



DURHAM OPEN SPACE AND TRAILS COMMISSION

AGENDA

June 21, 2023, 7:00 p.m.

VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87515862913?pwd=U3JVS3lVS3hJYUt5V1dxOWI1YnpOZz09>

- I. **Call to Order**
- II. **Approval of Minutes**
 - a. **Approval of April Minutes**
- III. **Excused Absences**
- IV. **Adjustments to the Agenda**
- V. **Presentations**
- VI. **Old Business**
- VII. **New Business**
 - a. **DOST Letter to Planning on Comprehensive Plan**
- VIII. **Updates**
 - a. **Updates from staff**
 - b. **Updates from liaisons**
 - c. **Updates from committees**
 - d. **Announcements**

Adjournment

DOST Priorities

1. Advocate for increased funding to build out and maintain priority trails and open space
2. Support the implementation of the Durham Beltline Master Plan with a specific focus on equitable community engagement for the components of the plan that can still be addressed
3. Examine the Matching Grants process to encourage applications that reflect the racial and economic diversity of Durham
4. Support implementation of the Trails and Greenways Master Plan with a specific focus on equity.
5. Encourage implementation of the Urban Open Space Plan
6. Pursue ongoing professional development on trends in equitable development of trails and open spaces.
7. Proactively research and implement open space and trails acquisition best practices for ordinances and policy.

DOST Committees

Committee	Chair	Meeting Date/Location
Matching Grants		As needed
Open Space	Steve Cohn	First Wednesday at 6:30 pm
Trails	Dave Connelly	Second Wednesday at 6:30 pm
Equity	Shakira Campbell	First Thursday at 6:30 pm

TO: Durham City/County Planning Department

FROM: The Durham Open Space & Trails Commission (DOST)

The Durham Open Space & Trails Commission (DOST) thanks Durham's City/County Planning Department for creating an excellent draft Comprehensive Plan after a thorough and inclusive public engagement process.

DOST strongly endorses keeping the Urban Growth Boundary just as it is in the current draft. We believe as it is currently drawn it strikes the balance necessary to encourage growth in appropriate areas while protecting the Durham we love.

Although DOST strongly endorses the current draft Comprehensive Plan, we do have some particular (and in some cases primarily editorial rather than substantive) recommendations related to certain individual elements within those parts of the plan that connect to open-space issues.

1. The term *Future Growth Areas* needs to be changed where it appears in Policy 120 and around the Place Type Maps, since this term implies that in the foreseeable future significant growth is expected in these areas, whereas the plan in fact clearly indicates that no growth in these areas should be anticipated unless and until various nonexistent pieces of infrastructure are added. One strong recommendation is to change this term to *Contingent Growth Areas*, since development can happen in these areas only if the City later decides to make one or more significant changes. We also recommend that where these *Contingent Growth Areas* are mentioned in the maps section there needs to be a link to Policy 120, since that is where the Plan describes what each such area's growth is contingent upon.
2. On page 182, where the description of the Place Type Map refers to two additional maps in Appendixes B and C, the two appendixes are transposed: where the text says Environmental Resources Map with a link to Appendix B on page 243, in fact Appendix B is the map of the Transit Network (and that is where the link leads), whereas the Environmental Resources Map is Appendix C on the following page.
3. The Place Type section on Recreation and Open Space states, *Open spaces not suitable for recreation should have no development and be permanently protected with public ownership or permanent conservation easements and include areas like floodways, wetlands, and land around water sources.* DOST definitely does not believe that *public ownership* in and of itself creates permanent protection for conservation purposes, since the City or County can at any future time decide to sell the land

or construct something in any area it owns. And, especially for publicly owned land, conservation easements are in some cases difficult or problematic to apply. Therefore we strongly recommend that the phrase *public ownership or permanent conservation easements* be removed from this section. We propose that this text should read as follows:

Open space not suitable for recreation, which includes areas like floodways, wetlands, and land around water sources, should have no development and should be permanently protected.

4. Two small but significant additions to Policy 77 are needed for clarity. It now says, *Protect Durham's most sensitive natural areas (including floodplains, wetlands, wildlife habitats, hillsides, drinking water sources, critical watersheds, and natural heritage areas) from the impacts of development.* We believe it should be modified to say, *Protect Durham's most ecologically sensitive natural areas (including floodplains, wetlands, wildlife habitats, unique plant communities, hillsides, drinking water sources, critical watersheds, and natural heritage areas) from the impacts of development.*
5. A small but significant addition to Policy 96 is also needed. It now says, *particularly for pollinators and birds, on both public and private land.* We believe it should be modified to say, *Encourage the creation and preservation of natural wildlife habitat and natural plant communities, particularly for pollinators and birds, both on public and private land.*
6. Policy 101, which we highly applaud, needs two significant changes to create clarity.
 - A. It needs a clear definition or set of criteria added, so there will be a common and undisputed understanding of what *a safe ten-minute walking distance* means in the sentence *Ensure that all residents living within the Urban Growth Boundary are within a safe ten-minute walking distance of a public park.*

If a clear definition or set of criteria for this term does not yet exist and cannot be arrived at right away, then creating such a definition or set of criteria should be added to Action Item #12, so that it reads, *Work with City Parks and Recreation Department to create a definition or a set of criteria for the term "a safe ten-minute walking distance"; then create a public parkland walkshed map, showing which homes in Durham are not currently within a safe ten-minute walk of public parkland.*
 - B. It also needs clarity on what constitutes *a public park* (and in Action Item #12 what constitutes *public parkland*). Does only a government-

owned park count as a *public park* or *public parkland*? Or does privately owned space that is open to the public count?

7. In Policy 103 an added set of parentheses is important for clarity. Its first sentence now says, *New developments should build or dedicate right-of-way for trails and greenways as per adopted trails and greenway plans*. We believe it should be modified to say, *New developments should build (or dedicate right-of-way for) trails and greenways as per adopted trails and greenway plans*.
8. A small but significant addition to Policy 105 is needed. It now says, *Work with residents to design park activities, events, and special programming that reflect, honor, and welcome youth and seniors; LGBTQIA+, Black, and Hispanic/Latino communities, and other underserved residents*. We believe it should be modified to say, *Work with residents to design park activities, events, and special programming that reflect, honor, and welcome youth and seniors; residents with disabilities; LGBTQIA+, Black, and Hispanic/Latino communities; and other underserved residents*.

In the Environment and Public Spaces Actions section we also have a few changes to recommend:

1. In Action 4 the terms bolded below are not clear in the sentence, *Pursue the permanent conservation of parcels designated as Recreation and Open Space on the Place Type Map, except for parcels **in active use, such as parklands***. It is not clear here what constitutes *active use*, and using *parklands* as an example only adds to the confusion, since those parklands that are not suitable for the sort of active recreation that requires recreation infrastructure (such as ballfields or swimming pools) are precisely the sort of land that should most urgently be permanently protected from any development.

Therefore we recommend that Action 4 should be shortened and simplified to read as follows:

Pursue the permanent protection of all those parcels designated as Recreation and Open Space on the Place Type Map, in accordance with the methods developed in Action Item #3.

2. In Action 9 in particular – but we note that this issue may also apply in other places throughout the Plan – the term *County* is used in a way that could be taken to refer only to places outside the City limits. Action 9 states, *Develop open space preservation strategies for areas of the County not currently under an adopted open space plan; work to create open space strategies for those “unplanned” areas and update open space plans developed prior to the adoption of Durham’s Equitable Community Engagement Blueprint*. It should be made completely clear that this particular

action item refers to areas within the City limits as well as to areas of Durham County outside the City limits. And other uses of the term *County* throughout the Plan should be reviewed for meaning, consistency, and clarity.

3. We remind here that Action 12 may need some changes, if a clear definition or set of criteria cannot be added to Policy 101 as was recommended above.
4. Some small but significant changes to Action 27 are needed, because there are already some such partnerships in existence, but their importance has not until now been sufficiently emphasized. It now says, *Develop partnerships between the City, the County, community groups, and nonprofits to support open space acquisition, management, and programming efforts.* We believe it should be modified to say, *Emphasize the development of additional and active partnerships between the City, the County, community groups, and nonprofits to support open space acquisition, management, and programming efforts.*
5. A small but significant addition to Action 44 is needed. It now says, *Work with City and County Departments such as General Services to eliminate pesticide and herbicide use on public land except when strictly necessary.* We believe it should be modified to say, *Work with City and County Departments such as General Services to eliminate pesticide and herbicide use on public land except when strictly necessary, e.g., managing invasives.*
6. Two small but significant additions to Action 45 are needed. It now says, *Develop programs, incentives, and initiatives to discourage invasive species and pesticide use on private property.* We believe it should be modified to say, *Develop programs, incentives, and initiatives to discourage and manage invasive species and pesticide use on both public and private property.*