



Agenda Action Form Overview

The Board is requested to approve the final budget for two Conservation Easements and approve Capital Project Amendment No. XXXXXXXX decreasing the Open Space & Farmland Preservation Capital Project (4730DC083) by \$380,600, and Budget Amendment No. XXXXXXXX transferring \$380,600 from the Pay-As-You-Go Capital Project Fund to the General Fund. These funds support the purchase of William and Margie Sparrow's farm conservation easement, 42 acres located at 3901 Red Mill Road, and Neil and Catherine Frank's easement, 30 acres at 1300 Red Mountain Road.

The Board approved the option to purchase a conservation easement on the Sparrow farm in October 2021, and the Frank farm easement in August 2024, both contingent on partial funding from grants. The Board also approved federal USDA-NRCS ACEP-ALE program agreements that support these projects

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 \$2.50 in outside grants, mainly from [USDA-NRCS programs](#) supporting permanent protection of working lands. Recently, the County has also partnered with the Army National Guard to protect lands near Camp Butner using [REPI funding](#).

The Sparrow Farm, a former tobacco farm owned by their family for over four generations, is located in eastern Durham County on Red Mill Road, adjacent to Falls Lake protected lands. The Sparrows have lived on the property since the 1980s and are longtime leaders in sustainable sheep farming. The Frank property sits at Red Mountain and Moores Mill Roads along the North Durham Country Byway. The Franks purchased this land and an adjacent 300 acres in 2000 for their home and Caywood Farm, a beef cattle operation. Durham County holds a conservation easement that was completed in 2012 on the adjacent 300 acres.

To date Durham County has permanently protected 2,422 acres of farm and forestland on 19 family farms. In addition to these two projects, funding for five additional conservation easements is secured that will protect an additional 131 acres of rural farmland in east and north Durham County.

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).

This work is also part of the implementation of Durham’s [2009 adopted Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Plan](#) which acknowledges the value of farmland and the rapid transformation of Durham, and outlines recommendations for supporting farming, including “continuing current County efforts to acquire permanent conservation easements from interested farmers.”

Both 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 these conservation easement projects in October 2021 (Sparrow) and August 2024 (Frank). Since then USDA-NRCS funding, through the Agricultural Lands Easement Program (ACEP-ALE), has been secured to pay 50% of the appraised easement value: \$141,000 (Sparrow) and \$226,500 (Frank). The transfer of \$380,600 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 two Conservation Easements and approve Capital Project Amendment No. XXXXXXXXX decreasing the Open Space & Farmland Preservation Capital Project (4730DC083) by \$380,600, and Budget Amendment No. XXXXXXXXX transferring \$380,600 from the Pay-As-You-Go Capital Project Fund to the General Fund. These funds support the purchase of William and Margie Sparrow’s farm conservation easement, 42 acres located at 3901 Red Mill Road, and Neil and Catherine Frank’s easement, 30 acres at 1300 Red Mountain Road.