

Henderson County Parks & Recreation Advisory Board Meeting

April 5, 2022, 12:00pm, 708 S Grove St, Hendersonville

Board members in attendance: Philip Ellis, Stephanie Cantwell, Terry Maybin, Jeffrey Donaldson, Milton Butterworth, Tricia King, Ralph King, and Robert Smith.

Staff in attendance: Carleen Dixon, Chris Todd, Megan Burnette, Bruce Gilliam, and Jason Kilgore.

Speakers in attendance: Alex Williams

1. Call to Order: 12:09

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: March 2022

Philip Ellis made a motion to approve the modified minutes with his and Tricia King's additions. Milton Butterworth seconded the motion.

3. NEW BUSINESS

a. Fostering Hopes

Carleen Dixon introduced Alex Williams. Alex is the President and Founder of Fostering Hopes, a non-profit that focuses on engaging the local community in the ever-growing needs of Foster Care. Carleen, Bruce, and Megan have met with Alex previously to talk about Fostering Hopes' Role in the community and how they can interact with Parks and Recreation. Alex has also presented twice to the Board of Commissioners. Fostering Hopes has a contract with Henderson County Department of Social Services to help recruit families into foster care.

Alex has worked in the fostering field for about a decade to help lead private agencies' foster programs. In the summer of 2020, the opportunity came about for Fostering Hopes. Foster care is a huge problem in every county of North Carolina. Each county is sending large numbers of children out of their county. 35-40% of children in Henderson County foster care get sent out of Henderson County. Fostering Hopes aims to 1) shine a light on the need of foster care and increase recruitment efforts of DSS and their foster care licensing team; 2) work with the local community to show people you can be involved in foster care without fostering a child. They also want to help reduce burnout of foster parents. They already have a really good relationship with Transylvania County Parks and Recreation. They had an event with Transylvania County to let people know about the program and used it as a recruitment opportunity. The

Transylvania County Department of Social Services Director also attended the event.

The difference between Fostering Hopes and other agencies is that Fostering Hopes is not a licensing entity. One of the challenges the state faces is that if someone is licensed by the state, they can only take children from the county which they live, but private agencies can send children to any county in the state and they are incentivized by profit. When a child leaves the county, they will be in foster care for longer and less likely to be reunited with their family. The primary goal of Fostering Hopes is to keep children in the same county their family is in. They are working to try to give information to people and let them know there is a problem and clear solutions. They believe they can use Parks and Recreation's connections to families to get the information out. There are approximately 170-180 kids at a time in the foster system in Henderson County. About 60-72 of those children are placed outside of the county.

Carleen Dixon stated that they do not normally invite outside contractors to events, but there is a clear connection between Parks and Recreation and Fostering Hopes' mission in addition to them already being contracted by Henderson County for outreach. One idea is to invite Fostering Hopes to come promote their mission at some events and the Advisory Board can brainstorm on other opportunities. An example she gave was a night out program for parents with a focus on foster parents, allowing them to have an evening of respite care. Another idea was to hold spots open for foster kids in summer camps because many foster kids are not placed until the summer by the time it is too late to sign them up for camps. Tricia King expressed her support for holding spots open for foster children and inviting Fostering Hopes to Parks and Recreation events.

Alex continued by stating that although it is not the initiative of Fostering Hopes to save money for counties, it does cost a lot more to place children with private agencies, so there is also a financial incentive to place children in the county.

Philip liked all of Carleen's ideas. He asked if there was anything Parks and Recreation could do in the preventative category. Alex talked about how they are working on finalizing a project to get more housing for foster parents and young adults who have just left the foster system and have no familial support.

Jeffrey Donaldson asked the ratio of foster kids being placed by private agencies compared to those placed by Henderson County. Alex said all of the children who are placed out of the county are through private agencies.

Stephanie asked what the reaction is from DSS to Fostering Hopes trying to change things. Alex said every DSS they have worked with has been very

receptive because they are a “nonthreatening entity”. There is no hard evidence to prove one [private vs DSS] is better than another, just anecdotal evidence. However, the ability for a social worker to provide for families where the children are far away is much more difficult. If they provide more opportunities for kids to stay in their county, social workers will be able to support the families much better.

Carleen thanked Alex for being at the meeting. She believes this cause is directly related to the mission of Parks and Recreation. She suggested in 6-8 months Alex could provide an update and the board could see what can be done in the meantime. Stephanie suggested talking to the Sheriff’s office because they are doing a fundraiser right now and they may be able to partner with them.

Carleen will run this potential partnership by County Administration to make sure there are no conflicts.

Milton Butterworth made a motion of support stating, “We would like to see Parks and Recreation work together with Fostering Hopes to explore activities and programs that would support foster families.” Phillip Ellis seconded the motion. There was a unanimous vote to support Fostering Hopes.

b. 2022 Accessibility for Parks Grant

The Accessibility for Parks (AFP) grant program will provide \$10 million solely to North Carolina and can be used to build new special recreation facilities or adapt existing facilities with focuses on children/veterans with physical or mental disabilities. Local governments can request a maximum of \$500,000. Local governments must match \$1 for every \$5 that is provided by the grant. The review deadline is September 15th (for the consultant). Applications are due November 1, 2022. Community support will be needed, as well as board support for matching funds or donations. East Flat Rock Park would be the location for the grant funds to be used. East Flat Rock Park is the first accessible playground that Ralph King and his group, Friends of East Flat Rock Park, fundraised for. The upper area needs replacement. The area on the right is supposed to be ADA parking but needs improvement because it is on a slope. Carleen is looking for support and ideas on redesigning that section of the playground and coming up with a plan for accessible parking. One possibility is adding a ramp. It is a great park, but difficult to get into for anyone with a disability. There has already been discussion on adding accessible playgrounds to Jackson Park, Etowah Park, East Flat Rock Park, and Old Edneyville Park. These parks have the highest need in the county. East Flat Rock Park will be

the next to consider for a new fully accessible playground. The other parks meet minimum standards for ADA compliance but are not ideal.

Phillip mentioned that the playground gets way too hot in the summer, and Carleen stated that they would add shading structures for the new playground.

Tricia talked about adding signage, so people know they are at the park and the correct parking lot. She also added that if we could open up the mouth of the entry to the park, that would help. Milton asked if the parking behind is shared with the apartments. Carleen's understanding is that all of the parking closest to the park is County owned property. Board members agreed it is confusing knowing where to park and if you are in the right place. Carleen wants board members to think about solutions for this, which could be added as a part of the grant.

4. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

a. PARTF Grant Application Update

The community support piece has been completed. There were 55 people in attendance for the public input meeting. This board provided support at the March meeting. The HOA President's Association, the Friends of Etowah Park, and the Etowah Lions Club have provided letters of support. Support is still needed from the Board of Commissioners. If they make that approval, then the grant is due May 2nd. The only thing that came out of the public input meeting that was different was the suggestion to add fitness stations into the grant along the walking trail.

b. Jackson Park All-Inclusive Playground Update

The Board of Commissioners have committed \$250,000 and we will be receiving a \$150,000 grant that has not been announced yet. Approximately \$40,000 has been received in donations to date to the HC Community Foundation. Another \$30,000 is committed to being donated. There is potential for a \$10,000 grant through the Elks Lodge. Goal is to reach an absolute minimum of \$500,000, but hopefully \$600,000. The fundraising committee set goal to finish by May 1st. Businesses who want to support the project are encouraged to donate a dollar amount or to pay for one of the pieces of equipment for the playground.

The first contractor proposal was rejected, so Parks and Recreation is now working with the second highest scoring contractor, REV, Inc., to finalize a contract and scope. Milton asked if REV, Inc. would implement the project, in addition to design and engineering. Carleen said yes, they would do everything.

Terry expressed how it is wonderful how fundraising has progressed so quickly. Carleen is continuing to work with UNC Health for possible fitness pieces around the playground.

Greenway Update

Christopher Todd introduced himself. He is the business development director for the county. Trail update: 6 miles are currently funded with state funds, all of the match dollars to date have come from Conserving Carolina and Friends of the Ecusta Trail. This project has not cost a single taxpayer dollar. As of last night, at the County Commissioners meeting, the Friends of Ecusta Trail and Conserving Carolina voted to give \$600,000 of state money that they have received to support the section of the trail from Kanuga Rd. to Main St. This portion was not in the original plan because they did not know if the rail line would sell them the land. They will only have to deal with one contractor for this whole piece. Hopefully construction will start in 12 months and in 24 months the trail will be usable.

Jeff asked what surface they will be using. Chris said they will meet with engineers to decide. They were contacted by the concrete lobby to consider. A lot still needs to be determined for the actual trail. There could be different surfaces on different sections of the trail and different widths. May be as big as 15 ft. wide in areas of high congestion.

Milton asked to talk more about the news from Friends of Ecusta Trail and Conserving Carolina. Specifically, if the new section will get us closer to Jackson Park and the Oklawaha Greenway. Chris said yes. NCDOT has planned a roundabout design with the intersection at Church St., King St., and Main St. They have asked NCDOT to incorporate pedestrian crossing to maximize functionality.

c. Subcommittees Update

i. Soccer – Delay update until May meeting

ii. Mobile Food Vending

Terry Maybin, Katie Breckheimer, and Carleen Dixon have met. They are working on a second draft for a mobile food vending policy. They still need to meet with concessionaires at Jackson Park before they make a recommendation.

iii. Dog Area

Philip Ellis, Hunter Marks, and Carleen Dixon met to discuss dog area rules. Will be finalized soon.

5. STAFF UPDATES

Egg Hunt is Saturday, April 9th from 12:00pm-2:00pm. It will be down on the Jackson Park soccer fields. Many organizations have volunteered to help.

Plant swap is April 24th at the Edneyville Community Center.

Adult basketball and softball summer registrations have opened.

Senior games will be taking place soon. Registration is through April 15th. Kickoff luncheon took place March 8th. Bridgette and Melanie have been heading this.

Almost all the summer camps are full, have added some additional sessions, which are also almost full. Tricia commented there is a lack of mountain bike camps in the area. Bruce said he's been in contact with teachers who want to do more bike programs.

Philip asked about Berkely Mills Park. Carleen: that was a school and city thing. He asked because there are some underdeveloped trails in that woods. Carleen said it is not County property.

Bruce gave an update on girls' softball. They lost it for a bit with the pandemic, but they are back playing now. He hopes once the schools start using Berkely Mills Park more that it will open up more county fields for softball and little league.

Jason gave information on rentals. In the last month there have been 435 baseball field reservations, 57 shelter/community building rentals, and 304 soccer field reservations.

The coordinator position has not yet been filled, so Bruce is still covering for that role. The department will also be losing a maintenance technician. This is their last week so the position will be posted soon. The department will be two full-time positions down as of next week.

6. MEMBER COMMENTS

- a. Terry noted that Jason Kilgore is able to maintain good relationships and is highly respected in the community, thank you.

7. ADJOURN: 1:11pm

The next Recreation Advisory Board meeting will be held on May 10th, 2022, at the AAC, 708 S. Grove St, Hendersonville.