



# D U R H A M Open Space & Trails Commission

## ANNUAL REPORT

January 2017 to December 2017

### Introduction and Mission

The Durham Open Space and Trails Commission is an advisory board that advises the City Council and the Board of County Commissioners on matters relating to the preservation of open space and trails. In order to provide recreational and environmental benefits for the citizens of Durham, the commission promotes the preservation of valuable open spaces, natural vegetation and stream valleys within the urban and rural environment, and the development of trails and other appropriate recreational and transportation facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists. The commission promotes the protection of the natural environment where appropriate to serve the public interest, with equal consideration for long-term care of the environment and the short-term pressures of growth. In doing so, the commission fosters the wise use of the City's and County's natural resources and strives to involve all segments of the Durham community.

The Commission consists of eight members appointed by both the City Council and Board of Commissioners, four elected or appointed officials, and up to 10 members appointed by the Commission. Membership for 2017 was 20.

### 2017 Accomplishments

**Priority Trails:** The Commission continues to advocate for funding for the five priority trails identified in the 2015 "Top Priority Trails for a Healthy Well Connected Durham" report. Two of the trails, the R. Kelly Bryant Bridge North trail and the Third Fork Creek trail extension have already been designated to receive funding from the State. We urge the Council to include funding for all five trails. Additionally, the Trails Committee has worked with Parks and Recreation staff to identify one additional trail, the Warren Creek Trail extension, which could be submitted to NCDOT for funding. The Commission also began the "Twenty for Trails" initiative to encourage City Council to budget \$2 million each year in support of the City's trail development program.

**Urban Open Space Plan:** This year saw the completion of the plan and its eventual adoption by the City Council and the County Commission. The Plan sets forth the most complete inventory of existing open space sites and opportunities for creating new open spaces ever assembled for Durham. In addition, it is the first Durham open space plan to acknowledge that environmental inequities exist in the city with respect to existing open space, and thus challenged Durham officials to address these inequities. In urging adoption of the Plan, DOST recommended four specific strategies to ensure that the Plan is implemented and implemented successfully: (1) a designated staff member to oversee and coordinate the implementation of open space initiatives; (2) the creation of an open space budget for the city (as

the County already has); (3) an expanded policy regarding surplus properties; (4) an annual progress report to the elected officials.

**Durham Belt Line:** Development of the Durham Belt Line into a world-class trail facility remains one of DOST's top priorities. The Commission is excited to see this project moving forward and is participating in the master planning process.

#### **Durham County Matching Grants Program**

Now in its twenty-seventh year, the Matching Grants Program continues to provide grants to community non-profit organizations for open space and recreation projects throughout the County. When funds are available, Durham County contributes an annual allocation to support the Program. During the life of this Program, the County's investment of \$1.5 million has leveraged over \$3 million in monetary and in-kind contributions. DOST hosted tours of select Matching Grant award winners to showcase how the Program has provided grants to community non-profit organizations for open space and recreation projects throughout the County

Durham County Matching Grants Program		
	Program to Date	Year 2017-18
Number of Grants	93	5
Value of County Matching Grants	\$1,510,000+	\$ 70,747
Total Value of Projects	\$3,300,000+	\$ 320,148

For the 2017-18 Grant Cycle, the Committee approved five new projects. Details on the projects and award amounts are below:

<b><u>Organizations</u></b>	<b><u>Description</u></b>	<b><u>Grant Request</u></b>
Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association	Purchase of .4 acre Soles property and removal of existing structure	\$13,200
Eno River Association	Construction of canoe launch at West Point on the Eno	\$17,991
Friends of Lakewood Elementary	Purchase of soccer goals, field marker, paint, and signs	\$565.85
The Scrap Exchange	Renovation of outdoor common space	\$4,000
Triangle Greenways Council	21 acre land purchase on Brightwood Lane	\$35,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$70,746.85</b>

## **Overall Commission Goals for 2017**

The Commission will continue to promote the preservation of valuable open spaces, the preservation of natural vegetation and stream valleys within the urban, suburban and rural environment, and the development of trails and other appropriate recreational and transportation facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists.

In addition, the Commission identified the following priorities for 2018:

- Continue to advocate for secure funding to build out the priority trails.
- Continue to advocate for intentional and predictable increased funding for trails and open space.
- Support the adoption and implementation of the Durham Beltline Master Plan.
- Strengthen Matching Grants program by advocating for increased funding. Examine the process to encourage additional applications from a diversity of applicants and geographic locations.
- Strengthen DOST's involvement in the development review process.
- Update the Greenways & Trails Master Plan, include a strong public input process.
- Ensure there are trail connections around the planned light rail stations.
- Implementation of the Urban Open Space Plan.
- Work on incorporating natural surface/non-paved trails into the trail network, including the Timberlake Trail and potentially a trail following the Indian Trading Path.