

OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION



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FY2004-2010

1. BACKGROUND ISSUES

The rapid growth in Wake County over the past twenty years has resulted in a tremendous amount of new development of homes, schools, roads, offices, and shopping malls. Because a significant amount of new development is in outlying areas, there has been a decline in the amount of forestland and farmland. In the past 25 years, the forestland in the County has decreased by approximately 60,000 acres, with estimated acres converted from farmland up to 100,000 acres. From 2000 to 2010, the population of Wake County is expected to increase 39 percent from 627,846 to 873,725 according to Wake County projections.

Recognizing the need for increased open space preservation efforts, the Board of Commissioners created an Open Space Task Force in 1998 and committed \$1.3 million for planning and a few select open space acquisitions over a three-year period. From 1998 to 2000, an assessment of four critical watersheds (Falls Lake, Jordan Lake, Little River, and Swift Creek) was completed. The County has also conducted numerous public sessions to receive feedback from stakeholders to refine the focus of open space efforts. In addition, the County supported a grant program to encourage municipalities to prepare open space plans and to leverage municipal funding for land acquisition efforts. In 2001, the Board of Commissioners adopted Phase 1 of the Open Space Plan and in March 2003 endorsed a long-range Consolidated Open Space Preservation Plan for Wake County.

In November 2000, the citizens of Wake County approved the issuance of \$15 million in bonds for open space preservation. The open space bond proposal focused heavily on the need to protect water quality, in addition to the protection of wildlife habitats, scenic areas and natural areas suitable for recreational or other similar public uses. Bond funds have initially been targeted towards the purchase of conservation easements and properties within the four watershed areas included in the 2001 Open

Space Plan (Phase 2). Leveraging matching funds through the purchase of priority parcels within each municipality through partnership agreements has also been a key strategy. Phase 2 includes acquisition of priority properties identified in the adopted Consolidated Open Space Preservation Plan. Properties to be acquired in this phase are additional priority parcels within each municipality or in the watershed areas of highest importance.

2. PROGRAM & FACILITY GOALS

The Open Space Preservation program is currently oriented to achieving the following goals:

- Protect Wake County's water resources and preserve the quality of its water supply.
- Preserve significant natural resources of the county.
- Acquire high priority lands or land rights (through conservation easements) in a cost effective and efficient manner.
- Protect up to 30 percent of the county's land area (equates to 165,000 acres) through land rights acquisition or appropriate regulatory initiatives.

3. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The long-term plan for open space preservation in Wake County has integrated all the plans developed by the municipalities into a comprehensive countywide open space preservation program. Pertinent information and key elements of recently completed plans for Watershed Management, Growth Management and Parks & Recreation have been incorporated into the Open Space Plan to provide a holistic land preservation perspective unprecedented in Wake County.

4. SEVEN-YEAR CIP PROGRAM SUMMARY

The seven-year CIP provides a total of \$26 million. Six million is comprised of pay-as-you-go funds spread over FY2005 and FY2006, and \$20 million is included in proposed bond funds, contingent upon the approval of a bond referendum in the Fall of 2006. The open space preservation plan is divided into two phases:

Phase 1: Purchase selected properties and/or land rights in four critical watersheds (Falls Lake, Jordan Lake, Little River, Swift Creek). Phase 1 activities also included developing municipal open space plans and integrating all local government open space initiatives into a consolidated open space plan (Wake Open Space Plan).

Phase 2: Purchase priority lands guided by the information and recommendations of Open Space, Watershed Management, and the Growth Management Plans. A multi-year detailed open space preservation/land rights acquisition implementation plan is currently under development. It is anticipated that the Board of Commissioners will review and approve the detailed plan by the end of FY2003. Initiation of key preservation efforts, including acquisition of identified parcels in highest priority watersheds, is expected to continue. Financial partnering opportunities will also be pursued with municipalities and non-profit land preservation entities to protect water quality and preserve critically important properties.

5. PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN FY2003

In addition to supporting the development of municipal open space plans, the County purchased the following properties in FY2003:

- O'Neal Property in Falls Lake Watershed (26 acres adjoining previously purchased Hosley Farm, \$246,000)
- Raftery Property (117 acres in Jordan Lake Watershed, \$2 million, partnership with Town of Cary contributing 50% of the funding)
- Neuse River Corridor south of Poole Road (51 acres conservation/greenway easement, \$108,000)

- Little River Corridor north of future Reservoir (10 acres conservation/greenway easement, \$45,000)

Through Municipal Partnership Agreements the County assisted with preserving the following properties:

- Lake Johnson Property with City of Raleigh (12 acres), Wake \$700,000, Raleigh \$1.2 million, total \$1.9 million.
- Batchelor Branch corridor with Town of Cary (86 acres), Wake \$350,000, Cary \$350,000, total \$700,000.
- Holleman Property with Town of Apex (46 acres), Wake \$405,780, Apex \$405,780, total \$811,560.
- Joyner Farm with Town of Wake Forest (117 acres), Wake \$1,500,000, Wake Forest \$2.65 million, total \$4.15 million.
- Clark Property with Town of Wendell (45 acres), Wake \$575,210, Wendell \$299,790, total \$875,000.
- Through direct acquisitions and partnerships the County has preserved approximately 800 acres of open space valued at \$13 million over the past two years. Approximately \$7 million of this total was County funds, with the remainder leveraged from municipal partners.

6. FY2004 PROJECT ACTIVITY SUMMARY

Based upon the recently adopted Wake Open Space Plan, priority lands within the highest ranked subwatersheds in the County have been identified and will be targeted for preservation as open space. Approximately 30,000 acres have been identified through this process. The following properties are currently being evaluated for potential acquisition in FY2004: Barham Farm - 100 acres of Farmland Preservation/Greenway Easement in Little River Watershed; Lake Wheeler/Benson Properties - 300 acres of floodplain in Swift Creek Watershed; Francis Property - 127 acres adjoining Neuse River. In addition, a comprehensive list of highest ranked parcels in priority one watersheds is being compiled for consid-

ered for acquisition in accordance with the recommendations in the Wake Open Space Plan. It is anticipated that Phase 2 of a detailed multi-year land acquisition plan will be finalized and approved by the Board of Commissioners early in FY2004. Conservation/greenway easements proposed in the original Phase 1 Open Space Plan will continue to be pursued along the Little River (north of Mitchell Mill State Park), along the Neuse River (south of Poole Road) and upstream of Falls Lake near the previously acquired Hosley Farm.

7. SUMMARY OF FUTURE PHASES (FY2005-2010)

The majority of the period FY2005 through FY2010 will involve preservation activities as identified in Phases 1 and 2 of the Wake Open Space Program.

8. OPERATING IMPACT

In May 2001, a staff committee prepared an interim stewardship plan to address the short-term management issues and identify potential long-term land management issues. At this early stage of preserving open space lands, relatively minor operating costs are anticipated with the stewardship of the land acquired through the open space program. However, with potentially thousands of acres of open space being acquired and protected over the long term, it is likely that the County will need to increase its land management operations and programs in the future. Opportunities to partner with municipalities, state and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations will be explored. Natural and low-cost management techniques will be considered.

9. RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS

The success of the open space initiative is partially dependent on several other major long range planning activities recently completed. The Watershed Management Plan was a primary source of data to support the prioritization of future land acquisitions based on protection of water quality. The Growth Management Plan also provided important land planning information and identified common objectives relative to anticipated development pressures. The new Parks and Recreation Master Plan provided valuable information regarding identified land acquisition needs

for future recreational facilities. Key recommendations and strategies of these plans will be considered in developing Phase 2 of the open space land rights acquisition plan.

10. ILLUSTRATIONS



Joyner Farm, Wake Forest



Cedar Fork Creek on Hartsfield-Price-Perry Property



Hosley Farm Property



Lowery Creek, Hosley Farm Property

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11. FINANCIALS

PART I. EXPENDITURES	FY2004	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	TOTAL
OPEN SPACE LAND ACQUISITION	\$0	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$26,000,000
TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS	\$0	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$26,000,000
PART II. FUNDING SOURCES	FY2004	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	TOTAL
Debt Financed	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$20,000,000
Pay As You Go	\$0	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$6,000,000
TOTAL	\$0	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$26,000,000
PART III. OPERATING IMPACT	FY2004	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	TOTAL
Total Operating Cost	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0