



Albemarle County

Legislation Text

File #: 16-250, **Version:** 1

AGENDA DATE: 5/4/2016

TITLE: Acquisition of Conservation Easements (ACE) Ranking Order for FY 2015-16 Applicant Class

SUBJECT/PROPOSAL/REQUEST: Request approval of final ranking order and appraisal of top five properties from FY 2016 ACE applicant pool

ITEM TYPE: Consent Action Item

STAFF CONTACT(S): Foley, Walker, Davis, Herrick, Benish, and Goodall

PRESENTER (S): Ches Goodall

LEGAL REVIEW: Yes

REVIEWED BY: Thomas C. Foley

BACKGROUND:

Pursuant to sections A.1-110(G) and A.1-110(H) of the ACE Ordinance, the Board of Supervisors reviews the list of parcels ranked by the ACE Committee and identifies parcels on which it desires to acquire conservation easements. Each conservation easement identified by the Board for purchase is appraised by an independent appraiser chosen by the County.

On October 31, 2015, five new applicants enrolled in the FY16 applicant class. Staff recently evaluated each of the properties from this applicant pool according to the ACE Ordinance ranking evaluation criteria. These objective criteria include: open space resources; threat of conversion to developed use; natural, scenic and cultural resources; and County fund leveraging from outside sources. Based on the results of the evaluation, staff has determined the eligibility of the properties and has ranked them in order (see Attachments A and B). These results were presented to the ACE Committee, which unanimously approved the proposed ranking at its April 11, 2016 meeting.

STRATEGIC PLAN:

Natural Resources: Thoughtfully protect and manage Albemarle County's ecosystems and natural resources in both the rural and development areas to safeguard the quality of life of current and future generations

Rural Areas: Preserve the character of rural life with thriving farms and forests, traditional crossroad communities, and protected scenic areas, historic sites, and biodiversity.

DISCUSSION:

All five properties under consideration scored enough points to be eligible for ACE funding. With \$908,392 of County funding available for this class (carryover, new appropriations, and reimbursements from VDACS Farmland Preservation), plus another \$155,807 of unused VDACS Farmland Preservation grant funds (see Attachment C), the County should be able to acquire easements on at least the three highest ranked properties. However, based on the final ranking order and eligibility status of these properties, the ACE Committee recommends that the Board authorize appraisals of all five properties: Brigish, Moon, Evans, G.

Clarke, and P. Clarke. Although the total ACE budget for FY16 may be insufficient to purchase easements on all five properties, staff and the ACE Committee believe it is prudent to have the authorization to appraise more properties in the event that either additional funding becomes available or a higher ranking applicant withdraws from the Program.

The acquisition of easements on these five properties would eliminate 42 development rights and would protect:

- 1) 583 acres of farm and forestland
- 2) 6,500 feet of common boundary with other protected lands (including 2,600 feet on Walnut Creek Park)
- 3) approximately 10,000 of state road frontage, including 4,000 feet on Route 6, a state scenic byway
- 4) approximately 14,000 feet of riparian buffers, including 3,800 on the South Fork Hardware River
- 5) 266 acres of "prime" farm, forest and orchard land
- 6) 119 acres of mountain protection, including a unique rock outcrop and habitat
- 7) 2 properties in the watershed of a drinking water supply reservoir
- 8) 4 properties that are working family farms or forestland.

BUDGET IMPACT: After purchasing two (2) ACE easements from last year's applicant pool (Sweeney and Clark), the County has \$1,064,199 to acquire new easements from the FY16 pool. This amount of funding reflects a combination of County funds (new and re-appropriated) and grants awarded from the VDACS Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP). OFP holds the County's grant money until the County submits for reimbursement for 50% of the acquisition, appraisal, and closing costs. Funding for the purchase of these conservation easements would come from the CIP-Community Development-Conservation budget (line-item 4 -9010-81010-481020-580409-1240). See Attachment C for additional budget information.

RECOMMENDATION:

The ACE Committee and staff recommend that the Board:

- 1) Approve the final ranking order for the FY15-16 applicant pool as shown on Attachments A and B;
- 2) Authorize appraisals of the top five properties: Brigish, Moon, Evans, G. Clarke, and P. Clarke.

A - Ranking Order of ACE Applicants for FY15-16

B - ACE Scoring Summary for FY15-16

C - ACE Budget for FY15-16 Applicant Pool