**MINUTES**
**BREVARD CITY COUNCIL**
**Joint Trail Workshop**
**with**
**ECUSTA TRAIL ADVISORY BOARD**
**and**
**PARKS, TRAILS & RECREATION COMMITTEE**
**June 26, 2024 – 1:30 PM**

The Brevard City Council met with the Ecusta Trail Advisory Board and the Parks, Trails & Recreation Committee on Wednesday, June 26, 2024, at 1:30 p.m. at the Mary C. Jenkins Community & Cultural Center of City Hall with Mayor Copelof presiding. The purpose of the meeting was to hold a joint workshop regarding the Ecusta Trail.

**Present – City Council -** Mayor Maureen Copelof, Mayor Pro Tem Gary Daniel, and Council Members Mac Morrow, Aaron Baker, and Pamela Holder
**Parks, Trails & Recreation Committee** – Citizen Members Howie Granat, Nancy DePippo, and Reba Osborne
**Ecusta Trail Advisory Board** – Larry Chapman, County Commissioner; Mark Tooley, Conserving Carolina; John Ditillo, Friends of Ecusta Trail (FOET); Chris Burns, Henderson County Rail Trail Advisory Committee (RTAC)

**Absent – City Council** - Lauren Wise
**Parks, Trails & Recreation Committee** – Wyn Birkenthal and JD Powers
**Ecusta Trail Advisory Board** – Addison Bradley, NC Cooperative Extension; Clark Lovelace, Tourism Development Authority; and At-Large Members Meredith Carli and Madeline Hanley

**Staff Present** – City Attorney Mack McKeller, Assistant City Manager/Finance Director Dean Luebbe, Assistant to the City Manager Alex Shepherd, Planning Director Paul Ray, and Assistant Planning Director Aaron Bland

**Guests/Presenters** – Hunter Marks, Watermark Landscape Architecture; Traffic Planning and Design Representatives Christy Staudt and Teresa Buckwalter; and Lonnie Watkins, NCDOT Project Manager

**Press** – Nick Haseloff, Transylvania Times

**A. Welcome and Call to Order** – Mayor Copelof called the meeting to order and welcomed those present.

**B. Introduction/Certification of Quorum** – Assistant to the City Manager Alex Shepherd certified that a quorum of Council and both committees was present.

**C. Agenda Review and Approval** – Mr. Morrow moved, seconded by Ms. Holder to approve the agenda as presented. The motion carried.

**D. Getting up to Speed** – Mayor Copelof gave a PowerPoint presentation in which she reviewed the City's expanding role in securing funding and overseeing development of the 8 miles of trail in Transylvania County. A copy of her presentation is attached.

Chris Burns of Henderson County RTAC gave an update of their progress to date. He explained that their first phrase of the trail goes from downtown Hendersonville to Route 64 and is approximately 6 miles of the 12 miles that lies in Henderson County. They are in the process of replacing all 9 bridges with the new bridges arriving in August. They are anticipating that paving will happen in the late September/early October timeframe, with an anticipated 3-week timeframe. Location markers will be

installed every 1/10 of a mile along the trail. They are working with Henderson County TDA to make the TDA building the trailhead in Henderson County. The goal is to have the trail fully open for those first 6 miles by December 31st. The second phase will pick up there and go all the way to the county line and the 30% design contract is underway, with a completion date of November 13th of this year. Construction is planned for the third quarter of 2026, with construction of the entire section in Henderson County to be complete by fourth quarter of 2027.

Mayor Copelof noted a couple of key points:

- Because Henderson County will be operational with 6 miles of trail by December, we have to make some joint decisions very quickly on a couple of things.
- Henderson County's 30% design on their second phase is about 4 months behind us and our hope is that those schedules will coincide so that we can do their second phase and our Transylvania section as one construction contract.

**E. Presentation of Branding/Logo** – Mayor Copelof explained that this is one of the joint decisions we need to make now because Henderson County is about to go into production of signage and markers. She reported that Friends of Ecusta Trail started working on trail branding about a year ago and she asked Mark Tooley to present the proposed branding and logo (copy attached). Mr. Tooley explained the process in selecting the proposed branding/logo and noted that the tag line for the brand is "Choose your Adventure". He said it was presented to the Henderson County RTAC at their last meeting and we would like to seek concurrence today on using this brand going forward. Mr. Morrow moved, seconded by Ms. Holder to accept the branding.

During discussion Hunter Marks of Watermark Landscape Architecture, a member of the design team for all three sections in Henderson County, gave a presentation of preliminary 30% design illustrations of the various amenities along the trail. A copy of his presentation is attached. He noted that this was presented to RTAC about 3 weeks ago and it was decided at that time to put it on hold until Brevard had an opportunity to see it and provide input.

There was discussion about the colors of the proposed logo. Attorney McKeller asked Mr. Morrow if his motion included full approval of the logo plus the colors as presented. Mr. Morrow confirmed that was his intent. Attorney McKeller asked if it would be appropriate to hold the motion at this time, until after the discussion in Item H. Mr. Morrow agreed to hold the motion until later.

**F. Review of 30% Design Information** – Lonnie Watkins of NCDOT explained that in providing oversight and management of design and construction of this project, NCDOT assigned design of the project to Traffic Planning and Design (TPD). He noted that the initial contract was for 30% as there are some major design elements that are unknown, such as impact on the floodplain and floodway; can some of the bridges be salvaged or do they need to be replaced; and railroad rights-of-way. Now that they are on the tail end of the 30% design, some decisions need to be made on the bridges. Another issue is the western terminus – how do we tie this trail into the rest of Brevard's trail system? Mr. Watkins added that we have sufficient funds to incorporate a number of the amenities and that needs to be determined. He said we are getting ready to do the contract with TPD for the remaining 70% and we need to develop the scope for that. We are at that stage where we need decisions on those major areas in order to start that next phase of work.

Christy Staudt from Traffic Planning and Design gave a presentation of the 30% design for the Transylvania side of the Ecusta Trail and noted that it has not yet been submitted to NCDOT for review, but will be by the end of this week; and then DOT will do the cost estimate. A copy of her presentation is attached. Ms. Staudt noted that there are a couple of items in their scope of work that are ongoing and won't be submitted right now: there is a brownfield at Davidson River Village and they have to do an environmental management plan for any work they do along that; finishing the

archeological and environmental surveys which have be done at a certain times of the year; and also the trail amenities work, which will be brought to the committee to make decisions to help get that design piece done. She noted that they have found three bridges that could potentially be salvaged with a potential savings of almost $1M in construction. This is something they will need some feedback on as there are some things that need to be considered. She said the critical path decisions they will need direction on are the structures, anything that is right-of-way related, and other decisions for amenities.

~~At 3:14 p.m. Mayor Copelof called for a 10-minute break~~

**G. What is your vision for the trail? What is its purpose?**

Mayor Copelof asked each participant to share their vision for the trail.

Mr. Baker – sees the trail as a transportation amenity that will lead to economic activity. To fully prepare for that economic activity, the city needs to look at existing zoning rules, existing bike and pedestrian plans, existing sidewalk plans, and existing CLUP.

Mr. Daniel – sees it as a destination for tourism; will provide connectivity for citizens to use to get around town and to get to Hendersonville; and will be a big economic driver. We do need to know more about what that means; what effects will this trail have on our community?

Mr. Morrow – all you have to do is read the grant application and background which tells us everything. We can upgrade the 2011 economic analysis and it will tell us what it will do. By nature, it is an opportunity to educate people on the history of the Cherokee, the name, the folks that lived here, and the significance of the river valley.

Ms. Holder – to engage the community and foster diversity and unity. What kind of activities can we have on the trail to provide a reason for people who would not normally go to the trail to use it?

Commissioner Larry Chapman – we are dealing with two separate entities: the City of Brevard and the County, and not everyone is in favor of bicycles and not everyone in the county, outside of certain areas, views it as positive. I think we need more of an educational process with our bike riders. It will have an economic impact, and the vision needs to be better identified and communicated to the public.

Mr. Ditillo – it will grow the cycling community by giving those people who are afraid to ride their bicycles on the roads an opportunity to ride safely, generally an older population, giving them one place where they can recreate, rehab and improve their health without worrying about being run over.

Mr. Tooley – it will help build connections of all the communities along the trail; connections of local communities getting people out that wouldn't normally get out. This is a trail for all ages and all abilities. It is also a transportation artery for people to use to commute to/from work.

Ms. Osborne – an added amenity that will attract more people who want to move to the area; a transportation element where lower income individuals living in the outlying communities can ride their bike to work in Hendersonville or Brevard; and a place where people with a disability can maneuver safely.

Ms. DePippo – it is so often referred to as a bike trail and I know the animosity about bikers so we have to remember this is not just a bike trail; and there will be a lot of people who will walk the trail. Every community along that corridor is going to have their own usage of it.

Mr. Granat – development of communities along the way adding a safe place for families to walk, stride, bike, or skateboard that will enhance everybody's life in some way, shape or form.

Mayor Copelof read some of the benefits listed in the grant applications and noted that almost all of them were mentioned:

- increased safety for bicyclists
- connecting local schools
- alternative ways to get into national forest
- rehabilitates and reuses a historic linear railroad transportation corridor
- tourism-related economic benefits
- reducing household transportation costs
- quality of life for everybody across our demographic
- part of environmental justice and racial equity
- job quality and workforce development

Mayor Copelof noted that we have a lot of big issues, as we look at this vision, that we are going to have to wrestle with so it happens in a way that we can focus it toward the vision.

Mr. Ray added that, as Mr. Baker referenced, it does impact all of our long-range planning documents that will need to be updated with the Ecusta Trail in mind. He said Staff will give Council a high-level outline and timeline of changes we should look at for each long-range planning document.

**H. "Decision Buckets"**

Mayor Copelof and Mr. Ray explained that this discussion is to identify a delegation of responsibilities and organize our decision-making process. Some examples of "decision buckets" identified by staff are:

| Examples of decisions | | | |
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| Technical | Trail Usability | Community Impact | Policy/Svc. Levels |
| • Bicycle design speed<br>• Shoulder width/grade<br>• Pavement thickness<br>• Pavement cross slope<br>• Maximum grade<br>• Bridges<br>• Encroachments<br>• Sign locations | • On-trail amenities<br>• Trail "rules"<br>• Types of signage<br>• Integration into other trails/rec facilities<br>• Long-term alignment at the western terminus<br>• What R5800 betterments should we pursue?<br>• Closure rules.<br>• Minor maintenance prioritization | • Branding<br>• End on Main St.?<br>• Rename Estatoe?<br>• Trailhead location?<br>• "Trail partners" program<br>• Impact studies<br>• Pause construction to let HC catch up? | • Decide who gets to decide.<br>• Role of FOET<br>• Non-grant financial commitments<br>• Public safety service levels<br>• Trash collection and landscape maintenance service levels<br>• Update land-use rules to orient towards trail? |

| **Upcoming Decisions (ranked in order of time criticalness)** |
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| 1.) Branding and design of certain amenities<br>2.) Which amenities to include in upcoming 70% design of Brevard section<br>3.) Trail etiquette/trail rules<br>4.) Designate Main St. as Brevard terminus?<br>5.) Role of FOET? |

During discussion, there was consensus of Council as follows:

- That the Ecusta Trail Advisory Board (ETAB) should be elevated to mirror other Council advisory committees, with the membership to include two council members, and that the minutes/updates be included on Council's consent agenda. Council requested that the City Manager bring a recommendation for updating the membership and charge/authority of the Ecusta Trail Advisory Board.
- That trail usability and community impact recommendations should be left to the Ecusta Trail Advisory Board.
- That designation of Brevard's terminus will be a Council decision.

**I. Long-term Governance/Role of Friends of Ecusta Trail** – FOET provided a draft document outlining its proposed role. It was noted that this draft has been shared with and discussed by staff of both Brevard and Henderson County, but has not been shared with RTAC or ETAB. There was consensus that staff would make a recommendation to Council regarding the role of FOET and Council would make that decision.

Discussion circled back to approval of the branding/logo. Mayor Copelof recalled that there was still a motion on the table. Attorney McKeller recalled that Mr. Morrow made the motion, seconded by Ms. Holder, to approve the branding and logo and asked if they wished to retain the motion and second. Mr. Morrow retained the motion, but Ms. Holder withdrew her second because she had concerns about the proposed colors of the design for safety reasons. Mr. Baker then seconded the motion. Vote was 3 in favor, 1 opposed (Holder); the motion carried.

**J. Open Mic/Additional Participant Concerns** – Commissioner Chapman commented that when he receives the ETAB agendas and minutes he distributes them to all Commissioners and the County Manager.

Mr. Morrow gave a brief update of upcoming projects that NCDOT is doing for us that will include trail improvements.

**K. Adjourn** – There being no further business, at 4:51 p.m. Ms. Holder moved, seconded by Mr. Daniel, to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

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Maureen Copelof
Mayor

Denise Hodsdon, CMC
City Clerk

Minutes Approved: August 19, 2024