

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF JACKSON



Jackson County
Land Conservation Easement Investment Policy/Process

Jackson County greatly benefits from its natural beauty. The County's streams, rivers, lakes, open space, mountain ranges and wildlife provides us with a source of water, food, recreation, entertainment and jobs. Our environment continues to be our most valuable resource and asset.

Jackson County has determined that there is value in investing in land conservation easement projects within the County through partnering with appropriate agencies. Agencies requesting partnership / financial assistance from Jackson County must meet certain criteria. It must be demonstrated that the proposed project helps achieve goals & objectives identified in the most recently adopted land use plan. At a minimum the following should be addressed in the agencies proposal to Jackson County.

1. Environment / Natural Resources

The proposed project should at a minimum assist with some of the goals and objectives within the land use plan that relate to protecting the County's environment and natural resources. Projects that meet these type of goals will preserve land with high biodiversity / wildlife ratings, preserve land with high potential for hillside erosion, protect watersheds and protect view sheds.

2. Recreation, Public Health, Education & Economic Development

These subject areas within a land use plan generally have goals relating to achieving healthy life styles, accessing trails/greenways/waterways, preserving agricultural land & enhancing tourism. Conservation easements used for these activities should be described in the proposal.

The requesting agency must also be able to demonstrate its experience and capacity to negotiate, close and manage land trust easements in a legitimate manner. In order to demonstrate this capacity, the requesting agency must be able to meet one of the two following requirements.

1. The Land Trust Alliance (LTA) is a national land conservation organization based out of Washington D.C. The Land Trust Accreditation Commission (an independent program of the LTA) has an accreditation process that requires adherence to ethical and technical guidelines for the responsible operation of a land trust. Agencies that have been accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission have demonstrated their capacity and automatically qualify to apply to Jackson County for a conservation partnership project.
2. The Land Trust Alliance has developed a technical document titled “Land Trust – Standards and Practices – Ethical and Technical Guidelines for the Responsible Operation of a Land Trust”. Any non- LTA accredited agency who applies to partner with Jackson County on a conservation project must demonstrate that they can comply with all of the elements identified in this document. It will be the applicant’s sole responsibility to document and comply with every element within the document.

(NOTE: These requirements apply to both the applicant and eventual easement holder if they are different entities in the proposed project)

It is mandated that any proposal be discussed with the County Manager (and any other staff member deemed appropriate by the County Manager) prior to submitting any written proposal. County staff will provide the requesting agency feedback regarding the agency’s experience and capacity to negotiate, close and manage land trust easements. County staff will also work with the agency to assess the project’s consistency with the County’s most recently adopted land use plan. If the agency demonstrates that it has the capacity to manage the proposed project and the proposal seems consistent with the land use plan then the agency will be invited to submit a full written proposal.

Invited written proposals should be submitted to the Jackson County Manager’s Office in the following manner:

Section 1 – Cover Letter

Cover letter should be from requesting agency that provides a one page summary of the requested partnership.

Section 2 – Detailed Proposal Summary

This should be a detailed summary of the proposal. This detailed summary should at a minimum include the following information:

- a) Details on the proposed property easement. This would include land description and proposed easement language.
- b) Description of how this conservation easement will achieve goals and objectives identified in the County's most recently adopted land use plan.
- c) Detailed proposed budget. This would include the purchase price and all proposed funding sources. Describe how the purchase price was derived at and provide summary of all potential funding sources.

Section 3 – Description of Agencies Involved

Provide information about lead agency, easement holder (if different) and all other entities involved.

Section 4 – Supporting Documentation

Provide copies of all supporting documentation. This is to include (but not limited to) items such as property appraisals and proposed grant applications.

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners will make the final decision regarding any proposed conservation easement partnership proposal. The following illustrates some (but not limited to) of the criteria to be used in the decision making process.

1. Agency's experience and capacity
2. How well the project assists in achieving goals and objective identified in the County's most recently adopted land use plan.
3. Cost benefit analysis. An example of information to be considered in this analysis includes comparing the total Jackson County tax investment (cash investment plus future property tax loss) versus the public benefits from the conservation easement project. The Board at the time of the project will make the final decision regarding the value of the proposed project.

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners reserves the right to change or modify this policy/process as it deems appropriate. The Board reserves the right to request any additional information deemed necessary to make the final decision.

Adopted this 17th day of September, 2019

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Brian Thomas McMahan, Chairman