



City of Virginia Beach

Open Space Advisory Committee

Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Annual Report to City Council

Appointed Agency Chair: Clay Bernick

Date: August 24, 2026

Executive Summary

On behalf of the Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) member volunteers and staff liaisons, I am pleased to present the FY 2025-2026 Annual Report to City Council. This report covers activities of the OSAC from July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026.

The Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) currently has 13 members. Membership includes one who also serves on the Clean Community Commission, one who also serves on the Parks and Recreation Commission, and two nonvoting student members. In the past fiscal year, the OSAC met six times. Other members also attend the Active Transportation Advisory Committee, the Green Ribbon Committee, the Parks and Recreation Foundation, and LRNow as informal liaisons and regularly report business updates from these committees and organizations. OSAC currently has one ongoing informal workgroup comprised of Committee members to bring recommendations to the full Committee for consideration. The workgroup addresses a wide range of matters including funding, grants, identification of potential open space properties, and other priorities identified by the Committee that may warrant focused research and analysis prior to discussion by the full Committee.

The Committee has actively participated in coordinating with other City departments and appointed agencies, Federal and State agencies, and numerous non-profit organizations to further its mission and looks forward to ongoing participation and collaboration on initiatives for future enhancement of the City's open space resources for its residents and visitors.

Our most significant accomplishments are detailed below, along with recommendations for your consideration.

Mission Statement

The purpose of the Open Space Advisory Committee shall be to serve in an advisory capacity to the City Council with respect to open space. Specifically, in furtherance of said purpose, it shall be the responsibility of the Committee:

- a. To provide recommendations regarding properties for acquisition, with such recommendations including priorities, schedule, and sequence
- b. To continue to include citizen involvement in all phases (acquisition and development) of the open space program
- c. To assist in the monitoring of funding sources, including Capital Funds, as well as grants
- d. To assist in the recommendation of joint partnerships, joint development, and joint management options
- e. To monitor and recommend revision, as needed, of the Virginia Beach Outdoors Plan
- f. To assist in the monitoring, overseeing, and guidance of the acquisition process, including the exercise of due diligence, analysis, and development alternatives
- g. To assist in the monitoring and review of the development process and schedule for improvements to sites
- h. To assist in the development and monitoring of the overall process for evaluation and recommendation of sites for acquisition.

Accomplishment of Goals and Objectives

Over the past fiscal year, OSAC, through its appointed volunteers and its liaisons, worked on the following key matters in furtherance of its mission:

1. Hosted briefing by staff on Virginia Land Conservation Fund grant application to support potential purchase of property on Indian River Road and Gum Swamp (7-28-25).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Completed
2. Reviewed and approved draft letter of recommendation to City Council for potential purchase of property on Buzzard Neck Road and the North Landing River; forwarded final letter to City council on August 7, 2025 (7-28-25).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Completed but property owner ceased negotiations with City

3. Reviewed final draft of OSAC Member Guidebook; adopted by OSAC on August 25, 2025 (7-28-25).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Completed
4. Initiated district map reviews to prioritize open space needs (7-28-25).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Ongoing
5. Forwarded letter of support for plastic bag fee to City Council (8-20-25).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Completed; no Council action to date.
6. Reviewed and adopted OSAC Annual Report to City Council (8-25-25).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Completed
7. Elected officers for OSAC for coming year (8-25-25).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Completed
8. Hosted briefing by staff on City negotiations to acquire the Bayside Middle School 6th Grade Campus as future open space (8-25-25).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Completed
9. Reviewed and adopted OSAC letter to Virginia Land Conservation Fund in support of grant application to support potential purchase of property on Indian River Road and Gum Swamp (8-25-25).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Completed
10. Researched ways to communicate information on delinquent tax properties that may be affordable and appropriate open space acquisitions. (8-25-25).
 - a. Commensurate with core mission
 - b. Ongoing
11. Received notification of grant awarded by the Virginia Land Conservation Fund to support potential purchase of property on Indian River Road and Gum Swamp (12-1-25).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Completed

12. Hosted briefing by HRSD staff on potential for future open space development and partnership with the City on portions of the Atlantic Sewage Treatment Plant property adjoining Ocean Lakes (1-26-26).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Completed
13. Hosted briefing by the Coastal Virginia Land Conservancy (CVLC) on potential partnership opportunities for protection of open space lands in Virginia Beach and learned of CVLC work on protecting Holland Road and West Neck Creek property originally recommended for acquisition as open space by OSAC to City Council (4-27-26).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Completed
14. Reviewed draft presentation prepared by OSAC members and staff for panel presentation at the Virginia Land Conservation and Greenways Conference held on April 27, 2026, in Newport News, VA (4-27-26).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Completed
15. Discussed City auction of land due to unpaid property taxes of potential open space property on Potters Road and London Bridge Creek, and need for developing a process to facilitate early dialogue with City departments on similar delinquent tax properties for review by OSAC as potential open space acquisition areas prior to auction (4-27-26).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Ongoing
16. Reaffirmed OSAC support for the Parks and Recreation ITA proposal first recommended in a letter to City Council on October 28, 2024 (4-27-26).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Ongoing
17. Attended Parks and Recreation Commission briefing by staff and consultants on the Economic Development Department's draft ITA Plan Revisions and related draft Princess Anne Commons Golf Course redevelopment proposal (5-7-26).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Ongoing

18. Hosted briefing by Active Transportation Advisory Committee member on proposed abandonment of Burton Station rail corridor and potential for reuse as bikeways and trails corridor (6-22-26).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Ongoing
19. Elected officers for OSAC for coming year (6-22-26).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Completed
20. Hosted briefing by staff on City negotiations to acquire Midway Manor property in Green Run as future open space (6-22-26)
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Completed
21. Hosted briefing by staff on City negotiations to acquire Lochaven Crescent and Crab Creek property in Ocean Park as future open space (6-22-26)
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Completed
22. Received notification of City decision to decline a grant awarded by the Virginia Land Conservation Fund to support potential purchase of property on Indian River Road and Gum Swamp (6-22-26).
 - a. Commensurate with the core mission of OSAC
 - b. Not completed

Copies of all materials provided to the Committee are available upon request.

Membership and Attendance

During FY 2025-2026, the OSAC filled multiple member vacancies. Two members were reappointed in October of 2025, one member was reappointed and a new member was appointed in November of 2025, and one member was reappointed in December 2025. The current Council liaisons are Barbara Henley (District 2) and Joashua Schulman (District 9). Attached is a copy of the membership roster for the Committee, staff liaisons and City Council liaisons.

The Committee meets monthly unless otherwise noted and provides recommendations to City Council based on the evaluation of potential properties for acquisition; monitors funding, including Capital Funds as well as grants, and assists in the monitoring, oversight, and guidance

of the acquisition process including the exercise of due diligence, analysis, and exploring development alternatives.

During FY 2025-2026, Committee members donated 319 volunteer hours of service to the City.

Financial Report

The Open Space Special Revenue Fund provides funding for the preservation of land that has been identified in the City's Outdoors Plan as a candidate for future recreational amenities in the City. This plan calls for the preservation of 5% of the City's land for parks, trails, or natural vistas. It is unclear how this goal will be achieved, since the plan does not clearly account for whether non-City owned open space areas count towards achieving the goal.

The Open Space Program is funded through the Department of Parks and Recreation's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) as adopted by the City Council. The source of revenue for this fund prior to FY 2025-2026 was a 0.44% dedication of the restaurant meal tax and the use of fund balance. The restaurant meals tax dedication for the Open Space Special Revenue Fund for FY 2025-2026 and beyond was reduced from 0.44% to 0.17%. Revenues received from the .17% dedication will only be used for debt service and operations, not acquisition.

Due to the available funding in the Open Space Special Revenue Fund, starting in the FY 2025-2026 funding will be transferred from the fund on an as needed basis and not an annual flat transfer. Essentially, this eliminates any appropriations to the Open Space Acquisition CIP Project for the next six years - starting in FY 2025-2026 and ending in FY 2030-2031. In FY 2025-2026, \$300,000 from two state grants associated with purchasing land adjacent to Crab Creek in Ocean Park were added to this fund. In FY 2025-2026, \$3,000,000 was transferred from the fund to the Midway Manor open space project fund.

Please refer to pages 208 and 218 in the City's adopted FY 2025-2026 CIP for funding details related to the Open Space Program at <https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/virginia-beach-departments-docs/budget/Budget/Adopted/FY27/FY27-CIP-Adopted.pdf>.

Goals and Objectives for the Coming Year

The following goals and objectives have been established by OSAC for the coming year:

1. Evaluate all properties brought to the attention of the Committee, or other City entities, for recommendation to acquire as open space, recreation and/or resilience opportunity in a timely manner.

2. Recommend property acquisition of properties that have the highest open space, recreation and/or resilience value, with an emphasis upon open space deficits identified by Parks and Recreation staff, adopted Committee evaluation criteria, and alignment with adopted City plans, policies and projects.
3. Evaluate existing City properties where appropriate as potential formal designation as open space, recreation and/or resilience opportunities and rezone properties accordingly for preservation.
4. Explore opportunities to better protect City properties that are not currently identified as open space areas that may warrant designation and protection as open space.
5. Coordinate with other City Committees and Departments to identify/address open space, recreation and/or resilience shortfalls and opportunities, and inform and communicate this information to the public.
6. Partner with other property acquisition programs to maximize open space, recreation and/or resilience acquisition in Virginia Beach and best leverage dedicated City funding with potential federal and state funding, grants, donations, partnerships, etc.
7. Update as necessary the Committee Member Guidebook (adopted in August 2025) to enhance member familiarity, new member orientation, retention of institutional knowledge, define process of how the Committee received property inquiries for evaluation, and routine review of committee methodology.
8. Update as necessary the land acquisition approval process from initial property inquiry to Committee submitting a recommendation to the City Manager for City Council consideration, and then to final action and disposition by City Council.

Recommendations to City Council

1. Ensure that City Council actions related to land use and open space align with adopted City plans and policies.
2. Consider that the Committee size be adjusted or realigned when filling vacancies to help ensure that each voting district and geographic area of the City are represented on the Committee.
3. Pursue allocation of a portion of open space funding towards site improvement priorities for both undeveloped and underdeveloped sites purchased through the Open Space Acquisition Program.
4. Minimize loss of tree canopy, pervious surfaces and wetlands, and make efforts to increase the quantity of these resources to help implement the City's adopted Sea Level Wise Plan and the Urban Forest Management Plan.

5. Always consider redevelopment opportunities to accommodate the full range of development opportunities before allowing open space properties to be developed.
6. Continue to support open space acquisition to ensure adequate parks, facilities, and natural areas and waterway access for Virginia Beach residents and visitors.
7. Pursue open space actions and options that help provide multiple benefits and optimize leveraging of available City funding by seeking partnership and grant opportunities.

Additional Information

Attachment: Membership Roster

Closing

Should you have any questions or prefer a City Council briefing on the work of the Committee, please feel free to reach out to:

Clay Bernick, Open Space Advisory Committee Chair
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OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP FY 2025-2026

<u>NAME</u>	<u>ROLE</u>	<u>BEGINNING DATE</u>	<u>ENDING DATE</u>
Bernick, Clay	Chair	11/19/2019	10/31/2028
Bland, Lauren	Member	9/2/2025	5/31/2028
Bowhens, Vincent	Member	12/10/2019	11/30/2028
Bowie, Richard T.	Member	10/4/2022	12/31/2026
Drumm, Francis J.	Member	10/4/2022	9/30/2028
Fleming, William W.	Member	10/4/2022	9/30/2028
Green, Tangela	Member	3/18/2025	8/31/2026
Hoehlein, Richard	P&R Commission	3/1/2026	2/28/2029
Lin, Eric	Student Member	7/1/2025	6/30/2027
Malaby, Heather	Member	5/6/2025	10/31/2028
McDowell, Dianna L.	Vice Chair	8/15/2023	7/31/2026
Rockefeller, Stephen	P&R Commission	10/15/2024	11/10/2025
Stuart, Cooper C.	Student Member	7/2/2024	6/30/2026
Wing, Jeremy	Member	6/3/2025	5/31/2028
Green, Corinna	City Staff Liaison		
Harrell, Trina	City Staff Liaison		
Henley, Barbara	Council Liaison		
Schulman, Joash	Council Liaison		

OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE VOLUNTEER HOURS FY 2025-2026

NAME	HOURS	VOLUNTEER COUNT
Bernick, Clay	133	
Bland, Lauren	7	
Bowhers, Vincent	53	
Bowie, Richard T.	8	
Drumm, Francis J.	10	
Fleming, William W.	10	
Green, Tangela	31	
Hoehlein, Richard	8	
Lin, Eric	10	
Malaby, Heather	19	
McDowell, Dianna L.	10	
Rockefeller, Stephen	4	
Stuart, Cooper C.	8	
Wing, Jeremy	<u>10</u>	
Grand Total	321	14