

**Item Title:** Approve Funding for an Agricultural Conservation Easement on the Johnson Farm near Zebulon

**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 purchase a conservation easement on the Johnson farm property owned by Thurman and Jan Johnson at 502 Temple Johnson Rd in Zebulon, subject to terms and conditions acceptable to the County Attorney; and**
- 2. Authorizes the Chair to execute a conservation easement (along with any other supporting documentation) to be held by Triangle Land Conservancy with a right of enforcement to Wake County, 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 related agreements.

**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 Johnson Farm is an approximately 32-acre property located southeast of Zebulon in eastern Wake County. The landowners, Thurman and Jan Johnson, wish to sell a perpetual conservation easement on the Johnson Farm, and Triangle Land Conservancy (TLC) will hold and monitor the easement.

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:** \$607,800 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.

**Additional Information:**

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 ~ 32-acre Johnson Farm property is a beautiful family farm comprised of pasture for grazing and mixed hardwood forest. The property contains one pond and over 2,000 linear feet of stream. The Johnsons raise sheep as part of a small farm operation. The Wake Soil and Water Conservation District has certified that roughly 96% of the farms' soils are considered prime farmland, or farmland of statewide importance. The entire project cost is estimated to be approximately \$1.25 million, and a majority of the project cost is covered by landowner donation.

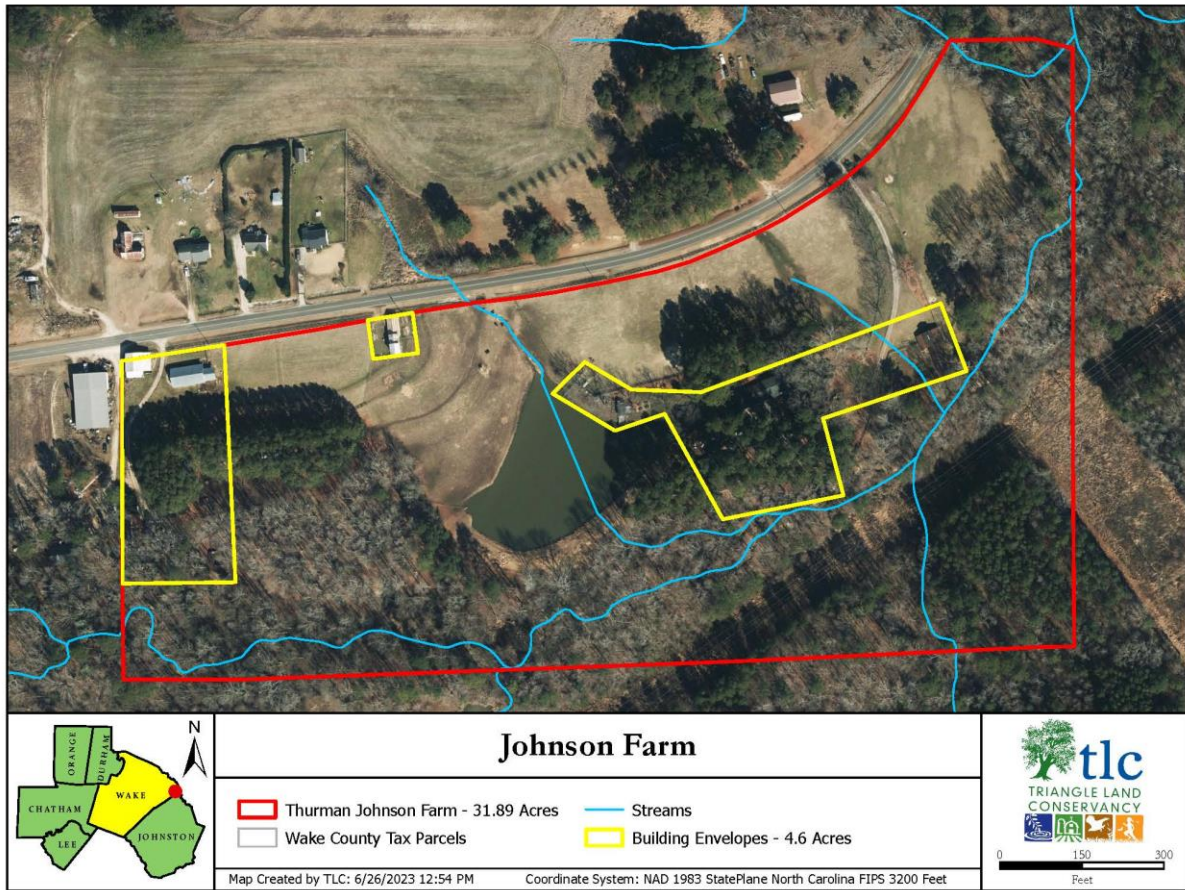
Wake County's contribution of up to \$607,800 would come from the annual Deferred Agricultural, Horticultural, and Forestlands Tax funding, for the purposes of farmland preservation and Agricultural Conservation Easements. This funding from Wake County includes the up to \$550,000 easement purchase price (\$17,188 per acre easement value) as well as transaction costs, which are estimated at \$57,800. TLC will hold an agricultural conservation easement at the end of the transaction with the County holding a right of enforcement for the conservation easement.

**Project Budget -**

Landowner Land Value Contribution	\$ 650,760
Wake County	\$ 607,800
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 1,258,560</b>

The Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB) reviewed this acquisition at its November 6, 2024 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.



**Attachments:**

1. Johnson Farm Conservation Easement