

**DAVIDSON COUNTY
VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT ORDINANCE**

**ARTICLE I
TITLE**

An ordinance of the Board of County Commissioners of DAVIDSON COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, entitled, "**VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT ORDINANCE.**"

**ARTICLE II
AUTHORITY**

The articles and sections of this ordinance are adopted pursuant to authority conferred by the N.C.G.S. Sections 106-735 through 106-744 and Chapter 153A.

**ARTICLE III
PURPOSE**

The purpose of this ordinance is to promote agricultural values and the general welfare of the county and more specifically, increase identity and pride in the agricultural community and its way of life; encourage the economic and financial health of agriculture; and increase protection from non-farm development and other negative impacts on properly managed farms.

**ARTICLE IV
DEFINITIONS**

The following are defined for purposes of this ordinance:

<u>Advisory Board:</u>	Davidson County Agricultural Advisory Board.
<u>Chairperson:</u>	Chairperson of the Davidson County Agricultural Advisory Board.
<u>Board of Commissioners:</u>	Davidson County Board of Commissioners.
<u>Agricultural District:</u>	Voluntary Agricultural District as established by this ordinance. Refers to Davidson County.
<u>Regions:</u>	The Davidson County voluntary agricultural district is divided into five regions for purposes of board representation and administration.
<u>Agriculture:</u>	Defined as farming, forestry and horticulture.

**ARTICLE V
AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD**

A. Creation

The Board of Commissioners shall establish an Agricultural Advisory Board to implement the provisions of this program.

B. Membership

The Advisory Board shall consist of at least 10 members appointed by the Board of Commissioners.

C. Membership Requirements

1. Each Advisory Board member shall be a Davidson County resident and landowner.
2. The Advisory Board shall be comprised of five members (one representing each region), and at least two at-large members. In addition, three ex officio non-voting members, one each from the Cooperative Extension, the Soil and Water Conservation District/Natural Resource Conservation Service and Planning Department shall serve on the board.
3. The five regional Advisory Board members shall be engaged in agriculture (i.e. farming, forestry, or horticulture) with land in present-use-value taxation program.
4. Members at large are not restricted to but may include representatives from the County Planning Board, Farm Bureau, Farm Service Agency Advisory Board, Economic Development, etc.
5. The members actively engaged in agriculture, as well as other members, shall be selected for appointment by the Board of Commissioners to include the names of individuals submitted to the Board of Commissioners by the Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors/Soil and Water Conservation District, the County Office of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, the U.S. Farm Service Agency County Committee, nonprofit agricultural organizations, conservation organizations, agribusiness, and the public at large.

D. Tenure

The initial board is to consist of two appointees for terms of one year; two appointees for terms of two years; and three appointees for terms of three years. Thereafter, all appointments are to be for terms of three years, with reappointment permitted. The three Cooperative Extension Service, Natural Resource and Conservation Service and Planning Department ex officio appointments serve on an on-going basis.

E. Vacancies

Any vacancy on the Advisory Board is to be filled by the Board of Commissioners for the remainder of the unexpired term.

F. Removal

Any member of the Advisory Board may be removed by the Board of Commissioners upon a two-thirds vote of the Commissioners. No cause for removal shall be required.

G. Funding

The *per diem* compensation or travel reimbursement, if any, for the members of the Advisory Board may be fixed by the Board of Commissioners and funds may be appropriated to the Advisory Board to perform its duties.

H. Advisory Board Procedure

1. Chairperson

The Advisory Board shall elect a chairperson and vice-chairperson each year at its first meeting of the fiscal year. The chairperson shall preside over all regular or special meetings of the Advisory Board. In the absence or disability of the chairperson, the vice-chairperson shall preside and shall exercise all the powers of the chairperson. Additional officers may be elected as needed.

2. Jurisdiction

The Advisory Board may adopt rules of procedure not inconsistent with this ordinance or with other provisions of State law.

3. Advisory Board Year

The Advisory Board shall use the Davidson County fiscal year as its meeting year.

4. Meetings

Meetings of the Advisory Board shall be held every other month at the call of the chairperson and at such other times as the Advisory Board may specify in its rules of procedure or upon the request of at least a majority of the Advisory Board membership. Meeting dates and times shall be posted as far in advance as possible on the Davidson County government website and by notice in local newspapers. All meetings shall be open to the public. Meetings may be cancelled if there is no business to conduct.

5. Majority Vote

All issues shall be decided by a majority vote of the members of the Advisory Board present, except as otherwise stated herein. A quorum is required to vote on issues.

6. Records

The Advisory Board shall keep minutes of the proceedings showing the vote of each member upon each question, or if absent or failing to vote, indicating such fact, and shall keep records of its examinations and other official actions, all of which shall be filed in the office of the Advisory Board and shall be a public record.

7. Administrative

The Advisory Board may contract with the Soil and Water Conservation District office to serve the Board for record keeping, correspondence, application procedures under this ordinance, and whatever services the Board needs to complete its duties.

8. The current version of Robert's Rules of Order shall govern operating procedures.

I. Duties

The Advisory Board shall:

1. Review and approve applications for qualified farmland to enroll in the voluntary agricultural district and make recommendations concerning the establishment and modification of the agricultural district;
2. Conduct public hearings;
3. Advise the Board of Commissioners on projects, programs, or issues affecting the agricultural economy or activities within the county that will affect the agricultural district;
4. Review and make recommendations concerning proposed amendments to this ordinance;
5. Shall develop a draft county-wide farmland protection plan as defined in N.C.G.S. §106-744 (e) (1) for presentation to the Board of Commissioners;
6. Study additional methods of farmland preservation and make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners;
7. Serve as liaison to municipal agricultural district program representatives; and
8. Perform other agriculture related tasks or duties assigned by the Board of Commissioners.

**ARTICLE VI
CREATION OF VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT**

A. Regions

Davidson County is hereby divided into 5 regions as defined below:

1. Townships of Arcadia, Hampton, Midway, Abbotts Creek
2. Townships of Boone, Reedy Creek, Tyro, and Yadkin College
3. Townships of Lexington and Thomasville
4. Townships of Conrad Hill, Cotton Grove, and Silver Hill
5. Townships of Alleghany, Emmons, Healing Springs, and Jackson Hill

B. Implementation

In order to implement the purposes stated in Article III, this program provides for the creation of the county-wide voluntary agricultural district which meets the following standards:

The District shall contain two or more qualifying farms, or a minimum of fifty contiguous acres of qualified farmland to initiate a voluntary agricultural district .

All land enrolled in a region, defined in section A, above, shall be part of a single region. If a single farm has acreage in two or more regions, the farm shall participate in the region where the largest acreage is found.

C. Education

The county may take such action as it deems appropriate through the Advisory Board or other entities or individuals to encourage the formation of the District and to further their purposes and objectives, including the implementation of a public information program to inform landowners of the agricultural district program.

D. Addition and Withdrawal

1. Qualifying farmland in a region within an existing district shall be added to the district as herein provided.
2. In the event that one or more participants in the District withdraw and the acreage in the District becomes less than the minimum acreage required or results in the remaining land being noncontiguous, a voluntary agricultural district will continue to exist so long as there is one qualifying farm.

**ARTICLE VII
CERTIFICATION AND QUALIFICATION OF FARMLAND**

Requirements

In order for farmland to qualify for inclusion in a voluntary agricultural district it must be real property that:

1. Is participating in the farm present-use-value taxation program established by N.C.G.S. §105-277.2 through §105-277.7, or is otherwise determined by the county to meet all the qualifications of this program set forth in G.S. 105-277.3 ;
2. Is managed in accordance with the Natural Resources Soil Conservation Service defined erosion control practices that are addressed to highly erodible land; and
3. Is the subject of a conservation agreement, as defined in N.C.G.S. §121-35, between the county and the owner of such land that prohibits non-farm use or development of such land for a period of at least ten years, except for the creation of not more than three lots that meet applicable county zoning and subdivision regulations.

**ARTICLE VIII
APPLICATION, APPROVAL, AND APPEAL PROCEDURE**

A. Application Procedure

1. A landowner may apply to participate in the program by making application to the chairperson of the Advisory Board or a designated staff person. The application shall be on forms provided by the Advisory Board. The application to participate in a district may be filed with the certification for qualifying farmland.
2. A conservation agreement to sustain, encourage, and promote agriculture must be executed by the landowner and recorded with the Advisory Board. Permitted uses include agriculture, horticulture, forestry, outdoor recreation, aquaculture, agri-tourism, packaging and processing of agricultural products.

B. Approval Process

1. Upon receipt of the application to the Advisory Board, the Advisory Board shall meet within sixty days to approve or disapprove the application. The chairperson shall notify the applicant by first class mail of approval or disapproval of participation in the district.
2. Upon receipt of an application, the chairperson will forward copies immediately to the following offices, which shall be asked to provide comments, if any, to the Advisory Board prior to the date set for the Advisory Board vote on the application:
 - a. The Davidson County tax administrator;
 - b. The Davidson County Soil and Water Conservation District office; and
 - c. The Natural Resources Conservation Service.
 - d. The North Carolina Division of Forestry Resources
 - e. The County Planning Department will then review the applications and the process to assure that the actions are reasonable and consistent with the county land development plan.
3. When approved, the application with parcel information, will be presented to the planning and GIS departments so the information can be posted on the web-based GIS program. The voluntary agricultural district information and overlay can then be used by departments (primarily tax, register of deeds and the planning departments).

C. Appeal

If an application is denied by the Advisory Board, the petitioner shall have thirty (30) days to appeal the decision to the Board of Commissioners. Such appeal shall be presented in writing. The decision of the Board of Commissioners is final.

**ARTICLE IX
REVOCATION AND RENEWAL OF CONSERVATION AGREEMENT**

A. Revocation

By providing 30 days advance written notice to the Advisory Board, a landowner of qualifying farmland may revoke the Conservation Agreement or the Advisory Board may revoke the same Conservation Agreement based on noncompliance by the landowner, subject to the same provisions as contained in Article VIII for appeal of denials. Such revocation shall result in loss of qualifying farm status and loss of eligibility to participate in a district. Absent noncompliance by the landowner, neither the Advisory Board nor the Board of Commissioners shall revoke any conservation agreements prior to its expiration.

B. Renewal

Conservation Agreements shall be deemed automatically renewed for an additional term of 10 years, unless either the Advisory Board or the landowner gives written notice to the contrary no later than 30 days prior to the termination date.

**ARTICLE X
PUBLIC HEARINGS**

A. Purpose

Pursuant to N.C.G.S. §106-740, which provides that no state or local public agency or governmental unit may formally initiate any action to condemn any interest in qualifying farmland within a District until such agency or unit has requested the Advisory Board to hold a public hearing on the proposed condemnation, this ordinance provides for such hearing.

B. Procedure

1. Upon receiving a request, the Advisory Board shall publish notice describing the proposed action in the appropriate newspapers of Davidson County within five (5) business days of the request, and will in the same notice notify the public of a public hearing on the proposed condemnation, to be held within ten (10) days of receipt of the request.
2. The Advisory Board shall meet to review:
 - a. Whether the need for the project has been satisfactorily established by the agency or unit of government involved, including a review of any fiscal impact analysis conducted by the agency involved; and
 - b. Whether there are alternatives to the proposed action that have less impact and are less disruptive to the agricultural activities of the District within which the proposed action is to take place.
3. The Advisory Board shall consult with the County Agricultural Extension Agent, the Natural Resources Conservation Service District Conservationist, and any other individuals, agencies, or organizations deemed by the Advisory Board to be necessary for its review of the proposed action.
4. Within five (5) days after the hearing, the Advisory Board shall make a report containing its findings and recommendations regarding the proposed action. The report shall be made available to the public prior to its being conveyed to the decision-making body of the agency proposing the acquisition.
5. There will be a period of ten (10) days allowed for public comment on the report of the Advisory Board.
6. After the ten (10) day period for public comment has expired, the Advisory Board shall submit a final report containing all of its findings and recommendations regarding the proposed action to the decision making body of the agency proposing the acquisition.
7. The total time period, from the day that a request for a hearing has been received to the day that a final report is issued to the decision making body of the agency proposing the acquisition, shall not exceed thirty (30) days. If the agency agrees to an extension, the agency and the Advisory Board shall mutually agree upon a schedule to be set forth in writing and made available to the public.
8. Pursuant to N.C.G.S. §106-740, the Board of Commissioners shall not permit any formal initiation of condemnation by local agencies while the proposed condemnation is properly before the Advisory Board.

**ARTICLE XI
NOTIFICATION**

Record Notice of Proximity to Voluntary Agricultural District

1. Procedure

The following efforts will be made to alert a person inquiring about purchasing real property (real estate), or inquiring about Voluntary Agricultural Districts, of farmlands within the Voluntary Agricultural District throughout the County.

Specific efforts will include:

A. Signs identifying approved farms within the agricultural district shall be placed along the rights-of-way of major roads that pass through or next to the farms enrolled in the agricultural district. There shall be at least one sign posted for every farm, or as deemed appropriate by the Advisory Board, or its administrative agent for the county's agricultural district program. Placement of signage shall be coordinated with the N.C. Department of Transportation and local utility departments.

B. Maps identifying approved agricultural districts shall be provided by the planning department to the following agencies or offices and placed on web sites within the respective agencies, depending upon respective technology being used:

1. Lexington, Thomasville, Denton and Davidson County Planning Departments;
2. Wallburg and Midway incorporated public buildings;
3. Register of Deeds;
4. Natural Resources Conservation Service, Soil and Water Conservation District;
5. North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service and;
6. Any other such agency or office the Advisory Board deems appropriate.

C. The following notice, of a size and form suitable for posting, shall be posted in the office of the Register of Deeds, and any other office or agency the Advisory Board deems necessary:

Davidson County has established an agricultural district to protect and preserve agricultural lands and activities. The district has been developed and mapped by the county to inform all purchasers of real property that certain agricultural and forestry activities, including but not limited to pesticide spraying, manure spreading, machinery and truck operation, livestock operations, sawing, controlled burning and other common farming activities, may occur in the district any time during the day or night. Maps and information on the location and establishment of the district can be viewed at the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service office, Natural Resources Conservation, Soil and Water Conservation District, Geographic Information System Department, the office of the Register of Deeds, and the County Planning Department.

D. The County Planning Department shall maintain maps of approved district within the Davidson County Geographic Information Mapping System Database. This mapping information may be viewed by accessing the Davidson County website at www.co.davidson.nc.us or at the County Planning Department.

E. The Davidson County Tax Department shall add a special notice to the Tax Inquiry Land Records System so that anyone doing title searches and record searches for outstanding tax bills will be advised to contact the County Planning Department concerning location of area Voluntary Agricultural District prior to change of parcel ownership.

F. Notice of these methods of District notification and identification shall be included in all Davidson County Voluntary Agricultural District Program information brochures, which are made available to the public by the Cooperative Extension Service, County Planning Department, Natural Resources Conservation, Soil and Water Conservation District, Geographic Information System Department, the County Tax Department, and Register of Deeds Departments .

2. Limit of Liability

In no event shall the County or any of its officers, employees, members of the Advisory Board, or agents be held liable in damages for any misfeasance, malfeasance, or nonfeasance occurring in good faith in connection with the duties or obligations imposed by this ordinance.

3. No Cause of Action

In no event shall any cause of action arise out of the failure of a person researching the title of a particular tract to report to any person the proximity of the tract to a qualifying farm or voluntary agricultural district as defined in this ordinance.

**ARTICLE XII
SUBDIVISION ORDINANCE AND ZONING ORDINANCE REVIEW**

Developers of major subdivisions, or planned unit developments, shall designate on preliminary development plans the existence of the land enrolled in the district within one-half aerial mile of the proposed development.

**ARTICLE XIII
ABEYANCES RELATED TO WATER AND SEWER ASSESSMENTS**

A. No Connection Required

A landowner belonging to the District shall not be required to connect to any utility company serving Davidson County with water and/or sewer systems.

B. Abeyance

Water and sewer assessments shall be held in abeyance, without interest, for farms in an agricultural district, until improvements on such property are connected to the water or sewer system for which the assessment was made.

C. Termination of Abeyance

When the period of abeyance ends, the assessment is payable in accordance with the terms set out in the assessment resolution.

D. Suspension of Statute of Limitations

Statutes of limitations are suspended during the time that any assessment is held in abeyance without interest.

E. Other Statutory Abeyance Procedures

Nothing in this section is intended to diminish the authority of the County to hold assessments in abeyance under N.C.G.S. §153A-201, or other applicable law.

F. Conflict with Water and/or Sewer System Construction and Improvements Grants

To the extent that this section conflicts with the terms of federal, state, or other grants under which county water and/or sewer systems are constructed this section shall not apply.

**ARTICLE XIV
COUNTY LAND-USE PLANNING**

A. Duty of the Advisory Board

It shall be the duty of the Advisory Board to advise the Board of Commissioners, or the agency or office to which the Board of Commissioners delegate authority to oversee county land use planning, on the status, progress, and activities of the county's agricultural district program and to also coordinate the formation and maintenance of the agricultural district with the county's land use planning activities and the county's land use plan.

B. Growth Corridors

The agricultural district will not be permitted in the designated growth corridors, as delineated on the official county planning map, without the approval of the Board of Commissioners. If growth corridors change over time, the land enrolled in the agricultural district that is located within the proposed new growth corridor boundaries, may remain, but shall not be expanded within the growth corridor area without the approval of the Board of Commissioners.

**ARTICLE XV
CONSULTATION AUTHORITY**

The Advisory Board may consult with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service office, the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and with any other individual, agency, or organization the Advisory Board deems necessary to properly conduct its business.

**ARTICLE XVI
NORTH CAROLINA AGENCY NOTIFICATION**

Annual Report to the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

A copy of this ordinance shall be sent to the Office of the North Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Board of Commissioners, the County Office of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, and the Soil and Water Conservation District office after adoption. Annually the county voluntary agricultural board shall submit a written report to the Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services and county commissioners, on the county's agricultural district program, including the following information:

1. Number of landowners enrolled;
2. Number of acres enrolled;
3. Number of acres certified during the reporting period;
4. Number of acres denied during the reporting period;
5. Number of acres for which applications are pending;
6. Copies of any amendments to the ordinance; and
7. Any other information the Advisory Board deems useful.

**ARTICLE XVII
LEGAL PROVISIONS**

A. Severability

If any article, section, subsection, clause, phrase, or portion of this ordinance is for any reason found invalid or unconstitutional by any court of competent jurisdiction, such decision shall not affect the validity of the remaining portions of this ordinance.

B. Conflict with other Ordinances and Statutes

Where there is a conflict between the provisions of this ordinance and the provisions of any other ordinance of Davidson County, the provisions of any other ordinance of Davidson County shall govern. Whenever the provisions of any federal or state statute require more restrictive provisions than are required by this ordinance, the provisions of such statute shall govern.

C. Amendments

This ordinance may be amended from time to time by the Board of Commissioners.

**ARTICLE XVIII
ENACTMENT**

The Davidson County Board of Commissioners hereby adopts and enacts the preceding articles and sections of this ordinance.

Adopted this the ____ day of _____, 2006.

Motion for adoption by _____ and seconded by _____.

DAVIDSON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Chairperson

ATTEST:

Clerk to Board of Commissioners

Approved as to form:

County Attorney