

Item Title: Wake County Farmland Preservation Program Ordinance

Specific Action Requested:

That the Board of Commissioners adopt the new Wake County Farmland Preservation Program Ordinance that repeals and replaces the December 5, 2016, Wake County Voluntary Agricultural District Program Ordinance.

Item Summary:

Purpose: The Board of Commissioners approves all ordinances.

Background: In 2016, the Board of Commissioners enacted an ordinance entitled, "Wake County Voluntary Agricultural District Ordinance," to boost farmland preservation efforts. Recently, the North Carolina legislature has expanded the County's statutory authority to adopt more comprehensive farmland protection measures.

The purpose of this ordinance is to replace the 2016 ordinance to expand the County's farmland preservation program. Staff briefed the Board on the ordinance during the June 13 2022 work session. The ordinance will encourage the economic and financial health of agriculture, horticulture, and forestry industries. And, it will decrease the likelihood of legal disputes, such as nuisance actions between farm owners and their neighbors, and other negative impacts on properly managed farms.

Board Goal: This action supports Board Objective ES 3.3 by strengthening County policies and services that support agribusinesses. Potential efforts include farmland preservation, next generation farming, and promoting local food systems and agritourism.

Fiscal Impact: A recurring commitment of \$4,000 beginning in FY 2024

Additional Information:

N.C. General Statutes Chapter 106, Article 61: The Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Enabling Act allows counties to adopt ordinances which provide for Voluntary Agricultural Districts, Enhanced Voluntary Agriculture Districts, and an Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.

Senate Bill 605 entitled the NC Farm Act of 2021 was approved and signed into law on July 2, 2021, that requires language changes to current Voluntary Agricultural District Ordinance.

The Wake County Farmland Preservation Program Ordinance was created by receiving feedback and input from multiple internal departments and external stakeholders.

Between 2013 and 2022 Wake County has lost 22,964 acres or 19.3% of working lands that were classified as either agricultural, horticulture or forestry.

Over the next decade, Wake County is expected to add another 250,000 new residents. Under current growth rates, 28,000 additional acres of new development could occur and all remaining unprotected land in the County could be converted to development within 25-50 years.

On April 5, 2021, the Wake County Board of Commissioners adopted PLANWake to help guide Wake County's future and policy decisions.

- The response from residents and stakeholders through the PLANWake process identified the protection of natural areas, farms, forests, and meadows as the number one change they would like to see in the County.
- PLANWake sets the goal to protect 30% (165,000 acres) of the County's land area as permanently protected open space through regulation, public-private conservation efforts and preservation alongside development.

Attachments:

1. Presentation
2. Proposed Ordinance Amendment
3. Senate Bill