



**Date:** July 24, 2018

**To:** Thomas J. Bonfield, City Manager  
**Through:** W. Bowman Ferguson, Deputy City Manager  
**From:** Steven W. Hicks, Director, General Services Department  
**Subject:** Proposed Acquisition of the Durham Belt Line Property

**Executive Summary**

The Durham Belt Line property is a former railroad corridor that extends from downtown Durham at Chapel Hill Street to Avondale Drive at Trinity Avenue.

The City had previously attempted to acquire the rail corridor, but was unable to negotiate favorable terms with the owner, Norfolk Southern Railway. In 2014, an environmental nonprofit, The Conservation Fund began work to acquire the property from the railroad to preserve the corridor for future trail development. In February, 2017, the Conservation Fund acquired the 1.7 mile long, 18.8 acre property.

The City's proposed use of the property will be for development as an trail consistent with the Transportation Department's Durham Belt Line Master Plan.

The cost of acquisition is \$7,802,800.00.

**Recommendation**

The General Services Department recommends that City Council approve the fee simple acquisition of multiple parcels totaling ±18.8 acres comprising the Durham Belt Line property from The Conservation Fund in the total amount of \$7,802,800.00.

**Background**

The concept for conversion of the unused Belt Line rail corridor into a bicycle and pedestrian trail has been considered for many years. The trail is recommended by both the adopted Downtown Durham Master Plan and the Durham Trails and Greenway Master Plan. City staff's work with an outside consultant (Stewart Engineering) to prepare the Durham Belt Line Master Plan began in February, 2017.

The Durham Belt Line is envisioned to be a trail that extends 1.7 miles from Downtown Durham, through the Innovation District, and through the Trinity Park, Pearl Mill Village, North Durham and Duke Park neighborhoods to Avondale Drive. In 2017 the abandoned rail line was purchased from the Norfolk Southern Railroad by the Conservation Fund, a non-profit organization that works to conserve land for parks across the United States. The City will acquire the property from The Conservation Fund using a combination of federal and local match funds.

**Issues/Analysis**

Converting the rail corridor to a trail has been planned for over twenty years. The Belt Line Trail Master Plan and draft plans for trail development include recommendations that include:

- Provision of 1.7 miles of trail with ten new connections across the corridor, eight of which re-link neighborhoods historically severed by the rail line.
- Serving ~1,843 households within ½ mile of the trail that do not have access to a vehicle. Approximately 20.5 percent of households within ½ mile of the trail lack access to a vehicle compared to 9.5 percent of households in the City of Durham as a whole.
- Re-use of an historic railroad bridge and the adaptation of an historic railroad trestle as a scenic downtown overlook.
- Three trail cross-sections that fit the context of each neighborhood, separating bicyclists and pedestrians where possible to increase the safety and mobility of trail users.
- Four acres of restored forest, a riparian area, a meadow habitat, and six acres of new urban green space.
- Opportunities for green infrastructure features to improve stormwater filtration in the Ellerbe Creek watershed.
- Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) features to increase safety.

A real estate appraisal of the belt line indicated a property value of \$12,096,400.00. The Conservation Fund acquired the property in February, 2017 at a cost of \$7,100,000.00. The City’s purchase price of the property will be \$7,802,800.00, representing the Fund’s acquisition cost including administrative fee, due diligence costs for Property Appraisals, Property Survey, Environmental Studies, and Attorney’s Title Examination as well as payment for the Fund’s carrying cost of the property since February, 2017.

**Alternatives**

City Council may elect to not move forward with acquisition of the Durham Belt Line property. This action is not recommended as doing so would be contrary to the aim of the Durham Belt Line Master Plan.

**Financial Impact**

Expenditures Related to the Acquisition

\$7,802,800.00	Purchase price
\$ 12,000.00	Estimated Closing Costs
\$7,814,800.00	Estimated Total Expenditures

Funds are available in the Durham Belt Line Trail account for acquisition of land (3612LG01-730100-LC400).

**SDBE Summary**

This item does not require review by the Equal Opportunity/Equity Assurance Department.

**Attachments**

- Map of Rail Corridor
- Property Survey