



Agenda Action Form Overview

The Board is requested to approve an option to purchase a farmland conservation easement with Allen and Cindy Needham, and to submit a 2019 federal ALE grant request to assist with the cost of the easement, and to use current capital project funds to support Durham County's required match. The farm consists of 33 acres in two parcels (#193061 and #193064) located on Brickhouse Road in northern Durham County, just south of Old Oxford Road. The property is adjacent to Army Corps of Engineers land for Falls Lake as shown on the attached maps, and is just south of the Amed Tilley farm, another farm that has been awarded funding that is in process. The Durham Farmland Protection Advisory Board recommended approval of a farmland easement on the Needham farm at their February 2019 meeting.

The ALE grant funds would be used to reimburse Durham County for 50% of the approved appraised value for the acquisition of a conservation easement on Mr. and Mrs. Needham's farm which consists of approximately 33 acres located in northern Durham County at the intersection of Brickhouse Road with Old Oxford Highway, as shown on Attachments A, B, and C.

Background/Justification

The County has had an active program of farmland protection since 2001, with the Durham County Farmland Protection Advisory Board providing oversight and guidance. The County presently has permanently protected 2131 acres of farmland with conservation easements on fifteen farms, as shown on Attachment 3. There are five additional farms totaling 256 acres approved by the Board of County Commissioners with 2016 and 2017 federal funds awarded that are in process, including the Amed Tilley farm that is located just north of this proposed farm, as shown on the attachments.

The Needham's farm is bordered by the Army Corps of Engineers property for Falls Lake on the west. The entire Brickhouse Road peninsula is surrounded by Falls Lake lands to the south east and west. With this strategic location, protecting the property for permanent open space and farmland uses serves multiple public benefits. Mr. Needham presently has hay on a portion of the property as well as beef cattle and horses.

Protection of farmland through conservation easements was a recommendation in the Durham County Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Plan, adopted by the Board of County Commissioners in 2009. Protection of farmland with permanent conservation easements also supports the adopted Durham Comprehensive Plan "Conservation and Environment" element, which has a specific objective regarding the County funding an active program of acquisition of farmland conservation easements and seeking grants to assist with these purchases

Policy Impact

The protection of the Len Needham farm with a conservation easement specifically helps to advance the Durham County Strategic Plan, Goal 4. Environmental Stewardship and Strategy 4.1C "Number of total acres of open space and farmland that have been protected/influenced by Durham County."

. Procurement (Acquisition) Background

n/a



Fiscal Impact

The ALE grant funds would be used to pay for 50% of the approved appraised value for the acquisition of the conservation easement. The appraisal may not be completed until after the federal funds are awarded, so the option to purchase specifies a range between \$4,000 per acre and \$6,000 per acre for the easement value, with the actual cost of the easement determined by the later appraisal. The county's estimated total costs for the easement including survey, appraisals, and closing costs should be no more than \$119,000 and probably significantly less. The County's open space and farmland capital project account has sufficient funds to pay for the county's portion of this project, so no additional funding is needed for these easements. A final budget for the farm easement would be brought back to the Board prior to closing. If awarded, the grant funds are not paid until the time the easement on the farm is conveyed.

Recommendation

The County Manager recommends that the Board approve the conservation easement option with Allen and Cindy Needham for three years through June 30, 2022, and authorize the Manager to submit a 2019 federal ALE grant request to assist with the cost of the easement, and to use current capital project funds to support Durham County's required match.