

Greenway Commission

March 10, 2011



Members present:

Marc Hunt, Chair
Jim Grode, Vice Chair
Marcia Bromberg
Stephen Jones
Stephanie Pankiewicz
Glen Locascio
Esther Manheimer, City Council

Staff present:

Megan Shepherd, Special Projects Coordinator
Seth Hendler-Voss, Landscape Architect
Al Kopf, Planning Superintendent
Blake Esselstyn, Planning Department

Guests present:

Marc called the meeting to order at 3:33 p.m.

1. Approval of February Minutes

Marcia moved to approve the February minutes, Stephanie seconded, all were in favor and motion passed unanimously.

2. Staff Update: Reed Creek Greenway

Seth reported the contractor has been selected for Phase II of Reed Creek Greenway. Once the State office in Raleigh has approved the contractor, the contract will be awarded and construction will begin soon.

Before we can begin Phase III and Phase IV, the City still needs to acquire several easements. The County owns one of those properties, which Seth showed on the map. The County has agreed to donate or sell (at low cost) the property to the City for Reed Creek Greenway usage. Marcia asked if the owners of the other parcels have been contacted. Seth said they have been contacted via letter.

Marcia moved to support accepting the deed from the County. Stephen seconded, all approved and the motion passed unanimously.

3. Community Outreach Committee Report

Sue reported that the Community Outreach Committee met last week. After a few more meetings, they will evaluate the effectiveness of their community outreach endeavors.

Stephen asked the Commission if they would be interested in sponsoring an event in partnership with RiverLink, WNC Alliance, GreenWorks, such as a tour of Beaucatcher Overlook Park. The event would promote greenways in Asheville. Al said that Beaucatcher Overlook would be a good choice because it's one of our priorities. It's also a good location because it is virtually all on City-owned land. Town Branch Creek Greenway might be another good location. Stephen clarified that the event would be more for awareness than fundraising. Marc suggested Stephen coordinate with staff and the various nonprofits. Stephanie also suggested contacting Sierra Club and business organizations. All agreed summertime would be the best time.

Sue reported that the Community Outreach Committee will give a presentation tomorrow to a school.

4. Asheville Parks & Greenways Foundation

No update. The meeting was cancelled.

5. Buncombe County Greenway Commission

The kick-off event for the master plan process will take place June 3 at the NC Arboretum. The RFQ for the master plan has been posted on the County's website.

A new entity called the Buncombe County Service Foundation, Inc. has been created to support Buncombe County service departments including the Parks, Recreation and Greenways Dept. The Board for the new Foundation will be comprised of representatives from the various county service departments and their boards. The new foundation will have no staff and will not be a fundraising body. The Parks, Recreation and Greenway department will use it as a vehicle for accepting private donations.

6. Bike & Ped Task Force Update

Jim reported that Ken Putnam gave an overview on sidewalks at the last Bike & Ped Task Force meeting. He discussed the project that staff is doing to overlay all the different City plans. It may take up to a year to complete.

A Bike/Ped usage count happened last fall. The highest numbers were downtown, and the next highest were from the greenways, particularly French Broad River Greenway.

7. Madison Street Alley Closure

David Foster introduced himself and stated that there is a "paper street" across from a church on Madison Street that is currently used for parking. The adjacent property is having challenges related to this property and they need to close this right-of-way. The

property connects to the Montford ball park, but there is an additional entrance to the ball park, so closing this alley does not create a conflict.

There are also no utility conflicts, and there aren't any sidewalks on the street, and the adjacent property owners don't have any problems with the closure. (A representative from the neighborhood was present.) Stephanie asked how the property will be divided. Usually, it's a 50/50 split between the adjacent owners, which in this case works out to approximately 10 ft each.

Marc moved to support the closure. Jim asked if the church has any concern since it's used as parking. Seth said the church is not operational at this time. Marcia seconded, all were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

8. Lawless Tract Update

Blake showed the location of the Lawless Tract on the Greenways Recommendation Map, which contains several alternative locations for where Hominy Creek Greenway could run. The Lawless property is of interest because it would shorten the connection between Hominy Creek Greenway and the Enka Center property.

Blake showed a map of the constraints on the property, such as floodways and sewer easements, which is why it is not suited for development. There is a mobile home park adjacent to the property. There is one steep elevation change, which would cause problems with the 5% grade ADA requirement. There is a small creek on the property.

The Greenway would have to bridge Hominy Creek, approx 100 ft. The floodway is 280 feet, so it would have to be a substantial bridge.

Marc asked about the status of the rezoning request, which was approved in April 2008. It was a standard rezoning so there were no conditions on it. Marc asked if the City has talked to potential buyers about establishing an easement on the property. They could donate this piece to the City and receive tax benefits. There is a small portion that is suitable for construction, maybe mobile homes or a duplex.

Marc asked if, in 2008 when the rezoning happened, this stretch was included in the Greenways Master Plan and evaluated by TRC. Blake said a standard rezoning doesn't go through TRC because there's not a site plan.

9. Waller/Hominy Creek Project Update

Marc Hunt introduced Doug Barlow, who launched the "Friends of Hominy Creek Greenway" to engage the community. Many people have been asking for more information about this tract.

Mr. Barlow gave a presentation on this area and his proposed Friends of Hominy Creek Greenway organization. About 4 years ago, he introduced the idea of a greenway in this

area and has been supporting it ever since, including helping to raise money. His original vision was a land trust, but that proved too expensive. He presented a history of the area and the current condition.

He noted that he's seen greatly increased traffic since the Citizen Times wrote an article on the area. On Saturday, March 19, 200 people will bike through the property as a celebration.

His vision is to have the area be established as a natural park and wildlife habitat, including a greenway (or mulched trail), community pavilion with picnic tables, and community gardens. It could be a potential site for environmental education for schools.

He described his proposal for the Friends of Hominy Creek Greenway, which could be anything from an official nonprofit to an informal group of neighbors, to meet monthly and determine ways to support and improve the property. Challenges he identified include cleanup, landscaping, balanced usage, erosion and water issues, access, and connectivity. Marc further described some of the safety and connectivity issues on the streets around this area. As staff is overlaying all the City plans, some of these disconnects will become apparent.

Marcia asked where the City stands in acquiring the Armory property. Al said they hope the transaction will happen in the next few months. This might also help people get through these unsafe road areas. Marcia asked staff if there are any issues regarding people going down to improve the area themselves. Al said there have been precedents for this; when people go out to do work they sign waivers. It often requires an agreement coordinated with the City that passes through Risk Management. The agreement helps outline expectations of the city and organization. There is a form outlining this process.

Stephen asked if Doug has talked with Asheville GreenWorks yet. He said he hasn't for this specifically. He felt that might be a good option, especially on the dump clean up.

Marcia suggested Doug talk to the County Greenways Commission as well to give the presentation.

10. New Business

Marc reported that he attended Council's strategic planning meeting. Council supports a multimodal focus for the City, which includes greenways, bike lanes, etc. Esther encouraged the Commission to keep up the pressure on greenways. She explained some of the complicated funding mechanisms for multimodal projects and challenges in funding. She said the City has been in discussions with the County about merging parks departments. This might take the form of a regional Parks Authority, similar to the successful MSD partnership. To merge the districts would probably require legislation. It would mean a new line item on tax bills. This would be helpful because on the City budget, parks often come last. There's a lot of resistance at the state level, however, about tax issues.

Meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.