

MINUTES

Farmland Protection Program Durham Soil and Water Conservation District

Meeting Number: 6 (Farmland Protection Advisory Board) Date: November 20, 2025

Advisory Board Present:

Nicole Connelly – Chair, Little River VAD
Deborah Luecken – DOST Representative
John Cowan – Cape Fear VAD
Matthew Eagle – At large
David Heeks – At Large
Talmage Layton – Falls VAD
Carolyn Rose-Seed – At Large
Samantha Gasson – At Large
David Harris – SWCD Board
Helena Cragg – At Large

Others Present:

Lisa Marochak – Soil & Water
Sherry Scully – Soil & Water
Celeste Burns – Open Space & Real Estate
Jill Fusco – Open Space & Real Estate
John Lyttle – Cooperative Extension
Raina Goldstein Bunnag – Cooperative Extension

The regular monthly meeting of the Farmland Protection Advisory Board was held on Thursday, November 20, 2025 at Durham Farm Bureau. This meeting was called to order at 6:01 pm by the chair, Nicole Connelly.

1. Nicole Connelly opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.
2. **Approval of August Board Minutes** – Motion made by Samantha Gasson to approve the August meeting minutes as submitted. David Harris seconded the motion. All in favor; motion passed.
3. **Financial Report** – Lisa notified Board of VAD expenditures approved by Nicole between meetings and provided update of account. David Harris made motion to accept the Financial Report. Matthew Eagle seconded. Motion passed. David Harris made motion to approve \$500 to be set aside for VAD expenses. Samantha Gasson seconded the motion. All in favor; motion passed.
4. **Breakfast Topics and Logistics** – Sherry Scully provided details of plans for upcoming winter breakfast series to be considered by the board. Board agreed and provided feedback on topics and requested an additional February breakfast. Carolyn Rose-Seed motioned to approve \$150 expenditure for each breakfast. David Harris seconded the motion. Motion passed.
5. **Farmland Protection Plan Update** – Sherry Scully reported that staff is reviewing the FPP provided by contractor, Foothills Regional Commission. There are a lot of concerns. Nicole Connelly asked that staff reach out to county attorney to determine legalities of contract. Board requested that plan draft with comments be shared. Special meeting may be called to handle this situation to speed up process.
6. **Easements/Open Space** – Celeste Burns informed the board that Durham City/County Planning is hiring a consultant to plan for county wide open space. She would like the FPAB to be a part of this and will share an online survey with the board.

Funding has been secured (including \$1.1 million in outside funding) for seven farm easement projects to protect 203 acres. In October, Open Space applied to USDA-NRCS for easement funding for Fran Cook's Mountain Creek Farm (146 acres). They are in preliminary conversations with several landowners about protecting their land with a conservation easement. With federal gov't running again, they anticipate closing several easement projects in the first quarter of 2026 calendar year.

7. **Soil & Water Conservation District Update** – Lisa Marochak made Board aware of the District's upcoming events and opportunities:
 - Farmer Appreciation Dinner held on October 28 with 100+ in attendance
 - Ag Economic Development Grant Program received 54 applications. 33 approved; all but two have had contracts written.
8. **Cooperative Extension Update** – John Lyttle provided details of upcoming events:
 - November 24 – Turkey Talk via Zoom 6-8pm
 - December 4 – Small farms referendum
 - December 16 – CEFS workshop on fruit production, 12-1pm
 - Jan 21-Mar 18 – Small Farm Boot Camp
 - March 2-June 15 – NC Farm School
- Raina Goldstein Bunnag informed board of the upcoming County Strategic Food System Plan. The plan will provide data on what the assets are and where the gaps are for Durham and how to prioritize and leverage partnerships to meet food security needs.
9. **Durham Open Space and Trails Commission Update** – Deborah Leucken shared that the planners released the UDO section referring to Open Space and the environment in October. DOST is reviewing the plan; Deborah recommended the board also review the plan and provide feedback.

Adjourn – With no additional business, Chair Connelly adjourned the meeting at 7:30 pm.

Nicole Connelly
Chairman

Sherry Scully
Soil and Water

December 18,2025
Date approved