

MINUTES

Farmland Protection Program Durham Soil and Water Conservation District

Meeting Number: 7 (Farmland Protection Advisory Board) Date: September 17, 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
David Harris – SWCD Board Representative
Helena Cragg – At Large
John Cowan – Cape Fear VAD
David Heeks – At Large
Talmage Layton – Falls 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

The regular monthly meeting of the Farmland Protection Advisory Board was held in a hybrid format on Thursday, September 17, 2026, at Durham Farm Bureau. This meeting was called to order at 6:01 pm by the chair, Nicole Connelly.

1. Chair, Nicole Connelly, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.
2. **Approval of July Board Minutes** – Motion made by Deborah Leucken to accept the July meeting minutes as submitted. Matthew Eagle seconded the motion. All in favor; motion passed.
3. **Financial Update** – Lisa Marochak informed board of their annual budget allocation of \$3,037. Several requests of expenditures made by staff:
 - a) \$500 for VAD supplies
 - b) \$200 to support cost of pizza lunch for the Southern High School construction class once each semester for this school year
 - c) 10 copies of The Ag Development and Farmland Preservation Plan were made for the BOCC Work Session on September 8th. This cost is unknown currently but will be determined and shared by Lisa Marochak.
 - d) 10 additional copies of plan were requested to be printed and bound
 - e) \$600 to cover cost of 3 breakfasts this winterDavid Heeks motioned to approve total cost of requests in the amount of \$1,300 plus cost of printing. Matthew Eagle seconded the motion. With no questions, vote called; motion passed.
4. **20226 Agriculture Development and Farmland Preservation Plan Update** – Sherry Scully provided follow up of The Plan discussion held at the BOCC Work Session on September 8th. Mark Waller and Gerry Cohn presented overview of plan and all staff involved in its creation joined in conversation in answer to questions and comments from the BOCC. The following points were addressed:
 - a) Be strategic around conservation easements
 - b) Importance of transitioning farms to younger farmers
 - c) What are options for supporting institutional food needs?
 - d) Agritourism awareness – suggested Discover Durham
 - e) Recommended follow through with Ordinance

- f) Issue of agriculture identified in LDC (Land Development Code/UDO)
- g) Recommended FPAB provide feedback on development proposals that affect agriculture, especially those properties along the fringe of UGB. “Voice of farmers is not being heard around development issues.”
- h) Recognized the increase in land values raising the cost of conservation easement acquisition and the need to raise amount provided by BOCC to do this work.
- i) Thanked residents who shop at their local Farmers’ Markets and restaurants who purchase from farmers.
- j) Recognized and complimented the collaboration of all departments involved with plan.
- k) The topic of food security was recognized and the link to agriculture in Durham. In particular, the need for a heat map and a food dessert map was recognized as a concern.

Discussion continued around these topics. The BOCC adopted The Plan on September 14 during their Regular Session. Gerry Cohn brought a wonderful dessert with fruit from local farms to celebrate the completion of The Plan with the board and staff.

5. **2026 FPAB Annual Report** – Sherry Scully provided the Annual Report prior to meeting, digitally. Board requested that this report be shared with the BOCC in both printed and digital format.
6. **Farmer Breakfast Series** – Sherry Scully requested board’s interest and feedback for 2027 Winter Breakfast Series details. The board would like to plan three breakfasts that will take place on the third Thursday of each month (December 17, January 21, February 18). Topics decided on include Control Burning and Forest Management, Management of Specific Invasives, Small Business Startup Information. Locations suggested: Redwood Ruritan, Cooperative Extension, Mt Sylvan Ruritan, Braggtown Baptist Church. Breakfast request to be made with Cheralyn Berry for Cooperative Extension Breakfast, others to be determined. Sherry Scully will follow up with speakers and determine locations for each.
7. **2026 Rollback Taxes Follow up** – Sherry Scully shared a spreadsheet that showed Rollback Taxes for the past four years. After receiving this information this past month, Celeste Burns set up a meeting to discuss with David Ades, DCo Assistant Director of Budget and Management, and Jonathan Yeomans, DCo Budget and Management Analyst, the possibility of utilizing these funds for the Farmland Protection Program. Discussion among Board members followed this information. It was decided that these numbers provide good feedback but will not be pursued.
8. **Voluntary Ag District Update** – Sherry Scully presented an application from Stephen and Kjellberg for their parcel of 62.42 acres in managed forest on Baptist Rd. Motion made by Matthew Eagle and seconded by David Harris to accept the property into the VAD program. Vote was called; motion passed.
9. **Easements/Open Space Update** – Celeste Burns and Jill Fusco reported that they closed on Ken Wolfe’s 29.5-acre easement in August. They are currently working to secure funding from ACUB, ACEP, ALE and watershed protection funds for 7 projects totaling 448 acres. One of these seven projects is a wildlife easement located in north Durham. Additionally, they are applying for ACEP-ALE for 312 acres.
10. **Soil & Water Conservation District Update** – Sherry Scully and Lisa Marochak provided update:
 - No update to the Ag Economic Development Grant Program available from county attorney.
 - New Soil & Water Conservation District Director will start on Monday, September 21.
 - Soil and Water Conservation Contest Information to be released soon.
 - Native Plant Sale will be held on October 1st, 4-6 pm at Cooperative Extension Building.

11. Cooperative Extension Update –report provided prior to meeting by Ashley Troth.

- Interviews have been held for Farm Campus Manager. Hiring is in process
- Small Farms and Local Foods Agent Interviews are in process.
- **September 22 at 5pm, Orange County Davis Center** – Farm Safety Workshop
- **September 30, 9-12pm at Durham Farm Campus** – Pasture Field Day
- **October 9 at 9-3pm at Breeze Farm**– Poultry Processing Workshop

12. Durham Open Space and Trails Commission Update – Deborah Luecken shared that DOST was very supportive of the Agriculture Development and Farmland Preservation Plan. Their support was shared with the BOCC through a letter of support. Deborah informed the Board of a Community Engagement Kickoff event for the Open Space Plan scheduled for September 23 from 3-5 and 5:30-7:30 at the Irwin R. Holmes Sr. Recreation Center at Campus Hills. Comments from the public will be accepted at this event. DOST is organizing a meeting with community groups (land trusts, environmental organizations, neighborhood associations, etc.) to collect feedback and suggestions on what they want included in the Open Space Plan. This meeting is scheduled for October 24, 10-12 AM, location TBD. If anyone from the Farmland Board is interested in attending this, please contact Steve Cohn (stevec@duke.edu) for more information.

Adjourn – With no additional business, Chair Nicole Connelly adjourned the meeting at 7:29 pm.

Nicole Connelly
Chairman

Sherry Scully
Soil and Water

October 15, 2026
Date approved