MINUTES
ECUSTA TRAIL ADVISORY BOARD 2.0

Wednesday, January 28th, 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 John Ditillo, Friends of Ecusta Trail Sheila Carland, Transylvania Economic Alliance (via Zoom)
Absent:	Madeline Hanley, At-Large Appointment Rebekah Robinson, Conserving Carolina Doug Miller, Heart of Brevard Meredith Carli, At-Large Appointment Chris Burns, Ex-Officio
Staff Present:	Maureen Copelof, Mayor, Ex-Officio Wilson Hooper, City Manager David Todd, Assistant City Manager Paul Ray, Planning Director Madalin Baker, Board Clerk
Guests:	Lonnie Watkins, NCDOT Laura Rice, Director, Friends of the Ecusta Trail Christy Stoudt, McAdams Tad Fogel, Friends of the Ecusta Trail

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A. Welcome and Call to Order

Committee Co-Chair Mac Morrow welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 3:31 PM.

B. Certification of Quorum

Quorum was certified by Board Clerk Madalin Baker.

C. Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda as written by D. Perkins, seconded by L. Chapman, passed unanimously.

D. Approval of Minutes

L. Watkins submitted one edit to the Board Clerk for the November draft minutes. D. Perkins made a motion to approve the draft minutes with L. Watkins' edit. L. Chapman seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

E. Public Comment – None.

F. Unfinished Business – None.

G. New Business

1. Timeline and Design Updates
   W. Hooper addressed the Board, thanking them for their dedication and acknowledging that some of the more recent meetings have not felt as hands-on or action oriented. He shared the City is nearing a reliable estimate for the full cost of the trail, which is expected later in the summer. He highlighted the way the Transylvania County portion of the trail requires highly technical design work as it passes lots of various terrain, and said Christy would share more in her presentation.

   C. Stoudt gave her presentation, attached. She began by thanking the many contributors to Ecusta Trail, noting the huge effort the trail has required from multiple investors. Providing context on the timeline of the trail's progress, C. Stoudt shared that in June of 2025, 30% design was completed, and since then, McAdams has been working through further details and advancing the design. C. Stoudt shared the trail features with some complex stormwater design challenges, and that McAdams has expanded their environmental study area to determine possible trailhead areas. To reach the construction phase, C. Stoudt noted all utilities in the area must be accounted for and moved. She referenced the charts in her presentation to illustrate the multi-step process required before construction is able to begin. L. Watkins contributed as well, sharing that NCDOT projects valued at over five million dollars, like this one, must be let out of the Raleigh office, and cannot be let out of the division office, which also offers less flexibility and takes more time. He shared there are lots of federal rules to adhere to in the letting process. L. Watkins went on to say that they feel pretty good about the timeline included in Christy's presentation, from an NCDOT standpoint.

   Following her presentation, C. Stoudt opened the Board for questions. M. Copeloff asked if we leave the project in May of 2027, what date are we looking at for construction to be complete? L. Watkins said up to two years from the let date, sometimes a year and a half, but that is decided by Raleigh. He pointed out that the Hendersonville portion of the trail, which is 6 miles, took about a year and a half to construct, and that the proposed Brevard portion of the trail will be 8 miles, and features a river crossing, making it more complex.

   L. Chapman asked if the trail funding is locked in, and if there is any risk of federal money being pulled from the project. W. Hooper shared he feels like we are in the clear,

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but the risk is never zero. C. Stoudt followed by saying they are looking at August or September of 2026 for obligated funds, which is far ahead of the required deadline. W. Hooper asked for clarity on what it means once the funds are "obligated," and L. Watkins shared that means NCDOT can begin writing checks against the fund. A. Baker asked when that means the funds are 100% safe—is it May 2027? C. Stoudt said no, in fall of 2026 once the funds are obligated, they are secure, and NCDOT has the complete authorization at that point to spend that money. L. Watkins said he has no concern about the funds being in danger or not meeting the authorization deadline.

M. Tooley asked what is being done in the design and engineering process to reduce possible construction costs. C. Stoudt said they are absolutely trying to keep construction costs down, in part by considering using retaining walls and re-using existing bridges.

A. Baker referenced the schedule in C. Stoudt's presentation, saying that the regularly scheduled let date looks like September of 2027, but on the accelerated schedule, it looks like the let date could be as early as May 2027—he asked how positive C. Stoudt is feeling about achieving the accelerated schedule. She replied that they are confident, and even the May 2027 let date has a bit of built in wiggle room. L. Watkins elaborated, saying the risk factor for the schedule is the review process once plans are sent to the central unit in Raleigh—he said it normally takes about two weeks, but can take longer—and that when they submit for permits, it typically takes about two months to be reviewed through the army corps of engineers, but can take longer—both of which are out of NCDOT control entirely. L. Watkins said if either review drags on, local NCDOT has no control, but it would still not put the September 2027 let date in danger at all. He said otherwise, he feels confident about the accelerated timeline C. Stoudt shared, and his team is still working to improve the timeline even further.

W. Hooper asked L. Watkins what the Henderson County completion schedule looks like now, after switching to the design build model to meet their obligation deadline. L. Watkins said he is unsure, as it is being handled in Raleigh. L. Rice contributed, saying the most recent construction completion date shared at the Hendersonville RTAC meeting was December of 2028. M. Copeloff noted that meant the Brevard portion of trail construction would be complete 5 to 6 months after the Hendersonville construction, and L. Rice said yes, that was correct.

C. Stoudt said there was potential for some trail elements to be usable and open before construction was complete, as long as user safety can be ensured.

A. Baker shared his thoughts, saying there is lots of excitement from Brevard residents about the future of the trail, but also pessimism in the community about how long the process is taking, given the dynamic between Henderson county having a section of trail complete and Brevard having nothing—some folks have preconceived notions that Brevard is behind Henderson County. He shared that perception is reality, even if it is not rooted in facts, and said that if there are simple ways to provide any trail access before construction is 100%, that they should be utilized. He said people are eager to enjoy the trail, and even if it's not planned for, that people will try to use the trail before it's open regardless. L. Chapman seconded A. Baker's thoughts, adding if there might be any way to push out communications to the county regarding the

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timeline of trail completion, it would do away with the "what-ifs" that folks have, eliminating rumors and keeping the public in the loop.

D. Todd asked if any of the construction documents so far dictate which end to start construction at, and L. Watkins said no, they don't tell their contractors where to begin work on a certain project. He said if they wanted to, the City could instruct them on a starting point accordingly, but it could come at additional cost. D. Todd said perhaps looking at key crosswalks in Brevard as a starting point for construction could be good for public opinion and visibility. C. Stoudt said from her point of view, the ideal starting point would be from the existing Estatoe trail in Brevard, with constraints being the construction of the bridge and the crossing of Old Hendersonville Highway, which is complex. C. Stoudt reminded the Board that paving is the last step of the construction process to occur, and that parts of the trail could be safe and walkable before paving is complete—that there are ways the City could get creative. C. Stoudt said perhaps publishing an infographic illustrating the Hendersonville timeline compared to the Brevard timeline of trail progress could be valuable to educate the public. A. Baker said he liked that idea, noting the importance of clarifying the funding sources and process for each portion. C. Stoudt continued, saying that sounds like a great idea, even when grants were pursued. D. Lytle said it would be nice to feature an interactive map on the FOET website as well, and L. Rice said that one already exists, but more details regarding the funding process could certainly be added. A. Baker added, saying public information is also good to encourage economic development opportunities—that possible developers aren't going to commit money to trail-related business ideas until they know it is real, so more public knowledge could help in that way as well. A. Baker thanked C. Stoudt and L. Watkins for their hard work.

H. Remarks / Future Agenda Considerations

L. Chapman noted that his concern was premature but said that Hendersonville had seen lots of ice and snow on the trail that was not melting quickly due to shade coverage. He said Brevard should consider who, if anyone, might eventually be responsible for clearing the trail in the event of snow or ice.

W. Hooper introduced the Board to Shawnee Cummings, the new Assistant to the City Manager.

T. Fogel reminded the Board that Cycle NC will be at Brevard College in August and said they are making progress planning routes to include the portion of the Ecusta trail that is already open.

L. Rice encouraged the Board to come out to the "Main to Main" ride and walk event to be hosted on the Ecusta trail in Hendersonville on April 19th.

I. Adjourn

The next meeting was set for February 25th, 2026. D. Lytle motioned to adjourn, seconded by D. Perkins, passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 PM.

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X _____
Aaron Baker, Chair

Minutes Approved-_____

X _____
Madalin Baker, Board Secretary

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