



**ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS
BOARD
MINUTES**

February 4, 2025

6:00 – 8:00PM

Virtual via Zoom

Voting Members in Attendance: Tom Campbell (Chair), Sherry Taylor (Vice-Chair), Taylor Price (Secretary), Corie Hlavaty, Mark Waller (Soil & Water), Sandra Howell, Carina Barnett-Loro, David Barron, Meech Carter, Jonathan Chan, Astrid Cook-Dial, Lena Tonkin

Not in Attendance: Chukwuemeka kanu-Oji, Larry Hall, Zora Lentz (Excused), Mark Radin, Lola Chafatelli, Anna Byers

Ex Officio Members/Staff: Annette Smith, Rachel Toker, Celeste Burns, David Bradley, Jonathan Baker, Megan Pendell, Scott Whiteman, Wayne Fenton, Council Member Matt Kopac

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

- a. 6:03 PM Call to order with roll call taken via Zoom Participants List

2. Centering and Good News

3. Adjustments to the Agenda and Approval EAB Minutes

- a. Approval of January meeting minutes passes

4. Announcements (including any Conflicts of Interest)

- a. The EAB has been matched with two students from Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment as a part of their Community-based Environmental Management Practicum. As a part of this work they will be doing research and analysis on other environmental boards in similar sized cities. Following their research they will be able to share best practices and what other cities have done to be successful.
- b. Next Meeting: March 4th in person at City Hall

5. New and Continuing Business (See below for notes)

- a. Proposal to renovate the old Durham Athletic Park into a public green space

- b. Report out on Durham County's wildlife connectivity program and the County's open space projects
- c. UDO Updates

6. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 7:37 PM

New and Continuing Business Notes

Topic: Durham Bulls Park into a Biodiverse Park

- Report from a citizen interested in supporting a more biodiverse option for the old Durham Bulls Athletic Park. The same presentation was presented to Durham Open Space and Trails in January.
- The current site is used 124 days a year and is solely used for baseball. As it is under utilized, the city is interested in revitalizing the space so that it can be used more often.
- In October and November there were 3 options presented to Durham's City Council following community engagement and research from an outside consultant group.
 - Option 1: Preserving as a baseball field and renovating historic landmarks
 - Option 2: Transforming into a new green space, with other areas for recreation
 - Option 3: New Development that would be a more robust park with civic and natural zones
- As of now, there has been a lot of advocacy to choose Option 1 that preserves the baseball field and little advocacy for turning it into a park or natural space.
- This presentation hopes to bring to the attention of the EAB and others about the various options, with the potential for more natural space downtown.
- The Land Use and Planning Committee of the EAB will take a look at the materials and propose something back to the full EAB in a future meeting.

Questions & Comments

- All three options would likely preserve the historic features of the ballpark. However the first option is the only one that keeps it a functional ball park athletic facility.
- With the announcement of the new professional softball team coming to Durham, there are likely still discussions here about future plans.
- A formal decision was not made by the City Council, but there was a clear advocacy for the preservation of the space as an athletic facility when brought up in the City Council work session. Any vocal support for other options could allow for those options to be considered.

Durham Open Space, Land Protection, and Wildlife Connectivity

- To date Durham County's Open Space Program has permanently protected 4,192 acres of land.
- The Triangle Connectivity Collaborative is a group of conservation partners in the area working together to make sure that all the conservation efforts could connect and make a

meaningful habitat for our wildlife. The initial plan was completed in 2019 with more recent updates to help better understand the wildlife within the various counties.

- Within this connectivity data helped to create a model using species and habitat information alongside land cover data.
- The model uses field data and occurrence data from indicator species with current land use data to identify habitat patch and least-cost corridors within the various watersheds. It also identified pinch points or places at the highest risk of fragmentation.
- All of this data is used to support land protection, guide research and stewardship priorities and inform policy and land use planning. It also plays a role in community engagement and education.
- The presentation highlighted important sites in the area highlighted within this model.
- To understand and protect habitats and corridors, we need both models and field-based data.
 - There is field based research and monitoring ongoing by the County like the New Hope Biodiversity Inventory which took place in 2021 and 2022.
- The Joint-City-County Planning Committee directed the Planning & Development Department to develop a County Wide Open Space Plan with the approval of the FY26 Planning and Development Work Program.
 - This open space plan will outline a roadmap that includes policies and actions for open space and preservation as well as land acquisition priorities.
 - This project is scheduled to kickoff in Spring of 2026
- **Questions & Comments:**
 - Discussion around where the Planning Commission and City Council can go to better understand the research that has been done when development cases are coming up in these conservation areas. While this is difficult to do before annexation and rezonings, there could be the opportunity during the site planning stage to work with developers on this topic.

Topic: UDO Continued

- The UDO subcommittee has continued to meet to review what recent changes were made to the draft UDO.
- The work that has been done by the EAB over the past year to provide topics, comments, and feedback into the UDO process has been well received and many have been incorporated.
 - Some of our more specific comments from the team have hit legal “roadblocks” (items that weren’t under jurisdiction by the City/County), but it has been mostly positive sentiment based on the EAB’s engagement through this process.
- Timelines for the UDO feedback and approval may shift to ensure that there is time for feedback from residents and staff alike to give feedback.