



Agenda Action Form Overview

The Board is requested to approve the final budget for Wesley and Cristan Poole’s Conservation Easement and approve Capital Project Amendment No. XXXXXXXX decreasing the Open Space & Farmland Preservation Capital Project (4730DC083) by \$80,300, and Budget Amendment No. XXXXXXXXX transferring \$80,300 from the Pay-As-You-Go Capital Project Fund to the General Fund. These funds support the purchase of a conservation easement on 25 acres of Tilley Farm owned by Wesley and Cristan Poole.

The Board approved this land protection project and easement on Wesley Poole’s farm 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, the D. C. Umstead Farm conservation easement approved in January 2025, is in process and anticipated to close in the next several months.

Wesley Poole’s 25-acre property (REIDs 208060 and 191949) is located in Northwest Durham County and adjacent to 239 acres of his family’s County-protected Tilley Farm. Wesley grew up on this land and still lives there with his wife and two children. He wants to continue his family’s legacy to permanently protect additional family land. Tilley Farm is one of only four [NC Century Farms](#) in Durham County. Roger Tilley, Wesley’s uncle, also lives on the farm and continues to tend the open land growing wheat, corn, and tobacco on rotation.

Tilley Farm is located within the Lake Michie/Little River Protected Area and 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 the property as permanent open space benefits water quality for Lake Michie and Falls Lake.

Permanent conservation of the farm 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 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 the past several years, the County has partnered with the Army National Guard to protect lands near Camp Butner using REPI funding.



To date Durham County has permanently protected 2,422 acres of farm and forestland on 19 family farms. In addition to this project, funding for seven additional conservation easements is secured that will protect an additional 173 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).

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 is also part of the implementation of Durham’s [2009 adopted Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Plan](#) which acknowledges the value of farmland, the rapid transformation of Durham, and outlines recommendations for supporting farming, including “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 January 2025. Since then \$213,000 has been secured from Army National Guard through REPI to protect Camp Butner for 75% of the Poole appraised easement value. The transfer of \$80,300 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 two Conservation Easements and approve Capital Project Amendment No. XXXXXXXX decreasing the Open Space & Farmland Preservation Capital Project (4730DC083) by \$80,300, and Budget Amendment No. XXXXXXXX \$80,300 from the Pay-As-You-Go Capital Project Fund to the General Fund.