



Agenda Action Form Overview

The Board is requested to approve Capital Project Amendment No.26CPA008 and Budget Ordinance Amendment No.26BCC026 Decreasing the Open Space and Farmland Preservation Capital Project (4730DC083) by \$225,000 and Transferring that Funding to the General Fund to Support Improvements at Little River Regional Park and Natural Area

Since opening to the public in December 2004, [Little River Regional Park and Natural Area](#) (LRRP) has operated under an Interlocal Agreement and Management Plan between Durham and Orange counties. The current agreement, updated in 2022, outlines shared responsibilities for the park's operation, maintenance, and development.

For FY 2026, Durham County's share of park management costs is \$154,757, as approved during the spring budget process. An additional \$225,000 from Durham's Open Space Capital account will fund 50% of the long-overdue paving of the park's entry driveway and parking area, as well as the repaving of the accessible loop trail—the top two capital improvement priorities identified in the 2021 *Little River Regional Park & Natural Area Master Plan*, adopted by the board on December 13, 2021. Orange County has approved its share of the funding and will oversee the project, which is expected to begin in late fall or winter, when park usage—particularly mountain biking—is typically lower.

Of the park's 391 acres, 255 are located in Durham County and 136 in Orange County. The Orange County portion includes all park infrastructure, including the office, playground, maintenance shed, picnic shelter, restrooms, parking area, and driveway. Because Orange County has an established Parks and Recreation Department, it serves as the lead agency for daily operations, maintenance, and staffing.

Background and Justification

LRRP is a 391-acre public park located in northern Durham and Orange counties. Jointly acquired in 1999 through a partnership between the two counties—with support from the Triangle Land Conservancy and the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund—the park reflects a long-standing commitment to regional conservation and public recreation.

Initial Park development was funded through a combination of local contributions and grants from the NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, and a State Trails Grant. The park continues to serve as a model for intergovernmental collaboration, environmental stewardship, and public access to natural spaces

Park Recreational Values. The park is a popular destination for residents of both counties, with usage evenly split between Durham and Orange County visitors. It serves as a vital community resource, offering accessible outdoor recreation, family-friendly amenities, and opportunities for nature-based education and wellness, including: 7 miles of hiking trails, 7 miles of mountain biking trails, playground, and a picnic shelter, which is frequently booked during peak seasons.

Environmental Value. Ecologically, LRRP is a critical conservation area within the Little River watershed, one of the cleanest and most biologically diverse watersheds in North Carolina. The park protects a rich mosaic of habitats, including:

- Riparian corridors that support aquatic species such as freshwater mussels, amphibians, and fish
- Forested uplands that provide habitat for migratory birds, pollinators, and small mammals
- Native plant communities, including sycamore, river birch, and oak-hickory forests, which contribute to regional biodiversity and climate resilience



Designated as a low-impact conservation and recreation area, LRRP includes areas managed for pollinator habitat, invasive species control, and habitat connectivity. These efforts enhance the park's role as a wildlife corridor and a natural buffer against development in the rapidly growing Triangle region.

In addition to its ecological value, the park functions as a living laboratory for environmental education and stewardship. Interpretive trails and signage help visitors understand the park's natural features and the importance of conservation. LRRP directly supports regional goals for water quality protection, biodiversity conservation, and public access to nature.

Policy Impact

The continued partnership with Orange County for the operation and stewardship of Little River Regional Park is strongly supported by several Durham County Strategic Plan Goals including:

Goal 1: Community Empowerment and Enrichment by serving as a regional outdoor classroom, offering environmental education, nature-based recreation, and cultural enrichment. The park supports access to recreational and educational resources, especially for residents in northern Durham and Orange counties.

Goal 2: Health and Well-being For All by promoting physical and mental well-being through access to trails, nature, and outdoor activities by offering recreational opportunities in a natural setting.

Goal 4: Environment. LRRP directly contributes to the preservation of natural resources, including forested land, riparian corridors, and biodiversity within the Little River watershed. The park supports regional environmental stewardship, aligning with indicators related to land conservation, water quality, and access to green space.

The Park also advances multiple community goals related to conservation, access, and intergovernmental collaboration as documented in *Durham's Comprehensive Plan*.

Environmental Protection & Conservation: Policy 79: Protects natural heritage areas, floodplains, and wildlife habitats—all of which are present in LRRP.

Access to Nature: Policy 106: Calls for investment in park maintenance and programming, supporting the joint operational model of LRRP.

Intergovernmental Collaboration: Policy 13: Encourages collaboration across departments and jurisdictions to advance community goals. Policy 26: Promotes community benefit from public investment, reinforcing the value of LRRP as a shared asset.

Procurement Background N/A

Fiscal Impact

The Board approved the current Interlocal Agreement in 2022, which states: "All operating, maintenance, and capital improvement costs for the Park shall be shared equally (50/50) by the Counties." A transfer of \$225,000 from the Open Space and Farmland Preservation Capital Fund to the General Fund will cover Durham County's required 50% share of the resurfacing project for the park's driveway and parking area.

Recommendation: The County Manager recommends that the Board of County Commissioners approve Capital Project Amendment No.26CPA008 and Budget Ordinance Amendment No.26BCC026 decreasing the Open Space and Farmland Preservation Capital Project (4730DC083) by \$225,000 and transferring the funding to the General Fund to support improvements at Little River Regional Park.