



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

## ANNUAL REPORT

January 2019 to December 2019

### Introduction and Mission

The Durham Open Space and Trails Commission (DOST) 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 advocacy for 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, equitable 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 the City Council, eight by the Board of Commissioners, four elected or appointed officials, and up to 10 members appointed by the Commission. Membership for 2019 was 19.

### 2019 Accomplishments

**Priority Trails:** The Commission continued to advocate for funding for nine priority trails identified in Durham's 2011 Trails and Greenways Master Plan. Two of these, the R. Kelly Bryant Trail and the Third Fork Creek Trail extension, have already been fully funded with state assistance, while the Durham Belt Line gathered momentum with the acceptance of \$8.4M in federal funds. All three of these projects began detailed planning and design in 2019. The DOST Trails Committee continued, under the banner of its "Twenty for Trails" initiative, to encourage City Council to budget \$2 million each year for ten years in support of the City's trail development program. On May 22, 2019, DOST organized and hosted its 2<sup>nd</sup> bus tour with public officials to highlight the City's three current trail projects.

**Open Space:** In 2019 the County finalized the purchase of properties in the Little River corridor and in the Little River uplands, purchases that will benefit water quality in the corridor, and the County also made progress toward opening its Santee Rd. property in East Durham to public access. These actions, anticipated in the documents for the County's major plan areas, were welcome conclusions to many years of effort on behalf of open space. Much of the most time-consuming work of the Open Space (OS) committee in 2019 was directed toward protecting its investments in other significant natural areas--the New Hope Creek Wildlife Corridor and the Hollow Rock Nature Park. In the first instance, a developer's plan encroached on the corridor, a designated natural heritage area and one of the first multi-

jurisdictional open space plans in the state, threatening wildlife at the corridor's most vulnerable point. In the second instance, the plan for a development adjoining the Hollow Rock Nature Park lacked important provisions that would guarantee the protection of the park's natural features. In both these instances, actions by the OS Committee, in collaboration with the New Hope Creek Corridor Committee, the Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, and other citizen groups, and securing the advice and consent of the full DOST Commission, were able to reach an accommodation with the developers to correct or ameliorate the problems. Finally, the OS Committee, with the backing of the full DOST, as well as the advocacy of the Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association, has continued to lobby for action on the part of the City of Durham to implement its Urban Open Space Plan, adopted in the spring of 2017. DOST has made recommendations to further this implementation. DOST is hopeful that Durham's new Comprehensive Plan will include City staffing for implementing this.

**Equity:** In 2018, the Commission formed a new committee to help address equity concerns, the DOST Equity Committee (known as DOST-E). Its members want Durham to become more attentive and more proactive about siting trails and open space in ways that avoid unanticipated outcomes such as housing displacement. DOST-E has continued to collaborate with community leaders, both listening and speaking on how trail planning can be improved through equitable community engagement.

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

Now in its twenty-ninth 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 \$1.9 million has leveraged over \$6.4 million in monetary and in-kind contributions. DOST hosted site 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 2019-20
Number of Grants	111	4
Value of County Matching Grants	\$1,905,000	\$ 76,700
Total Value of Projects	\$6,442,965	\$ 709,740

For the 2019-20 Grant Cycle, the Committee approved four new projects. Details on the projects and award amounts are below:

<u>Organizations</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Grant Request</u>
El Futuro, Inc	Phase II of Lakewood Shopping Center Open Space Improvements	35,000

Maureen Joy Charter School	Outdoor paved play/basketball court at Maureen Joy Charter School	5,000
Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association	Phase 5, Stream Restoration, Pearl Mill Nature Preserve Conceptual Design and Phasing	30,000
Durham Parks Foundation	West Point on the Eno Open Space Improvements	6,700
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$76,700</b>

### **Overall Commission Goals for 2020**

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.

Staffing needs: Currently Durham has no department assigned to plan, design and construct Master Plan trails out in the County, including two rails-to-trails opportunities. Nor does the City have a department tasked to implement the 2017 Urban Open Space Plan. DOST will ask community leaders to help identify ways to close these staffing gaps.

In addition, the Commission has identified the following priorities for 2020:

1. Advocate for increased funding to build out and maintain priority trails and open space.
2. Support the implementation of the Durham Belt Line Master Plan with a specific focus on equitable community engagement for the components of the plan that can still be addressed.
3. Examine the Matching Grant process to encourage applications that reflect the racial and economic diversity of Durham.
4. Support implementation of the Trails and Greenways Master Plan with a specific focus on equity.
5. Encourage implementation of the Urban Open Space Plan
6. Pursue ongoing professional development on trends in equitable development of trails and open spaces.
7. Proactively research and implement open space and trails acquisition best practices for ordinance and policy.

COVID-19 has prevented DOST from formally meeting since February of this year. In the interim, the chair of DOST wrote a personal letter of recommendation for a USDOT BUILD grant to fund completion of the Durham Belt Line Trail.

### **Attachments**

2019 DOST Attendance Report