

Conservation Easements Program

Heritage Resources Branch

Historic Preservation Information Series



PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

Department of Planning and Development

What is a conservation easement?

A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a property owner and a nonprofit or government entity which permanently limits the development and certain uses of a property, while maintaining private ownership. Preservation easements are a type of conservation easement used to protect properties that have historic, architectural, cultural, or archaeological significance. Each easement is tailored to the individual property and may focus on various goals such as maintaining historic views, preserving open space and natural resources, limiting alterations to building exteriors, or even safeguarding a building's important interior features. The Woodlawn Quaker Meetinghouse and Drover's Rest, pictured here, are two properties in the county that have easements.



Woodlawn Quaker Meetinghouse, Alexandria, c. 1851., easement 2011. Photo Credit: VDHR

Why donate an easement?

Donating a conservation easement is a voluntary and permanent decision that allows property owners to protect natural and historic resources that they value. In return, owners may be eligible for federal, state or local tax benefits. Easements may also reduce estate taxes, helping families preserve treasured historic, scenic, or natural resources for future generations.

What is the process for donating an easement?

To donate an easement, a property owner works with a qualified nonprofit conservation organization, such as Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT). Together, they create a customized easement that outlines the property's features, and the specific restrictions designed to protect them. Once the easement is in place, staff make regular visits to the property to ensure compliance, and support both the current and future owners in maintaining the property in accordance with the terms of the easement.



Drovers Rest, McLean, c. 1757-1785, easement 2024. Photo credit: VDHR

Questions? Please contact Heritage Resources Branch, DPD at dpzheritageresources@fairfaxcountygov or 703-324-1380 for more information

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