

Item Title: Approval of the Agricultural Conservation Easement at Williamson Preserve in Wendell

Specific Action Requested:
That the Board of Commissioners:

- 1. Authorizes the County Manager to execute a funding agreement (along with any other supporting documentation) to support the acquisition of a conservation easement on the Triangle Farm property owned by Triangle Land Conservancy at 1625 Major Slade Rd in Wendell, subject to terms and conditions acceptable to the County Attorney; and**
- 2. Authorizes the Chair to execute said deed of conservation easement document (along with any other supporting documentation), subject to the terms and conditions acceptable to the County Attorney.**

Item Summary:

Purpose: The Board of Commissioners approves all County real estate transactions and appropriates all expenditures.

Background: In 2022, the Board of Commissioners approved the Wake County Farmland Preservation Ordinance, affirming the County's commitment to farmland preservation. Following this ordinance change, the Board of Commissioners voted to divert the annual rollover tax funding to preserve farmland in the form of purchasing permanent conservation easements.

The Triangle Farm is a 35-acre working farm located in Wendell in eastern Wake County. The landowner, Triangle Land Conservancy, wishes to sell a perpetual conservation easement on the property, and the Wake County Soil and Water Conservation District will hold and monitor the easement.

The acquisition of this permanent conservation easement will conserve some of Wake County's most productive farmland and protect wildlife habitat and water quality in Mark's Creek, a critical natural area.

Strategic Plan: This action supports Growth, Land Use and Environment Goal 3: Protect 1,000 acres of green space, including open space, parks, greenways, farmland, and forests by 2029.

Fiscal Impact: \$30,000 will be reallocated to create a unit for this easement from the appropriated reserve of Deferred Agricultural, Horticultural, and Forestlands Tax set aside for farmland preservation and Agricultural Conservation Easements. The County will be

reimbursed by the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund (NCADFP) after closing, meaning the County has a net zero cost for this project. After the County is reimbursed by NCADFP, \$ 6,332,645 will remain in the reserve for future agricultural conservation easements.

Additional Information:

The June of 2022 Farmland Preservation Ordinance confirmed the county's commitment to farmland preservation and established the Wake County Agricultural Advisory Board. Later that year, the Board of Commissioners committed annual Deferred Agricultural, Horticultural, and Forestlands Tax funding to farmland preservation and Agricultural Conservation Easements, to be administered by the Wake County Agricultural Advisory board and Soil and Water Conservation Department staff. Staff established an open Request for Proposal (RFP) process for farmland preservation projects and evaluate applications on a rolling basis.

The Triangle Farm is a 35-acre farm in Wendell in eastern Wake County located adjacent to the Williamson Preserve owned and managed by Triangle Land Conservancy. The property includes about 33 acres of open cropland. The Wake Soil and Water Conservation District has certified that 94% of the farms' soils are considered prime farmland, or farmland of statewide importance.

The landowners, Triangle Land Conservancy, wish to sell a perpetual conservation easement on a 35.99-acre parcel, and the Wake County Soil and Water Conservation District will hold and monitor the easement. The conservation easement is valued at \$707,739 for 35.99 acres. Funding will be split, with 70% coming from the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund (NCADFP) and the remaining 30% in the form of a donation from the landowners. The \$30,000 contribution from Wake County will be reimbursed by NCADFP after closing, meaning the County has a net zero cost for this project. The funds will be used to cover due diligence costs and it is the maximum threshold for expenditures, with true expenses likely being lower.

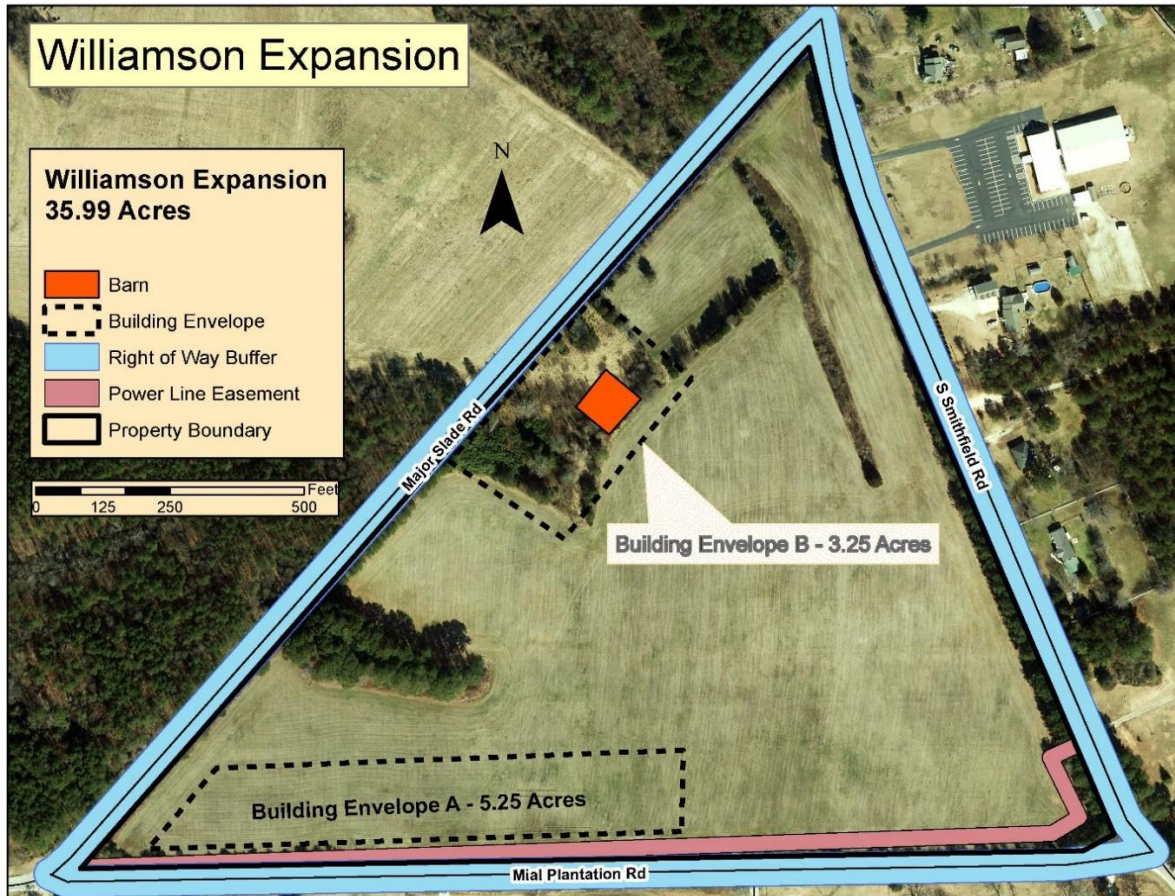
Project Budget -

Wake County (<i>to be reimbursed after closing</i>)	\$30,000
Landowner Land Value Contribution	\$ 207,739
NCADFP	\$ 500,000
Total	\$737,739

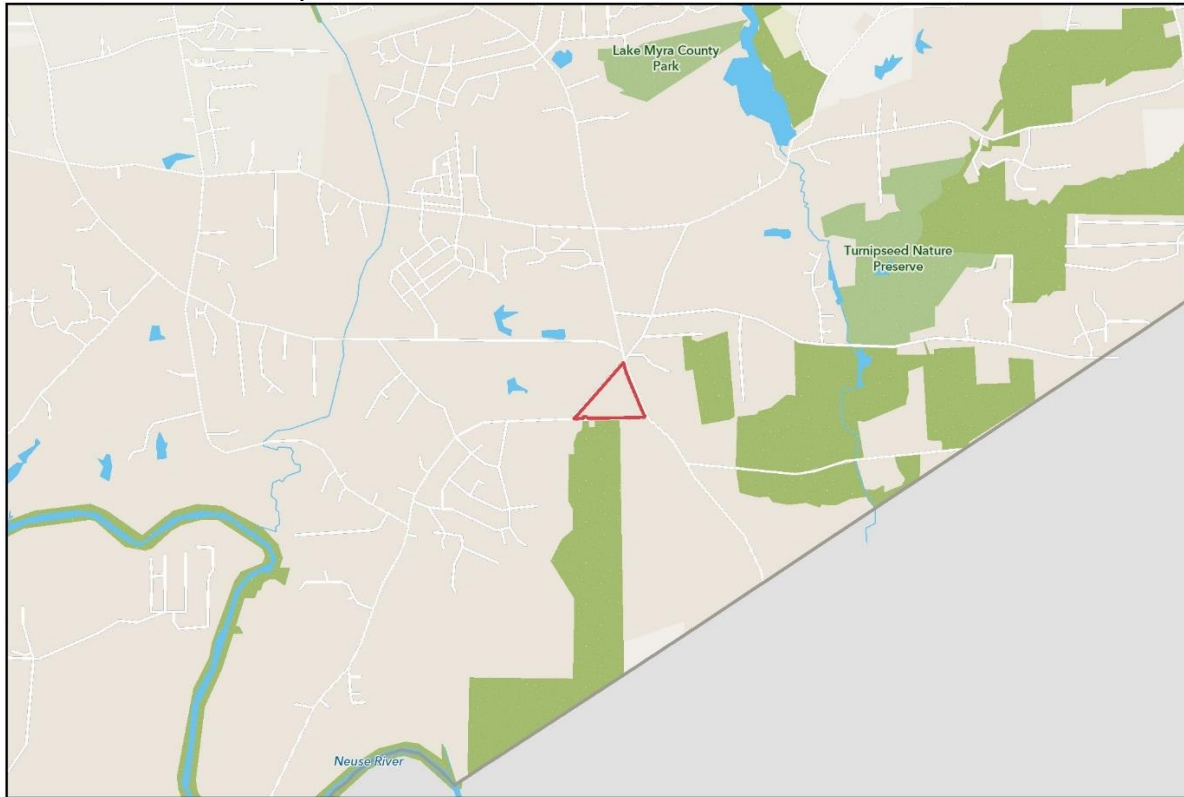
Wake County's contribution of \$30,000 would come from the annual Deferred Agricultural, Horticultural, and Forestlands Tax Program funding, for the purposes of farmland preservation and Agricultural Conservation Easements.

The Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB) reviewed this acquisition at its October 2022, meeting and voted unanimously to forward the item to the Board of Commissioners for their consideration.

Acquisition of this permanent conservation easement will conserve some of Wake County's most productive farmland, as well as protect wildlife habitat and water quality in the Marks Creek priority area.



TLC – Williamson Expansion



Attachments:

1. Funding Agreement – Wake County – TLC Williamson