



www.enoriver.org · 919-620-9099 · 4404 Guess Road, Durham NC 27712 · association@enoriver.org

June 4, 2020

Orange County Board of County Commissioners
P.O. Box 8181
Hillsborough, NC 27278

For Budget Public Hearing on June 4, 2020

Dear Board of County Commissioners,

We understand that the impacts of Covid-19 may result in the County facing lower revenue. However, the Eno River Association is adamantly opposed to the proposed FY 2020-21 CIP amendments CIP-004, CIP-005, and CIP-006 affecting the Lands Legacy and Conservation Easement Programs in Orange County.

Since 2000 over \$8 million in other funding--from grants and landowner donations--has been raised for land protection due to the Lands Legacy Program and Conservation Easement Program.

With those dollars nearly 4,000 acres within Orange County have been protected, creating parks for underserved populations within our community, improving water quality for over 500,000 citizens, ensuring viable farmland into the future and climate change resiliency, and strengthening the overall health and wellbeing of Orange County residents. These past weeks we have seen unprecedented numbers of visitors to Orange County open spaces, seeking solace during these difficult times. It is clear that more open space is needed to accommodate our neighbors.

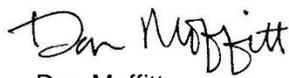
Investments in land protection today provide lasting, positive impacts on our community into the future. Proximity to parks and open space enhances the value of residential properties and produces increased tax revenues for communities. Open spaces capture precipitation, reduce stormwater management costs, and by protecting underground water sources, open spaces reduce the cost of drinking water up to ten-fold. Improving access to public open space can increase levels of physical activity, provide mental health benefits and reduce healthcare costs.

The Eno River Association and Orange County have worked collaboratively to protect land in the Eno River Watershed since 2012. Together we hold six conservation easements on working farms totaling 398 acres, and Orange County has helped us protect an additional 250 acres of land. The proposed amendments would pull *all additional funding* from the Lands Legacy Program and *all funding* from the Conservation Easement Program for the next three years. This would devastate land protection efforts in Orange County.

Without the financial commitment of the County, we would no longer be able to leverage grant funds to support land acquisition. In most cases, our joint funding partners require matching resources, especially from municipal and county governments. The lack of County funding would undermine all land trusts working to preserve land for future generations. The Eno River Association staff and Board of Directors urge you to reject the proposed amendments CIP-004, CIP-005, and CIP-006.

Sincerely,


Jessica Sheffield
Executive Director


Don Moffitt
Board of Directors, President

