MINUTES
ECUSTA TRAIL ADVISORY BOARD 2.0

Wednesday, May 27th, 2026 – 3:30 PM
City Hall Council Chambers

Members Present:	Aaron Baker, Co-Chair, Council Member Dean Lytle, Co-Chair, Council Member Larry Chapman, Transylvania County Commissioner Dee Dee Perkins, Transylvania Development Authority Mark Tooley, Friends of Ecusta Trail Shelia Carland, Transylvania Economic Alliance (via Zoom) Doug Miller, Heart of Brevard Kathy Klepfer, Conserving Carolina
Absent:	Madeline Hanley, At-Large Appointment Meredith Carli, At-Large Appointment
Staff Present:	Maureen Copelof, Mayor, Ex-Officio Chris Burns, Ex-Officio Wilson Hooper, City Manager David Todd, Assistant City Manager Paul Ray, Planning Director Edievith Gass, Board Clerk
Guests:	Hunter Marks , Watermarks Laura Rice, Director, Friends of the Ecusta Trail Christy Stoudt, McAdams Lonnie Watkins, NCDOT Teresa Buckwalter, McAdams (via Zoom) Clark Lovelace, Transylvania County TDA (via Zoom)

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I. Welcome and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Aaron Baker at 3:31 PM, following a brief welcome to all attendees.

II. Certification of Quorum

A quorum was established and certified by Board Clerk Edievith Gass.

III. Approval of Agenda

Chairman A. Baker requested a reordering of the agenda to address Item B prior to Item A. Due to the temporary absence of the presenter for Item B, the committee maintained the original agenda order. D. Lytle moved to approve the agenda as written, M. Tooley seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

IV. Approval of Minutes

Upon a motion made by D. Lytle and seconded by D. Perkins, the draft minutes from January were approved unanimously.

V. Unfinished Business

None.

VI. New Business

A. Signs and Amenities / Way Finding for Existing Section of Trail

W. Hooper introduced a proposal to accelerate the Ecusta Trail branding and signage project, focusing on installing branded signs from the Oskar Blues area to downtown Brevard. Hunter Marks of Watermark, the firm handling Henderson County's trail signage, was introduced to brief the committee on local sign locations, deployment considerations, costs, and implementation strategies.

H. Marks delivered a progress report on trail amenity integration for the Ecusta Trail segment from Oskar Blues to downtown Brevard. Reviewing standardized designs created with Equinox, Marks confirmed the segment will feature consistent station setups, orientation signage, interpretive markers, and half-mile markers to ensure design continuity.

H. Marks detailed the proposed signage and amenity framework spanning from downtown Hendersonville to Main Street Brevard. He reported that mile markers are established at half-mile increments, positioning Oskar Blues at mile 19.6, Jimmy Harris Depot at mile 21.5, and Main Street at mile 22. H. Marks reviewed the standardized amenity package, which includes bike racks, waste receptacles, repair stations, counters, and overlooks. He noted that while a signature Equinox bench serves as the primary trail standard, the City of Brevard has the option to utilize a Leisure Craft alternative to maintain consistency with existing urban furniture. Furthermore, he presented orientation and station signage mockups approved by the Friends of the Ecusta Trail, noting that station signs are designed to display trail rules on the front and directional maps on the back. H. Marks reported that the initial six miles of the project will feature custom informational signs covering the French Broad River Valley, local history, and geology, along with approved trail etiquette signage. Following minor revisions, the amenity and signage package is scheduled for

bid within one month, with on-the-ground installation expected in two to three months.

H. Marks reviewed the regional layout of the trail, identifying the completed Henderson County East section, the Transylvania County/Brevard West section, and the upcoming Ecusta Trail extension from Oskar Blues to downtown Brevard. He noted that the extension encompasses Jimmy Harris Park and the depot at mile 21.5, reaching downtown at mile 22. Regarding the deployment of amenities and signage for this section, H. Marks advised that the process would be straightforward and could be bid similarly to the initial six-mile phase. He recommended that the City of Brevard and ETAB identify exact signs, station locations, and finalize any necessary design modifications, while cautioning against excessive changes to maintain aesthetic continuity across the entire trail system.

D. Lytle noted that a historical station site exists in the unbuilt Pisgah Forest section. A. Baker suggested that station placement should expand beyond just historical locations. H. Marks agreed, clarifying that while historical significance was considered, current necessity and practical placement are the primary drivers for station location decisions.

H. Marks noted that the upcoming bidding process will secure definitive pricing for specific quantities of benches and stations. He recommended collaborating with the Friends of the Ecusta Trail and P. Ray to draft a preliminary site plan for initial installations, which will be brought to ETAB at a future meeting for feedback and final approval.

Responding to an inquiry from L. Chapman regarding public concern over restroom placement, H. Marks noted that restrooms are not part of the current discussion. Mayor M. Copelof clarified that the under-review trail segment is adequately served by existing facilities at City Hall and the Jimmy Harris Park Depot, eliminating the need for new restroom construction in this section.

H. Marks suggested permanent vaulted restrooms as a mid-term solution for areas with utility constraints. L. Rice reported that a potential site at the Crab Creek Road boat launch is being transferred to the City from Conserving Carolina. To address parking conflicts between trail users and boaters, a localized expansion concept plan has been drafted. Additionally, city staff will meet next week with Pisgah Labs to discuss acquiring or accessing a parcel near Everett Road.

D. Lytle asked if the area is serviced by gravity sewer or force main. W. Hooper noted it is likely gravity, transitioning to a force main closer to town.

D. Miller questioned the strategic reasoning behind installing Ecusta Trail branding and amenities on the active Estatoe segment prior to the Transylvania County construction phase. He requested clarification on the funding mechanism, emphasizing that amenity procurement must be integrated into the broader, multi-

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jurisdictional trail budget rather than managed in isolation. Additionally, he questioned if existing grant funds had been formally approved or allocated for this stretch.

W. Hooper clarified that infrastructure and branding for the Ecusta-Estatoe extension are ineligible for current project grant reimbursements, requiring local funding or alternative municipal revenues. Because certain primary trail amenities are also excluded from grants, the city plans to use existing Tourism Development Authority (TDA) and local capital fund allocations. Hooper identified attending Downtown Development (DD) stakeholders as potential future financial contributors, reiterating that all extension amenities must rely solely on local funding.

D. Miller emphasized that non-grant amenities like restrooms and signage compete for the same local dollars. He questioned the rush to proceed, recommending a holistic evaluation of all trail amenity funding rather than viewing this segment in isolation.

A. Baker noted that while the project could be deferred, its scalable design allows the committee to review upcoming competitive bid pricing before making final commitments. He emphasized that baseline assets like mileposts are necessary for continuity with Henderson County and identified Jimmy Harris Park Depot and the Pisgah Health Foundation junction as high-priority wayfinding sites with potential TDA funding interest. Baker concluded that moving forward would show visible public progress and generate cost savings through a consolidated bid.

D. Todd asked if the upcoming bids would feature unit pricing to grant the city flexibility to purchase extra signs later at locked-in rates, despite potential variances from bulk averages. H. Marks confirmed that the bid framework will require unit pricing for additional signage.

D. Perkins acknowledged valid arguments for both deferring and accelerating the signage project. Providing TDA historical context, she noted that this path and its wayfinding have been discussed for five years. Citing heavy trail use and merchant feedback from 185 King Street, Perkins argued that while delay was once justified during the Ecusta Trail transition, the current high volume of users urgently needs wayfinding. Moving forward now resolves an immediate safety/navigation need, builds public excitement, boosts fundraising, and validates the project ahead of final construction bids.

D. Miller cautioned that the proposal prioritizes immediate spending over comprehensive planning, arguing that amenity procurement must be part of a macro-level budget that considers competing capital needs like public restrooms. He also warned that mixing legacy Estatoe Trail markers with new Ecusta Trail signage could cause user confusion. Miller urged the committee to practice fiscal restraint and complete a system-wide trail asset assessment before approving localized funds.

L. Watkins acknowledged that the design team has fallen behind on the amenities phase, which should have been initiated earlier. He urged immediate action to ensure mile markers and critical wayfinding signs are installed by the time the new segment opens. L. Rice agreed, stating that a lack of clear signage is currently the top complaint received from the public.

D. Miller raised concerns regarding long-term operational liabilities, noting that a comprehensive maintenance strategy lacks establishment. He pointed out that Brevard has no finalized MOUs for fundraising or asset management, unlike Henderson County which utilizes a dedicated Parks and Recreation department. Given current city budget constraints and Public Works personnel shortages, Miller cautioned against isolated asset procurement and urged the committee to prioritize system-wide maintenance planning.

D. Perkins proposed integrating Mr. Miller's feedback into a comprehensive plan by mapping all amenities—such as signage, mile markers, and benches—across the entire Transylvania County section. By calculating full-trail cost estimates now, the project can be phased systematically. The current Ecusta Trail segment would function as Phase One, enabling data-driven financial decisions for the immediate rollout while setting a clear framework for future phases extending toward Hendersonville.

C. Stoudt announced that the county's amenities design phase begins this summer, mapping benches, kiosks, and restrooms. Because this section links at the Oskar Blues kiosk, she urged immediate municipal planning alignment. C. Stoudt also warned that NCDOT's upcoming R-5800 project will build a parallel trail along US 64, making distinct wayfinding coordination essential to differentiate the Ecusta Trail corridor.

Responding to D. Lytle's request for a procedural critique of the amenity timeline, L. Watkins stated that amenity planning should have begun much earlier due to the long lifecycle of the project. However, he noted Brevard will benefit from a streamlined process now that the core design frameworks are complete. Clarifying D. Miller's concerns, Watkins emphasized that the committee is only being asked for conceptual approval of the aesthetics (stations, benches, signs) rather than funding. Once approved conceptually, cost estimates will be gathered so the city can scale its purchases according to budget availability.

W. Hooper asked if the upcoming summer design and cost estimates would include both grant-eligible and non-eligible trail amenities. Teresa Buckwalter (via Zoom) clarified that their current scope covers only grant-funded amenities, including benches, wayfinding signs, mile markers, and stations. She added that they are identifying a few additional station sites and are drafting concept plans for up to three parking and trail access areas to function as centralized amenity hubs. T. Buckwalter noted that amenity locations are nearly finalized, and establishing the exact counts for benches and signs now is vital to determining the trail's overall cost estimate. She

stated that specific sites for these features were mapped out with the committee's assistance during the 30% design phase.

C. Stoudt recommended that the city begin its downtown corridor planning now so that both trail sections can be implemented simultaneously. She reported that the county segment is moving forward, with construction documents expected to be complete by the end of the year.

D. Miller argued that unless funding deadlines require immediate action, the city should defer spending to conduct a comprehensive review. He noted that because the TDA funds infrastructure county-wide, a single, holistic grant application could secure a larger package of amenities—such as benches and signage—for both the Estatoe and Ecusta segments together. He concluded that focusing solely on immediate signage for the existing section could shortchange future funding opportunities.

A. Baker clarified that the meeting's primary objective was to align active stakeholders on the structural and aesthetic integration of both trail segments. He noted that the committee's scope now includes evaluating how the existing municipal path will interface with the design standards of the federally funded Ecusta Trail. Baker emphasized that securing parallel cost estimates is necessary to determine baseline funding for critical assets like half-mile markers. Additionally, he recommended evaluating the feasibility of a phased, incremental asset deployment if a long delay occurs between initial structural work and total project completion.

W. Hooper requested a proposal from C. Stoudt to expand their design scope for in-town trail amenities, which Stoudt agreed to review with Hunter Marks. D. Miller cautioned that adding this work to the active contract is legally prohibited due to project limits, warning it would disrupt environmental clearances and the primary construction timeline. He recommended a separate contract instead. H. Marks expressed flexibility regarding the contract vehicle and agreed with Miller, noting that because the same design personnel overlap across all four trail segments, regional design continuity is inherently preserved without requiring a single, consolidated contract.

D. Lytle supported an early layout of initial amenities to build community credibility but advised fiscal caution until definitive construction costs are revealed this summer. He noted that amenities are strong fundraising tools and reminded the committee that current capital campaign donors are already owed recognition for future assets. A. Baker agreed with this financial overlap, noting it was his original motivation for reordering the agenda items to allow the construction update to provide context for the amenity debate.

D. Todd proposed a dual-signage system similar to the Mountains-to-Sea Trail to manage overlapping routes. He suggested using prominent Ecusta Trail signs with secondary Estatoe Trail markers where they intersect between Main Street and the

high school, noting this mirrors shared stretches of the Appalachian and Mountains-to-Sea trails. D. Lytle agreed, stating that this framework should be included in the scope of work to prepare for future co-branding with the upcoming Hellbender Trail system.

A. Baker warned that overlapping names would confuse the public, arguing that the Estatoe Trail name should only apply from Oskar Blues toward Pisgah Forest, with a new name chosen later for the high school segment. He provided historical context from the city historian regarding the original Cherokee "Estatoe" route into Rosman and South Carolina, noting that because "Ecusta" is also a word of Cherokee origin, the trail's native history remains fully honored under the new layout.

W. Hooper recommended requesting a quote from C. Stoudt and H. Marks for a separate contract to design amenities from Oskar Blues to downtown Brevard, to be reviewed at a future meeting. A. Baker asked if the scope would focus specifically on location recommendations and installation feasibility. C. Stoudt and H. Marks confirmed the scope would evaluate the corridor to place signage at trail entry points, select final amenity sites, and offer optional bidding and project oversight, which can be phased according to the city's preferences.

D. Miller noted that the design team's overarching project knowledge allows them to balance amenity counts across different sections to prevent over-installation downtown. A. Baker accepted the recommendation as the next step. There being no further questions, he transitioned to the next agenda item, requesting a current status report, an overview of next steps, and an updated project timeline, noting the committee had not met in four months.

B. General Update – Trail Status: Design Work/Next Step

C. Stoudt presented the project status, schedule, and milestones using printed materials due to a hardware delivery failure. She noted that Henderson County's phase is moving faster than the local segment because of historical grant sequencing and a "locally let" project delivery model, which avoids complex state DOT procurement channels. Since January, the team expanded the environmental study area to secure FHWA clearances for future trailheads and amenities. This expansion required additional technical reviews, including supplementary wetland and community impact assessments.

C. Stoudt reported on the systematic identification of natural resources within the expanded study areas, providing critical data for the environmental clearance document ahead of the summer field inspection. She also shared a concept layout of the Crab Creek Road parcel. This layout maps out local drainage channels, an active waterway, and protected wetlands, all of which are now included in the finalized Natural Resource Report.

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Regarding stormwater management and infrastructure design, C. Stoudt noted that the drainage submittal was strategically bifurcated with regulatory approval. The initial phase was submitted in January to expedite utility utility-impact coordination, thereby proactively shielding the project from late-stage utility relocation liabilities. The comprehensive drainage plan for the remainder of the eight-mile trail corridor was subsequently submitted in March, passing review with negligible agency corrections.

C. Stoudt summarized the April and May milestones, noting that bridge designs were filed and the updated Natural Resource Report was approved. She highlighted an NCDOT collaboration along Old Henderson Highway that adds safety guardrails without disturbing utility poles, avoiding major relocation costs. Additionally, the team submitted floodway compliance packages for the Davidson and French Broad rivers to verify a no-impact design. Finally, erosion control plans are tracking three weeks ahead of schedule and are designed to fully protect existing wetlands.

C. Stoudt reported strong progress on the trail project, with several summer milestones approaching. The environmental document is on track for late June completion to secure funding, followed by the submission of 65% design plans and an updated cost estimate next month. Upcoming work includes subsurface utility investigations, surveying, and railroad geotechnical designs. This summer, the team will secure DOT right-of-way clearance while engineers audit the eight-mile corridor to ensure proper drop-off railing offsets. Additionally, a specialized culvert evaluation is underway, which could save $500,000 in grant funding.

C. Stoudt shared that a full (and expensive) flood evaluation or Culvert Survey Report will not be required for culvert replacements. Because any necessary replacements will be "in-kind," they can be noted directly on the plans, saving the project significant time and money.

W. Hooper noted that the city can use dedicated stormwater funds to cover culverts requiring local dollars, maximizing cost efficiency by syncing repairs with trail construction. Ms. Stoudt agreed, noting that alternative methods like culvert lining are being considered to extend infrastructure life. McAdams has evaluated these costs, and a strategic decision will be made after the 65% design, and updated cost estimates are approved. Stoudt highlighted two specific sites: a dual culvert supporting wetlands between the park and Oskar Blues, and another beneath the former paper mill landfill pond.

A. Baker asked if the culvert evaluations accounted for stormwater capacity and structural wear from trail traffic. C. Stoudt explained that the primary risk is internal corrosion and erosion during heavy storms, which could compromise trail stability and trigger a 90-day closure. On bridges, she detailed challenges with a deteriorating private bridge near Enon Baptist Church. While a driveway relocation alternative was ruled out due to a $400,000 retaining wall requirement, the team secured permission to use NCDOT's post-Helene "Private Roads and Bridges Program" standards. This

strategy meets federal AASHTO requirements while cutting replacement costs in half to $400,000–$500,000.

W. Hooper highlighted the new bridge approach as a major success, emphasizing that it simultaneously secures critical cost savings and protects a highly scenic corridor from being disrupted by a large retaining wall. Stoudt expressed agreement, confirming that the team will explore two structural options to present to the board. The first option will completely span the area, while the second will mirror the current structure's existing look to retain its historic character.

A. Baker confirmed that the NCDOT program provides a more affordable design standard rather than direct funding. C. Stoudt noted that adopting this standard will yield major project savings and that the bridge design will quickly realign with the project timeline. This summer, the team is also coordinating with Pisgah Labs regarding their request for a city fence permit next to the trail. This dialogue has led to preliminary discussions about leasing a scenic, vacant parcel owned by Pisgah Labs northeast of Everett Road for a new trailhead. Stoudt concluded by emphasizing that current trailhead concepts are preliminary sketches; the team must still evaluate sightlines, design drainage, and secure DOT driveway permits for safe access.

T. Buckwalter noted that the initial trailhead concepts originated from the original RAISE grant funding. Stoudt agreed with the clarification, adding that these preliminary ideas were developed years ago during the initial Ecusta Trail feasibility study.

C. Stoudt walked the board through the complex NCDOT federal compliance flow chart, noting that the project schedule is reverse engineered from a firm letting date of April 20, 2027. To meet this target, all final design work must wrap up by the end of 2026, with permitting and bid documentation finalized in early 2027. The team is pushing toward the 65% design milestone, with the final Plans, Specifications, and Estimates (PS&E) package due in January 2027. Refined cost estimates will be delivered in July/August and November 2026, with each update lowering the project's contingency rate as hard data replaces unknowns. Lastly, Stoudt suggested structuring certain amenities as "add alternates" in the bid package to give the city financial flexibility ahead of a March 2027 advertisement date.

L. Watkins provided critical context on the strict timeline, explaining that because the project exceeds $5 million, the letting process must be handled by the NCDOT Central Unit in Raleigh rather than the local division office. This centralized oversight requires all finalized materials to be submitted three months prior to the April 20 letting date for an exhaustive review matching plans to official DOT pay items. Watkins noted this phase involves intense coordination, leaving no room to accelerate the advertising schedule. C. Stoudt added that NCDOT's strict compliance procedures naturally lengthen the timeline, as administrative tasks like contract reviews often take six months instead of two, requiring built-in schedule patience.

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W. Hooper asked if the projected 12-to-18-month construction window was a flexible estimate or a hard contractual requirement. L. Watkins clarified that the NCDOT Central Unit will embed mandatory completion deadlines and strict environmental moratorium dates directly into the contract. Regarding a potential January 2029 wrap-up, Watkins noted that an 18-month build window starting with the April 2027 letting will capitalize on two full summer construction seasons (2027 and 2028). As a result, the team is targeting a more favorable completion date around October 2028.

D. Todd requested clarification on the timeline for the contract award and the subsequent notice to proceed following the April 20 date. L. Watkins explained that after bids open on April 20, a standard one-month administrative window occurs for the contract award, insurance verification, and bonding, placing the official "date of availability" around May 20. Watkins emphasized that while the final completion deadline is legally binding, the contractor retains total flexibility over their start date and staging. Some firms may choose to delay mobilization and utilize double crews later to meet the mandated schedule.

C. Stoudt shared comparative timeline data from colleagues, noting that Phase 1 required approximately three years from its summer 2022 design start to its 2025 opening. The current phase began design in 2023, placing the team roughly three years into the workflow. Stoudt noted that while this state-regulated process is inherently slower, the team will provide hard milestone dates to help the public track progress.

A. Baker raised concerns about potential pre-construction delays, questioning if extensive revisions and comments from the NCDOT Central Unit in Raleigh could stall progress. L. Watkins reassured the board that while numerous comments are expected, the three-month pre-letting window explicitly accounts for this rigorous review process. Watkins noted that the team does not anticipate any project "showstoppers" during this phase. Because environmental permits will already be secured, any remaining state comments can typically be resolved in time to maintain the April letting schedule.

W. Hooper addressed potential budget shortfall risks tied to the upcoming August 2026 cost estimate, noting that while current indicators remain reasonable, a significant funding gap unresolved by value engineering or private donations would cause a temporary project pause. L. Watkins reinforced these concerns, stating that existing funding is already insufficient for the current estimate. He noted that if the 65% design estimate reveals a wider gap, the board must evaluate scaling back the project scope or seeking new funding. Watkins emphasized that the August timeline provides a critical window to pursue alternative revenue before final deadlines.

C. Stoudt noted that the design-build process for the project's middle section should enable that phase to quickly catch up to the current schedule. Because design-build allows contractors to begin early site work like clearing while simultaneously

finalizing design plans, its timeline tracks just a couple of months behind this phase, keeping the broader project on a parallel track.

A. Baker noted that the board had previously discussed upcoming cost estimates for the middle section in January. L. Watkins clarified that because the design-build contract is already awarded and encompasses both design and construction, those project costs are locked in. Baker then inquired if these established figures could help the city better forecast or refine its own upcoming construction cost estimates.

D. Todd advised that the design-build nature of the middle section limits direct cost comparisons, urging strict adherence to April letting deadlines to avoid severe delays caused by environmental moratoriums. He demanded immediate reporting of any potential schedule slippage to allow for prompt remedial intervention by the city.

D. Todd raised concerns that overlapping bat tree-cutting restrictions and trout stream regulations could freeze construction for a year if the schedule slips. L. Watkins explained that a "pay-to-cut" framework acts as a flexible, $7,000-per-acre contingency plan. Because fees are only charged on an as-needed basis if clearing occurs during restricted dates, pre-approving this mechanism serves as a zero-upfront-cost insurance policy against environmental delays.

L. Watkins noted that the trout stream moratorium relies on different rules than the bat restrictions, with D. Todd adding that their opposing timelines create a narrow work window for bridges and culverts. C. Stoudt clarified that most of the physical work occurs well above the critical impact zones. She stated that the team is evaluating trout variance requirements while awaiting a final decision from the NCDOT division. Todd concluded by reiterating the board's commitment to absolute accountability and strict schedule adherence.

A. Baker asked if the upcoming 65% design milestone would include the final recommendations for the types and numbers of amenities in the Transylvania County section. Ms. Stoudt replied that this timeline remains flexible because amenities are currently covered by the project's contingency budget. She explained that the engineering team must first finish evaluating drainage and spatial constraints for these features, assuring the board that finalized numbers and placement data will be delivered as soon as the technical assessment wraps up.

A. Baker highlighted that the upcoming project milestone will provide a strategic decision-making window. By combining the refined cost estimate and amenity plans with real-world bid results from the Henderson County phase, the board will be positioned to make smart, data-driven choices about adding extra amenities. Stoudt added a slight clarification to the timeline, noting that while the technical package is submitted in July, the actual cost estimate report will likely arrive in August 2026 due to the multi-week processing time required after submission.

VII. Public Comments

A. Baker apologized for initially bypassing the public comment period and opened the floor to attendees.

An unidentified local resident requested that the city open safe, clear sections of the railroad right-of-way to the public to maintain community engagement during the upcoming year of construction inactivity. The speaker proposed a volunteer pilot project to clear brush behind Oskar Blues to foster community ownership and demonstrate the trail's value to skeptical neighbors. The residents suggested that safety and liability risks could be managed similarly to establish volunteer trail programs in Pisgah and DuPont forests.

D. Miller noted that volunteer work in Pisgah and DuPont forests requires formal service agreements to manage worker safety and liability. He emphasized that the city must thoroughly evaluate and establish similar legal and liability frameworks before bringing volunteers out to clear the railroad corridor.

A resident supported calls for volunteer opportunities, noting her family relocated from Asheville specifically for the trail, and expressed a desire to volunteer once liability frameworks are finalized. She noted that sparse online updates had mistakenly led the community to believe the project had stalled. Citing how reassuring the meeting's engineering updates were, she urged the city to publish these milestones online to restore local enthusiasm.

L. Rice highlighted a recent newsletter update from Stoudt detailing behind-the-scenes project progress. Regarding potential early trail access, L. Chapman noted that adjacent property owners must be notified in advance to mitigate complaints. W. Hooper agreed to review this protocol, noting that proactive communication with neighboring landowners is already underway.

L. Rice cautioned that opening early trail sections requires resolving dangerous road crossings. She noted Transylvania County has higher-speed roads and more blind spots than Henderson County's lower-speed first phase. Rice urged the committee to carefully evaluate these traffic hazards before granting public right-of-way access.

A *Transylvania Times* representative noted that groundbreaking remains the public's primary question and advised replacing sporadic press releases with a steady stream of smaller updates. Sharing minor design victories (e.g., signage or benches) in partnership with the newspaper will reassure residents of active progress. The representative and Laura offered to collaborate with the team on this continuous media strategy.

Clark Lovelace, Transylvania County TDA (via Zoom) thanked W. Hooper for the session's technical insights. He noted that the committee’s infrastructure and engineering updates directly impact the TDA, as these decisions will likely involve future TDA capital and funding resources.

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VIII. Remarks / Future Agenda Considerations

A. Baker opened the floor for final committee remarks.

L. Rice announced that June and July roundabout construction on Highway 64 will block the trail thoroughfare at Little River Park. The city will actively issue communications advising travelers to avoid Highway 64 toward Hendersonville and directing trail users to stick to both ends of the path. Rice noted that consistent public updates maintain project momentum and support future fundraising readiness.

D. Miller recommended that the city swiftly finalize a contract with the Friends of Ecusta to unlock significant nonprofit fundraising for trail maintenance. He also warned of safety risks from e-bikes and mopeds traveling up to 30 mph on sidewalks and the Estatoe Trail. He urged the city to establish clear signage, public education, and law enforcement rules before trail construction concludes to protect pedestrians.

M. Tooley stated that the Friends of Ecusta are analyzing national e-bike trends, noting a rise in local ordinances across California and New Jersey due to a lag in state and federal action. He emphasized that future federal laws will only regulate manufacturing specifications, not local trail behavior. Warning that children are operating high-powered electric vehicles, Tooley urged Henderson County and the City of Brevard to enact local ordinances, noting that trail rules remain legally unenforceable without a local legislative framework.

L. Chapman outlined two operational priorities: executing a public relations update to share design milestones—potentially utilizing The Transylvania Times column to reassure residents of active progress—and immediately briefing local Police, Sheriff, and EMS leaders on trail security. Early emergency planning will avoid bottlenecks and establish a foundation for a public safety MOU.

A. Baker proposed requesting an operational brief on Henderson County's open six-mile trail section to review maintenance costs, safety incidents, and e-bike activity ahead of Brevard's August 2026 technical update. M. Tooley confirmed that Henderson County's existing tracking system can provide this data, which will help guide Brevard's future maintenance, security, and ordinance frameworks.

IX. Closing Remark and Next Meeting

A. Baker confirmed that the committee will reconvene for its next monthly regular meeting on Wednesday, June 24 at 3:30 p.m.

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X. Adjourn

On a motion by D. Perkins, seconded by D. Lytle and carried unanimously, Chairman A. Baker adjourned the meeting at 5:04 p.m.

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Aaron Baker, Chair

Minutes Approved Date-_____

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Edievith Gass, Board Secretary

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