



D U R H A M Open Space & Trails Commission

ANNUAL REPORT

January 2015 to January 2016

Introduction

The Durham Open Space and Trails Commission (DOST) is an advisory commission charged with advising the City Council and the Board of Commissioners on matters relating to open space preservation and trail development while involving and educating all segments of the Durham Community. Additionally, the Commission has a mission to foster the wise use of Durham's natural resources. The Commission consists of eight members appointed by both the City Council and Board of Commissioners, four elected or appointed officials, and up to 10 members appointed by the Commission. Membership for 2015 was 22 and included the following individuals: Jeffery Bakalchuck, Sara Dwyer, Alexa Kleysteuber, Abigail Van de Bogert, Sunny Carrington-Hahn, Aspen Romeyn, Brian Buzby (Vice Chair), Joe Jackson, John Goebel (Chair), Debra Hawkins, Eric Ireland, Charles Welch, Perry Whitted, Meredith Stewart, Annette Montgomery, County Commissioner, Ellen Reckhow, LaDawnna Summers, Reynolds Smith, Thomas Stark, Will Wilson, Dave Connelly, Councilman Steve Schewel and Alternate Don Moffitt. A new member has been appointed for 2016, Luis Suau.

As an advisory board with reporting responsibility to both the City Council and the Board of Commissioners, the Commission pursues activities through regular monthly meetings of the full body of the DOST. These meetings are held the third Wednesday of every month at 7:00 pm in the Committee Room on the second floor of City Hall. To facilitate activities, the Commission has the following committees that meet on a monthly or as-needed basis: Trails, Matching Grants, Development Review, Community Education, Finance, Open Space, and Diversity. These committees bring forward issues and proposals for consideration and action by DOST. This report summarizes and gives an overview of the activities of these committees where appropriate as well as the activities of the City of Durham and Durham County as they relate to the Durham Open Space and Trails Commission.

Trails Committee

The Trails Committee, in accordance with DOST, makes recommendations to the Durham Parks and Recreation (DPR) and the City-County Planning Department as well as elected bodies on trails and greenways, development priorities, new trails and greenway routes, and trail proposals prepared by design consultants.

The Trails Committee has overseen a number of projects this year, including completion of the American Tobacco Trail now finished.

The Duke Beltline is under consideration for purchase from Norfolk Southern. Norfolk Southern has begun the early stages of the abandonment process of the Right of Way corridor for the Beltline. The City is actively pursuing the corridor in conjunction with private investors. Financing of the trail would be in part from the initial transportation earmark of \$2 million. This past year the staff and the Trails Committee worked extensively with Norfolk Southern, NCDOT and other departments to try and reach an agreement to purchase the Beltline. The City Manager has met with several entities about the possibility of purchasing the beltline from Norfolk Southern and may be actively pursuing an offer to purchase with Norfolk Southern, at the request of the Beltline committee. The Duke Beltline project remains instrumental to our Downtown plan and our Trails plan and will serve as a catalyst to downtown development. Staff, DOST and others continue to monitor the situation and insert themselves into the process to keep this alive. Maps were prepared by the Commission to highlight this acquisition and the committee has walked the Beltline to determine its functionality and kept abreast of details. There have been several meetings with elected officials and key individuals within the business community pressing for the acquisition of the Beltline. This is ongoing.

In 2014 the Transportation Department was awarded a TIGER Planning Grant that will help evaluate the Beltline's development feasibility. This grant is now moving forward as a Request for Proposals through the Transportation Department and should be finalized in the spring of 2016. This planning grant should assist elected officials and others in their decisions about the Belt Line. The Trails Committee continues to stay abreast of the issue and has made specific requests as the governing bodies continue to pursue the Duke Beltline. This acquisition will provide an excellent link to downtown and will serve as a major connector to neighborhoods and the active re-development that is occurring. It is a top priority. The staff in transportation and planning will continue to push for this high priority trail.

The Commission requests that the governing bodies continue to pursue the Timberlake corridor as it provides for an excellent link to development in downtown and open space in Northern Durham and could serve as a major multi-modal connector. This was re-emphasized as a part of the Rougemont Village Plan and has recently been highlighted again as Person County begins to look at regional connections to Durham.

To date, the completed sections of the North/South Greenway system (the top priority of the Master Plan) include a section of the American Tobacco Trail, Downtown Trail, South Ellerbe Creek Trail, Ellerbe Creek Trail, Stadium Drive Trail and Upper Warren Creek Trail, and the Third Fork Creek Trail. The remaining uncompleted portions include the Lower Warren Creek Trail and a section of the Third Fork Creek Trail that runs roughly parallel to the ATT. Because of its proximity to the ATT corridor, that section of the trail may take a lower priority or be eliminated from the plan. The West Ellerbe Creek Trail sections have been acquired and construction should begin in the spring of 2016.

The completed and under-construction projects generally represent the complete expenditure of City bond funds, the primary source for trail construction, including about \$3.5 million from

1990 and \$4.1 million from 1996. The Durham Open Space and Trails Commission members have been good stewards in seeking additional funding via other sources, such as grants and the City has received generous support from various other sources for trail construction, including in earlier years several million from the Transportation Efficiency Act (TEA-21) the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and a Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARFTF) Grant, and (in 2011), \$800,000 from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus funding. Those funds have all been expended and Durham needs to consider another bond referendum. The Commission is highly supportive of the Parks Foundation (501(c) 3), and the deferred maintenance funding for Parks and Trails. We appreciated the establishment of these which will allow Durham to have some additional revenue sources for trail construction, maintenance and acquisition in the near future but recognize the very apparent need we have for large scale funding for future trail construction. Both of these will benefit the overall health of the trail system. Durham is falling woefully behind our neighbors in trail construction and we need to seek funding sources to facilitate new construction. With the American Tobacco Trail now finished, the most recent reports from the Institute for Transportation Research and Education indicate a 133% increase of trail users on the trail. Those figures are important if we are considering what Durham citizens will be demanding in the next several years for more viable trail systems throughout the City and County.

In 2015, members of the Trails Committee worked with Parks and Recreation and received funding for a brochure prepared by a consultant for the, "Top Priority Trails for a Healthy Well Connected Durham". This brochure highlights the 5 top priority trails that will directly benefit neighborhoods within Durham that need safe multi model trails. Neighborhood groups need to advocate for design funding for these trails and the Trail's Committee has begun a campaign to acknowledge these trails as very important to Durham's health and wellbeing within neighborhoods. DOST greatly appreciates the funding source that was allocated by council to fund this brochure. CIP funding needs to be secured and placed in the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) for these trails. The slow progress of the West Ellerbe Creek Trail and the funding sources dedicated to the ATT parking lot on Scott King Rd. has meant that the Bryant Bridge /Rocky Creek Trail project has been moved to next year's CIP. Since the R. Kelly Bryant Bridge is a major connection to the neighborhood, Trails Committee members are seeking connections to that bridge funding through the NCDOT TIP; that funding will be requested in the CIP in FY 17/18 and has already been put forth.

The trails committee created a data base of trail easements that have been acquired and those that need to be acquired. That project is ongoing. The committee also worked with the Planning Department and Parks and Recreation to provide an interactive data base map showing the acquisition status of segments of planned trails in the Master Plan. This serves as a useful tool to estimate acquisition costs required for the development of planned trails.

With the leadership of the trails committee, Sandy Creek Park has received several grants from the County Matching Grants Program in which has enabled the completion of a number of projects at the Park including new signage and a bird watching area as well as plantings and upgrades to the facility; a tremendous amount of volunteer labor has gone in to creating the space. The Sandy Creek area continues to make progress with numerous volunteers much has

been accomplished in 2015. Additional trail construction within the park is needed and will be a major effort in 2016. A very successful first time, “Monarch Festival” was held in the Park in 2015 and will continue as an annual event.

The Trails Committee has selected trails from the Master plan that should receive priority in future land acquisition and construction funding. The committee is now in the process of re-examining the priority trails to see if any revisions need to be made to those priorities and produced a brochure to highlight those needs.

The Trails Committee would like to see trail maintenance improved. In addition, the Committee would like to see the continued acquisition and construction of trails throughout Durham. We recognize the need for additional funding. DOST plans to make a request for additional funding for trail design and construction and push for a 2016-2017 bond referendum proposal. The committee has been working with staff on a policy that would allow and encourage trails that are built by the developer.

The trail maintenance funding source approved by Council in last year’s budget cycle for future maintenance of the trails and parks within our system should be a start to needed funds and we look forward to progress on that. The commission will also continue to support the “Parks Foundation” in order to shore up funding sources for upcoming projects.

This year the focus was on the Sandy Creek Trails in particular John Goebel and Charlie Welch worked on Sandy Creek trails. The park benefited from over 200 volunteers and 1000 volunteer hours this year. These volunteers have been instrumental in creating a space that will be accessible to handicapped individuals, hikers, birdwatchers and so many others. The plantings, and physical labor involved in completion of many of the projects within the park have completely transformed it. The contacts with nearby neighborhoods helping with the cleaning, and some background on each of the trails and projects was done.

Sandy Creek Park and “Creek Week” in March continue to be big draws for the community. The Trails Committee has taken on the volunteer work of the upgrading of some of the trails in Sandy Creek Park including maintenance on the existing bridge and construction of a bird blind within the park. They continue to focus on upgrades to the park that take a variety of forms, from improved access, and signage to wildlife viewing areas, fencing around the grassy areas, butterfly gardens, and increased educational activities for the surrounding community. The park is becoming a real centerpiece for the area because of all the hard work. We are hoping to make this a facility that is very accessible to handicapped individuals. Keep Durham Beautiful has been extremely helpful in facilitating improvements at Sandy Creek.

All of these initiatives are important as our neighborhoods become more vibrant and trail connections become more important for exercise, connections to downtown and our parks.

The Committee is continuing to focus on neighborhoods such as Sandy Creek and Northeast Central Durham and is working on additional funding, focusing on Healthy Mile Trails in

conjunction with the Health Department and priority trails throughout the community. Many of these trails have been completed.

Constructing trails requires patience and long range vision as a result of the slow parcel-by-parcel acquisition of trail corridors that is typically required as well as an often protracted contracting process. DOST feels that support for more funding, trail construction and acquisition should continue as a priority. Now that the ATT is complete Durham has only 29 miles of paved trails. We lag behind our Triangle neighbors in new construction.

Committee Goals for 2015 included: Establishing a trails priority listing, overseeing implementation of better trails signage, finishing our easement data base, meeting with trails groups in adjacent jurisdictions, keeping track of construction updates, working with the Finance Committee to promote bond funding for future trails, continue providing input to staff on community needs including reaching out to neighborhood groups, assisting with new trails maps, and more trail awareness in neighborhoods.

Mountains to Sea Trail. Continue to support the use and value of this trail to Durham. The Trail now connects Hillsborough to Wake County with the Falls Lake section in Durham running approximately 29 miles. Durham is the only county east of the mountains to have completed the MST in its' jurisdiction.

Open Space Committee

Throughout the year the Committee, in conjunction with staff, has been working on the Urban Open Space Plan, easements, usage and acquisition and a number of other environmental concerns including resolutions and letters of support for various open space concerns. The Committee has also worked through an evaluation process for properties that are County owned within the area covered by urban open space plan that may have open space value in order to help develop appropriate policies regarding whether those properties should be retained or sold. The Committee brought forward several resolutions that raised environmental awareness about water, sewer, and watershed concerns, including land use changes in sensitive areas. The Urban Open Space Plan is being finalized and the committee will begin its' evaluation in 2016.

The Committee has developed a list serve group concerning open space issues, which contains around 140 members, (as of January 2016) and continues to be active in open space issues. They have also presented several resolutions for DOST's consideration concerning environmental concerns that relate to Triangle Transit's proposed crossing of the New Hope Creek Corridor. Additionally they have kept abreast of environmental concerns that relate to the watershed and transit. They continue to follow various environmental issues throughout Durham keeping elected officials informed and updated about their concerns including issues that affect Durham's open space.

Farmland Protection: The Open Space and Trails Commission co-ordinates with the Durham Farmland Protection Advisory Board through a liaison. For 2015, this liaison was Perry Whitted. The Farmland Board hosted three Farmer well attended "Farmer Appreciation Breakfasts".

These breakfasts provide an informal networking opportunity for local farmers and feature current topics of interest. These breakfasts are continuing a series that are provided in different locations in the county.

By the end of 2015, Durham County has permanently protected thirteen farms with conservation easements totaling 2047 acres, at a Durham County average cost of \$1,034 per acre. In addition, the County is working with six more farms where the owners have signed commitments to convey easements totaling an additional 288 acres. The new farm Bill approved in 2014 has significantly lower funding available for federal farm conservation easements. In 2015, funds for North Carolina totaled approximately 25 percent of that which had previously been made available under the previous farm bill.

New Hope /Hollow Rock Preservation: The Master Plan for the Hollow Rock Access Area was adopted in 2009/2010 by Durham County, the City of Durham, Chapel Hill, and Orange County, the four jurisdictions that participated in the purchase of the property. The Master Plan was developed with an advisory committee with several public input sessions. The master plan proposed a small parking area, nature trails, and interpretative displays about the significant history and ecology of the area for this northern anchor to the New Hope Creek corridor.

In late 2013, the County was awarded a state grant for \$200,000 to assist with construction of the Hollow Rock bridges and parking lot so this area could be safely opened for public use. The agreement was approved by the BOCC in January 2014, with the contract running until April 2016. A new Interlocal Agreement between Orange and Durham counties regarding the construction and maintenance of the Hollow Rock Nature Park was finalized in June 2015. During the fall of 2015, construction was completed on the nature trail bridges. Construction of parking lot was handled by Orange County and was completed in January 2016. A spring grand opening celebration is anticipated.

Outreach

The Commission's mission to foster the wise use of Durham's natural resources along with acquisition of open spaces, greenway protection and trail development involves reaching out to the citizens of Durham. In order to achieve this goal, the Commission assists the City-County Planning Department, highlighting current environmental and recreational issues, and meets face to face with the public at Earth Day, Center Fest, and Festival for the Eno River. The Commission appreciates the funds that the Board of Commissioners and City Council contributed to the budget to help achieve these educational objectives. The Earth Day booth rental fee was paid for through those funds. The remaining funds will be used to pay for the additional re- printing and upgrading of the very popular Durham Trails and Greenways Bike Hike maps. A few additional educational materials are often possible with the remaining funds. This year's remaining funds were encumbered by the Department for additional printing needs on the bike/hike map and new banners for our commission. The Commission is requesting additional funding to provide for better educational materials and made that request as part of the 2017 budget process.

Education

Throughout the year the Education Committee has continued to enhance the DOST website. The Committee and volunteers have done an outstanding job incorporating content into the website that explains DOST's goals and interests, and also informs the public about upcoming events and issues.

www.bikewalkdurham.org/dost
www.durhamost.org

Progress continues on orienting and educating neighborhood organizations, INC. and others to the nearest trails and open spaces, with the hopes that meeting with these groups and talking up DOST activities those groups will become more involved with what is happening in their neighborhoods.

The Educational Committee would like to pursue more vigorously the use of various Web sites and educational outreach programs that schools or other organizations may be involved in that promote trails and greenways. In order to do this more effectively, the Commission needs funds for some basic items for festival booth displays printings and presentation materials for enhancing public education.

The Community Education Committee staffs a Commission booth at the Earth Day Festival in April, the Eno River Festival in July, and Center Fest in September to inform the public about open space and trails programs, provide maps, and encourage community involvement. The Web site will continue to have a big presence and provide vital links to maps, other information.

Committee goals for 2015 included: Maintain a presence at each of the local festivals, publishing news via our web site, improving the DOST website with maps and additional tools and links, improving community presence and public awareness of DOST, supporting the other committees by helping to publicize their work and bring visibility to them through the web site (i.e., Urban Open Space, Matching Grants program, etc)

Development Review Committee

The Development Review Committee of the Commission screened over 300 site plans and plats and screened or made recommendations/comments on approximately 40 zoning map changes that had impacts on areas of the Trails and Greenways Master Plan as well as the Durham Inventory of Important Natural Areas, Plants, and Wildlife and other areas of environmental concern. These cases were reviewed by the Committee and recommendations brought forward to elected officials which up held Durham's long standing effort at protection of Natural Heritage sites and corridors.

This has facilitated additional input into plans that have significant environmental/open space, inventory sites, and trails and greenways that are affected by development. The Development Review committee continues to monitor and make comments on plans going before elected officials

The Development Review Committee studies and makes advisory comments on zoning map changes and site plans for projects regarding impacts to greenways and open space.

Committee goals for 2015 included; 1. Continue to review site plans and re-zoning requests and make written reports as determined by the Committee, and DOST. 2. Continue to represent DOST on development issues. 3. Seek additional input as needed on updates for adopted Inventory and work with developers to create trails that are publically accessible but developer constructed.

Finance Committee

The Finance Committee plans to meet several times in addition to the matching grants funding cycle to look at possible additional, non-public funding sources for trails and greenways. The Committee is considering how additional funding could be obtained from developers and/or the corporate community to facilitate trail construction.

The Committee has been instrumental in pulling together and researching our current financial situation on trails and greenways and continues to monitor how additional funding could be acquired through the Capital Improvement Project process. This group is also interested in long term financial maintenance of trails. The committee has been researching the costs of completed trails and their sources of funding and has continually followed budget constraints on trail funding sources.

This committee continues to reach out to Keep Durham Beautiful (KDB) in a joint effort to research and create a system for attracting private funds for public projects such as sponsorship of a trail or greenway, and to better coordinate volunteer activities for trail clean up days.

In addition the committee would like to work more closely to better connect the Recreation Advisory Board with DOST, and to support the Parks Foundation and funding for Parks and trail maintenance.

Committee goals for 2015 included: 1. Develop a database of past, current and future trail projects, 2. Investigate status or ability to collect contributions for trail funding from private sources, 3. Investigate potential funding strategies- CIP, bond referenda, impact fees, private contributions and to facilitate more neighborhood interaction with community trails. And support the Parks Foundation and Pennies for Parks.

Durham County Matching Grants Program

Now in its twenty-fifth year, the Matching Grants Program continues to provide grants to community non-profit organizations for open space and recreation projects throughout the County. When budgetary feasible, Durham County contributes an annual allocation to support the Program. During the life of this Program, the County's investment of \$1,524,395 has leveraged over \$3 million in monetary and in-kind contributions.

Durham County Matching Grants Program

	Program to Date	Year 2015-16
Number of Grants	82	8
Value of County Matching Grants	\$1,524,395	\$ 62,906
Total Value of Projects	+\$3,000,000	\$ 154,501

For the 2015-16 Grant Cycle, the Committee approved eight new projects. Details on the projects and award amounts are below:

Organizations	Description	Grant Request
Creekside Elementary PTA	Playground Improvements - Balance beam, tetherball, seesaw, water fountain and litter container for school playground.	\$3,531
Durham Parks Foundation	Sandy Creek Park Trail Expansion, widening and marking of the Pond Loop Trail.	\$18,000
Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association	Infrastructure additions and improvements at The Rocks Nature Preserve - welcome kiosk, wooden fence, pet waste receptacle, interpretative sign, bench, and wildlife observation camera and bike rack.	\$10,800
Extra Terrestrial Projects, Inc.	Pollinator and native plant garden along American Tobacco Trail.	\$6,575
George Watts Montessori PTA	Phase 2 of playground improvements including outdoor hard surface play space, embankment slide and walking trail plantings.	\$8,000
Jordan High School PTA	Landscaping at the school's courtyard and reinstallation of 'Remembrance Garden' and nutritional garden with plants, herbs and amendments.	\$2,000
Keep Durham Beautiful,	At Lowe's Grove Middle School,	\$1,000

Inc.	create an Outdoor Environmental Learning Center, install a fruit tree orchard and picnic tables near the track.	
SEEDS	Garden walking path improvements at the SEEDS facility, railing and masonry repair and plantings.	\$13,000
Total		\$62,906

County Commissioners will have the opportunity to approved \$62,906 in total Matching Grant funding for FY 2015-16 at the February 8th BOCC meeting .

Matching Grants Committee reviewed grants and criteria for the program and continues to Monitor and advertise the grant program, committee goals included revamping the application materials and better advertising to the citizens of Durham.

Overall Commission Goals for 2016

The Commission will continue to promote the preservation of valuable open spaces, the preservation of natural vegetation and stream valleys within the urban, suburban and rural environment, and the development of trails and other appropriate recreational and transportation facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists.

In addition, the Commission will promote the protection of the natural environment where appropriate to serve the public interest, with equal consideration for long-term care of the environment and the short-term pressures of growth and continue to seek funding sources for additional trails and land acquisition. The Commission also feels that it is important to work with and reach out to other Commissions and agencies in order to reach common goals.

Commission Goals for 2016

1. Promote the need for a newly updated Trails and Greenways Master Plan
2. Continue to support the Urban Open Space Plan for the city, vital with our pace of growth for preservation of our open spaces and our environment (implementation of Comprehensive Plan policies 7.2.2.h and 10.1.3e).
3. Provide more accessible, safe, trails for a,” Healthier Durham” population.
4. Promote funding for a New Durham Trails and Greenways Master Plan and funding for including but not limited to; other grant proposals, open space acquisition and trail construction funds through a bond referendum and/or as an annual appropriation in the Capital Improvement Program. Existing funds have been expended for new trail construction.
5. Support the Parks Foundation as a funding source for trails and open space.
6. Continue to promote the adopted Eastern Durham Open Space Plan in Eastern Durham and support the Mountains to Sea Trail. This trail is an integral part of Durham and the Eastern Durham Open Space Plan. This trail is a vital link to the Eno trail system, serves as regional connector to Orange and Wake Counties.
7. Update the adopted New Hope Creek Master Plan.

8. Recommend that the Flat River Plan (Comprehensive Plan policy 7.2.2g) be made a high priority on the work program so that land acquisitions that are currently occurring in the northeast portions of the County can be incorporated into an adopted plan.
9. Seek out new funding sources such as grants, and corporate or other private-public partnerships that may help contribute to possible construction and or acquisition of open space and trails.
10. Continue to reach out to the Durham community through publication of maps, our web site presence, educational brochures, and participation in Earth Day, Festival for the Eno, Center Fest, and production of maps. Continue to reach out to the community and educate neighborhoods and others on our efforts including educational endeavors.
11. Advocate for open space and trails, express citizen concerns regarding open space and trails to Durham's governing boards, and communicate plans and programs to the general public.
12. Provide recommendations for zoning map changes/development and site plans to uphold the *Durham Trails and Greenways Master Plan*, and pedestrian accessibility as well as the preservation of open space and respect for environmentally sensitive areas.
13. Continue to advocate for ongoing trail maintenance including the Adopt-a-Trail Program and quarterly work days.
14. Continue to facilitate the Durham County Matching Grants Program.
15. Promote the regional connectivity of trails, bike lanes, and sidewalks.
16. Provide and explore more diversity on the Commission and diversity in relationship to trails, greenways, open space and education.
17. Push for bond funded trails in 2016-2017
18. Continue to liaison with the Eno River and Ellerbe Creek Association the Farmland Board and other groups/organizations that foster good environmental stewardship

Attachments

(Appendix I.) Durham Open Space and Trails Commission Attendance).
Accomplishments List
Budget Request