



Chatham County, NC

Legislation Text

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Receive a presentation and vote to approve Chatham Agricultural Preservation & Development (CAPD) Trust Fund Recommendations from the Agricultural Advisory Board and Chatham Soil & Water Conservation District Supervisors

Introduction & Background:

Chatham County is losing prime farm and forestry land at an alarming rate. According to a recent study by the American Farmland Trust, Chatham County is projected to lose 44% of its working landscapes by 2040, ranking it as one of top five North Carolina counties in projected loss of working landscapes.

The CAPD Trust Fund was unanimously approved by the Chatham County Board of Commissioners on October 17, 2022, to support agricultural preservation and development within Chatham County. Funding for the CAPD Trust Fund was designated in the Article 46 tax referendum that was approved by Chatham County voters in the March 2020 voter referendum. The purpose of the CAPD is to provide project support and acquisition funding to local and regional land trusts, who will acquire, hold, and steward the conservation easements. With the Commissioners approval on October 2, 2023, the CAPD Trust Fund opened its first application round in December 2023 for farmland preservation projects in Chatham County.

After a successful CAPD grant application period this winter, the Chatham County Agricultural Advisory Board (February 13, 2024, meeting) and the Chatham Soil & Water Conservation District Supervisors (March 14, 2024, meeting) have voted to recommend funding of the following four grant applications:

- Project A: A permanent conservation easement acquisition on 87 acres of working farmland off Otis Johnson Road in northern Chatham County. CAPD funding of \$12,000 is recommended for legal defense/stewardship endowment funding.
 - Grantee: Triangle Lands Conservancy
 - Matching Grants (pending): North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund
 - Anticipated project closing date: Summer/Fall 2025
- Project B: A permanent conservation easement acquisition on 75 acres of working farmland off Silk Hope/Gum Springs Road in north central Chatham County. CAPD funding of \$140,000 is recommended for conservation easement acquisition and \$10,000 for legal defense/stewardship endowment funding.
 - Grantee: Triangle Lands Conservancy
 - Matching Grants (pending): North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund
 - Anticipated project closing date: Summer/Fall 2025
- Project C: A permanent conservation easement acquisition on 120 acres of working farmland off Highway 87 in north central Chatham County. CAPD funding of \$438,000 is recommended for conservation easement acquisition.
 - Grantee: Triangle Lands Conservancy
 - Matching Grants (proposed): Town of Cary Watershed Protection Fund

- Anticipated project closing date: December 2024 (if matching grant received)
- An organizational support grant for the Triangle Lands Conservancy (TLC) of \$75,000 is recommended to support their farmland preservation work prioritize and programming in Chatham County.
 - Grantee: Triangle Lands Conservancy
 - Project Term: FY2025 (July 2024-June 2025)

*Please note that the conservation easement acquisition grants are submitted as matching funds and are contingent on the outcome for other pending grant applications.

As part of this agenda item, Triangle Lands Conservancy representative(s) will provide a brief overview of their ongoing farmland preservation work in Chatham County and be available to answer questions about how CAPD grants will be used to support matching grant applications.

Discussion & Analysis:

Approving the recommendations for these CAPD grant projects will support the permanent conservation of approximately 282 acres of working landscapes, representing a significant step forward in the farmland preservation initiatives outlined in the “Plan Chatham” Comprehensive Plan, the “Chatham County Farmland Preservation Plan,” as well as the Board of Commissioners commitment to farmland preservation represented in their October 2022 vote to dedicate Article 46 funding to farmland preservation efforts. Approval of these recommendations will place Chatham County at the forefront of county-supported farmland preservation programs in North Carolina. The Organizational Support grant will create a first-of-its-kind public/nonprofit farmland preservation partnership in North Carolina.

How does this relate to the Comprehensive Plan:

The “Plan Chatham” Comprehensive Plan devotes an entire section within Chapter IV to preservation and development of Chatham County’s agriculture and forestry resources. The recommended projects support the “Primary Goal” of this section, which is to “Preserve, protect, and enable agriculture and forestry,” as well as the secondary goal of “Preserving the rural character and lifestyle of Chatham County.” These CAPD projects support Policy 5 in this section, which recommends that Chatham County “Support permanent, voluntary protection of agricultural lands” and “implement a county-led farmland protection policy” and Strategy 5.1: “Implement a county-led farmland protection program.”

From the “Natural Resources” section of “Plan Chatham,” these projects support the “Primary Goal: Conserve Natural Resources” as well as two of the Secondary Goals: “Preserve the rural character and lifestyle of Chatham County” and “Preserve, protect, and enable agriculture and forestry.” Permanent farmland conservation supports the “Big Idea” for natural resource conservation identified in the plan: “The big idea for natural resources is to actively work to create a connected system of public and privately owned lands that maintain key ecosystem services and are sensitively integrated into well-designed development. This land protection effort will require local and regional partners.” (p. 103)

These projects also support action recommendations in the current “Chatham County Farmland Preservation Plan,” including “Build support for conservation easement programs” and “Develop a local funding option for farmland preservation projects” within “Recommendation 4: Build support for a County Working Lands Protection Program.”

The Organizational Support grant supports other elements of the “Plan Chatham,” including a recommended strategy to “partner with land trusts to provide technical assistance to those who demonstrate interest in establishing agricultural conservation easements” (Strategy 1.1). TLC’s farmland preservation programming and initiatives in Chatham County supported through the Organizational Support grant includes support of its

“Land Transfer Navigator” program, to support farmland transition and estate planning initiatives, and its “Good Ground” program, which is a TLC program focused on providing farmland access for new and minority farmers.

Budgetary Impact:

The recommendations will dedicate \$675,000 in funding from the CAPD, which has a current balance of approximately \$1.2 million in funding that has accrued since the Article 46 revenue referendum was passed by voters. Existing CAPD funds of \$75,000 will be appropriated to the 2025 Budget for the Organizational Support Grant. Funding for Projects A, B & C will not be appropriated at this time, pending approval and issuance of matching grant contracts and project due diligence. Conservation easement acquisition funding will be distributed to the grantee (Triangle Land Conservancy) at closing.

Recommendation/Motion: Motion to approve the recommendations of the Agricultural Advisory Board and the Chatham Soil & Water Conservation District Supervisors to award CAPD grant funding.