PRESS RELEASE

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TOWN OF MILLS RIVER LAUNCHES LAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM

MILLS RIVER, North Carolina – The Town of Mills River is proud to announce the formal launch of the Land Preservation Program. The program encourages and financially supports the voluntary conservation of agricultural lands, environmentally sensitive areas, and open spaces from development.

Town Council established the program in 2024 and allocated $500,000 of federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds as seed money to assist with preserving what Mills River community members have identified as important cultural and natural resources.

The Town of Mills River intends to partner with non-profit conservation organizations and willing private property owners to pursue options for land preservation and grant funding of a conservation easement. The Land Preservation Program establishes the Town of Mills River as a gap funding partner, providing financial assistance for ancillary costs associated with a conservation easement, like property surveys, land appraisals, and legal fees. The program is currently accepting applications from willing landowners who are interested in preservation.

"The launch of the Land Preservation Program is an intentional approach to help achieve the Town's vision to preserve, sustain, and cultivate community. We are committed to this vision, and we encourage all interested landowners to find out more information at www.millsriver.gov," stated Matthew McKirahan, Mills River Town Manager.

According to the American Farmland Trust 2020 report, *Farms Under Threat*, North Carolina is ranked second in the nation for both the total acreage and percent of farmland converted to urban development and low-density residential development between 2001 and 2016. During this period North Carolina lost 732,000 acres of farmland to development, which is 6.7% of all North Carolina farmland. 78% of North Carolina's converted farmland went to low-density residential land uses, equivalent to 571,700 acres, the highest conversion rate percentage in the United States. This last statistic is particularly relevant to the Town of Mills River, which has seen an increase in low-density residential subdivision development over the last five years. Agribusiness Henderson County (AgHC) estimates that more than 2,000 acres of agricultural land have been lost in Henderson County since 2020, based on lower voluntary agricultural district enrollments.

The highest priority of the Town of Mills River is to preserve large tracts of active agricultural land which is accessible by a major road, is near public utilities, and is at the highest risk of being converted into a development. However, any land meeting the goals and criteria of the program will be considered for support. This can include properties with important

characteristics like floodplains, wetlands, streams, forestland, steep slopes, or other natural and open spaces.

Further information on the Land Preservation Program is available at www.millsriver.gov. Interested parties may reach out to Town of Mills River Planning staff at planning@millsriver.gov with questions.

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