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration) Program. In 2023 Durham County partnered with Triangle Land Conservancy to protect 177 acres within the buffer using these Camp Butner funds. Another project, Wesley Poole's farm conservation easement, was finalized in December 2025 and was also funded with ARNG funds.

Billy and Toni Stevens purchased their historic home and 40 acres, the D.C. Umstead Farm, at the corner of Bahama and Hall Roads in 2012 and have since made significant improvements to their house and land. Billy and Toni work closely with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission through a Wildlife Habitat Conservation Agreement to comprehensively manage the land for wildlife, diverse habitats, and to protect water quality. The property has structures listed on the [National Register of Historic Places](#), including their home and the D.C. Umstead Store and Flat River Post Office (1882-1903), and is located along the [North Durham County Scenic Byway](#). Billy and Toni Stevens want to ensure that the land is permanently protected from development through a Durham County-held conservation easement.

Permanent conservation of the land supports Durham County's continued protection of farmland, significant conservation land and their related scenic, water quality, habitat, and wildlife connectivity values. This land protection effort provides important community and environmental benefits and supports several County policy goals.

Background/Justification

Since the early 2000s Durham County has protected ecologically significant land and farmland by purchasing the developing rights through conservation easements that permanently protect the land. The land stays privately-owned, for farming, forestry, and conservation uses, but cannot be developed or subdivided. To date Durham County has permanently protected 2,851 acres of land, farmland and conservation lands, with conservation easements. Seven additional easement projects are currently funded and will contribute an additional 427 acres of protected farmland.

Durham County has leveraged approximately 69% of land protection project costs in outside grants and landowner donations. Funding is through several sources including USDA-NRCS programs



that support permanent land protection of working lands and NC and local programs to protect water quality and ecologically significant lands.

The Stevens easement is funded through Army National Guard (ARNG) Funds to protect a buffer around Camp Butner from dense residential development. Durham County's Open Space Program has a 2021 Cooperative Agreement with ARNG through the [REPI](#) (Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program) and has utilized this funding for two previous projects.

Policy Impact

The acquisition of conservation easements for permanent open space aligns with DCo Forward 2029 Strategic Plan Focus Area: Sustainable Infrastructure and Environment, Objective SI 3 – Preserve and restore the natural and built environment through Initiative SI 3c – Improve water quality through equitable and efficient use of resources and land protection and through Initiative SI 3d – Protect and restore natural resources, land, recreational, historical, and rural spaces.

Additionally, Durham's adopted [Comprehensive Plan](#) includes policies that include protection of land to conserve significant natural areas, ecosystems, habitats, and wildlife corridors (Policies 78, 79, 83, 98) and safeguard drinking water sources for Durham and nearby communities (Policy 86). The Comprehensive Plan also includes policies that support rural and agricultural land uses including protecting farmland and supporting farmers, encouraging sustainable agricultural practices, and supporting local farmers and food markets (Policies 89, 91, and 141).

The property's land use is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's Place Type Map as "Rural & Agricultural Reserve" and protection contributes to the Comprehensive Plan's goal to place 30% of Durham County's land area in permanent conservation (Policy 78).

Procurement (Acquisition) Background

n/a

Fiscal Impact

The Board approved this conservation easement project in January 2025. Since then \$330,000 has been secured from Army National Guard through REPI to protect Camp Butner for 75% of the Poole appraised easement value. The transfer of \$115,000 to the General Fund will be used to pay Durham County's 25% share of the easement values and closing-related fees.

County Manager's Recommendation: The County Manager recommends that the Board approve the final budget for Billy and Toni Stevens' Conservation Easement and approve Capital Project Amendment No. XXXXXXXX decreasing the Open Space & Farmland Preservation Capital Project (4730DC083) by \$115,000, and Budget Amendment No. XXXXXXXX transferring \$115,000 from the Pay-As-You-Go Capital Project Fund to the General Fund, as well as Recognizing \$330,000 from the Army National Guard's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program to support the purchase of this conservation easement. These funds support the purchase of a conservation easement on 41 acres of the D.C. Umstead Farm owned by Billy and Toni Stevens and located at 3500 Bahama Road, Rougemont.