

Item Title: Approve an Easement Acquisition on the Switzer Properties for the County's Open Space and Farmland Preservation Programs

Specific Action Requested:
That the Board of Commissioners:

- 1. Authorizes the County Manager to execute a funding agreement in an amount not to exceed \$670,500 with the Triangle Land Conservancy (TLC), subject to final survey and terms and conditions acceptable to the County Attorney; and**
- 2. Authorizes the Chair of the Board of Commissioners to execute a conservation easement (along with any other supporting documentation) to be held by the Triangle Land Conservancy with a right of enforcement to Wake County, subject to terms and conditions acceptable to the County Attorney; and**
- 3. Authorizes the Chair of the Board of Commissioners to execute a conservation easement (along with any other supporting documentation) to be held by Wake County allowing for the construction of a greenway on the properties.**

Item Summary:

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

Background: One goal of the 2018 Parks Greenways Recreation & Open Space bond was to continue the County's efforts toward open space preservation.

Additionally, 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 two Switzer properties, totaling approximately 28 acres, are in the Marks Creek watershed. The properties are along an unnamed tributary to Marks Creek and are immediately adjacent to County-owned open space creating a connection between the existing open space properties.

At the end of this acquisition project, TLC will own and hold a conservation easement over the entire 28 acres. Wake County will

also own and hold a conservation easement on the property allowing for the construction of a greenway for future connections to existing open space and TLC's Williamson Preserve. The Switzer family will retain fee-simple ownership of the actual property.

Acquisition of this permanent conservation easement will conserve some of Wake County's most productive farmland in an area with prior conservation efforts and county investment in farmland preservation.

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.

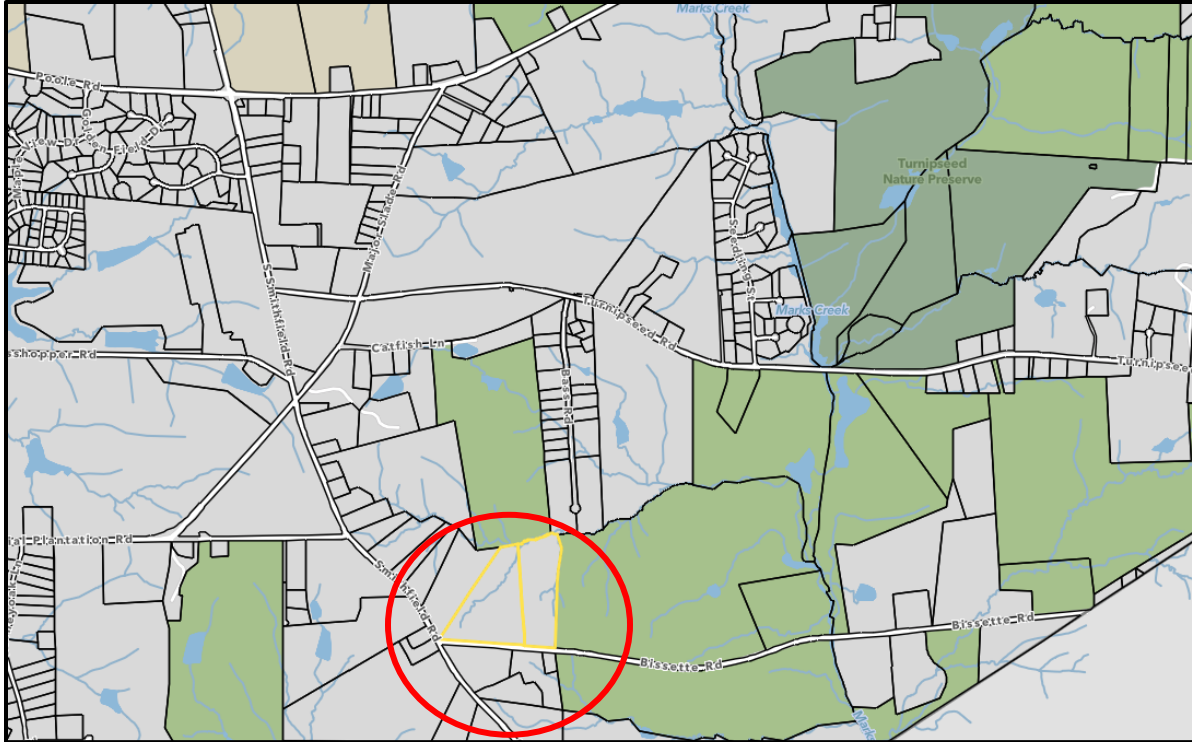
Fiscal Impact: The total cost to Wake County, including acquisition and due diligence, is \$670,500. \$432,500 will be reallocated to create a unit for this easement from the appropriated reserve of Deferred Agricultural, Horticultural, and Forestlands Tax set aside for farmland preservation and Agricultural Conservation Easements. \$238,000 will be reallocated from the PGROS bonds set aside for Future Open Space.

Additional Information:

The successful 2018 Parks Greenways Recreation & Open Space bond reserved approximately \$20 million to continue the County's efforts toward open space preservation. An additional \$5 million was provided by The North Carolina Department of Transportation as a part of the Complete I-540 Lawsuit Settlement. To date, approximately 1,722 acres for inclusion in the County's Open Space Preservation Program.

The June of 2022 Farmland Preservation Ordinance confirmed the counties 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 two Switzer properties, totaling approximately 28 acres, are in the Marks Creek watershed. The properties are along an unnamed tributary to Marks Creek and are immediately adjacent to County-owned open space creating a connection between the existing open space properties.



The properties are forested except for a small area where the landowners have their home and ancillary structures. The forest is predominantly mature loblolly pine and contains 3,150 feet of tributary streams to Mark's Creek. This stream corridor contains some beautiful old oaks, tulip poplars, and other hardwoods.



The landowner has agreed to protect their properties with a conservation easement over both properties which would prevent the properties from being subdivided or developed beyond the single existing residence; this easement would be held by TLC. The easement would allow for continued forestry, agriculture, and recreational use. A separate conservation easement, held by Wake County, would allow for a future trail connection to be constructed and maintained on the properties by the County allowing possible future connections between the existing County open space properties and potentially down to TLC's Williamson Preserve.



The conservation and the separate greenway easements are valued at \$834,000; a value substantiated by an appraisal from Richard Kirkland, Jr., MAI. The cost of the easement is \$617,000 which would be covered by the County's Farmland Preservation Program (\$432,500) and the County's Open Space Program (\$238,000). The remainder of the value is contributed by the landowner in the form of a bargain sale:

Item	Wake County Farmland Preservation Program	Wake County Open Space	Landown er Bargain Sale	Totals
Conservation Easements	\$ 400,000	\$ 217,000	\$ 217,000	\$ 834,000
Due Diligence	\$ 32,500	\$ 21,000		
Totals	\$ 432,500	\$ 238,000		\$ 670,500

The Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee (OSAPAC) reviewed this acquisition at its August 25, 2025 meeting and voted unanimously to forward the item to the Board of Commissioners for their consideration. The Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB) reviewed this acquisition at its August 28, 2024 meeting and voted unanimously to forward the item to the Board of Commissioners for their consideration.

Attachments:

1. OS Bond and NC DOT Funding Tracker