



Agenda Action Form Overview

The Board is requested to approve the final budget for Ken Wolfe’s Conservation Easement and approve Capital Project Amendment No. XXXXXXXX decreasing the Open Space & Farmland Preservation Capital Project (4730DC083) by \$104,600, and Budget Amendment No. XXXXXXXX transferring \$104,600 from the Pay-As-You-Go Capital Project Fund to the General Fund. These funds support the purchase of Ken Wolfe’s farm conservation easement, 29.605 acres, located at 1444 Bacon Road, Rougemont.

The Board approved this conservation easement project in September 2024. Since then, USDA-NRCS funding through the Agricultural Lands Easement Program (ACEP-ALE) has been secured to cover 50% of the appraised easement value. The transfer of these funds will cover Durham County’s 50% share of the easement value and closing fees.

Ken Wolfe’s 30-acre property (REID 189562) is located in northwest Durham County and is adjacent to 64 acres of the County-protected Blalock Farm. Mr. Wolfe grew up on and worked on this farm, where they grew tobacco. He purchased this land from his aunt in 2016 with the intent to protect it with a farm easement as his brother, Barry Blalock, did in 2015.

The farm is within the Lake Michie/Little River Watershed Protected Area, a watershed that includes Lake Michie and Little River, two drinking water reservoirs for City of Durham residents. The parcel is also identified by both the City of Durham’s and City of Raleigh’s Watershed Protection Programs as a *priority parcel for conservation*. A conservation easement on this parcel will protect it from conversion to non-agricultural uses and from fragmentation by prohibiting future parcel subdivision.

The preservation of this farm supports Durham County’s continued farmland and open space protection efforts and will be an important addition to north Durham protected land. This land protection provides important community and environmental benefits and supports several County policy goals.

Background/Justification

Since 2001, Durham County has preserved farmland and forestland by purchasing development rights through conservation easements, which keep the land privately owned for farming and forestry but prohibit development or subdivision. For every \$1 the County spends, it leverages about \$2.33 in outside grants, mainly from [USDA-NRCS programs](#) supporting permanent protection of working lands. In August 2024, to recognize Durham’s success partnering with USDA to protect farmland, Durham County County’s Open Space Program was designated a *certified eligible entity* under the ACEP-ALE Program.

To date Durham County, through 26 projects, has permanently protected 2,447 acres of farm and forestland on 19 family farms. In addition to this project, funding for six additional conservation easements is secured that will protect an additional 222 acres of rural farmland Durham County.

Policy Impact

The acquisition of conservation easements for permanent open space supports Strategic Plan Community Indicator Goal 4 (Environment) by protecting natural resources and promoting



community and economic vitality for all Durham County residents, specifically through the Natural Resource and Stewardship Protection Objective.

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).

This work supports Durham’s [2009 adopted Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Plan](#), which recognizes the value of farmland, the county’s rapid growth, and recommends actions such as “continuing current County efforts to acquire permanent conservation easements from interested farmers.”

Procurement (Acquisition) Background

n/a

Fiscal Impact

The Board approved this conservation easement project in September 2024. Since then, \$97,500 has been secured through USDA-NRCS funding through the Agricultural Lands Easement Program (ACEP-ALE) to cover 50% of the appraised easement value. The transfer of \$104,600 to the General Fund will be used to pay Durham County’s 50% 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 Ken Wolfe’s Conservation Easement and approve Capital Project Amendment No. XXXXXXXX decreasing the Open Space & Farmland Preservation Capital Project (4730DC083) by \$104,600, and Budget Amendment No. XXXXXXXX \$104,600 from the Pay-As-You-Go Capital Project Fund to the General Fund.