



Agenda Action Form Overview

The Board is requested to approve acceptance of a donated 22-acre conservation easement from David and Carmen Durack at 1700 Woodstock Rd and 3900 W. Cornwallis Rd (a portion of REID 137661 and all of 137648) for permanent open space protection.

The landowners wish to permanently protect their property by donating a conservation easement to Durham County. Longtime residents have lived on the property for more than 40 years and seek to ensure it remains protected from future development and that its natural resources and wildlife habitat are preserved.

Under the conservation easement, the owners will retain full fee ownership of the land, while Durham County will hold the easement, which will permanently prohibit future development or subdivision of the easement area. No additional residential uses will be permitted within the easement area.

Background/Justification

Since the early 1990s, Durham County's Open Space Program has worked to enhance environmental and community well-being by protecting natural landscapes, conserving habitats, wildlife corridors, farmland, forestland, and cultural resources, and safeguarding biodiversity. To date, Durham County has protected 4,300 acres of land—1,450 acres owned outright, and 2,851 acres protected through 43 conservation easements.

The proposed 22-acre conservation easement on Woodstock Road lies in west-central Durham County within the rural Arrowhead community. The property includes a 1.9-acre pond, roughly 10 acres of woodland, and additional areas containing the Duracks' home, a barn, and a park-like landscape with large mature oak trees. Wildlife observed on the site includes great blue herons, wild turkey, deer, foxes, flying squirrels, and various birds and waterfowl. The landowners manage their property to benefit wildlife habitat including removal of invasive non-native plants on the property.

In September 2025, staff from the [NC Natural Heritage Program](#) visited the property, documented a variety of plant and animal species, and affirmed the ecological value of protecting this tract, particularly noting the potential for ephemeral wetland amphibian habitats and the significance of the large mature trees.

The conservation easement will:

- Prohibit any future subdivision of the 22-acre easement area
- Limit residential uses to the existing home
- Allow agricultural and forestry uses using best management practices
- Prohibit commercial and industrial land uses
- Protect large trees and tree canopy
- Preserve wildlife habitat
- Safeguard wetland areas

Policy Impact

This land protection project aligns with several County policy priorities:



Strategic Plan Goal 4: Environment – Protect natural resources and support and promote community and economic viability for all residents of Durham County, through the Natural Resource Stewardship and Protection Objective.

The property’s current land use—and its protection through a conservation easement—aligns with its existing designation as Rural & Agricultural Reserve on the Comprehensive Plan’s Place Type Map. This Place Type protects rural character, farmland, and working lands by limiting development to low-intensity uses, and helps prevent suburban expansion, conserve natural resources, and maintain open landscapes outside the Urban Growth Boundary.

- The 2023 Durham Comprehensive Plan includes policies to preserve significant natural areas, habitats, wildlife corridors, and drinking water sources.

Policy 78 Ensure that a minimum of 30% of the land area of Durham County is placed in permanent conservation by 2050. Encourage permanent conservation of land, especially publicly owned land, that is most suitable for permanent protection, such as natural heritage areas, forested tracts, and bottomlands.

Policy 79 Protect Durham’s most ecologically sensitive natural areas (including floodplains, wetlands, wildlife habitats, unique plant communities, hillsides, drinking water sources, critical watersheds, and natural heritage areas) from the impacts of development.

Policy 86 Protect Durham’s drinking water sources. Ensure that all residents have access to clean drinking water following equitable investment in water infrastructure. Protect water sources that provide drinking water for adjacent counties.

Policy 98 Encourage the creation and preservation of natural wildlife habitat and natural plant communities, particularly for pollinators and birds, on both public and private land.

Procurement (Acquisition) Background

n/a

Fiscal Impact

The easement donation reflects a significant and generous commitment by the landowners, with an estimated easement value of approximately \$500,000. Durham County’s anticipated costs for survey, closing, and title work are estimated at no more than \$17,000. These expenses can be covered by existing funds within the Open Space and Farmland Preservation Capital Fund, and no additional funding is requested.

County Manager’s Recommendation:

The County Manager recommends that the Board approve acceptance of a donated 22-acre conservation easement from David and Carmen Durack at 1700 Woodstock Rd and 3900 W. Cornwallis Rd (a portion of REID 137661 and all of 137648) for permanent open space protection.