

Item Title: Consideration of the Revision to the Voluntary Agricultural District Program

Specific Action Requested:

That the Board of Commissioners approves the revised ordinance of its Voluntary Agricultural District Program, replacing the 2002 ordinance with an updated ordinance that aligns with current General Statutes section 106-735 through 106-744 and Chapter 153A, effective immediately.

Item Summary:

In 1985, North Carolina passed the Farmland Preservation Enabling Act. In 1989, Wake County passed its first Farmland Preservation Plan. In 2002, The Wake County Board of Commissioners adopted its Voluntary Agricultural District Program, one of the first in the state. The program was designed to increase visibility of farm community, focus on the importance of the agricultural communities, work with County agencies to make it easier to achieve farmland preservation, give the agriculture community a voice in local issues and reduce conflicts between farm and non-farm land uses.

Key updates and changes are: 1) The revised ordinance aligns with current General Statutes; and 2) The required enrollment acres are reduced from 100 acres to 20 acres of forest OR ten acres of cropland OR five acres of in-ground horticulture production.

In 2005 and 2011, several changes in General Statutes impacted Wake's 2002 VAD ordinance. In 2013, Wake County Board of Commissioners endorsed its new farmland preservation plan, *Wake County Agricultural Economic Development (WCAED) Plan*. One recommendation listed in the WCAED Plan was to revise the outdated VAD ordinance and reduce the current 100 acre enrollment requirement.

Current conditions: North Carolina now has 87 counties with VAD programs. In the 14 years of the program, Wake County enrolled 6,447 acres. Wake County farm and forest landowners continue to show interest in the program and provided valuable input and comments to the revised ordinance.

The draft of the revised ordinance was presented, or submitted for review, to Wake County Farm Bureau, Wake County Agribusiness Council, Planners Committee (Wake County and Municipal planners), Wake County OSAPAC, Wake County Planning Board, Wake Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors, Wake County GIS, and Wake County Attorney. Their comments and suggestions are included in the draft.

Adoption of the revised VAD program ordinance follows a priority recommendation of the Wake County Agricultural Economic Development Plan. It also encourages farmland preservation, an important work goal for the Board of Commissioners.

With the revised VAD ordinance, the Soil and Water Conservation Department will work with the VAD Advisory Board to increase enrollment in the program, which is expected to double over the next two years. The only expected cost of the updated ordinance is additional signage for newly enrolled farms.

Attachments:

1. Revised Ordinance Draft
2. Draft MOU between Wake County and Municipalities
3. Summary Comparison Sheet 2002/2016
4. Map of Voluntary Agricultural District Parcels