MINUTES
ECUSTA TRAIL ADVISORY BOARD 2.0

Wednesday, October 30, 2024 – 3:30 pm
City Hall Council Chambers

Members Present:	Aaron Baker, Chair, Council Member Mac Morrow, Vice Chair, Council Member Larry Chapman, Transylvania County Commissioner Dee Dee Perkins, Transylvania Development Authority Rebekah Robinson, Conserving Carolina (Zoom) John Ditillo, Friends of Ecusta Trail Sheila Carland, Transylvania Economic Alliance Doug Miller, Heart of Brevard (Zoom) Meredith Carli, At-Large Appointment (Zoom)
Absent:	Chris Burns, Henderson County RTAC Madeline Hanley, At-Large Appointment
Staff Present:	Maureen Copelof, Mayor, Ex-Officio Wilson Hooper, City Manager Aaron Bland, Assistant Planning Director David Todd, City Engineer
Guests:	Christine Stout, Lonnie Watkins, Tad Fogel, Mark Tooley, Vicki Eastland

A. Welcome and Call to Order

Committee Co-Chair Mac Morrow welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 3:34 PM.

B. Certification of Quorum

Quorum was certified by City Planner Katherine Buzby.

C. Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve amended agenda by Ms. Perkins, seconded by Mr. Baker. The motion carried unanimously.

D. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve September 25, 2024 meeting minutes by Mr. Chapman, seconded by Mr. Perkins.

E. Recap of Last Meeting & Follow-Ups

Mr. Hooper recapped the last meeting: Location of mile markers and multiple parking locations were discussed and given to staff for further review. Staff is scheduled to have a preliminary map of amenity locations at the next ETAB 2.0 meeting.

F. Helene Impacts on the Trail

Traffic Planning & Design (TPD) will go out to assess the damage of the railroad bed for damaged caused by Helene and any other features that may impact their design. TPD may need to redo the survey based on their findings at impacted sites. The damage assessment is outside of the approved Scope of Work for TPD so a supplemental contact will be awarded to them for the damage assessments. They will require assess to walk the trail so they are working with the City Manager and Planning Director to get the path cleared. Once the walkthrough is completed, they will report back to the City immediately and will upload information into GIS in about a week's time. The final report on the damage should be a week or two after that is completed (2-3 weeks total). TPD is currently working on driveway access point modifications for a private property that currently has a bridge that will most likely need to be removed due to its current condition and on scoping the final design.

Mr. Chapman stated that the County is receiving multiple concerns about if the culverts in the flood prone areas are being addressed by the TPD design. Ms. Stout confirmed that culvert evaluation is part of their scope and will be addressing culverts that need to be replaced or upsized. They have areas of where they will be increasing the ground elevation and areas they will be lowing it, so they are making sure that they have no impact on the floodplains in these areas. There are areas that will be submerged during flooding, but this is common practice with greenway projects that follow rivers and will be designed to drain properly and not hold water. An example of this is near Crab Creek where the trail is adjacent the river, but the drainage will actually be improved due to upsizing pipes. They are in talks to resolve issues with the new NCDOT bridge crossing on Wilson Rd.

Mr. Hooper asked for a timeline of the design work as Helene has created a delay. Ms. Stout stated that the timeline is dependent on if they must resurvey specific areas, and whether they are required to submit a revised 30% deign or can the changes be made at final design stage. Mr. Watkins will investigate this further with NCDOT after the damage assessment is completed. Henderson County sections have some reported damage to the already constructed trail, and are preparing a supplement contract to get repairs completed but no financial damage numbers are available yet. The delay timeline is not known for them yet as some sections will need to be repaved and the paving plants shut down for the winter depending on the weather.

G. How to Measure the Trail's Success

Conserving Carolina in conjunction with NC State University have come up with options on how to measure the economic impacts of the trail by assigning different categories (see attachment). Henderson County is doing the economic impact study mostly in house by geo-analysis, building permits, and possible zoning overlay along the trail to better steer how they want development to look.

The City is managing the Transylvania County section of the trail so it will not be directly benefiting from an increase in property values as the taxes on the majority of the properties lie outside the City's jurisdiction. Mr. Hooper wants to know property value growth related to the trail so he recommends the study focus on the Property Value and Tax Revenues approach to measure economic impact of property values of adjacent properties versus non-adjacent property owners to distinguish natural growth and trail related growth.

Mr. Baker recommended one-to-one economic development activity tracking related to the trail as potential developers are already asking in Henderson County about proximity to the proposed trail. The Economic Alliance may be able to track this by project development based on the trail or the County permitting office can ask projects coming at permitting if the trail had any impact on their project.

Ms. Copelof brought up savings to families that will be using the trail for transportation purposes and is there is a way to track this, maybe by questionnaire or survey. Also, half of the grant money was given for the trail as the National Forest wanted a way to bring people to the forest without the parking problems this creates; so, the economic impacts to the forest will need to be tracked somehow too to justify the need for the grant.

Friends of Ecusta Trail is in discussion with TPD to design in trail counters as an amenity in the final design. A supplemental contract may need to be given to TPD to design the trail counter locations from Oskar Blues to downtown Brevard, and Friends will be more than willing to pay for this supplemental contract. They can provide volunteers to do any surveys needed, or are willing to coordinate data and County needs as requested.

Ms. Perkins tracks visitors at her business by zip code. Mr. Miller stated that cell phone location data may be able to be used to measure some of the impacts and to contact the Transportation Development Authority (TDA) as they are already using cell phone data for some tracking purposes. He also stated it may be better for NC State to gather all the information needed for these reports and not have multiple sources of data coming in that may not be coordinated. A graduate student from UGA did a market study on Transylvania County and TDA has that study now. UNC and Brevard College may be able to help with market studies as well.

Quality of Life survey data could be measured to see how the trail impacts the health and welfare of trail users. Blue Zones has some data already and could be used as a basis for measuring quality of life. Mr. Chapman also recommended tracking the elderly population specifically to show positive health impacts and bring in visitors to the County.

H. Public Comment

Ms. Harrington with the Blue Ridge Bicycle Club would like to survey the value between different users of the trail (walkers, runners, bicyclers, etc.) to go into depth about how people look at the trail. They also have volunteers available for projects.

Sales tax implications should be tracked as well as property taxes.

The Transylvania Bird Club discussed the potential installation of a bird observation tower back in December 2022 and is asking to have it implemented. Ms. Copelof inquired if the tower will be in the Right-of-Way (ROW) or on private property and Mr. Chapman stated it is private property so the City decided to have the trail constructed first then evaluate where the tower can be constructed via talking to the property owners at that time. The City did try to reach out to the property owner (Prudential) previously to submit a proposal to them and were not successful but will try again.

Mr. Baker mentioned that NCDOT project R-5800 will be delayed due to having to fix Helene damaged roads. Per Ms. Eastland, the update they have received (prior to the flood) is that the draft State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) will be released in January will address financial constraints and other issues and a delay is anticipated. Mr. Hooper stated the staff working group met before this meeting and are discussing between when the trail opens and when R-5800 is completed, how does the City get people into downtown with the infrastructure we currently have on a temporary basis. Information on decisions will be brought to this board in the future.

I. Set Date for Next Meeting

A special meeting of the Ecusta Trail Advisory Board 2.0 is scheduled for Wednesday, December 4, 2024 at 3:30 PM that will be a November/December meeting combined due to the holidays .

J. Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:31 PM.

X _____
Aaron Baker, Chair

Minutes Approved- 12/4/24

X _____
Katherine Buzby, City Planner

Attachments: Economic Impact Study Handout

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

ITRE

Economic Impact Study

Methods and Associated Options

Impact	Option 1	Option 2	Recommended
Construction Impacts	Use capital expenditures	Extrapolate based on typical costs per trail mile	Option 1
Property Value & Tax Revenues	Use parcel data before and after the trail has been built to see how property values have changed over time. Requires multiple years and multiple home sales.	Extrapolate based on typical property value premiums found using a meta-analysis in literature and apply to parcels in the trailshed	Option 1
Tourism Activity	Use trail survey data to obtain percentage of trail users who are tourists.	Extrapolate based on tourism attraction found on other trails.	Option 1
Health Care Cost Reduction	Use trail user surveys to get physical activity profiles of trail users, annualize using annual trail visits	Use trail visits and extrapolate based on PH benefit per trail visit.	Either option
Environmental Impact	Use NLCD and EEA data for carbon storage and sequestration by land cover type	Extrapolate based on findings in literature	Option 1
Local Trail User Expenditures	Use trail user surveys to get expenditure behavior of trail users, annualize using annual trail visits	Extrapolate based on purchase probabilities at business locations within 0.5 miles of the trail	Option 1