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I urge you to support all of the Park and Recreation staff recommended Capital Improvement Plan FY2029 projects and sustain momentum for land acquisition. Last week watching a local broadcast of a program on business in the Carolinas I learned that in the next ten to thirty years the majority of the country's population will shift from the northeast to the southeast. A representative from South Carolina stated that right now for the first time in their history 100% of its population growth came from out of state. The resident population has aged and is not producing generations for the workforce. Industry needs workers of all skill levels to sustain growth. The panel members agreed that US businesses are relocating to the Southeast for less expensive land and homes, pleasant weather, safety concerns and other reasons. The official from South Carolina stated, "We have land and water and the tech industry uses a lot of water. The Northeast does not have abundant clean land and water like we have. Although an exception is we have lowered our water table in the western part of the state." When I heard the phrase "available and abundant land and water" I realized with concern, he means Habitat. In the last fifty years one third of the total US bird population has disappeared, that is three billion birds. From the Dusky Seaside Sparrow to the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker spectacular species are lost principally from habitat degradation and destruction. Due to the rapid population growth in our region, it is more important than ever to acquire and protect available land for parks, greenways, and nature preserves.

Speaking as a retired presenter for Discovery Place and the Girls Scouts I value Nature. I respect all that it provides us from clean water and air to dramatic beachscapes and soul-soothing mountain streams. Our natural heritage has been abused for decades and too little is being done to maintain and restore it to health and diversity. I agree with E.O. Wilson who said that loss of Biodiversity would be the principle reason that future generations will not forgive us. We need to be ready for the stress coming to the environment.

The value of natural heritage is beyond all budgeting, it is legacy and it is American identity.

Thank you.

Christie Benoit
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