MINUTES
City Council Parks, Trails, & Recreation Committee

Wednesday, January 17, 2024 at 3:30 PM
Administration Conference Room

Members Present:	Aaron Baker, Chair, Council Member Lauren Wise, Vice-Chair, Council Member Howie Granat, Citizen Member Nancy DePippo, Citizen Member Wyn Birkenthal, Citizen Member (Arrived 3:36 pm) Reba Osborne, Citizen Member Mayor Maureen Copelof, Ex-Officio Member
Staff Present:	Wilson Hooper, City Manager Wesley Shook, Acting Public Works Director Paul Ray, Planning Director Alex Shepherd, Assistant to the City Manager Aaron Bland, Assistant Planning Director Katherine Buzby, Planner
Guests:	James Veal, Stacey Wiedrich, Tyler Donaldson
Media:	Jon Rich, Transylvania Times

A. Welcome & Call to Order

Committee Chair Aaron Baker welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 3:30 pm.

B. Certification of Quorum

Quorum was certified by Assistant to the City Manager Alex Shepherd.

C. Approval of Agenda

Motion by Mr. Wise, seconded by Ms. Osborne, to approve the agenda as amended titling section E. Bracken Preserve Update and adding a section F. Bracken Preserve Maintenance Update with subjects for Pisgah Area SORBA and Bracken Preserve Easement Request. The motion carried unanimously.

D. Approval of Minutes from October 18, 2023 Meeting

Motion by Ms. DePippo, seconded by Mr. Granat to approve the minutes of the October 18, 2023 meeting as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

E. Bracken Preserve Update

Mr. Hooper informed the committee that the City officially closed on the additional thirty-four acres. However, we do not yet own the two donated bank properties. Conserving Carolina is still processing this transaction.

Mr. Granat stated that the next phase involves repairing the existing trail and adding the climbing trail. We are collaborating with Todd Branham from Long Cane Trail on both projects. The next steps include determining whether Todd Branham will be contracted by the City of Brevard or if there are funds remaining with Conserving Carolina. Based on the funds available and the quote from Long Cane Trails, the general plan should cover the repair of the existing trail and the necessary maintenance for this year. Mr. Granat informed the committee that we have submitted a grant application to the American Trails Foundation. This grant aims to support small municipalities or trail organizations without established maintenance plans and to help fund our projects. Once this phase is complete, and as we look to the future, we will explore fundraising initiatives for phases two and three to commence the design and construction of new trails on the recently acquired land.

Mr. Wise mentioned that he would like to see the plans for each phase of repair and construction for Bracken Preserve.

Mr. Granat stated that we have the funds, and the potential grant will cover phase one this year. We hope to have funds to place a kiosk to honor all the donors and to update signage to ensure consistency as we expand the trails.

Mr. Baker asked Mr. Granat to discuss the steps for phase one and the climbing trail.

Mr. Granat informed the committee that phase one will cover the first half-mile of trail repairs and maintenance. The goal is to make Bracken Preserve less intimidating for beginner trail riders and to address trail erosion and wear over the past ten years. Regarding the climbing trail, we have received verbal approval from Brevard Music Center, and the next step is to flag the trail.

Mr. Bland shared with the committee that the City will receive 200 American Chestnut seedlings for the Bracken Preserve this year. We will work with volunteers to plant the American Chestnuts in the area.

Mr. Granat stated that we will attempt to change the parking spaces at Bracken to angled parking so that we could potentially have two rows.

F. Bracken Preserve Maintenance Update

a. Pisgah Area SORBA

Ms. Wiedrich and Mr. Donaldson discussed the founding principles, background, and capabilities of Pisgah Area SORBA. Ms. Wiedrich stated that our membership exceeds 500 people and that last year, we spent 3300 hours managing approximately 100 miles of trails. We currently have twenty-eight active trail crew leaders, fifteen U.S. Forest Service certified sawyers, and 500 volunteers who will contribute around 400 hours of trail maintenance for Bracken Preserve. We plan to divide the hours evenly every month and schedule numerous trail days. Also stated in the MOU is an annual donation by the City of $10,000 to PAS for structured, scheduled maintenance of the current Bracken Preserve trail system.

Mr. Hooper expressed his intention to evaluate the MOU and research the necessary insurance coverage that would be required.

b. Bracken Preserve Easement Request

Mr. Veal presented that he owns several plots of land next to the Bracken Preserve trail and parking lot. He stated that he is requesting access to the plots of land by car so that he can potentially develop them in the future.

Mr. Granat questioned the request, stating it seems the ask is for us to redo our trail. What does the general public of Brevard get from helping you achieve access to more land that, at the moment, you don't own.

Mr. Veal clarified that he is representing himself on parcel 2 and representing Mr. Robinson on parcel 1 because he has a signed sales agreement to purchase parcel 1 that is contingent on getting access by car.

Mr. Ray stated that our City Attorney sat in on the meeting with Mr. Veal and made it very clear that the City cannot spend public funds to serve a private interest. He then asked if Mr. Veal is willing to pay the cost for the trail being moved.

Mr. Veal responded that he has not ruled out paying the cost to relocate the trail.

Mr. Baker expressed his appreciation to Mr. Veal for bringing this matter to our attention. However, he stated that it is not best suited for the Parks, Trails, and Recreation Committee. Instead, he suggested it should be left up to City Council and the Public Works Committee.

Mr. Hooper emphasized the need to compile information for the benefit of the City Council and to have a discussion on how to address the issue. He mentioned that at a later date, he will provide Mr. Veal with a timeline of how and when he will present this request to City Council.

G. Estatoe Trail Update

Mr. Baker informed the committee that the Ecusta Trail is scheduled to be completed in 2026. When examining the Ecusta Trail in Hendersonville, it becomes apparent that it closely approaches their downtown. However, on our end, it terminates at Oscar Blues and does not directly connect to Brevard's downtown. Over the next two years, my focus is to ensure the connection between the end of the Ecusta Trail and our downtown is established through the Estatoe Trail. I would like an update on the status of each section, the next steps for the trail, and as we head into the budget season, an understanding of what initiatives we may undertake next year.

Mr. Ray mentioned that the Main St. section, extending from Main St. to the Mary C. Jenkins Center, is currently on hold for evaluation of potential routes and easements. City Council must take action to remove this hold status before progress can be made. Staff have been exploring various routes to propose once the hold is lifted. The next step is the quarter-mile Tannery North section, commencing at Cashiers Valley Rd/Carver St. and terminating at Silverstein Dr. This section is located on a former brownfield site, making development complicated. Two easements are required to complete this section. Our intention is to engage NCDOT to construct this segment due to their expertise in navigating brownfield and wetland permitting. We anticipate reaching an agreement with them sometime next week.

Mr. Granat discussed the idea of marking Mills Ave as an on-road bike path until it descends into the valley near the Mary C. Jenkins Center. This may be something worth considering.

Mayor Copelof mentioned that when we explored this idea previously, it raised safety concerns due to the presence of driveways, traffic, and the church along Mills Ave. We considered making Mills Ave a one-way street with a dedicated bike lane, but residents expressed concerns about driveway access.

Mr. Baker inquired about the expected start of construction for Tanney North this spring or summer and about the Rosman Highway crossing.

Mr. Ray responded that it's too early to provide a definitive timeline, but that's our goal. However, we still need to complete environmental assessments and other prerequisites. He noted that the Rosman Highway crossing will necessitate special permitting from NCDOT, and they have agreed to a fully signalized mid-block crossing. This plan also includes extending the sidewalk to the Marathon Gas Station. After crossing Rosman Highway, we will need to construct an elevated platform to access the drier land and the School Board easement, which spans half a mile.

Mr. Baker asked when do you think the next City Council vote will be needed to engineer this section? Do you think that we would be qualified to build the trail section near the School Board property.

Mr. Ray responded most likely sometime this summer. We would also be required to obtain permits from NCDEQ because it gets near the stream.

Mr. Shook affirmed, yes, we are qualified, but we will not be as fast as the contractor would be because of our other duties like trash, sanitation, water, and sewer.

H. Green Space Adoptions

Ms. Buzby informed the committee that there are four renewals and two new applications. The four renewals are Clemson Plaza, part of the Depot by Brevard Rotary, a section of the bike path behind McDonald's, and the Greenway Skatepark. The two new ones are a bump out in front of Cup and Saucer and a section of the bike path near Whitmire and Railroad.

At 5:39 PM, a motion was made by Mr. Granat and seconded by Ms. Osborne to approve the Green Space Adoptions. The motion passed unanimously.

I. Set Date for Next Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Parks, Trails & Recreation Committee was scheduled for Wednesday, February 21, 2024 at 3:30 PM.

J. Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:41 pm.

X _____
Aaron Baker
Chair, Council Member

Minutes Approved: February 21, 2024

X _____
Alex Shepherd
Assistant to the City Manager