



Agenda Action Form Overview

The Board is requested to approve Capital Project Amendment No. xxxxxxxxxx and Budget Ordinance Amendment No. xxxxxxxx Decreasing the Open Space & Farmland Preservation Capital Project (4730DC083) by \$123,000 and transferring that funding to the General Fund, as well as recognizing \$117,500 from the City of Durham's Water Supply Protection Program to support the purchase of a 19.27-acre conservation easement from Robin Davis at 505 Mason Road for a total cost of \$240,500.

The Board approved this conservation easement in June 2025 after receiving notice that the City of Durham's Water Supply Protection Program would fund 50% (\$117,500) of the easement value. The transfer of \$123,000 to the General Fund will cover Durham County's remaining 50% share and closing costs.

Ms. Davis has lived on her farm for over 30 years and wants to ensure it is protected from further development. She values wildlife and nature and is committed to preserving her land. The parcel is in the Lake Michie/Little River Protected Area which, per current UDO, requires 150' buffers along streams, ponds, and lakes (Durham County UDO Section 8.5.4.B.1). The protection of this parcel will protect an additional 400 - 700' wide buffer and 15.7 acres of protected buffer along the stream and lake edge.

The eastern portion of this parcel has received a score of 7 out of 10 on the Natural Heritage Program's Biodiversity and Wildlife Habitat Assessment. The adjacent parcel to the east, Eden Lakes, is an eBird hotspot; Bald Eagles, Hooded Mergansers, and a wide variety of songbirds have been documented here. Protection of the Davis property will safeguard existing wildlife habitat from impacts of development. More than 88% of the property includes soils that are designated as prime or of state significance as farmland. It is productive farmland that Ms. Davis currently manages for hay production. The protection of this property provides:

- water filtration for downstream water supplies
- protection of 15.7 acres of undeveloped buffer along 1,940 feet of stream and lake frontage
- protection of existing early successional wildlife and water bird habitat
- scenic beauty along road frontage and adjacent to residential neighborhood
- protection of historic, rural, and cultural features

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 the early 2000s Durham County has protected ecologically significant land and farmland by purchasing the developing rights through conservation easements that permanently protect the land. The land stays privately-owned, for farming, forestry, and conservation uses, but cannot be developed or subdivided. To date Durham County has permanently protected 2,851 acres of land,



farmland and conservation lands, with conservation easements. Seven additional easement projects are currently funded and will contribute an additional 305 acres of protected farmland.

Durham County has leveraged approximately 69% of land protection project costs in outside grants and landowner donations. Funding is through several sources including USDA-NRCS programs that support permanent land protection of working lands and NC and local programs to protect water quality and ecologically significant lands.

This project is funded by the City of Durham’s Water Supply Protection Program to protect water quality in the Little River Reservoir.

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.

The protection of this site supports wildlife habitat, water quality, scenic values, and soil conservation. Because protection will be via a conservation easement, no public access will be allowed. The protection of this site supports the implementation of the [Little River Open Space Corridor Plan](#), adopted by the Board of County Commissioners and Durham City Council in 2001.

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.”

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).

Procurement (Acquisition) Background

n/a

Fiscal Impact



The Board approved this conservation easement in June 2025 after receiving notice that the City of Durham’s Water Supply Protection Program would fund 50% (\$117,500) of the easement value. The transfer of \$123,000 to the General Fund will cover Durham County’s remaining 50% share and closing costs.

County Manager’s Recommendation: The County Manager recommends that the Board approve Capital Project Amendment No. xxxxxxxxxx and Budget Ordinance Amendment No. xxxxxxxx Decreasing the Open Space & Farmland Preservation Capital Project (4730DC083) by \$123,000 and transferring that funding to the General Fund, as well as recognizing \$117,500 from the City of Durham’s Water Supply Protection Program to support the purchase of a 19.27-acre conservation easement from Robin Davis at 505 Mason Road for a total cost of \$240,500.