

Greenway Commission

June 9, 2011



Members present:

Jim Grode, Chair
Marcia Bromberg, Vice Chair
Sue Barlow
Marc Hunt
Glen Locascio
Stephen Jones

Staff present:

Megan Shepherd, Special Projects Coordinator
Al Kopf, Planning Superintendent
Roderick Simmons, Director
Seth Hendler-Voss, Landscape Architect
Barb Mee, Transportation
Debbie Ivester, Assistant Director

Guests present:

Jim called the meeting to order at 3:36 p.m.

1. Approval of May Minutes

Marcia motioned to approve the May minutes, Marc seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

2. CIP and Planning Update Process

Roderick described the CIP allocation budget process. This year, the Department has \$1.4 million allocated for CIP greenway projects, including \$1,200,000 for greenway development and \$200,000 for land acquisition.

He explained that some of this funding comes from debt services, which is a new activity for City Council. He asked the Greenway Commission to review the CIP priority list and add new items, as necessary. This will help City Council determine priorities and decide which projects get funded. Between now and October, the Greenway Commission should seek public input as the first step toward updating the CIP priority list. Members may also include their own input and recommendations. The next step will be for a subcommittee to hammer out which recommendations should go on the list. Then, the subcommittee will bring those recommendations to the Commission for a vote. Finally, it will go to City Council.

Roderick presented the current list, with the top projects in greenway construction and land acquisition. By putting greenways in a separate CIP category, the Department ensures greenways don't compete for funding with other Department or City projects.

Historically, the Department only requested funding for land acquisition when a project was ready with completed construction drawings. Now we're looking further ahead. Currently, we're looking at land acquisition at Town Branch and then Clingman, because those are components of the Tiger II grant and will be the next constructed. This structure gives us more control over projects. We will also be working closer with Public Works to see if their street crews can lay the asphalt. This will help stretch dollars.

Roderick explained that the list is not a static document. At any time, staff and the Commission can go back to City Council and change the list. The most important thing is to work off a list endorsed by the Greenway Commission. (In contrast, the Master Plan is used for evaluating and monitoring work performance.) For example, the City recently acquired the Walton Tract. If the adjacent property went on sale, the Commission could alter the priority list based on this new opportunity. The Health Adventure property is another example of recent changes. This is why we will review this list every year.

Marcia asked if we could also remove projects from the list. Roderick said yes, after a discussion with staff, the public and Commission as a whole. Marcia asked if this priority list fits within a larger network or connectivity plan, which it does. Roderick emphasized this priority list is crucial toward planning and actually laying greenway. Marc asked about the difference between the long-range CIP priority list and the Master Plan. For example, many other departments and partners look at the Master Plan but not necessarily CIP list, since they are looking very long-term. Roderick explained that a Master Plan is a snapshot of citizen priorities at a given moment in time. That's why we do an update every 5 years. We don't do more frequent, continuous updates because then there's nothing to compare. The Master Plan is a visioning document, and the vision for greenways is connectivity. If a new opportunity comes up not specifically addressed on the Master Plan, it still fits within that vision.

Marcia emphasized that the CIP priority list still fits in the umbrella of Master Planning, even if it's not included in that original static document. Roderick gave the example of the river district; departments are actively working in that area, so greenways in that area that are currently on hold will likely be bumped up in priority.

Marc asked about the Health Adventure and City ownership of the greenway corridor along the road. Originally staff had wanted the greenway to run along the creek but the Health Adventure wasn't amenable to that idea. Now that the property is open again, Marc hoped the City might try to re-plan the location of that greenway. Roderick agreed staff's preference would have been along the creek. So, staff has looked at the costs of the two options, and built the highest option into this priority list. It all depends on who buys the property or if it reverts back to the City. Marc pointed out that no one can build within 30 feet of the stream anyway due to stormwater ordinances.

Glen asked if the land acquisition for Beautcatcher Overlook has been completed. Roderick explained there's a small sliver left to purchase, costing around \$80,000, and another piece on College St. that might be City right-of-way. Glen also asked about the County's Master Plan process. He felt the City's current Greenways Master Plan map is incomplete and was concerned it might affect the final outcome for the County-wide initiative. Roderick said it's a dialogue, and as the City and County work together we can discuss new corridors or new opportunities—it doesn't have to be tied in to a rigid, static map.

Jim asked for more details regarding the \$200,000 land acquisition allocated this year. The plan is for \$80,000 to go to Beautcatcher Overlook Park, \$100,000 to Town Branch, and the rest will go to the next project, or fees, or unexpected costs.

Marc asked which parcel will be the Town Branch acquisition. Roderick said right now we just have a general idea of where we want it to go. There are several options. Roderick stated we try to purchase easements first, since they are cheaper, rather than direct land purchases.

Roderick emphasized this is the first year we've received greenways funding, and it's because we started the process early. Marcia felt that is in part because of the high visibility of greenways.

3. Community Outreach Committee Report

Sue reported that Marc created a poster of the Master Plan greenways recommendation map to be used at outreach events. Sue staffed a table at the Board of Realtors event, which received over 200 attendees. The County greenways were also represented. Marc hosted an information table in Montford.

A County representative also did a presentation at a church Earth Day event.

Marc also wrote some articles for the Montford Neighborhood Association newsletter and the Asheville Running Association newsletter. He felt neighborhood events were a great way to raise awareness.

4. Staff Updates: Planning

No planning report.

5. Staff Updates: PRCA

Al reported that staff is already working on this year's projects. We did a draft RFQ for the Clingman Ave greenway and Town Branch greenway. We will probably send the RFQ out this summer and the design documents will begin after that. The grant is for 80% of construction drawing costs, but we are aiming to have it cover 100%. We also have money for land acquisition in those areas so we'll start working on that process too.

The RFQ for the Beaucatcher Overlook greenway is under development and we are working on last land negotiations/transfers. We are looking closely at the pedestrian connections, many of which will be street and sidewalk connections, which might require more easements.

The Department broke ground on Reed Creek greenway recently. The contractors are preparing to set the retaining wall and bridge crossing. Hominy Creek/French Broad river extension is also underway and needs more stormwater planning (hopefully that will happen this summer, with some invasive removal and education panels and wetlands planting.) Seth is working with Nikki Reid for land acquisitions for future phases of Reed Creek. Also, staff is continuing to contact and negotiate with property owners of the bridge piece between Amboy Rd park and French Broad River Park, but there is one property owner unwilling to sell or negotiate.

Marc asked about the RFQ process, and when the specific alignment happens. Al said we'll provide an approximate map with the RFQ detailing alignment. Staff is also including alternates if possible. Then, much depends on environmental and cultural issues that will arise during the process. At the time the Master Plan map was created, staff walked the corridors to ensure alignment, but there is always some flexibility. Al offered to include Commission members in tours during this process so they can understand the process and see alignment and alternates. Seth said some alignment corridors and alternates depend on land acquisition and cultural factors. Roderick added this is why planning and land acquisition is so important, to ensure we have control over where the greenway corridor can go. Marc felt like this Commission could help motivate the right key people to reach out to land owners, who might be more receptive than talking to staff. Seth added that part of the RFQ includes public input sessions.

6. Asheville Parks & Greenways Foundation Update

Glen reported that the Foundation met last week. Soon a group will start hammering out a fundraising plan for some Parks, Recreation & Cultural Arts projects including Beaucatcher Overlook greenway. The Foundation was happy to see the Greenways brochure and will aid in distribution.

One Foundation member rented a brush clearer and offered to go out and clear the Hominy Creek corridor. Roderick said the member should connect with the City's volunteer coordinator. There are some insurance requirements regarding volunteer activity. Marcia also suggested they connect to Friends of Hominy Creek Greenway. Marc stated that the various groups (bikers, hikers, etc), have different visions for how the property should look. Roderick stated that it's public property and requires a public input process.

7. Friends of Hominy Creek Update

Marcia reported that she recently spoke with Brother Hug, organizer of the Friends of Hominy Creek, and that the group now understands they need to work with Marcia and Al. The FoHC want to develop a plan for clearing invasives and preserving native species. They are also interested in adding spurs to the main trail. They are also considering financial agents or partners. They have a set of officers.

8. Buncombe County Greenway Update

Marcia announced the County greenways master plan kick-off is tomorrow at the Arboretum. Also, there is some potential to get funding from PARTF for the Master Plan project, though the state might cut this funding. PARTF has approved the project but has not yet allocated funding.

The County has some funding to build paths at the county sports complex. The County has also developed a video on greenways.

9. Asheville Bike & Pedestrian Task Force

Jim reported that the Task Force discussed the Citizen Times article about the Clingman bike lane. They also discussed Strive Not to Drive week.

10. Park Authority Bill Update

Stephanie and Jim are continuing to work with Esther to find a time to meet to discuss the Park Authority Bill. Esther did report that little is happening now with the bill. Roderick said that the bill creates a tax authority; so the City may lower its taxes but the new authority will pick that up, so citizens will pay the same tax rate ultimately, or even more (to fund CIP). Commission members felt the bill was unclear in its exact taxing authority.

Meeting adjourned at 4:50 p.m.