MINUTES

City Council Parks, Trails & Recreation Committee

Wednesday, March 18, 2026, at 3:30 PM
City Hall Council Chambers

Members Present:	Lauren Wise, Vice Chair, Council Member Daniel Jessee, Citizen Member Jackson Tate, Citizen Member Reba Osborne, Citizen Member Maureen Copelof, Mayor, Ex-Officio
Absent:	Aaron Baker, Chair, Council Member JD Powers, Citizen Member Howie Granat, Citizen Member
Staff Present:	Wilson Hooper, City Manager Wesley Shook, Public Works Director Paul Ray, Planning Director Shawnee Cummings, Assistant to the City Manager
Guests:	Drake McNeary, Laurel McNeary, Gary Lowden, Heather Perkins, Caitlin Walters
Media:	David Bradley

A. Welcome and Call to Order

Committee Vice Chair Lauren Wise welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 3:36 PM.

B. Certification of Quorum

Assistant to the City Manager Shawnee Cummings certified that a quorum was present.

C. Approval of Agenda

J. Tate motioned to approve the agenda as presented. D. Jessee seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

D. Approval of Minutes – February 18, 2026

D. Jessee motioned to approve the minutes, seconded by J. Tate. The motion carried unanimously.

E. Bracken Preserve

1. Bracken Trail Update

G. Lowden from Pisgah SORBA stated that they will begin clearing the corridors early next week and will start from the back and make their way in. The initial section from the parking lot that loops near the music center will be done last to keep it out of the public view. G. Lowden expects that they will start cutting trail with bigger equipment in mid-April. He has been talking with A. Bland and D. Todd about completing the trail in June, letting it simmer for a month, and opening in July. They have also been coordinating regarding the bids received for the first bridge repair in Brushy Creek and the pricing, but since A. Bland and D. Todd are out this week, they will meet next week. G. Lowden stated that one contractor has been identified for bridge #1, but they will need to bring D. Todd up to speed since it has been a while since it all started. G. Lowden said luckily where the bridge is failing, it is on grade, so there is no potential to fall through.

P. Ray stated that they asked Todd to provide an estimate for replacing the two failing retaining walls. G. Lowden said that there is continuing discussion as to whether to replace the retaining walls or to reroute the trail to include switchbacks. He added that there are 3 to 4 switchback areas they are evaluating and they plan to bring those recommendations to the Committee in April. P. Ray asked if it is possible to reroute the trail so that no retaining wall is needed. G. Lowden stated it is steep and may need multiple switchbacks, so they are looking at all options.

2. Reconsideration of E-Bike Policy in Bracken Preserve

D. McNeary stated that he did research and found that Class 1 e-bikes have no significant difference on trail impact. He also found that the average speed is similar, with e-bikes going faster uphill but the same speed downhill. D. McNeary stated that if the City moves forward with allowing Class 1 e-bikes in Bracken, the biggest challenge will be more users, which can bring economic development. He also spoke to Brevard Bike Alliance and they are willing to do educational outreach to teach bikers how to share the trail. He thinks more people using the trail is a good thing, but that the City may have to manage or respond to it in some way.

L. Wise stated that Bracken connects to Pisgah National Forest and asked if an e-biker accesses Pisgah, intentionally or not, what are the repercussions for the City? D. McNeary said that even now, people take e-bikes where they are not allowed, regardless of whether they are allowed in Bracken, so he does not see that as the City's problem. R. Osborne asked if it is obvious when you leave Bracken and enter Pisgah. D. McNeary said yes, but they can also add more signage.

L. Wise asked if anyone knows of any movement at the State or Federal level about e-bikes on public lands, such as Dupont or Pisgah. D. Jessee stated that Dupont will not allow e-bikes any time soon, as they are not ready to have that discussion due to it being too controversial. D. Jessee said that people parking in Dupont to ride their e-bikes outside of Dupont get accosted by other bikers accusing them of breaking the rules.

R. Osborne asked if the Ecusta trail allows e-bikes. D. Jessee said they allow Class 1 e-bikes and the speed limit is 15 mph. P. Ray added that the City allows Class 1 and Class 3 on the Estatoe Trail, so we may want to reconsider allowing Class 3 in the future to be consistent with the Ecusta Trail and Bracken. R. Osborne asked what class of e-bike is needed to navigate Bracken. D. Jessee stated that Class 1 is what everyone advocates for on single-track trails and that it will take a massive effort to educate the public on the differences between classes.

R. Osborne said that e-bikes would allow people with disabilities to navigate, but she is not sure how that translates to different classes. D. Jessee said his wife has a disability and her Class 1 e-bike gets her to a basic fitness level but it does not go over the top in what it allows her to do.

L. Wise said he thinks that State and Federal governments not addressing e-bikes is a mistake, but he is not sure how much the City wants to be at the forefront. D. Jessee asked about Pisgah SORBA's perspective. G. Lowden said they have taken an educate and inform perspective and are staying open-minded because of the Forest Service but have not taken a firm position. G. Lowden said that is specific to Class 1 e-bikes because most people doing single track trails on a Class 1 are bikers who have not ridden in a while or people who do not yet have the fitness or capability. G. Lowden said he personally thinks that if a Class 1 gets someone on a bicycle, that is a great thing. He added that his wife rides an e-bike and they now ride together, which was not happening anymore. He also thinks Bracken and the City should be at the forefront of this policy because e-bikes are everywhere and if you are not proactive, you are behind.

D. Jessee clarified that Dupont allows e-bikes for people with disabilities but does not advertise it.

G. Lowden added that after Hurricane Helene, Bracken and the Forest Service started allowing Pisgah SORBA to use Class 1 e-bikes for trail evaluation and maintenance. It has been a major improvement for volunteers and people who have to carry heavy equipment.

L. Wise stated some of A. Baker's concerns were things that D. McNeary's research helped disprove, such as excessive speed, increased weight of e-bikes, and wear and tear on the trail. L. Wise also stated that the Ecusta Trail will be bringing people on bikes with varying skill levels and he wants them to be able to enjoy all parts of the City, as opposed to just the paved sections. W. Hooper asked if D. McNeary would be willing to share the information discussed today, to which he said he would and that he has a study on the soil impacts. G. Lowden added that he would also share survey data from People for Bikes. He added that mitigation will come from education and teaching trail etiquette. C. Walters added that some acoustic bikes are heavier than e-bikes so weight doesn't always correlate with bike type.

D. Jessee said that if there are changes being made to the policy, it would be worth talking to the Forest Service. He asked G. Lowden if Pisgah SORBA would be willing to make connections and help facilitate collective discussions about potential violations of the border with Pisgah.

C. Walters added that she spends a lot of time in the forest and sees e-bikes on the trails, so it is happening whether it is permitted or not. She added that she thinks it will benefit the local economy and bike shop owners who will be able to give people access to Class 1 e-bikes. She stated that people want to rent e-bikes and the shops are advocates for following current policies, but it is hard when there is money walking out the door because they don't have e-bikes available. The people inquiring are usually people just looking for more accessibility.

L. Wise asked about next steps. W. Hooper said that with G. Lowden's help, Staff will meet with the Forest Service to discuss the potential policy change and see if they object. W. Hooper said Staff will compile information and bring it back to the Committee for possible action.

F. Estatoe Trail Boardwalk Replacement Designer Shortlist

P. Ray stated that the selection committee will interview design firms all day on Monday and prepare a list of their preferred firms. L. Wise asked if he knew how many interviews there are, to which P. Ray said 4. L. Wise asked if there is a timeline for the work. P. Ray stated that there is no timeline yet, as they have not signed any contracts with the Federal Highways Division.

W. Hooper stated that the City has 6 more months on its leases with the owners of the properties that the temporary trail is on. He added that we will likely have to renew the leases before we work to make the trails permanent. P. Ray stated that with the FLAP grant, it took the Federal Highways Division a long time to send over the contracts and get the money released.

G. Public Comment

Laurel McNeary said the studies on e-bikes' impact on soil have been conducted on the West Coast and in the Midwest. She asked if we have conducted any studies on the soil impacts and erosion because the weather conditions and soil are different. She added that it doesn't need to be a study but just a comparison between soil from an area that allows e-bikes and an area that does not to see if e-bikes are affecting our soil differently. W. Hooper said that is a good point and he would like to compare the report provided by D. McNeary and compare it to the report he has from the NCLWF that relates to Bracken's soil to see if there are any conclusions we can draw. W. Hooper added that conservation is the main point of having Bracken so that must be a strong consideration. He added that the NCLWF, who helped the City turn Bracken into a preserve, has strict limitations, so it is worth seeing if the rules are compatible with e-bikes.

D. Jessee thanked everyone for putting signs up to encourage drivers to look both ways, as his friend was hit by a car near Brevard College and badly injured. He stated that he knows it is related to driver habits and there are limitations on what can be done. W. Hooper offered an update stating that Staff met with the traffic engineer and asked for recommendations on how to make the crossing safer. The road belongs to NCDOT, but the traffic engineer is familiar with what the State will tolerate and will make recommendations she thinks the State will agree to.

H. Set Date for Next Meeting – April 15, 2026, at 3:30 PM

Committee members set the date for the next meeting on April 15, 2026, at 3:30 PM.

I. Adjourn

There being no further business, R. Osborne motioned to adjourn, D. Jessee seconded, the motion passed unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 4:12 PM.

Approved: April 15, 2026

Aaron Baker, Chair, Council Member, or
Lauren Wise, Vice Chair, Council Member

Shawnee Cummings
Assistant to the City Manager