HOW WE SCORE APPLICANT PROPERTIES

The Berkeley County Farmland Protection Board (the "Board") evaluates application properties through a standardized, data-driven scoring process. Each application is assessed using a mix of applicant-provided information and verified public data. Where needed, staff may conduct a site visit to confirm on-the-ground features, such as the presence of mature hardwood forests.

To promote objectivity and consistency, the Board uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) as the foundation for its scoring. Staff members independently score and rank each property using the same established data sources. Scores are then reconciled — typically in October — after which Board members conduct a final review, referred to as "vetting," to confirm the ranked list in descending order.

The finalized rankings are presented to the full Board, generally in November or December, for approval and selection of top-ranked properties. Final selections are based on the funding allocated for that fiscal year.

A breakdown of the scoring categories follows below:

Imminence of Residential, Commercial, or Industrial Development: This category evaluates development pressure, public utility access, and road frontage using GIS data. Surrounding tax parcels and development presence are worth up to 10 points, water and sewer availability up to 30 points, and road frontage type up to 10 points.

Sources for data: Berkeley County Tax layer, WVU GIS WV_WaterSewer_WVWDA layer, and WVU GIS Clearinghouse Roads layer

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Acreage & Farmland Characteristics: Farm acreage is scored at 1 point per acre for farms over 20 acres, with an additional 50 points awarded if all acreage is offered for easement. Soil quality is scored using NRCS Web Soil Survey data — prime or unique soils earn 100 points if at least 50% of the soil, while statewide or locally important soils earn 75 points if at least 50% of the soil. Applicants must also submit an approved Farm-Use Valuation form (mailed from the Assessor's office each July) documenting gross farm revenue, which is scored at 1.5 points per $1,000 for farms grossing $1,001 or more.

Sources for data: Property's application as verified by the tax information, NRCS Web Soil Survey, and the Berkeley County Assessor's Approved Farm Use Valuation Form

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Proximity and Value: Properties bordering a conserved property earn 100 points; being within 2,500 feet of a conservation easement and adjacency to park land or a property with farm-use valuation are also

considered. Easement asking price is scored on a sliding scale — a full donation earns 200 points, $3,250 per acre earns 100 points, and the Board's maximum allowable price earns zero points.

Sources for data: Berkeley County Tax layer, internal BCFPB easement data, Property's application

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Historical and Natural Importance: Properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places and other historical significance may earn up to 20 points. Natural features — including major (named) streams, minor streams, mature hardwood forests of 10 or more acres, springs/ponds, wetlands, and significant groundwater recharge potential (entire property or 40+ acres on karst) — can contribute up to 160 points combined.

Sources for data: WVU GIS SHPO public layer (includes National Registry), Property's application, NHD (National Hydrography Dataset) Hydrology layer, Chesapeake Bay Land Use Land Cover data, Initial property visits by staff, US Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetland Inventory layer, and WVU GIS Karst layer.

Secured Debt: Properties with no secured debt — including mortgages, lines of credit, mechanic's liens, and tax liens — are awarded 20 points.

Sources for data: Property's application and verified by Berkeley County Courthouse records