



Agenda Action Form Overview

The Board is requested to approve two options to purchase two farmland conservation easements, one with Ken and Janine Wolfe at 1444 Bacon Road, Rougemont and one with Clifford and Raelene Teasley at 6815 Wiley Mangum Road, to use existing open space capital project funds to support 50% of the easements' cost, and to authorize the Manager to execute grant agreement documents if funds are awarded.

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 this intent to protect it with a farm easement as his brother, Barry Blalock, did in 2015.

Mr. and Mrs. Teasley live on their property (REID 191649) which is along the [North Durham Country Byway](#). Mr. Teasley is active in Durham's farm community and manages and cuts hay on more than 200 acres of Durham farmland. He has lived in Bahama all of his life wants to make sure his farm is protected from future development.

The preservation of both farms supports Durham County's continued farmland and open space protection efforts and these farms will be important additions 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 that permanently protect the land. The land stays privately-owned, for farming and forestry uses, but cannot be developed or subdivided. Durham County has leveraged approximately \$4.33 in outside grants and donations for every \$1.00 that the County has spent. The majority of outside funding is through USDA-NRCS programs that support permanent land protection of working lands. In August 2024 Durham County was approved by USDA to be a 'certified eligible entity,' an acknowledgement of the County's experience and leadership with federal conservation programs. This certification permits greater independence and will allow for more efficient grant administrative processes.

To date Durham County has permanently protected 2,422 acres of farm and forestland on 19 farms. Three projects are currently funded and will contribute an additional 80 acres of protected farmland.

Ken Wolfe's farm is located within the Lake Michie/Little River Protected Area. The Teasleys' Triangle Farm is within the Lake Michie/Little River Critical Area. Both farms are within the Upper Neuse Watershed, an area that includes nine public drinking water reservoirs and the focus of conservation initiatives to protect land for water quality protection and improvement. The protection of both farms as permanent open space benefits water quality for Lake Michie and Falls Lake.



The Durham Farmland Protection Advisory Board recommended approval of both farmland easements in August 2024.

Policy Impact

The acquisition of farmland conservation easements for permanent open space aligns with Strategic Plan Focus Area: Sustainable Infrastructure and Environment, Objective SI 3: Preserve and restore the natural and built environment, and SI 3d: Protect and restore natural resources, land, recreational, historical, and rural spaces.

This work is 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.” In addition, Durham’s recently adopted [Comprehensive Plan](#) 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).

Both farms’ 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 2024 USDA-NRCS Agricultural Lands Easement (ALE) Program cycle has a submission deadline of October 4, 2024. For farms to be eligible for consideration, the County needs to have a signed commitment (real estate option) securing the County’s and owner’s intent to proceed if funding is approved. The real estate options give the County the right, but not the obligation, to purchase the easements. ALE funds would pay 50% of the approved appraised conservation easement values. The County’s estimated total costs for both easements (including 50% of the easement value, survey, appraisals, and closing costs) should not exceed \$270,000. The County’s open space and farmland capital project account has sufficient funds to pay the County’s portion so no additional funding is needed for these easements. If ALE funds are awarded and the projects continue, final budgets will be brought to the Board for approval prior to closing.

County Manager’s Recommendation: The County Manager recommends that the Board approve two options to purchase two farmland conservation easements, one with Ken and Janine Wolfe at 1444 Bacon Road, Rougemont and one with Clifford and Raelene Teasley at 6815 Wiley Mangum Road, to use existing open space capital project funds to support 50% of the easements’ costs, and to authorize the Manager to execute grant agreement documents if funds are awarded.