

Matching Grants a Good Investment

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Given our sad economic circumstances, I am fearful that our County Commissioners are going to overlook the big bang for our buck that Durham County gets via matching grants programs like those conducted through Durham Open Space and Trails, Keep Durham Beautiful, and the Soil and Water Conservation District.

If we must cut something, it shouldn't be programs that are actually *making us a profit!* Fifty % matching funds (provided by (s)he who writes the grant) + the tremendous (and required) volunteer labor involved in each project = ~75% of the project cost. Durham county taxpayers are, therefore, only footing 25% of the true cost.

Cutting any matching grants programs is cutting off our nose to spite our faces. When federal and state dollars are lacking, matching grants programs are exactly the types of things that local governments should be funding (in order to maintain the county at its current level at the minimum cost to taxpayers).

Rather than cutting these programs, it would be far better to increase publicity of these programs to every organization in Durham. The more people who utilize these matching grants programs, and the more County funding that goes into them, the more our community will take care of its playgrounds, parks and open spaces, thereby reducing government maintenance fees and sustaining everyone's property values.

I personally oversaw the following three matching grants, and they have already positively impacted Durham kids/families of all ethnicities and socio-economic circumstances:

1. DOST's matching grants program provided the extra funding needed (by DPS's Creekside Elementary PTA) for two youth-league-quality soccer goals for student/teacher use during recess and for use by the general public after school hours. Until now, the kids have had to play on a rutty side-field at Creekside, using poles of a makeshift shelter as goals and losing what few balls they were able to find as a result.
2. Keep Durham Beautiful (KDB) has supplied the Creekside Gardening Committee (i.e., me and the KG-5 kids I garden with during recess) with several truckloads of mulch each year, as well as topsoil and (donated) bulbs every spring. Last year, KDB awarded us \$300 (a very nominal fee) to install a rain-garden along the basketball courts at Creekside, and this has turned the swampy mess along this walkway (taken every day by 5th graders to their trailers) into an aesthetically pleasing, water absorbing Best-Management-Practice.

This year, KDB provided \$500 for us to plant loriape and fruit trees around the middle playground at Creekside, which is surrounded by impervious surface (roof, walkways, basketball courts, etc.), and is a muddy mess for 1/2 the year.

These projects have helped stem severe erosion problems (of which DPS is aware), which would otherwise have to be engineered at far greater cost to DPS and, therefore, Durham County.

3. The Soil and Water Conservation District covered 75% of the installation costs (and 100% of the plans and oversight) for leveling and reseeding the track field at Creekside Elementary. It was literally a riverbed (thanks to stormwater runoff problems that are

indicative of most school grounds).

If the kids actually tried to *run* on this 'track field', they'd very likely have twisted or broken an ankle, a clear liability. After this, Allen Bailey (DPS superintendent of grounds and maintenance and a good man) has helped to maintain the field (via proper mowing and growth, as advised by the SWCD) and has met with Mike Dupree (SWCD) to make plans for long-term solutions to other major erosion problems (ruts, sinkholes around grates, etc.).

Through their 'CCAP' program, the SWCD also covered 75% of the cost of installing a 1000-gallon cistern at Creekside. It is used to water the Creekside vegetable garden and collects a tremendous amount of the water that runs off the large gym and cafeteria roofs. This water would otherwise continue to erode surrounding areas, producing liabilities as well as polluting our waterways.

So, these three organizations have already saved DPS (and Durham County taxpayers) a lot more money (in the long run) than it cost to fund the Creekside matching grants.

It's simply a bad business move for Durham County to cut its matching grants programs.