

Greenway Commission

April 14, 2011



Members present:

Jim Grode, Vice Chair
Stephanie Pankiewicz
Glen Locascio
Sue Barlow

Staff present:

Megan Shepherd, Special Projects Coordinator
Al Kopf, Planning Superintendent
Barb Mee, Transportation Department

Guests present:

Lucy Crown, Buncombe County Parks, Greenways & Recreation

In Marc's absence, Jim called the meeting to at 3:31 p.m.

1. Approval of March minutes

Stephanie motioned to approve the March minutes, Sue seconded, all approved and the motion passed unanimously.

2. Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

Barb Mee introduced herself and gave an overview of the Bike/Ped plan. The plan takes into consideration the following criteria: zoning, community destinations, transit stops, major thoroughfares, missing segments or safety concerns, and feasibility of construction.

Barb said the sidewalk inventory was conducted in 2009 and recently updated. The City has gained 12 miles in 6 years, a figure the City would like to see increase. Barb presented the existing and envisioned plans that would help achieve that goal.

Glen knew that transit routes are being reworked and asked what implications that might have. Barb said they are looking at how bike/ped issues tie into the new transit routes. Under the new plan, all streets within 500 ft of transit stops will have sidewalks. She said bikes and transit have a great relationship: all buses have bike racks in the front.

Barb announced the City is working with a low-vision support group tomorrow, so they can become familiar with the sound and operations of the new hybrid buses.

3. Momentum Tract Background and Update

Al stated that in 2005, the Health Adventure expressed interest in Momentum site, which the City owned in part and had been using as a leaf dump. The City considered the land for a trailhead park as part of the greenway component. When the Health Adventure approached the City to request the land, the City supported their programming and expansion, but asked for an easement. The Health Adventure was not amenable to that idea, citing security and coordination concerns.

The final land agreement set aside a corner for City use, with the provision that the Health Adventure could freely encroach on that corner. The deal also set aside a narrow strip of land along the state right-of-way that could become a greenway.

Now that the Health Adventure has declared bankruptcy, many people are wondering what this might mean for the City. There was no reversion clause in the land agreement, so the land won't automatically go back to the City. However, the agreement included a commitment from Health Adventure to build the greenway by 2009, which hasn't happened. The City's legal staff is currently reviewing our options. One option would be for the leaf dump land to revert back to the City. The greenway was primarily in the right-of-way, so that is still a possibility with this option.

Jim asked when the closing occurred. It was in 2007, too long ago to consider a fraudulent conveyance.

Stephanie asked if the lack of greenway counts toward part of their debt. Al said the deed actually includes the agreement, so the deed isn't valid without the greenway construction. This means the obligation to build a greenway might transfer to the next owner, or any number of other options. Jim asked for a copy of the deed, which Al said he will provide.

Jim asked for confirmation that Health Adventure filed Chapter 11 (which it did). He asked if there was any chance it might get converted to Chapter 7, but no one knew. That might have potential ramifications.

4. Park Authority Legislation

Jim reported that a placeholder bill was filed to create a park authority, which would be effective when it becomes law. The Commission discussed what role, if any, the Greenway Commission might play and how the bill would impact greenways. Stephanie pointed out the bill is unclear on which facilities would stay with the City and County and which would join the Authority. She also noted that the issue of budget was not included. Glen also felt it was unclear what the outcome would be, and asked Al for staff's opinion. Al agreed there is little information at this point and it is difficult to speculate, but staff would like to be a part of that process.

Jim asked if staff has any sense of how it is being received in the legislature. Al said there is really no information. Jim would also like to see more specific funding mechanisms

described in the plan. There are many national models, but no other authorities in North Carolina.

Jim read comments Marc and Marcia had previously submitted. They had various concerns about taxing authority, staffing, competition for public funding support, and the motivation behind the proposal. They also wondered if greenways would fall under Transportation or the Parks Authority.

Stephanie suggested requesting an information session from Esther, since staff has not been heavily involved thus far. Jim also suggested asking Susan Fisher to speak. Stephanie agreed to contact them.

5. Smith Mill Creek Tour Report

Jim reported that Marcia and he attended a tour of the proposed Smith Mill Creek greenway, led by the Asheville Design Center. He described the location and length of the creek. He found it to be an impressive, large area, amenable to park-like settings, though with much maintenance needs. Challenges are that it's not on the Master Plan and there are a large number of property owners.

Stephanie asked if there is a process to amend the Master Plan, because there are occasional needs for that. Though there is no formal process, Al said he will discuss the issue with Roderick since it has been a year when this question was last revisited (at that time the director stated the master plan was recently adopted and too soon to amend). He thought walking the area as a Commission would be a good step toward assessing it and felt the area might have more potential as a park rather than a greenway, because it has several cultural challenges (property owners, commercial interests, Patton Avenue, the golf course, etc).

6. Community Outreach Committee Report

Sue reported that over the past month the Committee has done several presentations. Marcia presented at Francine Delaney Elementary and they'd like to continue with the school focus. Jim spoke to the bike group at REI. Marcia and Stephanie went to a Black Mountain event. Next steps are making the presentation longer, and addressing the City/County possibilities.

7. Staff Updates: Planning Department

No updates.

8. Staff Updates: PRCA Department

Al said that we received approval from the State to proceed with Reed Creek Greenway Phase II. Construction should begin by the end of May.

Staff also met with Council to discuss requests for CIP. There are currently over \$1,000,000 in CIP requests for Tiger grant projects (largely for land acquisition) and design/construction of Beaucatcher Overlook Greenway. There is no formal vote yet.

9. Asheville Parks & Greenways Foundation Update

Glen reported that the Foundation is trying to help out the Friends of Hominy Creek Greenway group. The Foundation also plans on working with the City to set priorities and is considering a direct mail campaign.

10. Buncombe County Greenway Update

By proxy, Marcia reported the RFQ closed April 7 for the Buncombe County Greenway Master Plan. The public kick-off is scheduled from 2-4 pm on June 10th at the Arboretum.

11. Asheville Bike & Pedestrian Task Force Update

Jim reported that the Task Force discussed Beecham's Curve, an area of much concern.

12. Other Business

The Friends of Hominy Creek Greenway are planning a trail-clearing event on Saturday, April 23.

13. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 4:50 p.m.