



Launching a Successful Greenbelt Program

Lessons Learned from Dorchester County's Journey

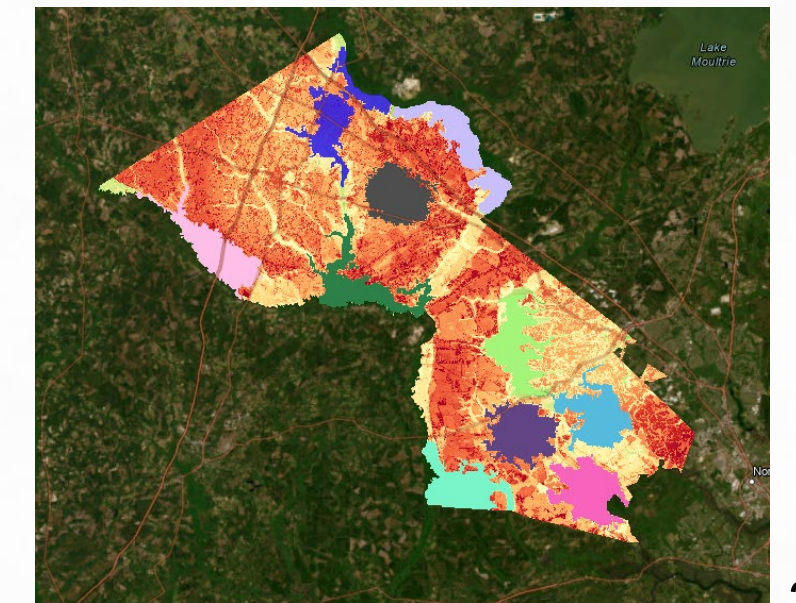
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Greenbelt Program Overview

Dorchester County’s Greenbelt Program is funded by a \$35 million allocation from the 2022 Transportation Sales Tax. Guided by the Greenbelt Master Plan adopted in May of 2024, the program provides a strategic framework for protecting the County’s most important natural, agricultural, and cultural resources. Through collaboration with landowners and conservation partnerships, the Greenbelt Program has quickly grown into an active conservation effort, conserving more than 2,300 acres through 5 projects in its first years.



Start with Community

Before establishing program goals, find out what your community values.

Conduct Extensive Public Outreach:

- Public Workshops
- Online Surveys
- Stakeholder Interviews (landowners, farmers, local business owners, etc.)
- Public Meetings and Open Forums

Incorporate feedback into your Master Plan and program framework.

Lesson #1

Build the Program Around Community Values

Key Takeaway

Conservation Succeeds When Residents See Their Priorities Reflected in the Program.



Public Feedback Shaped Priorities

- Flood Attenuation
- Water Quality
- Wildlife Habitat
- Sustainable Growth/Development
- Historic/Cultural Landscapes
- Farmland
- Outdoor Recreation

Build Leadership Support Early

A successful program is more than just funding and acquisitions; it's about having leaders who believe in the program.

Build Trust Early to Help:

- Create Political Support for Funding
- Build Public Support and Transparency
- Create Strong Program Advocates
- Support Long-Term Program Sustainability

Lesson #2

Generate Champions for your Program

Key Takeaway

Don't Wait Until Projects Arrive to Engage with Leadership.



Our Program Champions

- Dorchester County Council
- Conservation and Greenbelt Advisory Commission
- Planning and Zoning Dept.
- Parks and Recreation Dept.

Invest In Education

People support what they understand.

All staff, leaders, and decision-makers should have a base-level understanding of:

- Conservation Easements vs. Fee Simple Purchases
- Ecosystem Services
- Greenbelt Funding Process
- Appraisal and Due Diligence Process
- Land Management Practices
- Public Access
- Common Misconceptions Surrounding Conservation

Lesson #3

Education Leads to Better Decision Making

Key Takeaway

Many People, Even Professionals and Leaders, are Unfamiliar with the Specifics of Land Conservation.



Land Conservation Workshop

- SC Conservation Bank Funding
- Role of Land Trust
- Ecosystem Services and Benefits
- Conservation Easement Benefits

Partners Multiply Success

Lean on Partners for:

- Advice
- Tools, Technical Knowledge, and Program Support
- Opportunities for Match Funding and Project Collaboration

***Strong Partnerships = More Expertise + More Funding +
Greater Capacity + Bigger Conservation Wins!***

Lesson #4

You Don't Have to Do it Alone

Key Takeway

Sharing Knowledge and Experience Leads to Better
Conservation for Everyone



SOUTH CAROLINA
**Land Trust
Network**

SOUTH CAROLINA
**CONSERVATION
BANK**



**OPEN SPACE
INSTITUTE**



Audubon



LOWCOUNTRY
LAND TRUST

Our Partners:

- Lowcountry Land Trust
- Open Space Institute
- Audubon SC
- SC Land Trust Network
- SC Conservation Bank
- Charleston County
- Berkeley County
- The Nature Conservancy
- Clemson Extension

Build the Right Foundation

Good Management Helps Build Public Trust.

Invest in:

- Master Plan
- Monitoring Protocols
- Application Process
- Evaluation Criteria
- Financial Tracking
- GIS Mapping
- Policies
- Project Database
- Stewardship Planning

Lesson #5

Create Systems Before You Need Them

Key Takeaway

Successful Programs Aren't Built Through Acquisitions Alone, But Through Good Program Infrastructure.



Building a Master Plan:

- Consult Industry Experts
- Review Existing Plans and Policies
- Take Inventory of Existing Protected Areas
- Identify Priority Areas
- Clear Program Framework

Stay Flexible

No two conservation projects are the same. Successful programs can maintain clear goals and priorities while remaining adaptable enough to respond to new and unique opportunities and challenges.

Remember:

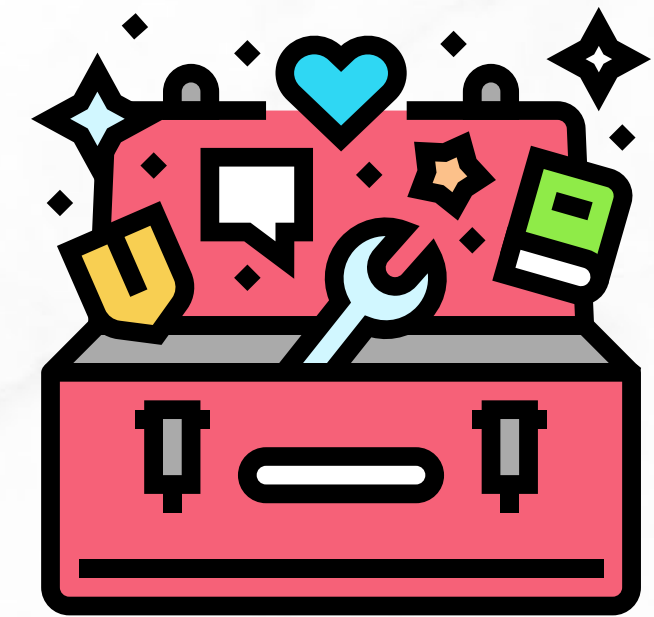
- *Conservation Opportunities are Unpredictable*
- *Every Project has Different Circumstances*
- *Rigid Programs Can Miss Valuable Opportunities*

Lesson #6

Build Flexibility into the Program

Key Takeaway

Not Every Project Will Follow the Same Path. Be Ready to Adapt and Evolve.



The Conservation Toolbox

- Property Acquisition and Management Strategies
- Partnership Network
- Cross-Departmental Staff Commission
- Monitoring/Stewardship Tools
- Additional Funding Sources Database

6 Key Lessons:



1

Community First

Ensure community values are reflected in the program.

2

Leadership Support

Garner support of leadership.

3

Invest in Education

Education leads to better decision -making.

4

Build Partnerships

Conservation is a team sport.

5

Strong Foundation

Start with strong program systems in place.

6

Stay Flexible

Be ready to adapt to new challenges.

Thank You!

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