

Item Title: Approval of the Wake County Farmland Preservation Plan

Specific Action Requested:

That the Board of Commissioners approves the Wake County Farmland Preservation Plan as the County's long-term strategy for protecting farmland, supporting agriculture, and guiding farmland preservation efforts.

Item Summary:

Purpose: The Wake County Farmland Preservation Plan is a long-term strategy developed in collaboration with municipalities, agricultural stakeholders, and the community to support the protection of farmland, strengthen the agricultural economy, and ensure the long-term viability of farming in Wake County.

Background: The Wake County Farmland Preservation Plan provides a comprehensive framework for preserving working farmland and supporting agriculture in one of the fastest-growing counties in North Carolina. The Plan takes a proactive approach to balancing growth and development with the protection of agricultural lands, natural resources, and the rural character that supports Wake County's farming community.

The Plan is the result of a collaborative effort led by the Wake County Farmland Preservation Plan committee and an extensive community engagement process involving farmers, landowners, municipalities, partner organizations, and residents. It builds upon the foundation of PLANWake, the One Water Plan and other County planning initiatives, resulting in a series of goals and action strategies designed to address challenges related to rapid growth, land conversion, farm viability, and generational transition in agriculture.

Implementation of the Plan will require continued collaboration among municipal partners, homebuilders association, agricultural organizations, landowners, conservation partners, academic institutions, community organizations, and the residents of Wake County.

Strategic Plan: The Farmland Preservation Plan will support a broad range of Strategic Plan goals. Specifically, this action supports Growth, Land Use and Environment Goal 3: Protect 1,000 acres of green space, parks, greenways, farmland and forests by 2029.

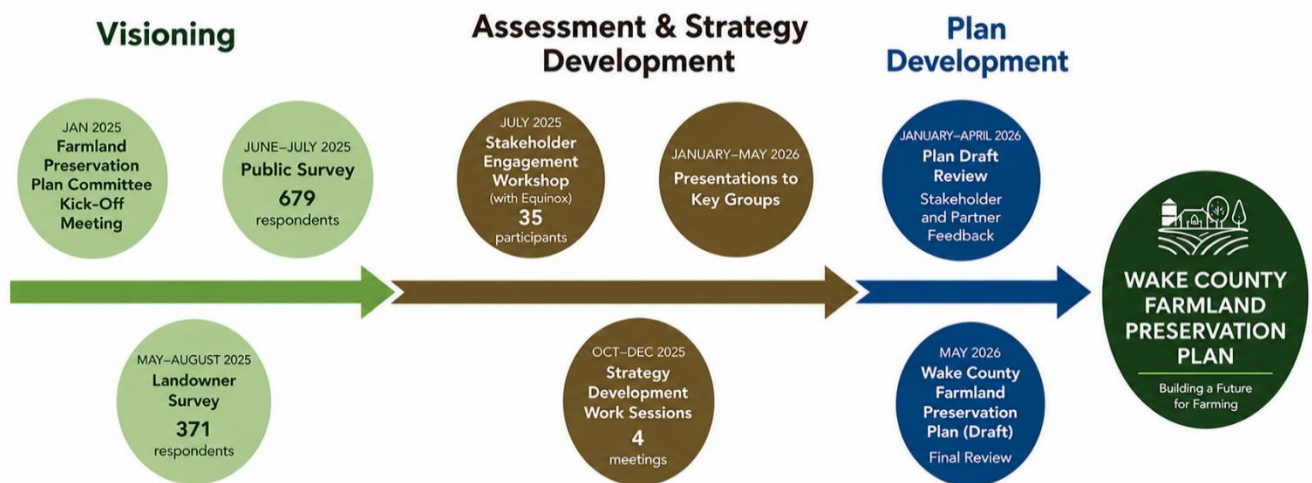
Fiscal Impact: This action has no fiscal impact to the FY 2026 budget.

Additional Information:

Rapid growth, development pressure, and rising land values have led to a significant loss of working farmland, which threatens the long-term viability of agriculture in Wake County. Preserving farmland is essential to supporting the local agricultural economy, maintaining food security, protecting natural resources, preserving rural heritage, and sustaining the quality of life that attracts residents and businesses to the County.

Recognizing the importance of agriculture to County's future, the Wake County Board of Commissioners (BOC) supported the development of the Wake County Farmland Preservation Plan to establish a coordinated, long-term strategy for farmland protection and agricultural sustainability. The Plan evaluates existing farmland preservation efforts, growth and development trends, agricultural viability, and land use challenges in order to identify opportunities and strategies to support farming and preserve agricultural lands for future generations.

The Plan was developed through a collaborative process led by the Wake County Farmland Preservation Plan committee, with participation from municipalities, farmers, landowners, agricultural organizations, conservation partners, community stakeholders and the public. The Plan included an extensive public and stakeholder engagement process, including a countywide public survey and a targeted landowner survey to gather input from residents, farmers, and agricultural landowners. Additional engagement efforts included a stakeholder workshop facilitated by consultant Equinox Environmental, as well as presentations and discussions with a variety of local boards, committees, and partner organizations. These engagement efforts helped inform and refine the Plan's vision, goals, and recommended strategies.



In the early stages of the Wake County Farmland Preservation Plan (FPP), the Wake County Soil and Water Conservation District convened a Farmland Preservation Plan Advisory Committee to guide the direction of the planning effort. The Committee included representatives from the County's Agricultural Advisory Board, County planning and environmental staff, local conservation organizations such as the Triangle

Land Conservancy (TLC), and other community partners.

Throughout the planning process, the Committee served as a central forum for collaboration, reviewing agricultural data, evaluating policy tools, and providing ongoing technical and community-based input. Early in the process, the Committee developed a shared Vision and set of Goals to establish a unified foundation for the Plan and guide long-term decision-making.

VISION FOR WAKE COUNTY

The remaining farmland in Wake County is prioritized now and for generations to come.

VISION FOR THE PLAN

The Wake County Farmland Preservation Plan identifies actions the County can take to protect local farmers and agricultural resources – farms, working lands and forests, prime soils, and other natural resources – to ensure sustainable business operations and preserve rural character.

GOALS

- Highlight the existing conditions of farmland in Wake County.
- Analyze county and municipal land-use patterns and identify priority areas for long-term farmland and rural preservation.
- Identify and evaluate planning tools and funding sources that support farmland protection, rural character preservation, and agricultural economic strength.
- Provide policy recommendations that protect agricultural resources and support farmers in long-term agricultural planning.
- Educate the public on the social, environmental, and economic value of farmland and inspire future generations of agricultural producers.
- Foster a cohesive message with municipal partners and other stakeholders on the value of farmland preservation.
- Sustain and increase funding for farmland preservation.

The Plan includes a comprehensive assessment of existing agricultural conditions, development pressures, and policy frameworks influencing farmland preservation in Wake County. Through this analysis, the Plan identifies priority areas where farmland is most vulnerable to conversion and where preservation efforts can have the greatest long-term impact.

A series of stakeholder workshops with agricultural partners, conservation organizations, and subject matter experts informed the development of recommended strategies to address farmland loss, strengthen agricultural viability, and support rural economies. Public engagement efforts, including surveys and community input sessions, further refined these strategies and ensured alignment with local values and

priorities.

The resulting strategies are organized into four primary focus areas:

1. Farm-Friendly Land-Use Policies

Ensure that land-use decisions and growth management strategies protect priority farmland and guide development toward existing centers supported by public infrastructure.

2. Farm Ownership Support

Support long-term farm viability and generational continuity by reducing barriers to farm operation, improving access to land and capital, and strengthening pathways for new and transitioning farmers. This includes policies that support flexible land ownership structures, diversified agricultural enterprises, and long-term succession planning.

3. Agricultural Protection Funds

Secure and expand dedicated financial resources to permanently protect strategic agricultural lands and strengthen farmland preservation capacity in Wake County. This focus area emphasizes leveraging a mix of local, state, federal, and philanthropic funding sources while strengthening partnerships with municipalities and land conservation organizations.

4. Environmental, Economic, & Social Benefits of Farmland

Recognize farmland as critical infrastructure that supports ecosystem services, water quality, community health, and offsets expenses from residential development. Use data-driven analysis, mapping of land use changes and public education to elevate farmland's role in wildlife connectivity, climate resilience, food security, cultural preservation and fiscal sustainability.

These focus areas align with and support multiple County initiatives, including PLANWake, Wake County One Water Plan, Wake County Food Security Plan, Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and other countywide efforts related to growth management and environmental sustainability.

The Farmland Preservation Plan is intended to be a “living document,” designed to evolve as land-use conditions, agricultural trends, funding opportunities, and community priorities change over time. Implementation will be guided by measurable actions, milestones, and partnerships that ensure continued progress toward protecting Wake County's agricultural future.

Attachments:

1. Presentation
2. Wake County Farmland Preservation Plan