MINUTES
City Council Parks, Trails, & Recreation Committee

Wednesday, April 24, 2024 at 10:00 AM
City Council Chambers

Members Present:	Aaron Baker, Chair, Council Member Lauren Wise, Vice-Chair, Council Member Reba Osborne, Citizen Member Wyn Birkenthal, Citizen Member J.D. Powers, Citizen Member Mayor Maureen Copelof, Ex-Officio Member
Staff Present:	Wilson Hooper, City Manager Wesley Shook, Acting Public Works Director Alex Shepherd, Assistant to the City Manager Aaron Bland, Assistant Planning Director
Guests:	Nora Jane Montgomery, Natalie Narburgh Pisgah SORBA

A. Welcome & Call to Order

Committee Chair Aaron Baker welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 10:00 am.

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 presented. The motion carried unanimously.

D. Approval of Minutes from March 20, 2024 Meeting

Motion by Mr. Powers, seconded by Ms. Osborne to approve the minutes of the March 20, 2024 meeting as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

E. Bracken Preserve Maintenace Update

Mr. Bland mentioned that we received American Chestnut seedlings last week and that we plan to have a workday with Conserving Carolina tomorrow to plant them.

Mr. Baker then inquired about any updates on the new trail construction.

Mr. Hooper responded that Mr. Granat would be able to provide those updates, but he is not in attendance.

F. Pisgah SORBA MOU

Mr. Hooper mentioned that since our last meeting, we've had discussions with the City of Asheville regarding their arrangement with Pisgah SORBA, which manages their Richmond Hill Park trail. He conveyed that we've received nothing but positive feedback about Pisgah SORBA, and the City encouraged us to enter into an agreement with them. However, there are a few items in the agreement that he would like to negotiate. One such item is the City's responsibility for an annual donation of $10,000 to Pisgah SORBA. He recommended adjusting this to $8,500 and adding a provision for the contribution to be voted on annually.

Ms. Narburgh informed the committee that the $8,500 request was separate from the $10,000 donation and was intended to cover the cost of purchasing a machine to help maintain trails. However, she expressed a preference for the donation and MOU over the request for the machine.

Mr. Baker inquired about the possibility of reallocating funds from the maintenance line item for Bracken to cover the cost.

Mr. Hooper clarified that legally, the $8,500 cost of the machinery cannot be funded because the machine must exclusively benefit us and not other projects. He suggested either including the $8,500 in the MOU or returning to the Council to request an increase in the amount to $10,000 from the initial $8,500 they had agreed to.

Mr. Baker proposed funding the $10,000 and using additional funds from the Public Works budget to also give to SORBA.

Mr. Hooper explained that Public Works will continue to work at Bracken, so he doesn't recommend using their entire budget amount. He suggested funding the $8,500 donation and potentially using Public Works funds to cover up to a total of $10,000.

Ms. Narburgh asked if our funding could differ from competing with other nonprofits since we already have an MOU in place.

Mr. Hooper confirmed, stating that this would be changed next year. He then addressed the implementation of appropriate risk management and safety procedures and volunteers on City property, asking Ms. Narburgh if she needed guidance from the committee on this matter.

Ms. Narburgh stated that we currently utilize the US Forest Service's policy and guidelines, unless there are specific changes the committee wishes to implement.

Mr. Shook added that our policies closely align with those of the Forest Service, suggesting that ours may be more relaxed.

Mr. Hooper then informed the committee of his desire to modify the City's responsibility from allocating staff support to providing a reasonable amount of staff support.

Ms. Narburgh confirmed agreement with this change.

Mr. Hooper then inquired about Ms. Narburgh's process for arranging sponsorships.

Ms. Narburgh explained that sponsorship primarily pertains to trail adoption, where individuals or groups provide funds or in-kind donations to support a trail. She noted that individuals must undergo training before adopting a trail, and it becomes their responsibility to conduct a certain number of workdays annually.

Mr. Hooper addressed the committee, emphasizing that when the City allows trail sponsorships, it becomes a form of government speech. He proposed implementing a policy for sponsorships, requiring approval from the Council, and designating commitments for maintenance days.

Ms. Narburgh agreed with these suggestions, proposing flexibility in adjusting workdays based on weather and trail conditions.

Mr. Baker raised the question of which changes are being implemented.

Mr. Hooper confirmed that the committee appears to be in agreement with the $10,000 request, with a proposed five-year agreement including annual renewals or renegotiations. He noted that the City would approve signage.

Ms. Narburgh asked if grant applications should be presented to the City first.

Mr. Hooper explained that if you apply for any grants that you would like us to match, then you should come to the City first for approval. However, if you are doing the work exclusively, then no.

Mr. Baker suggested including language in the agreement to coordinate grant applications to avoid duplication.

Mr. Bland informed the committee of a forest management plan for Bracken, proposing its inclusion in the agreement.

Mr. Hooper concluded the discussion, stating he would work on incorporating the proposed changes and present an updated draft for committee review.

G. Public Comment

Ms. Montgomery asked if there are any updates regarding the Tannery section of the Estatoe Trail.

Mr. Bland replied that there is no update at the moment. However, NCDOT is still resolving some final engineering matters before commencing work on the project.

H. Set Date for Next Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Parks, Trails & Recreation Committee was scheduled for Wednesday, May 15, 2024 at 3:30 PM.

I. Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:09 am.

X

Aaron Baker
Chair, Council Member

Minutes Approved: May 15, 2024

X

Alex Shepherd
Assistant to the City Manager