

Open Space Bond: Passive Recreation Lands Application Guidelines

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I. Introduction: The Open Space Bond

In November 2022, Buncombe County voters approved a \$30 million General Obligation bond to fund projects that conserve open space, build greenways, and expand passive recreation opportunities. The goals at the heart of the Open Space Bond are to **preserve the natural beauty of Buncombe County**, **increase the quality of life for its residents**, and **improve access to passive recreational activities in the area**.

The **Passive Recreation Lands** component of the Bond will fund projects that provide publicly-accessible land, outdoor space, waterbodies, and corridors where passive recreational activities – such as hiking, birding, bicycling, and wildlife viewing - place minimal stress on a site’s resources in a designated area. These lands provide ecosystem services and are highly compatible with natural resource protection.

Projects are welcome to apply for funding from any of the three Project categories of the Open Space Bond. However, one Project will only be able to receive funding from one category.

II. Funding

The Open Space Bond will make available a portion of the \$30 million for eligible Passive Recreation Lands projects that score well against the evaluation criteria. The FY24 application window will make available the first funds for Passive Recreation Projects, and we anticipate additional application windows in the future. The County is not obligated to award any bond funding at the outset of any application window.

There is no cap on the amount of funding an individual project may receive, but efficient allocation of project costs will be considered in proposal evaluation.

III. Timeline

January 16, 2024	Application Launch
January – March, 2024	Pre-Application Support
February 21, 2024	Pre-Application Workshop
March 29, 2024	Application Deadline
April – June, 2024	Proposal Review
July 2024	Project Selection & Announcement

IV. Eligibility

To be eligible for Passive Recreation Lands funds, an applicant and project must meet the following criteria:

- a) **Applying Organization:** Applicants must be Buncombe County or a municipality in Buncombe County; any agency, commission, or instrumentality of the county or municipality within Buncombe County; a not-for-profit charitable organization; schools and universities, and any other entities as may be approved by the County Commission.
- b) **Projects:** The proposed project must be for acquisition, improvement (restoration, public access, recreation development), or a combination of these project types. The completed project must be accessible by the public in perpetuity.

- a. Acquisition Definition: The purchase of (fee simple) or acquisition of easement rights for land for public access to open space and outdoor recreational and educational amenities, such as greenways, outdoor gathering areas, trails, and access to rivers and other waterways.
- b. Improvements Definition: Improvement projects can include:
 - i. Implementation or construction of new site improvements for, and that facilitate, outdoor passive recreation and education including public access to open spaces and parks for outdoor recreational use. Physical improvements can include any part of building structure, erection, alteration, demolition, excavation, clearing, grading, filling, or landscaping that aligns with the spirit and definition of Passive Recreation Lands. Sample improvements include: trails, trailheads, picnic, and staging areas, natural playgrounds, and outdoor classrooms to promote health and wellbeing, as well as environmental education.
- c. Allowable Costs: Open Space Bond funds can be used for:
 - i. Acquisition of land and/or establishment of conservation easements/permanent deed restrictions on property.
 - ii. Examples of improvements that may be funded with Passive Recreation Lands Bond funds include: natural area restoration, boardwalks, foot bridges, trails, trailheads, roadways, parking areas, ranger stations, restrooms, picnic shelters, natural playgrounds, observation platforms, fishing docks, outdoor classrooms; may include amenities that place minimal impact to areas as approved through the application process.
 - iii. Equipment needed to support the development of a passive recreation project.
- d. Disallowable Costs: Items that will **NOT** be funded from Passive Recreation Lands Bond funds include, but are not limited to:
 - i. Planning, engineering, and design fees
 - ii. Capital improvements for indoor recreation (e.g., swimming pools, rec centers, gyms, etc.) or other active recreation (e.g., basketball courts, soccer fields, etc.)
 - iii. Long-term operating costs, including staffing.
 - iv. Administrative fees and insurance
 - v. Outstanding financial obligations

Eligibility Questions: Please attest to the project’s eligibility for Bond funds, including the following requirements. Text boxes are limited to 1,500 characters.

- a. Proposed use of Bond funds must be for either acquisition of/easements on land or improvements on the land.
 - i. What are the proposed improvements (if applicable)?
- b. Is the project located within Buncombe County?
- c. Does the project’s timeline allow for the allocation of funds within the Bond schedule (by 2030)?
- d. Does the project include a plan for long-term management and maintenance?
- e. Is the project/will the project be accessible to the public?

V. **Application Process**

Deadline: Applications are due by 5:00 PM on March 31, 2024. Organizations are encouraged to apply online through Buncombe County's grant software, which can be accessed at buncombecounty.org/apply or linked through the General Obligation Bonds page at www.buncombecounty.org/governing/bonds. Applicants can pick up and return paper applications at 200 College Street, Suite 300, Asheville, NC 28801. If returning the application by mail, the package must be postmarked by the application deadline.

Consultations: Staff is available to answer questions and to provide basic one-on-one support to applicants. Contact jill.carter@buncombecounty.org to request a consultation.

Workshop: An application writing workshop will be held on February 21, 2024, from 9:30 – 11:30 AM. This will be a virtual meeting. The purpose of this workshop is to provide in-depth information about the application process. A recording will be posted online after the session. The pre-application workshop is not mandatory for the application process. Those interested in attending the webinar should complete [this form](#) to register.

Committee Contact: Applicants are asked not to communicate with the Passive Recreation Lands Subcommittee members regarding their applications. If the Subcommittee decides to ask follow-up questions or hold meetings with finalists, County staff will notify applicants.

Application Requirements: The application consists of a questionnaire including the following items:

- a) Project Overview
- b) Funding Request & Match
- c) Project Summary
- d) Acquisition/Improvements Narrative & Supporting Documentation
- e) Alignment with Evaluation Criteria
- f) Applicant Experience
- g) Budget
- h) Additional Documentation

VI. **Review Process**

Scoring Committee: Project Applications will be reviewed and scored by an Open Space Bond scoring committee utilizing a standardized, points-based system. Scores will be conducted independently by members of the Scoring Committee, and average project scores will be shared with the Passive Recreation Lands Subcommittee.

The following criteria will be considered by the Scoring Committee:

- a. *Conservation and Environmental Impact (20%)* - Passive Recreation Lands should be compatible with conservation and natural resource protection goals. How well does the Project not only minimize the potential negative impacts of use and land improvements, but also actively contribute to habitat, landscape, and wildlife protection or restoration?

- b. *Feasibility (20%)* - Bond-funded projects must be able to be completed and open to the public in an efficient and timely manner. How feasible is the project's completion, and how does its scope, timeline, staffing, and physical and social qualities impact that feasibility?
- c. *Accessibility (15%)* - Bond-funded projects should be accessible to everyone in Buncombe County, regardless of physical ability, geographic location, or socioeconomic status. How accessible is the project to members of our community?
- d. *Equity (15%)* - Buncombe County considers equity as a foundational focus and value within our community. How does the project promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in passive recreation?
- e. *Long-Term Management and Maintenance (10%)* - Bond-funded projects should be safe and enjoyable for public use for years to come. What are the plans for the long-term management and maintenance of the project?
- f. *Costs and Leveraged Funding (10%)* - It is essential that Bond funds be allocated efficiently and, when possible, in conjunction with other funding sources. How does the project budget minimize costs and leverage bond funds?
- g. *Alignment with County Plans/Needs/Other Priorities (5%)* - The County aims to allocate Bond funds in a strategic manner, creating an intentional network of Open Space. How does the project align with existing County/municipal/regional plans, needs, or other priorities?
- h. *Safety (5%)* - Bond-funded projects should be safe for all to use. How does the Project plan support safety from accidents, crime, wildlife, and other concerns?

Projects will be scored against each criterion on a scale of 1 to 5 with a maximum score of 40. The corresponding weights for each criterion will then be applied. The Scoring Rubric is attached.

Subcommittee's Role: The Passive Recreation Lands Subcommittee will review all scored project applications. The top-scoring project applicants will be asked to give a presentation and site visit to the Subcommittee or selected members. The Subcommittee will recommend projects and funding amounts based on project scores as well as fit within the overall portfolio, taking factors into consideration such as geography, project focus areas and categories.

The Subcommittee meeting schedule, along with meeting materials and announcements are posted on <https://engage.buncombecounty.org/passiverecreationlands>. All meetings are open to the public.

Board of Commissioner's Role: The Bond Project Manager will present the recommended project list to the Board of Commissioners in a regular meeting. The Board of Commissioners will make the final decision on which projects should receive funding and specify the amount approved for each project.

VII. Awards

Funding recommendations prepared by the Passive Recreation Lands Subcommittee will be submitted for a vote to the Board of Commissioners. Funding awards will be finalized with

budget amendments upon contract finalization. Funds will be distributed on a reimbursement basis in the specified funding amount for the completion of given deliverables.

VIII. Project Implementation & Evaluation

All project awards will be administered via performance contracts. Contracts will include a scope of work that defines services, deliverables, and reporting measures, and a timetable that allows for the allocation of Bond funds by 2030. There is no required timeline or end date for the projects. Prior to contract development, projects must submit proof of insurance, financial audit documentation, and landowner notification (when applicable).

Projects will be subject to a regular reporting process. Contract performance will be monitored and evaluated by the County on an ongoing basis. In addition to on-site monitoring of the project, monitoring will include: examination of books, papers, accounts, documents, or other records of the applicant as they relate to the project. Applicants must maintain an accounting system for the project in accordance with generally accepted accounting procedures and standards. The project records and related financial records must be retained and accessible by County staff for no less than 5 years after the project is completed. Performance results will be published online in a funded projects dashboard.

The Community Oversight Committee will be responsible for monitoring the investment of Open Space Bond dollars. The Committee will review each awarded project to ensure it meets the financial and legal requirements of the Bond.

IX. Lead Department/Division

Staffing for this bond program is provided by Buncombe County's County Management Department. For more information, contact Open Space Bond Manager Jill Carter at jill.carter@buncombecounty.org.

Outline: Passive Recreation Lands Application

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II. Project Overview

- a. Project Title:
- b. Agency/Organization Requesting Funding
 - i. Organization Type
 - ii. Contact Information
 - 1. Project Manager
 - 2. Authorized Person
 - iii. Co-Applicant(s)
- c. Project Type (Acquisition/Improvements/Combination):
- d. Project Location
 - i. Address:
 - ii. Parcel Number:
 - iii. Acreage:
 - iv. Zoning Designation:

III. Funding Request & Match

Please complete the following tables, detailing the funding request and total project costs.

Total Project Cost	
Bond Funding Request	
Matching Funds	

Matching Funds

Source	Amount	Status

IV. Project Summary

Please provide a summary of the project including the following items. Text boxes are limited to 1,500 characters.

- 1. What is the purpose and objective of the project? What are the anticipated outcomes?
- 2. What are the proposed uses of the bond funding?
- 3. How does the project align with the Open Space Bond’s goals of preserving the natural beauty of Buncombe County, increasing the quality of life for its residents, and improving access to recreational activities in the area?
- 4. Who are the typical users of the project?

V. Eligibility

Please attest to the project’s eligibility for Bond funds, including the following requirements. Text boxes are limited to 1,500 characters.

- a. Proposed use of Bond funds must be for either acquisition of land or improvements on the land.
 - i. What are the proposed improvements (if applicable)?
- b. Is the project located within Buncombe County?
- c. Does the project’s timeline allow for the allocation of funds within the Bond schedule?
- d. Does the project include a plan for long-term management and maintenance?
- e. Is the project accessible to the public?
- f. Proof of non-profit or government status, if applicable.

VI. Acquisition Narrative & Supporting Documentation (If Applicable)

Please provide a narrative summary of how the project will use bond funds for the acquisition of land for future passive recreation development. Text boxes are limited to 1,500 characters.

Please attach the following supporting documentation:

- a. Scope of Work- must include description of ownership. If applicant is not the owner, please include explanation for achieving site control. (or whatever, it is called in Recreation?)
- b. Project Schedule
- c. Letters of Support
- d. Visual depiction of project with description of type and total area of impervious/hardscape surface, if relevant

VII. Improvements Narrative & Supporting Documentation (If Applicable)

Please provide a narrative summary of how the project will use bond funds for any improvements of land for passive recreation opportunities. Text boxes are limited to 1,500 characters. Please attach the following supporting documentation:

- a. Scope of Work
- b. Project Schedule
- c. Letters of Support
- d. Visual depiction of project and/or completion of restoration/construction plans with description of type and total area of impervious/hardscape surface, if relevant

VIII. Alignment with Evaluation Criteria (Questions for Each Criterion)

Please answer the following questions to demonstrate how the project aligns with the evaluation criteria of the Bond. Text boxes are limited to 1,500 characters.

- a. Conservation and Environmental Impact (20%)
 - i. Describe how the project contributes to any of the following:
 - 1. Restoring/Protecting wildlife habitat
 - a. Endangered or threatened species?
 - b. Protecting wildlife access
 - 2. Maintaining an ecosystem and biodiversity

3. Protection of natural resources and infrastructure (Forests, freshwater, wetlands, riparian zones, floodplains, watershed, tree canopy, etc.)?
 4. Increasing or maintaining opportunities for conservation education
 5. Defending against threat of loss of habitat or natural resources.
 6. Development of new passive recreation opportunities
 7. Removing nonnative invasive species and/or restoring native plants
 8. Improving water quality
 9. Managing water quantity (stormwater runoff)
- ii. Does the project acquire new land for public open space for recreation and/or natural resource restoration? Is it adjacent or nearby existing open space?
 - iii. Describe the improvement techniques to be used and their impact on the natural landscape.
 1. How will the project incorporate natural elements into design?
 2. How will the project limit the number of impervious surfaces and/or hardscape?
 - iv. How does the project contribute to educational opportunities related to conservation and wildlife?
 - v. How will you measure the success of conservation/environmental benefits?

b. Feasibility (20%)

- i. How will the applicant ensure that the project is completed?
- ii. What are the potential risks/impediments to completion? How will they be addressed? What other factors may affect the project's timeline?
- iii. Please describe the readiness of the project, including the current status and the timeline for completion and public use.
- iv. Who are the partners involved in the project and what are their roles?
- v. Please describe the historical uses of the land.
- vi. Please describe the physical aspects of the property (vegetation, soils, hydrology, wildlife, topography, historical uses).

c. Accessibility (15%)

- i. Please describe how the project is accessible by road/greenway/trail/waterways /public transportation?
- ii. How does the project address public access and use? Are there any anticipated limitations to public access?
 1. Will the property be available to Rent/Lease for private use (e.g., events)?
 2. Does the project make available restrooms, parking, drinking fountains, sitting areas?
- iii. Is the project in close proximity to a nearby community or neighborhood? If yes, please describe the community.
- iv. Explain how the project will follow ADA.

d. Equity (15%)

- i. How does the project promote diversity, equity, and inclusion?
 - ii. Does the project serve traditionally disadvantaged communities? How?
 - iii. Is the project close to existing or planned low-income or senior housing? If yes, which projects?
 - iv. What are the historical or cultural features of the land, and how does the project contribute to their protection/education?
 - v. Describe the public support/involvement in design/implementation of the project.
 - 1. Describe any community outreach done or planned.
 - vi. How does the project design and implementation plans consider and mitigate for potential negative impacts on community?
- e. Long-Term Management and Maintenance (10%)
 - i. What is planned for long-term maintenance and management of the project?
 - 1. Invasive species management
 - 2. Trash and litter management
 - 3. Maintenance techniques?
 - ii. Will there be staff dedicated to land management, maintenance, and deed enforcement? Please describe their experience, credentials, and expertise.
 - iii. Will there be staff dedicated to financial management of the land? Please describe their experience, credentials, and expertise.
 - iv. What financial resources are planned for the long-term management and maintenance of the land? Please describe the plan for securing this funding, if applicable.
 - 1. Describe how operations and maintenance costs have been identified and the activities needed.
 - v. Is the community involved in land management/maintenance of the project? If yes, please describe the plan for community involvement.
- f. Costs and Leveraged Funding (10%)
 - i. Describe the specific project components to be completed using bond funds. How were these costs estimated?
 - ii. Describe the specific project components to be completed using matching funds. How were these costs estimated?
 - iii. What efforts have been made to pursue funding from other sources?
 - iv. If awarded less than requested, what components of the project could still be completed? What are their costs?
- g. Alignment with County Plans/Needs/Other Priorities (5%)
 - i. How will this project fulfill community needs (recreation, tourism, economic benefit, public health, public services, other)?
 - ii. Does this project address any current county plans? Which goals are impacted?

1. Did you receive input from a municipal or County planning department or staff person?

h. Safety (5%)

- i. How will the project be managed to ensure safety from: accidents, crime, wildlife?
- ii. How will the project be maintained and protected from deterioration and vandalism?
- iii. How does the project mitigate against potential conflict between different user groups?
- iv. When applicable, please describe any clear signage and navigation tools available.

IX. Applicant Experience

Please provide a summary of the applicant's experience including the following items. Text boxes are limited to 1,500 characters.

- a. Organization Summary
 - i. Time in existence
 - ii. Staff
 - iii. Fiscal capacity
- b. Relevant Past Experience
 - i. Project descriptions
 - ii. Size/location/method of conservation
- c. Qualifications of all involved organizations

Please attach the following documentation:

- d. Proof of nonprofit status (where applicable)
- e. Resumes of key staff

X. Budget

Please provide a narrative explaining the project's budget. Text boxes are limited to 1,500 characters. Please also attach the Project budget to the supporting documentation.

XI. Additional Documentation

Please ensure the following documents are attached:

- a. Proof of nonprofit status (When applicable)
- b. Resumes of key project staff
- c. Certified authorizing resolution from nonprofit corporate board
- d. Maps (location, site, parcel)
- e. Photographs
- f. Long-term Maintenance and Management Plan
- g. Scope of Work
- h. Project Schedule

- i. Letters of Support
- j. Visual depiction of project and/or completion of restoration/construction plans with description of type and total area of impervious/hardscape surface, if relevant.