MINUTES

Farmland Protection Program
Durham Soil and Water Conservation District

Meeting Number: 5 (Farmland Protection Advisory Board) Date: May 21, 2026

Advisory Board Present:
Nicole Connelly – Chair, Little River VAD
Carolyn Rose-Seed – At Large
Samantha Gasson – At Large
Matthew Eagle – At Large
Deborah Leucken – DOST Representative
Douglas Daye – Flat River VAD
David Harris – SWCD Board Representative
John Cowan – Cape Fear VAD

Others Present:
Lisa Marochak – Soil & Water
Sherry Scully – Soil & Water
Celeste Burns – Open Space & Real Estate
Jill Fusco – Open Space & Real Estate
Gerry Cohn
Donna Stainback
David Hoffman

The regular monthly meeting of the Farmland Protection Advisory Board was held in a hybrid format on Thursday, May 21, 2026, at Durham Farm Bureau. This meeting was called to order at 6:03 pm by the chair, Nicole Connelly.

1. Nicole Connelly opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. (Agenda order revised until quorum obtained.)

2. **Farmland protection Plan Update –** Gerry Cohn informed the board of his progress in the last month. He is pleased with the interviews and research that he has completed. Discussion held on the question that Gerry posed of 'what the members' goals for the plan are?' Board will work more on this at the retreat.

3. **Approval of April Board Minutes –** Motion made by John Cowan to accept the April meeting minutes as submitted. Deborah Leucken seconded the motion. With no discussion, vote was called. All in favor; motion passed.

4. **Financial Update –** Lisa Marochak provided balance of board's account. Estimates of SWAG were provided by Board. The quantities available are very low. Items are given to VAD enrollees and to landowners during easement closing. Lisa Marochak requested that staff be allowed to purchase items once the balance is determined in account after paying for Retreat costs. David Harris made a motion to approve these purchases. Deborah Leucken seconded the motion. All in favor; motion passed.

5. **Easements/Open Space Update –** Celeste Burns reported the following:
   - **County Open Space Plan:** Open Space staff (Celeste, Jill, and David Bradley) met with and toured Durham alongside the consulting team, Agency Landscape + Planning, on May 20–21 as part of the kickoff for the new county-wide open space plan.

   - **Hall Road Farmland Protection:** Celeste reported on Durham County's partnership with Triangle Land Conservancy to acquire 145 acres on Hall Road. Funding includes Durham County ($750,000), Raleigh's Watershed Protection Program ($815,000), and the Army National Guard's REPI Program ($720,000). Durham County will hold a conservation easement to ensure permanent protection.

   - **Farmland Protection Plan:** Celeste and Jill met with Gerry and toured the County on May 9. They are compiling information and data for him.

- **Oral Histories – Farm Legacy Stories:** Julianne Patterson (Preservation Durham) is coordinating and recording oral histories with easement landowners and others. More updates forthcoming.

6. **Soil & Water Conservation District Update** – Sherry Scully and Lisa Marochak provided update:

   - Durham/Orange Pond Clinic was held on May 16th.
   - Ag Economic Development Grant Program application period will open on July 1st and close August 25th.
   - Ag Economic Development Grant Program Training will be held at Cooperative Extension July 9th at 6:00 pm.
   - Eddie Culberson is retiring on June 30. Celebration will be held on June 25 at Redwood Ruritan from 2-4pm.
   - Director position has been posted.

7. **Cooperative Extension Update** – Raina Bunnag present to provide report:

   - **June 1** - Cattle Reproduction Workshop at Butner Beef Lab – Sold-Out. Dr. Silva from NCSU will be there to discuss breeding season management for beef producers and teach palpation techniques.
   - **June 9** - Orange/Durham 4-H Dairy Project starts on June 9th. We have 6 kids signed up as of now with about 3/4 coming from Durham. They'll learn anatomy and management practices while getting ready for a show on July 14th.
   - **July 14** – Debunking Myths in Agriculture, Durham Library. (Alex is also planning a fall workshop at Farm Campus and would love to hear topic requests if anyone has anything in particular they're interested in.)
   - **August 11-12** - Pesticide Safety School, Durham Coop Extension Office. For more information and to register. Durham Pesticide Safety School

8. **Durham Open Space and Trails Commission Update** – Deborah Luecken reported the following: Durham Open Space and Trails Commission (DOST) had a successful Trails Tour on May 13. The focus was on three funded but long-delayed trails that will connect to other trails as well as farmers' markets. These trails are a draw for people to move into dense housing closer to town and less development pressure in outlying areas.

   The DOST development review committee is looking into how to provide comments on proposed developments, in particular, we are trying to utilize section L. of the Zoning Map Change Report, which has a table for Advisory Body Recommendations. We are looking into how to better coordinate our comments with other boards that have similar interests, to amplify our concerns to the City Council, and will keep the Board updated on what process we find that works best.

   Residents are able to sign up for a weekly release of upcoming development submissions from the Planning Department, to get a heads-up on potential submissions of concern. Sherry will share links with everyone.

Adjourn – With no additional business, Chair Nicole Connelly adjourned the meeting at 7:19 pm.

Nicole Connelly	Sherry Scully	_July 17, 2026_
Chairman	Soil and Water	Date approved