

**HERTFORD COUNTY
VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT
ORDINANCE**

**ARTICLE I
TITLE**

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

**ARTICLE II
AUTHORITY**

The articles and sections of this program are adopted pursuant to authority conferred by the N.C.G.S. Sections 106-735 through 106-743 and Chapter 153A.

**ARTICLE III
PURPOSE**

The purpose of this ordinance is to promote agricultural values and 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:

Agriculture:

- (1) The cultivation of soil for production and harvesting of crops, including but not limited to fruits, vegetables, sod, flowers and ornamental plants.
- (2) The planting and production of trees and timber.
- (3) Dairying and the raising, management, care, and training of livestock, including horses, bees, poultry, and other animals for individual and public use, consumption, and marketing.
- (4) Aquaculture as defined in [G.S. 106-758](#).
- (5) The operation, management, conservation, improvement, and maintenance of a farm and the structures and buildings on the farm, including building and structure repair, replacement, expansion, and construction incident to the farming operation.
- (6) When performed on the farm, "agriculture", "agricultural", and "farming" also include the marketing and selling of agricultural products, agritourism, the storage and use of materials for agricultural purposes, packing, treating, processing, sorting, storage, and other activities performed to add value to crops, livestock, and agricultural items produced on the farm, and similar activities incident to the operation of a farm.

Advisory Board: Hertford County Agricultural Advisory Board.

Chairman: Chairman of the Hertford County Agricultural Advisory Board.

District: Voluntary Agricultural District as established by this ordinance.

Board of Commissioners: Hertford County Board of Commissioners.

ARTICLE V AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD

A. Creation

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

B. Membership

The Advisory Board shall consist of NINE (9) members appointed by the Board of Commissioners.

C. Geographical Representation

For the purpose of this Ordinance, the County is divided into six (6) regions that are coextensive with the six (6) townships in Hertford County. One member of the Advisory Board shall be appointed from each region and shall represent his or her respective region. The remaining three (3) appointees shall be at-large members of the Advisory Board.

D. Membership Requirements

- i. Each Advisory Board member shall be a Hertford County resident with at least one member representing each of the six (6) county townships.
- ii. At least 6 of the 9 members shall be actively engaged in farming.
- iv. The members actively engaged in farming shall be selected for appointment by the Board of Commissioners from the names of individuals submitted to the Board of Commissioners by the Soil and Water Conservation District, the Hertford County Extension Service, and the Hertford County Farm Bureau with an effort to have the broadest geographical representation possible.

E. Tenure

The initial board is to consist of three (3) appointees for terms of one year; three (3) appointees for terms of two years; and three (3) appointees for terms of three years. Thereafter, all appointments are to be for terms of three years, with reappointments permitted.

F. Vacancies

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

G. Removal

Any member of the Advisory Board may be removed by the Board of Commissioners for the remainder of the unexpired term..

H. Funding

At the discretion of the Board of Commissioners, per diem compensation may be fixed and paid to members of the Advisory Board, and funds may be appropriated to the Advisory Board to perform its duties.

I. Advisory Board Procedure

1. Chairman

The Advisory Board shall elect a chairman and vice-chairman each year at its first meeting of the fiscal year. The chairman shall preside over all regular or special meetings of the Advisory Board. In the absence or disability of the chairman, the vice-chairman shall preside and shall exercise all the powers of the chairman. 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 Hertford County fiscal year as its meeting year.

4. Meetings

Meetings of the Advisory Board shall be held at the call of the chairman 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. A meeting shall be held at least annually and notice of any meetings to the members shall be in writing, unless otherwise agreed to by all Advisory Board members. Meeting dates and times shall be posted as far in advance as possible on the door of the meeting site and by advertisement in a local newspaper or by other means of public dissemination of meeting dates as shall be agreed upon by at least a majority of the Advisory Board membership. All meetings shall be open to the public.

5. Majority Vote and Quorum Requirements

All issues shall be decided by a majority vote of the members of the Advisory board present, except an otherwise stated herein. A quorum is defined as the attendance of at least two-thirds of the Advisory Board membership. No business may be conducted by the Advisory Board without a quorum present.

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.

J. Duties

The Advisory Board shall:

1. Review and approve applications for qualified farmland and voluntary agricultural districts and make recommendations concerning the establishment and modification of agricultural districts;
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 agricultural districts;
4. Review and make recommendations concerning proposed amendments to this ordinance;
5. Study additional methods of farmland preservation and make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners; and,
6. Perform other agricultural related tasks or duties assigned by the Board of Commissioners.

K. Administration

The Advisory board may contract with the Hertford County office of the Cooperative Extension Service to serve the Board for record keeping, correspondence, application procedures and other services as are required by the Advisory Board to complete its duties.

**ARTICLE VI
CREATION OF VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS**

In order to implement the purposes stated in Article III, there are hereby created a Voluntary Agricultural Districts that consist of the Regions of Hertford County created in Article V(C).

A. Enrollment

1. Initial Enrollment - For enrollment into the Voluntary Agricultural District Program, The owner or owners of a tract or tracts containing at least 20 acres of qualified farmland must apply for enrollment. If any of the tracts included in an initial enrollment application contain less than 20 acres of qualifying farmland, such tracts must be within five(5) aerial miles of an enrolling tract that contains twenty(20) acres or more. If an initial enrollment crosses a regional boundary, then representation on the Agricultural Advisory Board will be based upon the Region where the majority of the initial enrollment is located.
2. Addition to an Existing Enrolled Area – A tract of qualifying farmland of any size may be added to existing enrolled areas if such tract is no more than five (5) aerial miles from said existing enrolled area.
3. If land is enrolled in a Voluntary Agricultural District based on its proximity to an initial enrollment that is in a different Region, representation of such land on the Agricultural Advisory board will be based upon the Region where the initial enrollment is located or, if the initial enrollment crosses a regional boundary, on the Region where the majority of the initial enrollment is located.

4. If an enrolled area that consists of multiple tracts falls below 20 acres because one or more participating tracts is removed from the Program, the remaining tracts will continue to be enrolled as long as there remains any tract of qualifying farmland in the enrolled area.

B. Encourage Formation

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 Districts and to further their purposes and objectives, including the implementation of a public information program to reasonably inform landowners of the farmland preservation program.

C. Display

The Districts shall be marked on county maps displayed for public view in the following county offices:

1. Register of Deeds
2. Planning Department
3. Tax Supervisor
4. Soil and Water Conservation District
5. County Extension Service
6. County Land Records
7. Any other office deemed necessary by the Advisory Board.

D. Withdrawal

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 non-contiguous, a voluntary agricultural district will continue to exist so long as there is one qualifying farm.

**ARTICLE VII
CERTIFICATION AND QUALIFICATION OF FARMLAND**

To secure county certification as qualifying farmland, a tract of land must:

- A. Be engaged in agriculture, as defined in Article IV above;
- B. Be managed, if highly erodible land exists on the farm, in accordance with the Natural Resources Conservation Service defined erosion-control practices that are addressed to said highly-erodible land;
- C. Be 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; and
- D. Be located in the unincorporated area of Hertford County, unless there is an agreement with a municipality through which the county is authorized to exercise the authority of the municipality on its behalf.

**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 chairman of the Advisory Board or a designated staff person. The application shall be on forms provided by the Advisory Board. There shall be an application fee equal to the cost of the total number of member signs requested per tract of qualifying farmland proposed to be enrolled. Said fee shall be used, as available, to cover costs for signage and mapping provided for in Article VII above.
2. A conservation agreement (required by N.C.G.S. §106-737 and defined in N.C.G.S. §121-35) to sustain, encourage, and promote agriculture must be executed by the landowner with the Advisory Board, which shall record a certified copy of such with the Hertford County Register of Deeds. Permitted uses include agriculture, horticulture, forestry, and outdoor recreation.

B. Approval Process

1. Upon submission of the application to the Advisory Board, the Advisory Board shall meet within 60 days to approve or disapprove the application. The chairman shall notify the applicant by first class mail of approval or disapproval of participation in the district.
2. Upon receipt of an application, the chairman 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 Hertford County tax assessor's office; and
 - b. The Hertford County Natural Resources Conservation Service (NCRS) office. The offices shall evaluate, complete and return their copies to the chairman within 30 days of receipt.

C. Appeal

If an application is denied by the Advisory Board, the petitioner has 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, ENFORCEMENT AND RENEWAL OF CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS**

A. Revocation and Enforcement

By providing written notice to the Advisory Board, a landowner of qualifying farmland within the District 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(C) 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 Agreement prior to its expiration. If the Advisory Board shall revoke this Conservation Agreement for cause, the landowner shall have the appeal rights set forth in Article VIII(C). Transfers of land in a District due to death of the landowner, sale or gift shall not revoke the Conservation Agreement unless, in the event that there are water or sewer assessments held in abeyance, the

new owner(s) fails to agree in writing to accept liability for those assessments in the event that the land is withdrawn either voluntarily or involuntarily from the District. Enforcement of the terms of a Conservation Agreement for land enrolled in a District shall be limited to revocation of the Conservation Agreement and the benefits derived therefrom. A notice of revocation shall be recorded in the county land record system sufficient to provide notice that the land has been withdrawn from the Voluntary Agricultural District program.

B. Renewal

A Conservation Agreement for land within a Voluntary Agricultural District shall be automatically renewed unless the landowner provides 30 day written notice to the Advisory Board of intent not to renew. Absent noncompliance by the landowner, neither the Advisory Board nor the Board of Commissioners shall fail to renew any Conservation Agreement unless this Ordinance or its authorizing legislation has been repealed.

**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 Hertford County within five 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 30 days of receipt of the request.
2. The Advisory Board shall meet to review:
 - a. if 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;
 - b. 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 may consult with the County Agricultural Extension Agent, U.S.D.A. NRCS Conservationist, the Hertford County Farm Bureau and may consult with 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 within these time limits.

**ARTICLE XI
NOTIFICATION**

A. Record Notice of Proximity to a Voluntary Agricultural District

1. Procedure

Upon certification of qualifying farmland and designation of real property as a District, the Hertford County Register of Deeds shall provide some form of notice reasonably calculated to alert a person researching the title of a particular tract that such tract is located within one-half mile of a District.

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 .

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 District as defined in this Ordinance.

B. Signage

Signs giving notice of the existence of the Voluntary Agricultural District shall be posted along the right-of-way of all major roads entering Hertford County at the county line. There shall also be signage posted at the farm gate of each enrolled qualifying farm. Placement of signage shall be coordinated with the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

C. Maps

Maps identifying enrolled farmland may be provided to the following agencies or offices:

1. Planning Department;
2. Register of Deeds;
3. Natural Resources Conservation Service;

4. Hertford County Cooperative Extension;
5. Soil and Water Conservation District; and
6. Any other such agency or office the Advisory Board deems appropriate.

**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 Districts within one-half mile of the proposed development.

**ARTICLE XIII
WAIVER OF WATER AND SEWER ASSESSMENTS**

A. No Assessment

A landowner belonging to the District shall not be assessed for or required to connect Hertford County water and/or sewer systems.

B. Abeyance

Water and sewer assessments will be held in abeyance, without interest, for farms, whether inside or outside of a 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.

**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 Voluntary Agricultural District program and to also coordinate the

formation and maintenance of the District with the county's land use planning activities and the county's land use plan if one currently exists at the time this is enacted or when one is formed.

B. Posting of Notice

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:

Hertford County has established a Voluntary Agricultural District to protect and preserve agricultural lands and activities. This District has been developed 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, and other common farming activities may occur in this District any time during the day or night. Maps of enrolled farmland and information on the establishment of this District can be obtained from the Hertford County Cooperative Extension Service office, the office of the Register of Deeds, the County Planning office, or the Natural Resources Conservation Service office.

C. Growth Corridors

At such time as the county might establish designated growth corridors, land shall not be enrolled in the District in the designated growth corridors, as delineated on the official county planning map without the approval of the Board of Commissioners. Enrolled farmland located in growth corridors designated after the effective date of this program may remain part of the District,

**ARTICLE XV
CONSULTATION AUTHORITY**

The Advisory Board may consult with Hertford County Cooperative Extension, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, 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

The Clerk to the Board of Commissioners shall send a copy of this Ordinance to the Office of the North Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the County Office of North Carolina Cooperative Extension, and the Soil and Water Conservation District office after adoption. At least annually the county shall submit a written report to the Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services on the county's Voluntary 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. Municipalities with which Memorandums of Understanding have been signed;
7. Municipalities that have adopted this Ordinance for the purpose of the county enforcing this Ordinance within their corporate boundaries;
8. Copies of any amendments to this Ordinance or Memorandums of Understanding signed with municipalities; and
9. 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

Whenever the provisions of this Ordinance conflict with other ordinances of Hertford County, this Ordinance 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 Hertford County Board of Commissioners hereby adopts and enacts the preceding articles and sections of this Ordinance.

Amended this the 21st day of September, 2015.

Motion for adoption by Freeman and seconded by Gatling.

HERTFORD COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Chairperson

ATTEST:

Clerk to Board of Commissioners

Approved as to form:

County Attorney

