

Item Title: Update to the Board of Commissioners on the forthcoming Open Space and Greenways Request for Proposals (RFP) Process

Specific Action Requested:

That the Board of Commissioners authorizes staff to proceed with the Open Space and Greenways Request for Projects process.

Item Summary:

Purpose: The Growth and Sustainability committee recommended an update for the full Board of Commissioners on the forthcoming Open Space and Greenways Request for Proposals (RFP) Process.

Background: The \$120 million 2018 Parks, Greenways, Recreation, and Open Space (PGROS) bond contains approximately \$40 million dollars for the County's continued acquisition of open space and its partnerships with municipalities on the development of greenway trails.

For a portion of the open space acquisitions and greenway development projects, staff will solicit proposals from potential municipal and non-profit partners across the County in an effort to leverage funds and increase County-wide impact.

The RFP process has been successful in the past, allowing staff to proactively identify high quality land acquisitions and greenway connections, prioritize projects to maximize benefits, and leverage funding. Projects will be evaluated on funding consideration criteria developed and honed over the last four RFP processes.

Board Goal: This action directly implements Growth and Sustainability objective GS1: Implement a comprehensive approach for preserving open space and developing parks and greenways to address gaps, leverage opportunities and resources, and enhance collaboration with municipal partners.

Fiscal Impact: These processes will use the 2018 Parks, Greenways, Recreation, and Open Space (PGROS) bond funds. While no funding will be appropriated at this time, it is anticipated that up to \$17.3 million of PGROS bond funding could be allocated in the first RFP funding cycle. The specific projects will be identified through the RFP processes before being brought back to the Board for approval and appropriation.

Additional Information:

The County's Open Space Program began in the late 1990's in reaction to the quickening pace of urbanization in the County and the loss of green space. The purpose of the program is to protect and conserve County land and water for current residents and future generations. This land would: preserve natural resources, wildlife habitat, and historical and cultural properties; protect forest and farm land, scenic landscapes, riparian corridors and water quality; and provide venues for outdoor recreation. To date, the program has protected over 7,600 acres outright or through partnerships with local municipalities, non-profits, the State of North Carolina, and the federal government.

In 2011, the County was approached by the City of Raleigh regarding the development of a greenway trail along the Neuse River. A segment of the Neuse River Greenway, specifically the Lower Neuse Greenway from Poole Road to the County line, was of special interest to the County due to its relationship with the County's Neuse River Open Space Corridor, one of the County's original priority stream corridors for land preservation. The Neuse River Greenway became the first of many greenway trail partnerships with local municipalities which now total almost 24 miles.

In 2012, the County began utilizing a Request for Proposals (RFP) process to solicit open space acquisition and greenway trail development projects from local entities. Through four subsequent RFP process (2012, 2013, 2015 & 2016) the County has completed 25 acquisitions totaling 2,699 acres, and 8 greenway partnerships totaling 15.7 miles. In past RFP processes, both open space acquisition and greenway development projects competed for the same funding stream and it was often difficult to compare and rank the two types of projects against one another.

The recently passed 2018 Parks, Greenways, Recreation, and Open Space (PGROS) bond identified separate open space and greenway funding streams and will allow County staff to initiate two separate RFP processes. Of the \$120 million bond funding, approximately \$40 million is planned for open space and greenway programs. The bond sale this fall 2019 will cover an anticipated \$10 million for greenway development and \$7.3 million for open space acquisition, allowing us to continue acquisitions highlighted by the Open Space Model and greenway connections defined in the Wake County Greenway System Plan.

Staff has developed funding considerations for both Open Space and Greenways RFP processes that fit within a common framework:

Open Space projects include fee simple acquisitions, or the acquisition of easements on strategic open space within Wake County. Factors that will be considered in the evaluation of proposals include:

- Planning – is the property identified in the municipality's current open space plan or other conservation-oriented planning document.
- How does the project rank in Wake County's Open Space Priority Model?

- Project Description - function and allowable uses; open to the public, and in what capacity; property acreage and estimated total cost; sources of funding in place or anticipated; formal action the governing Board or Council has taken in support of the proposed project.
- Proposed partnership with the County - (not greater than the amount the municipality itself is investing in the project); Who is the primary applicant and are there other partners? County's project history with the primary applicant

Greenway projects in which funding is only needed for construction (all design, permitting and easements/property acquisition is completed, or the funding is in place) and the project can be completed within 3 years.

- Planning – is the project in the municipality's current greenway master plan; Wake County's Greenway System Plan (in which category: Bridge the Gaps, Connect to Parks & Lakes, Connect the Communities, or Complete the System); CAMPO's 2045 Regional Active Transportation Plan; and/or CAMPO's current area study plans
- Project Description – connectivity; users served; project length and estimated total cost; importance to the municipality; project timeline; sources of funding in place or anticipated; formal action the governing Board or Council has taken in support
- Proposed partnership with the County - (not greater than the amount the municipality itself is investing in the project); Who is the primary applicant and are there other partners? County's project history with the primary applicant

Attachments:

1. Presentation