

**Henderson County
RAIL-TRAIL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Monthly Meeting
Wednesday, November 8, 2023**

The RTAC held a regularly called meeting on November 8, 2023, at 10:00 a.m. in the King Street Meeting Room and via Microsoft Teams. Voting members that were present virtually, online are denoted with the letter “O”.

Voting Member	Present	Not in Attendance
Chuck McGrady, Chair	√	
Chris Burns, Vice Chair		√
Douglas Moon, at-large	√	
Selena Einwechter, at-large	√	
David Adams, at-large	√	
Dr. Ken Shelton, at-large	O	
Brent Detwiler, City of Hendersonville		√
Nancy McKinley, Town of Laurel Park		√
Mike Egan, Conserving Carolina	√	

Also present: Autumn Radcliff, Planning Director; Janna Bianculli, Senior Planner; and Marcus Jones, County Engineer. Joining remotely was the City of Brevard planning staff and the mayor.

Call to Order

Chairman Chuck McGrady called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

Public Comment

None.

Approval Meeting Summary

Ken Shelton had one typo correction to the summary that he gave to staff. The committee approved the October 11, 2023, meeting summary with the correction noted by majority.

Updates

Conserving Carolina

Kristin Cozza stated that she had no updates, and that Mark Tooley would discuss CC’s only update.

Friends of Ecusta Trail (FOET)

Mark Tooley reported that the FOET has been working with Conserving Carolina on a MOU that transfer the fundraising portion of the trail to the FOET’s. He stated that CC will continue to maintain records of pledges. He also stated that the organization is continuing to work with DBD (Destination by Design) on signage and plan to present that to the RTAC and the City of Brevard’s rail advisory group. He said that Henderson County has been working on the MOU and the FOET is working with the City of Brevard on an MOU for the Transylvania County portion. He said that FOET is looking at the user experience.

Chuck McGrady stated that there is an upcoming retreat with the FOET Board and asked Mark to comment on some of the items for discussion. Mark stated that the retreat will take place on December 1st, and the main topic will be looking at reorganizing the FOET into a true friend’s organization. He also reported that the FOET have an RFP out for redesigning their website as part of this reorganization effort and will continue to work in partnership with Henderson County, City of Brevard, and both TDA’s.

Chuck McGrady thanked the County staff, including other staff like Jimmy Brissie and Mike Morgan, for making the groundbreaking event a success. He stated there is a lot of work that goes into these events and this one turned out well. Autumn Radcliff stated that Chirs Todd was unable to attend the meeting but wanted to make sure some items were updated to the RTAC.

Ecusta Groundbreaking Event

She stated that the groundbreaking event was held on Saturday October 28th at the Veteran Healing Farm with around 400 people in attendance. Ms. Radcliff said that it was a successful event that highlighted the programs and projects at the Veteran Healing Farm, but the success of the Ecusta Trail. She stated that there were several guest speakers which were stated during the meeting. She also thanked the FOET for their assistance with the event and with parking, including a recognition to the County Building Services Director, Crystal Lyda who assisted the FOET with parking. A video clip from WLOS and the County Communication Director was also sent to the RTAC.

Construction of Phase I (Ecusta East from S. Main to US 64 – 6 miles)

Ms. Radcliff provided an overview of the status of the construction of Phase I or as we refer to it as Ecusta East. She stated that the Board of Commissioners approved the selection of NHM Constructors, but the bid had to be extended 60 days to align with the Board of Transportation meetings. The project cost is \$10,629,359 and will be paid for using a portion of the NSFLTP funds and use STBG-DA for the remainder of the cost. Chuck McGrady reminded the RTAC that there was a match requirement for these grants. Marcus Jones stated that NHM had been very willing to work with the County on the bid extension. He also stated that with the bid amount and including all other construction related items, the cost per mile on this portion was around 2 million.

Ms. Radcliff stated that the Board of Transportation will meet next week on November 15th agreements with the Henderson County for the funding of construction. Following the meeting, a contract with NHM will be executed. Anticipated construction completion in end of calendar year 2024. Mr. McGrady stated that there had been some legislative issues with the Board of Transportation that had nothing to do with this project, which resulted in a court case last week on the Boards make up. He stated that he will continue to serve regardless of the outcome, and it will be business as usual until anything is decided.

Ecusta West PE (US 64 to County Line – 5 miles)

Ms. Radcliff reported that the Board of Commissioners approved the selection of JMT to complete the PE for Ecusta West. The FBR-MPO approved moving some of the STBG-DA funds from construction of the west section for PE. This will allow the County to continue moving forward and the RAISE funds for PE will be applied towards the construction. The Board of Transportation will review the STIP amendment need for the Ecusta West PE and will approve the STIP amendment and funding agreement at the December meeting. Ms. Radcliff stated that the scoping of the Ecusta PE is being finalized, and both the scope and fees will have to be reviewed by NCDOT and the GESC (General Engineering Services Consultant). She anticipates that the contract will be finalized following the December Board of Transportation meeting. It is also expected that JMT will survey this section in January/February. The PE will take approximately 18 months to complete. After the 100% design is finalized, NCDOT will move forward with the bidding of the construction. It is anticipated that the trail construction will be done in conjunction with the Transylvania County side. Mr. McGrady mentioned that the City of Brevard is dealing with the same process and there has been a concern stated with the grant funding since the Henderson County portion if moving quicker. Mr. McGrady assured everyone that NCDOT is working on the grant funding allocation and Henderson County is utilizing funding that is available to them. He also stated that the funding that may be available for amenities is adding a level of complexity to the project as well.

Updates to Grants

Ms. Radcliff reviewed the grant funding. She stated that NCDOT is the grant administer for the recent funds and is determining the best way to utilize the funds with the required matches. She stated that Ecusta East is using STBG-DA and NSFLTP funds; Ecusta West PE will utilize STBG-DA in place of RAISE; Ecusta West Construction will use a combination of STBG-DA, NSFLTP, and RAISE. It will be clearer after the

construction is bid for the west section and City of Brevard about how the funds will be distributed. Ms. Radcliff stated that NCDOT is being mindful of the match requirements and grant limitation when allocating funding as STBG-DA requires a 20%, NSFLTP requires 10%, and RAISE does not require match.

Trail Amenities

Ms. Radcliff stated that the NSFLTP and RAISE funds allow for certain trail amenities. A list of the types of amenities being considered were shared. NCDOT is waiting on confirmation from FHWA on the types of amenities that will be considered. It was noted that amenities are not allowed under STBG-DA funds. There was a question about landscaping and fencing. Mr. Jones explained that it must be for the purpose of the trail and not for an adjacent property owner. An example was safety where fencing or guard rail was necessary for trail users or landscaping for the purpose of back stabilization.

Questions and Other Items of Discussion

Mr. McGrady asked staff the status of the MOU. Mr. Radcliff stated that Chris Todd had been working with the municipalities to finalize the MOU. The goal is to have the MOU finalized by the end of the calendar year. Mr. McGrady stated that once the MOU is in place for the Henderosn County side, the next step would be to get the MOU for the City of Brevard.

There was a question about if the PE estimate was known from the Ecusta West section. Mr. Jones stated that the estimate was \$1.1 million but is older and we expect it to be a little higher, but close to that. He stated that NCDOT has built in some contingencies for this, but the scope and fees will still be reviewed by NCDOT and their engineer consultant.

Mark Tooley and Ken Shelton mentioned that the FOET is working with NC State University on an economic impact study of the Ecusta Trail. This concept was mentioned to the City of Brevard that was excited about the potential of the study.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:55 a.m.

This meeting was recorded and the MP4 file can be made available upon request. Please contact County staff.