



AGENDA
BREVARD ECUSTA TRAIL ADVISORY BOARD - REGULAR MEETING
Wednesday, July 29, 2026 - 3:30 PM
City Council Chambers

- A. Welcome and Call to Order**
- B. Certification of Quorum**
- C. Approval of Agenda**
- D. Approval of Minutes**
 - 1. ETAB Draft Minutes 05/27/2026
- E. Public Comments**
- F. Unfinished Business**
- G. New Business**
 - 1. Scope of a Watermark
 - 2. Final Map Amenities and Development
- H. Remarks / Future Agenda Considerations**
- I. Next Meeting - August 26, 2026 @3:30 PM**
- J. Adjourn**

Agenda Posted, Website, Sunshine List (7/23/2026)
V. Gass, City Clerk

To review Agenda materials, go to the City's website www.cityofbrevard.com. Select "Your Government" tab followed by "Council Agenda Packet" tab. Agenda packet materials are posted on Thursday afternoon prior to Council's Monday meeting.

**MINUTES
ECUSTA TRAIL ADVISORY BOARD 2.0**

Wednesday, May 27th, 2026 – 3:30 PM
City Hall Council Chambers

Members Present: Aaron Baker, Co-Chair, Council Member
Dean Lytle, Co-Chair, Council Member
Larry Chapman, Transylvania County Commissioner
Dee Dee Perkins, Transylvania Development Authority
John Ditillo, Friends of Ecusta Trail
Sheila Carland, Transylvania Economic Alliance (via Zoom)
Doug Miller, Heart of Brevard
Kathy Klepfer, Conserving Carolina

Absent: Madeline Hanley, At-Large Appointment
Meredith Carli, At-Large Appointment

Staff Present: Maureen Copelof, Mayor, Ex-Officio
Chris Burns, Ex-Officio
Wilson Hooper, City Manager
David Todd, Assistant City Manager
Paul Ray, Planning Director
Edievith Gass, Board Clerk

Guests: Hunter Marks, Watermarks
Laura Rice, Director, Friends of the Ecusta Trail
Christy Stoudt, McAdams
Lonnie Watkins, NCDOT
Teresa Buckwalter, McAdams (via Zoom)
Clark Lovelace, Transylvania County TDA (via Zoom)

I. Welcome and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Aaron Baker at 3:31 PM, following a brief welcome to all attendees.

II. Certification of Quorum

A quorum was established and certified by Board Clerk Edievith Gass.

III. Approval of Agenda

Chairman A. Baker requested a reordering of the agenda to address Item B prior to Item A. Due to the temporary absence of the presenter for Item B, the committee maintained the original agenda order. D. Lytle moved to approve the agenda as written, M. Tooley seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

IV. Approval of Minutes

Upon a motion made by D. Lytle and seconded by D. Perkins, the draft minutes from January were approved unanimously.

V. Unfinished Business

None.

VI. New Business

A. Signs and Amenities / Way Finding for Existing Section of Trail

W. Hooper introduced a proposal to accelerate the Ecusta Trail branding and signage project, focusing on installing branded signs from the Oskar Blues area to downtown Brevard. Hunter Marks of Watermark, the firm handling Henderson County's trail signage, was introduced to brief the committee on local sign locations, deployment considerations, costs, and implementation strategies.

H. Marks delivered a progress report on trail amenity integration for the Ecusta Trail segment from Oskar Blues to downtown Brevard. Reviewing standardized designs created with Equinox, Marks confirmed the segment will feature consistent station setups, orientation signage, interpretive markers, and half-mile markers to ensure design continuity.

H. Marks detailed the proposed signage and amenity framework spanning from downtown Hendersonville to Main Street Brevard. He reported that mile markers are established at half-mile increments, positioning Oskar Blues at mile 19.6, Jimmy Harris Depot at mile 21.5, and Main Street at mile 22. H. Marks reviewed the standardized amenity package, which includes bike racks, waste receptacles, repair stations, counters, and overlooks. He noted that while a signature Equinox bench serves as the primary trail standard, the City of Brevard has the option to utilize a Leisure Craft alternative to maintain consistency with existing urban furniture. Furthermore, he presented orientation and station signage mockups approved by the Friends of the Ecusta Trail, noting that station signs are designed to display trail rules on the front and directional maps on the back. H. Marks reported that the initial six miles of the project will feature custom informational signs covering the French Broad River Valley, local history, and geology, along with approved trail etiquette signage.

Following minor revisions, the amenity and signage package is scheduled for bid within one month, with on-the-ground installation expected in two to three months.

H. Marks reviewed the regional layout of the trail, identifying the completed Henderson County East section, the Transylvania County/Brevard West section, and the upcoming Ecusta Trail extension from Oskar Blues to downtown Brevard. He noted that the extension encompasses Jimmy Harris Park and the depot at mile 21.5, reaching downtown at mile 22. Regarding the deployment of amenities and signage for this section, H. Marks advised that the process would be straightforward and could be bid similarly to the initial six-mile phase. He recommended that the City of Brevard and ETAB identify exact signs, station locations, and finalize any necessary design modifications, while cautioning against excessive changes to maintain aesthetic continuity across the entire trail system.

D. Lytle noted that a historical station site exists in the unbuilt Pisgah Forest section. A. Baker suggested that station placement should expand beyond just historical locations. H. Marks agreed, clarifying that while historical significance was considered, current necessity and practical placement are the primary drivers for station location decisions.

H. Marks noted that the upcoming bidding process will secure definitive pricing for specific quantities of benches and stations. He recommended collaborating with the Friends of the Ecusta Trail and P. Ray to draft a preliminary site plan for initial installations, which will be brought to ETAB at a future meeting for feedback and final approval.

Responding to an inquiry from L. Chapman regarding public concern over restroom placement, H. Marks noted that restrooms are not part of the current discussion. Mayor M. Copelof clarified that the under-review trail segment is adequately served by existing facilities at City Hall and the Jimmy Harris Park Depot, eliminating the need for new restroom construction in this section.

H. Marks suggested permanent vaulted restrooms as a mid-term solution for areas with utility constraints. L. Rice reported that a potential site at the Crab Creek Road boat launch is being transferred to the City from Conserving Carolina. To address parking conflicts between trail users and boaters, a localized expansion concept plan has been drafted. Additionally, city staff will meet next week with Pisgah Labs to discuss acquiring or accessing a parcel near Everett Road.

D. Lytle asked if the area is serviced by gravity sewer or force main. W. Hooper noted it is likely gravity, transitioning to a force main closer to town.

D. Miller questioned the strategic reasoning behind installing Ecusta Trail branding and amenities on the active Estatoe segment prior to the Transylvania County construction phase. He requested clarification on the funding mechanism, emphasizing that amenity procurement must be integrated into the broader, multi-

jurisdictional trail budget rather than managed in isolation. Additionally, he questioned if existing grant funds had been formally approved or allocated for this stretch.

W. Hooper clarified that infrastructure and branding for the Ecusta-Estatoe extension are ineligible for current project grant reimbursements, requiring local funding or alternative municipal revenues. Because certain primary trail amenities are also excluded from grants, the city plans to use existing Tourism Development Authority (TDA) and local capital fund allocations. Hooper identified attending Downtown Development (DD) stakeholders as potential future financial contributors, reiterating that all extension amenities must rely solely on local funding.

D. Miller emphasized that non-grant amenities like restrooms and signage compete for the same local dollars. He questioned the rush to proceed, recommending a holistic evaluation of all trail amenity funding rather than viewing this segment in isolation.

A. Baker noted that while the project could be deferred, its scalable design allows the committee to review upcoming competitive bid pricing before making final commitments. He emphasized that baseline assets like mileposts are necessary for continuity with Henderson County and identified Jimmy Harris Park Depot and the Pisgah Health Foundation junction as high-priority wayfinding sites with potential TDA funding interest. Baker concluded that moving forward would show visible public progress and generate cost savings through a consolidated bid.

D. Todd asked if the upcoming bids would feature unit pricing to grant the city flexibility to purchase extra signs later at locked-in rates, despite potential variances from bulk averages. H. Marks confirmed that the bid framework will require unit pricing for additional signage.

D. Perkins acknowledged valid arguments for both deferring and accelerating the signage project. Providing TDA historical context, he noted that this path and its wayfinding have been discussed for five years. Citing heavy trail use and merchant feedback from 185 King Street, Perkins argued that while delay was once justified during the Ecusta Trail transition, the current high volume of users urgently needs wayfinding. Moving forward now resolves an immediate safety/navigation need, builds public excitement, boosts fundraising, and validates the project ahead of final construction bids.

D. Miller cautioned that the proposal prioritizes immediate spending over comprehensive planning, arguing that amenity procurement must be part of a macro-level budget that considers competing capital needs like public restrooms. He also warned that mixing legacy Estatoe Trail markers with new Ecusta Trail signage could cause user confusion. Miller urged the committee to practice fiscal restraint and complete a system-wide trail asset assessment before approving localized funds.

L. Watkins acknowledged that the design team has fallen behind on the amenities phase, which should have been initiated earlier. He urged immediate action to ensure mile markers and critical wayfinding signs are installed by the time the new segment opens. L. Rice agreed, stating that a lack of clear signage is currently the top complaint received from the public.

D. Miller raised concerns regarding long-term operational liabilities, noting that a comprehensive maintenance strategy lacks establishment. He pointed out that Brevard has no finalized MOUs for fundraising or asset management, unlike Henderson County which utilizes a dedicated Parks and Recreation department. Given current city budget constraints and Public Works personnel shortages, Miller cautioned against isolated asset procurement and urged the committee to prioritize system-wide maintenance planning.

D. Perkins proposed integrating Mr. Miller's feedback into a comprehensive plan by mapping all amenities—such as signage, mile markers, and benches—across the entire Transylvania County section. By calculating full-trail cost estimates now, the project can be phased systematically. The current Ecusta Trail segment would function as Phase One, enabling data-driven financial decisions for the immediate rollout while setting a clear framework for future phases extending toward Hendersonville.

C. Stoudt announced that the county's amenities design phase begins this summer, mapping benches, kiosks, and restrooms. Because this section links at the Oskar Blues kiosk, she urged immediate municipal planning alignment. C. Stoudt also warned that NCDOT's upcoming R-5800 project will build a parallel trail along US 64, making distinct wayfinding coordination essential to differentiate the Ecusta Trail corridor.

Responding to D. Lytle's request for a procedural critique of the amenity timeline, L. Watkins stated that amenity planning should have begun much earlier due to the long lifecycle of the project. However, he noted Brevard will benefit from a streamlined process now that the core design frameworks are complete. Clarifying D. Miller's concerns, Watkins emphasized that the committee is only being asked for conceptual approval of the aesthetics (stations, benches, signs) rather than funding. Once approved conceptually, cost estimates will be gathered so the city can scale its purchases according to budget availability.

W. Hooper asked if the upcoming summer design and cost estimates would include both grant-eligible and non-eligible trail amenities. Teresa Buckwalter (via Zoom) clarified that their current scope covers only grant-funded amenities, including benches, wayfinding signs, mile markers, and stations. She added that they are identifying a few additional station sites and are drafting concept plans for up to three parking and trail access areas to function as centralized amenity hubs. T. Buckwalter noted that amenity locations are nearly finalized, and establishing the exact counts for benches and signs now is vital to determining the trail's overall cost estimate. She

stated that specific sites for these features were mapped out with the committee's assistance during the 30% design phase.

C. Stoudt recommended that the city begin its downtown corridor planning now so that both trail sections can be implemented simultaneously. She reported that the county segment is moving forward, with construction documents expected to be complete by the end of the year.

D. Miller argued that unless funding deadlines require immediate action, the city should defer spending to conduct a comprehensive review. He noted that because the TDA funds infrastructure county-wide, a single, holistic grant application could secure a larger package of amenities—such as benches and signage—for both the Estatoe and Ecusta segments together. He concluded that focusing solely on immediate signage for the existing section could shortchange future funding opportunities.

A. Baker clarified that the meeting's primary objective was to align active stakeholders on the structural and aesthetic integration of both trail segments. He noted that the committee's scope now includes evaluating how the existing municipal path will interface with the design standards of the federally funded Ecusta Trail. Baker emphasized that securing parallel cost estimates is necessary to determine baseline funding for critical assets like half-mile markers. Additionally, he recommended evaluating the feasibility of a phased, incremental asset deployment if a long delay occurs between initial structural work and total project completion.

W. Hooper requested a proposal from C. Stoudt to expand their design scope for in-town trail amenities, which Stoudt agreed to review with Hunter Marks. D. Miller cautioned that adding this work to the active contract is legally prohibited due to project limits, warning it would disrupt environmental clearances and the primary construction timeline. He recommended a separate contract instead. H. Marks expressed flexibility regarding the contract vehicle and agreed with Miller, noting that because the same design personnel overlap across all four trail segments, regional design continuity is inherently preserved without requiring a single, consolidated contract.

D. Lytle supported an early layout of initial amenities to build community credibility but advised fiscal caution until definitive construction costs are revealed this summer. He noted that amenities are strong fundraising tools and reminded the committee that current capital campaign donors are already owed recognition for future assets. A. Baker agreed with this financial overlap, noting it was his original motivation for reordering the agenda items to allow the construction update to provide context for the amenity debate.

D. Todd proposed a dual-signage system similar to the Mountains-to-Sea Trail to manage overlapping routes. He suggested using prominent Ecusta Trail signs with secondary Estatoe Trail markers where they intersect between Main Street and the high school, noting this mirrors shared stretches of the Appalachian and Mountains-

to-Sea trails. D. Lytle agreed, stating that this framework should be included in the scope of work to prepare for future co-branding with the upcoming Hellbender Trail system.

A. Baker warned that overlapping names would confuse the public, arguing that the Estatoe Trail name should only apply from Oskar Blues toward Pisgah Forest, with a new name chosen later for the high school segment. He provided historical context from the city historian regarding the original Cherokee "Estatoe" route into Rosman and South Carolina, noting that because "Ecusta" is also a word of Cherokee origin, the trail's native history remains fully honored under the new layout.

W. Hooper recommended requesting a quote from C. Stoudt and H. Marks for a separate contract to design amenities from Oskar Blues to downtown Brevard, to be reviewed at a future meeting. A. Baker asked if the scope would focus specifically on location recommendations and installation feasibility. C. Stoudt and H. Marks confirmed the scope would evaluate the corridor to place signage at trail entry points, select final amenity sites, and offer optional bidding and project oversight, which can be phased according to the city's preferences.

D. Miller noted that the design team's overarching project knowledge allows them to balance amenity counts across different sections to prevent over-installation downtown. A. Baker accepted the recommendation as the next step. There being no further questions, he transitioned to the next agenda item, requesting a current status report, an overview of next steps, and an updated project timeline, noting the committee had not met in four months.

B. General Update – Trail Status: Design Work/Next Step

C. Stoudt presented the project status, schedule, and milestones using printed materials due to a hardware delivery failure. She noted that Henderson County's phase is moving faster than the local segment because of historical grant sequencing and a "locally let" project delivery model, which avoids complex state DOT procurement channels. Since January, the team expanded the environmental study area to secure FHWA clearances for future trailheads and amenities. This expansion required additional technical reviews, including supplementary wetland and community impact assessments.

C. Stoudt reported on the systematic identification of natural resources within the expanded study areas, providing critical data for the environmental clearance document ahead of the summer field inspection. She also shared a concept layout of the Crab Creek Road parcel. This layout maps out local drainage channels, an active waterway, and protected wetlands, all of which are now included in the finalized Natural Resource Report.

Regarding stormwater management and infrastructure design, C. Stoudt noted that the drainage submittal was strategically bifurcated with regulatory approval. The

initial phase was submitted in January to expedite utility utility-impact coordination, thereby proactively shielding the project from late-stage utility relocation liabilities. The comprehensive drainage plan for the remainder of the eight-mile trail corridor was subsequently submitted in March, passing review with negligible agency corrections.

C. Stoudt summarized the April and May milestones, noting that bridge designs were filed and the updated Natural Resource Report was approved. She highlighted an NCDOT collaboration along Old Henderson Highway that adds safety guardrails without disturbing utility poles, avoiding major relocation costs. Additionally, the team submitted floodway compliance packages for the Davidson and French Broad rivers to verify a no-impact design. Finally, erosion control plans are tracking three weeks ahead of schedule and are designed to fully protect existing wetlands.

C. Stoudt reported strong progress on the trail project, with several summer milestones approaching. The environmental document is on track for late June completion to secure funding, followed by the submission of 65% design plans and an updated cost estimate next month. Upcoming work includes subsurface utility investigations, surveying, and railroad geotechnical designs. This summer, the team will secure DOT right-of-way clearance while engineers audit the eight-mile corridor to ensure proper drop-off railing offsets. Additionally, a specialized culvert evaluation is underway, which could save \$500,000 in grant funding.

C. Stoudt shared that a full (and expensive) flood evaluation or Culvert Survey Report will not be required for culvert replacements. Because any necessary replacements will be "in-kind," they can be noted directly on the plans, saving the project significant time and money.

W. Hooper noted that the city can use dedicated stormwater funds to cover culverts requiring local dollars, maximizing cost efficiency by syncing repairs with trail construction. Ms. Stoudt agreed, noting that alternative methods like culvert lining are being considered to extend infrastructure life. McAdams has evaluated these costs, and a strategic decision will be made after the 65% design, and updated cost estimates are approved. Stoudt highlighted two specific sites: a dual culvert supporting wetlands between the park and Oskar Blues, and another beneath the former paper mill landfill pond.

A. Baker asked if the culvert evaluations accounted for stormwater capacity and structural wear from trail traffic. C. Stoudt explained that the primary risk is internal corrosion and erosion during heavy storms, which could compromise trail stability and trigger a 90-day closure. On bridges, she detailed challenges with a deteriorating private bridge near Enon Baptist Church. While a driveway relocation alternative was ruled out due to a \$400,000 retaining wall requirement, the team secured permission to use NCDOT's post-Helene "Private Roads and Bridges Program" standards. This strategy meets federal AASHTO requirements while cutting replacement costs in half to \$400,000–\$500,000.

W. Hooper highlighted the new bridge approach as a major success, emphasizing that it simultaneously secures critical cost savings and protects a highly scenic corridor from being disrupted by a large retaining wall. Stoudt expressed agreement, confirming that the team will explore two structural options to present to the board. The first option will completely span the area, while the second will mirror the current structure's existing look to retain its historic character.

A. Baker confirmed that the NCDOT program provides a more affordable design standard rather than direct funding. C. Stoudt noted that adopting this standard will yield major project savings and that the bridge design will quickly realign with the project timeline. This summer, the team is also coordinating with Pisgah Labs regarding their request for a city fence permit next to the trail. This dialogue has led to preliminary discussions about leasing a scenic, vacant parcel owned by Pisgah Labs northeast of Everett Road for a new trailhead. Stoudt concluded by emphasizing that current trailhead concepts are preliminary sketches; the team must still evaluate sightlines, design drainage, and secure DOT driveway permits for safe access.

T. Buckwalter noted that the initial trailhead concepts originated from the original RAISE grant funding. Stoudt agreed with the clarification, adding that these preliminary ideas were developed years ago during the initial Ecusta Trail feasibility study.

C. Stoudt walked the board through the complex NCDOT federal compliance flow chart, noting that the project schedule is reverse engineered from a firm letting date of April 20, 2027. To meet this target, all final design work must wrap up by the end of 2026, with permitting and bid documentation finalized in early 2027. The team is pushing toward the 65% design milestone, with the final Plans, Specifications, and Estimates (PS&E) package due in January 2027. Refined cost estimates will be delivered in July/August and November 2026, with each update lowering the project's contingency rate as hard data replaces unknowns. Lastly, Stoudt suggested structuring certain amenities as "add alternates" in the bid package to give the city financial flexibility ahead of a March 2027 advertisement date.

L. Watkins provided critical context on the strict timeline, explaining that because the project exceeds \$5 million, the letting process must be handled by the NCDOT Central Unit in Raleigh rather than the local division office. This centralized oversight requires all finalized materials to be submitted three months prior to the April 20 letting date for an exhaustive review matching plans to official DOT pay items. Watkins noted this phase involves intense coordination, leaving no room to accelerate the advertising schedule. C. Stoudt added that NCDOT's strict compliance procedures naturally lengthen the timeline, as administrative tasks like contract reviews often take six months instead of two, requiring built-in schedule patience.

W. Hooper asked if the projected 12-to-18-month construction window was a flexible estimate or a hard contractual requirement. L. Watkins clarified that the NCDOT

Central Unit will embed mandatory completion deadlines and strict environmental moratorium dates directly into the contract. Regarding a potential January 2029 wrap-up, Watkins noted that an 18-month build window starting with the April 2027 letting will capitalize on two full summer construction seasons (2027 and 2028). As a result, the team is targeting a more favorable completion date around October 2028.

D. Todd requested clarification on the timeline for the contract award and the subsequent notice to proceed following the April 20 date. L. Watkins explained that after bids open on April 20, a standard one-month administrative window occurs for the contract award, insurance verification, and bonding, placing the official "date of availability" around May 20. Watkins emphasized that while the final completion deadline is legally binding, the contractor retains total flexibility over their start date and staging. Some firms may choose to delay mobilization and utilize double crews later to meet the mandated schedule.

C. Stoudt shared comparative timeline data from colleagues, noting that Phase 1 required approximately three years from its summer 2022 design start to its 2025 opening. The current phase began design in 2023, placing the team roughly three years into the workflow. Stoudt noted that while this state-regulated process is inherently slower, the team will provide hard milestone dates to help the public track progress.

A. Baker raised concerns about potential pre-construction delays, questioning if extensive revisions and comments from the NCDOT Central Unit in Raleigh could stall progress. L. Watkins reassured the board that while numerous comments are expected, the three-month pre-letting window explicitly accounts for this rigorous review process. Watkins noted that the team does not anticipate any project "showstoppers" during this phase. Because environmental permits will already be secured, any remaining state comments can typically be resolved in time to maintain the April letting schedule.

W. Hooper addressed potential budget shortfall risks tied to the upcoming August 2026 cost estimate, noting that while current indicators remain reasonable, a significant funding gap unresolved by value engineering or private donations would cause a temporary project pause. L. Watkins reinforced these concerns, stating that existing funding is already insufficient for the current estimate. He noted that if the 65% design estimate reveals a wider gap, the board must evaluate scaling back the project scope or seeking new funding. Watkins emphasized that the August timeline provides a critical window to pursue alternative revenue before final deadlines.

C. Stoudt noted that the design-build process for the project's middle section should enable that phase to quickly catch up to the current schedule. Because design-build allows contractors to begin early site work like clearing while simultaneously finalizing design plans, its timeline tracks just a couple of months behind this phase, keeping the broader project on a parallel track.

A. Baker noted that the board had previously discussed upcoming cost estimates for the middle section in January. L. Watkins clarified that because the design-build contract is already awarded and encompasses both design and construction, those project costs are locked in. Baker then inquired if these established figures could help the city better forecast or refine its own upcoming construction cost estimates.

D. Todd advised that the design-build nature of the middle section limits direct cost comparisons, urging strict adherence to April letting deadlines to avoid severe delays caused by environmental moratoriums. He demanded immediate reporting of any potential schedule slippage to allow for prompt remedial intervention by the city.

D. Todd raised concerns that overlapping bat tree-cutting restrictions and trout stream regulations could freeze construction for a year if the schedule slips. L. Watkins explained that a "pay-to-cut" framework acts as a flexible, \$7,000-per-acre contingency plan. Because fees are only charged on an as-needed basis if clearing occurs during restricted dates, pre-approving this mechanism serves as a zero-upfront-cost insurance policy against environmental delays.

L. Watkins noted that the trout stream moratorium relies on different rules than the bat restrictions, with D. Todd adding that their opposing timelines create a narrow work window for bridges and culverts. C. Stoudt clarified that most of the physical work occurs well above the critical impact zones. She stated that the team is evaluating trout variance requirements while awaiting a final decision from the NCDOT division. Todd concluded by reiterating the board's commitment to absolute accountability and strict schedule adherence.

A. Baker asked if the upcoming 65% design milestone would include the final recommendations for the types and numbers of amenities in the Transylvania County section. Ms. Stoudt replied that this timeline remains flexible because amenities are currently covered by the project's contingency budget. She explained that the engineering team must first finish evaluating drainage and spatial constraints for these features, assuring the board that finalized numbers and placement data will be delivered as soon as the technical assessment wraps up.

A. Baker highlighted that the upcoming project milestone will provide a strategic decision-making window. By combining the refined cost estimate and amenity plans with real-world bid results from the Henderson County phase, the board will be positioned to make smart, data-driven choices about adding extra amenities. Stoudt added a slight clarification to the timeline, noting that while the technical package is submitted in July, the actual cost estimate report will likely arrive in August 2026 due to the multi-week processing time required after submission.

VII. Public Comments

A. Baker apologized for initially bypassing the public comment period and opened the floor to attendees.

An unidentified local resident requested that the city open safe, clear sections of the railroad right-of-way to the public to maintain community engagement during the upcoming year of construction inactivity. The speaker proposed a volunteer pilot project to clear brush behind Oskar Blues to foster community ownership and demonstrate the trail's value to skeptical neighbors. The residents suggested that safety and liability risks could be managed similarly to establish volunteer trail programs in Pisgah and DuPont forests.

D. Miller noted that volunteer work in Pisgah and DuPont forests requires formal service agreements to manage worker safety and liability. He emphasized that the city must thoroughly evaluate and establish similar legal and liability frameworks before bringing volunteers out to clear the railroad corridor.

A resident supported calls for volunteer opportunities, noting her family relocated from Asheville specifically for the trail, and expressed a desire to volunteer once liability frameworks are finalized. She noted that sparse online updates had mistakenly led the community to believe the project had stalled. Citing how reassuring the meeting's engineering updates were, she urged the city to publish these milestones online to restore local enthusiasm.

L. Rice highlighted a recent newsletter update from Stoudt detailing behind-the-scenes project progress. Regarding potential early trail access, L. Chapman noted that adjacent property owners must be notified in advance to mitigate complaints. W. Hooper agreed to review this protocol, noting that proactive communication with neighboring landowners is already underway.

L. Rice cautioned that opening early trail sections requires resolving dangerous road crossings. She noted Transylvania County has higher-speed roads and more blind spots than Henderson County's lower-speed first phase. Rice urged the committee to carefully evaluate these traffic hazards before granting public right-of-way access.

A *Transylvania Times* representative noted that groundbreaking remains the public's primary question and advised replacing sporadic press releases with a steady stream of smaller updates. Sharing minor design victories (e.g., signage or benches) in partnership with the newspaper will reassure residents of active progress. The representative and Laura offered to collaborate with the team on this continuous media strategy.

Clark Lovelace, Transylvania County TDA (via Zoom) thanked W. Hooper for the session's technical insights. He noted that the committee's infrastructure and engineering updates directly impact the TDA, as these decisions will likely involve future TDA capital and funding resources.

VIII. Remarks / Future Agenda Considerations

A. Baker opened the floor for final committee remarks.

L. Rice announced that June and July roundabout construction on Highway 64 will block the trail thoroughfare at Little River Park. The city will actively issue communications advising travelers to avoid Highway 64 toward Hendersonville and directing trail users to stick to both ends of the path. Rice noted that consistent public updates maintain project momentum and support future fundraising readiness.

D. Miller recommended that the city swiftly finalize a contract with the Friends of Ecusta to unlock significant nonprofit fundraising for trail maintenance. He also warned of safety risks from e-bikes and mopeds traveling up to 30 mph on sidewalks and the Estatoe Trail. He urged the city to establish clear signage, public education, and law enforcement rules before trail construction concludes to protect pedestrians.

M. Tooley stated that the Friends of Ecusta are analyzing national e-bike trends, noting a rise in local ordinances across California and New Jersey due to a lag in state and federal action. He emphasized that future federal laws will only regulate manufacturing specifications, not local trail behavior. Warning that children are operating high-powered electric vehicles, Tooley urged Henderson County and the City of Brevard to enact local ordinances, noting that trail rules remain legally unenforceable without a local legislative framework.

L. Chapman outlined two operational priorities: executing a public relations update to share design milestones—potentially utilizing The Transylvania Times column to reassure residents of active progress—and immediately briefing local Police, Sheriff, and EMS leaders on trail security. Early emergency planning will avoid bottlenecks and establish a foundation for a public safety MOU.

A. Baker proposed requesting an operational brief on Henderson County's open six-mile trail section to review maintenance costs, safety incidents, and e-bike activity ahead of Brevard's August 2026 technical update. M. Tooley confirmed that Henderson County's existing tracking system can provide this data, which will help guide Brevard's future maintenance, security, and ordinance frameworks.

IX. Closing Remark and Next Meeting

A. Baker confirmed that the committee will reconvene for its next monthly regular meeting on Wednesday, June 24 at 3:30 p.m.

X. Adjourn

On a motion by D. Perkins, seconded by D. Lytle and carried unanimously, Chairman A. Baker adjourned the meeting at 5:04 p.m.

Aaron Baker, Chair

Minutes Approved Date-_____

Edievith Gass, Board Secretary

STAFF REPORT

Ecusta Trail Advisory Board, Wednesday, July 29, 2026

Title: Scope of a Watermark

Speaker: Hunter Mark

Prepared by: Paul Ray, Planning Director

Approved by: Wilson Hooper, City Manager

Summary:

Watermark Landscape Architecture has submitted a proposal to provide professional design services for the Ecusta Trail Extension amenities and signage along the approximately two-mile section of the trail from the current terminus near Oskar Blues Brewery to Brevard City Hall. The proposed scope includes data collection and site analysis, conceptual design, design development, construction documents, and preparation of an Opinion of Probable Construction Cost (OPCC). The work also includes coordinating amenity and signage locations with City staff, the Ecusta Trail Advisory Board (ETAB), Friends of Ecusta Trail (FOET), McAdams, NCDOT, and other project partners to ensure consistency with the overall trail design.

Staff requests that the Ecusta Trail Advisory Board review the proposed scope of services and determine whether it adequately addresses the project's needs. If the Board believes modifications or additional services are warranted, staff requests that those recommendations be provided for consideration. At this time, a funding source has not been identified to execute a professional services agreement with Watermark Landscape Architecture. However, if the ETAB recommends approval of the scope of work, staff will pursue and seek to secure funding to complete this project before bringing a contract forward for execution.

Attachments:

1. 260702 Estatoe Ecusta Brevard Proposal



July 2, 2026

Paul Ray, Planning Director
City of Brevard
65 W Main St
Brevard, NC 28712

Paul:

Per our discussions, please find below our proposal for professional design services for the Ecusta Trail Extension amenities and signage. We sincerely appreciate this opportunity and look forward to the possibility of working with you and the city of Brevard on this project.

Sincerely,

Hunter Marks



PROPOSAL FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

**Ecusta Trail Extension
(Former section of the Estatoe Trail)
Amenities and Signage
Brevard, North Carolina**

July 2, 2026

Submitted to:

City of Brevard
Attn: Paul Ray, Planning Director
95 West Main St
Brevard, NC 28712
(Referred to herein as Client)

Submitted by:

Watermark Landscape Architecture
Hunter Marks, RLA, ASLA, LEED AP
513 North Justice Street, Suite C
Hendersonville, North Carolina 28739
(Referred to herein as WLA)

SCOPE OF SERVICES

WLA proposes to provide the following services for the approximately two-mile section of the Ecusta Trail (formerly a section of the Estatoe Trail), from the current end of trail just west of Oscar Blues Brewery to Brevard City Hall, related to trail amenities and signage.

1. Data Collection/Inventory & Analysis: WLA will conduct site visits as needed, and compile Client supplied and publicly accessible information such as site surveys, GIS, lidar, aerial imagery, field measurements, etc. If no site survey is available, WLA will discuss with the Client regarding obtaining a survey, if needed. Survey cost is not included in this proposal and will be an additional cost to the Client. Based on compiled site data, WLA will produce a base map of the project area. WLA will conduct a thorough analysis of the site to understand project limitations and opportunities. WLA will work with the Client to develop and clarify project goals, timelines, and budgets.



2. Conceptual Design: WLA will identify potential locations for amenities and signage within the trail ROW. WLA will meet with the Client to review and confirm the locations and quantities of each sign type and amenity. WLA will meet with the Client to consider any minor edits, as may or may not be desired, to existing Ecusta Trail signage templates, in coordination with the Brevard Ecusta Trail Advisory Board (ETAB) and the Friends of Ecusta Trail (FOET). Any edits to the signage template designs will need to be finalized prior to WLA's development of location specific signage content. All design work will consider and coordinate with the design of NCDOT STIP # BF-0002 – Ecusta Trail Transylvania Section.
3. Design Development: WLA will proceed with finalizing amenities and sign locations, and develop location specific signage content:
 - WLA will develop location specific signage. This will include periodic progress meetings (up to two) with the Client. Signage with location specific content will include:
 - a. Trailhead signs
 - b. Station Signs
 - c. Orientation Signs
 - WLA will specify the following amenities and their locations, per the direction of the Client:
 - a. Stations
 - b. Mile markers
 - c. Waste receptacles
 - d. Benches
 - e. Bike racks
 - f. Landscape screening/ buffer areas
 - g. Bike repair stations
 - h. Station signs
 - i. Orientation signs
 - j. Trailhead signs
 - WLA will coordinate with McAdams engineering regarding continuity of design related to STIP # BF-0002 -Ecusta Trail Transylvania Section. WLA will also coordinate with NCDOT regarding project R-5800 and the Ecusta Trail.



4. **Construction Documents:** WLA will prepare a final deliverable package that will include an overall site map identifying existing features, enlargements of proposed amenity and signage locations, amenity location charts, amenity construction details, and landscape screening/buffer plans. Note: Scope does not include structural design or certification for any applicable amenities listed above. WLA will present the final locations of amenities and location specific signs to the Client, and will assist the Client in presenting these signs to ETAB and FOET as requested by the Client. WLA will do one round of revisions if requested by the Client. Based on the final design plans, WLA will prepare an Opinion of Probable Construction Cost (OPCC) for the Client.
5. **Additional Services:** WLA will provide additional services as may be requested by the Client on an hourly basis or a mutually agreed upon lump sum. These may include, but are not limited to: additional meetings beyond those outlined above, additional amenities, additional signage, interpretive signage, color renderings, encroachment permitting and coordination with NCDOT (primarily related to NCDOT project R-5800), branding or co-branding design, bidding assistance, construction observation & oversight, conversations or correspondence unrelated to the Ecusta Trail Extension amenities and signage, etc.

SCHEDULE

WLA will begin work upon acceptance of this agreement unless otherwise specified and will work to meet all reasonable schedules requested by the Client. Scheduling is dependent on WLA receiving information from the Client in a timely manner.

COMPENSATION FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

The estimated cost for services defined in this agreement shall be as follows:

1. Data Collection/ Inventory & Analysis	\$5,700.00
2. Conceptual Design	\$7,400.00
3. Design Development	\$17,600.00
4. Construction Documents	\$26,100.00
5. Additional Services	<u>+Hourly</u>

Project Total: **\$56,800**

Cost of services indicated does not include additional work beyond the Scope of Services or the cost of reimbursable expenses as identified in this agreement. Payment shall be made monthly, due upon receipt of invoice, for all work completed to date. In the event payment is not made according to the terms herein set forth, WLA at its option will stop work until payment is received and not be in default under the terms and conditions of this Agreement.



WLA provides professional services on an hourly basis, determined by the amount of time spent on a project. WLA does not invoice based on deliverables. The amounts shown above are estimates based on our understanding of tasks described in the project scope, and our experience with similar projects. If it becomes apparent that actual time spent on a project may exceed the estimated cost, WLA will contact the Client to review the scope and costs to date, and discuss how the Client may wish to proceed.

CLIENT'S RESPONSIBILITIES AND GENERAL CONDITIONS

- The Client shall provide WLA with property surveys, other site information, marketing information, building plans, programs, budget, or other information as may be required to complete the work, or shall agree to reimburse WLA for the cost of obtaining the information required.
- The Client shall hold WLA harmless for conditions arising from information supplied by others not under the direct control of WLA.
- The Client shall identify and designate one individual as the primary point of contact for project communication, reviews, approvals, etc. This benefits both the Client and WLA in that it provides clarity regarding project communication, and maximizes adherence to project scope, schedule, and budget.
- The Client shall identify any special definitions or conditions required for invoicing for services rendered.
- The scope of work will be performed by Watermark Landscape Architecture PLLC. WLA will perform those services, which at its discretion, are reasonably necessary for the reasonable and prompt fulfillment of its obligations.
- Services performed by WLA under this agreement will be conducted in a manner consistent with the degree of skill and diligence normally employed by members of our profession performing the same or similar services.
- The Client may terminate this agreement for convenience upon ten (10) business days written notice to WLA. Where the Client terminates this agreement for convenience, the Client shall pay WLA an equitable amount proportional to the services rendered by WLA under the agreement, up to the date of termination, plus reasonable termination costs.
- WLA carries professional, general liability, and workman's compensation insurance. WLA will furnish appropriate insurance certificates upon request. The Client understands and agrees that the total liability of WLA for any and all injuries, claims, losses, expenses, or damages whatsoever, including attorneys' fees and legal expenses, arising out of or in any way related to the project from any cause or causes shall not exceed the total amount recoverable from such insurance.



CONTRACT ACCEPTANCE

This proposal shall be valid for thirty (30) days. Upon acceptance it shall become a formal agreement between the Client and Watermark Landscape Architecture. This proposal may be amended by attachment thereto upon acceptance by both parties. If this proposal is satisfactory and acceptable, please sign and return. WLA will provide you a fully completed copy for your files.

HOURLY RATES

Principal/Senior L.A.	\$200/hour
Project Manager	\$135/hour
Designer	\$110/hour
Drafter	\$90/hour

REIMBURSIBLE EXPENSES (Cost X 1.35)

Mileage (Charged portal to portal) - \$0.725 per mile
Printing, photography & reproductions
Postage & delivery fees
Permits & fees
Client directed expenses
Outside consultants

Signature and Date:

Signature and Date:

Paul Ray, Planning Director
City of Brevard

Hunter Marks, RLA, ASLA, LEED AP
Watermark Landscape Architecture

Submitted July 2, 2026

STAFF REPORT

Ecusta Trail Advisory Board, Wednesday, July 29, 2026

Title: Final Map Amenities and Development

Speaker: Teresa Buckwalter

Prepared by: Paul Ray, Planning Director

Approved by: Wilson Hooper, City Manager

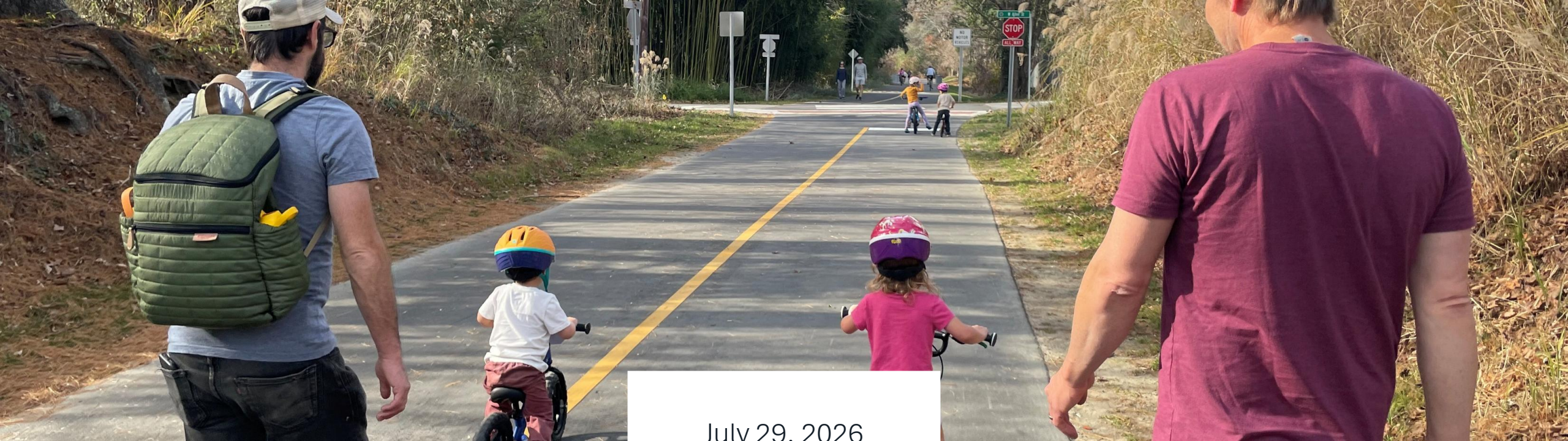
Summary:

McAdams and Watermark will provide the Ecusta Trail Advisory Board (ETAB) with an update on the overall Ecusta Trail project, including progress made since the previous committee meeting, current design efforts, proposed trail access locations, signage concepts, and amenity planning. The consultants will also present updated cost estimates for the proposed amenities. These cost estimates reflect refinements made since the preparation of the attached draft presentation and should be considered the most current information available.

Staff is requesting that the ETAB review and approve the proposed list of trail amenities presented during the meeting. Committee approval will provide direction to the design team as they continue final design and coordinate funding priorities, allowing the project to move forward with a defined package of amenities that aligns with the project's budget and grant funding opportunities.

Attachments:

1. ETAB MTG PRES DRAFT 07-29-2026



July 29, 2026

Ecusta Trail Advisory Board

Amenities Update



Agenda

- 01 Brief Project Overview
- 02 Amenities Recap
- 03 Signage Update
- 04 Mapping
- 05 Trail Access Sites
- 06 Next Steps

Amenities Team

Ecusta Amenities Team

Christy Staudt,
PE

McAdams | Project Lead



Teresa Buckwalter,
RLA

McAdams | Landscape and
Amenities Lead

Hunter Marks, RLA

Watermark | Amenities
Advisor

Megan Foy, RLA

Equinox | Construction
Documents and Site
Planning

Drake Elder

Watermark | Signage & Cost
estimating

Lauren Faye Welsh

Equinox | Assist site
planning

Project Update

Overall

Completed:

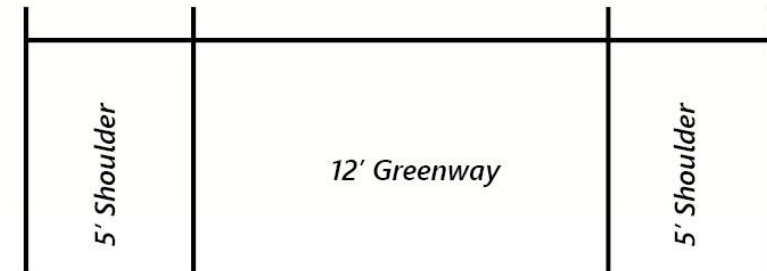
- | Incorporated all drainage modifications into design
- | Guardrail location approval
- | Pisgah Labs fence status
- | Field Inspection Submission

Ongoing:

- | Utility coordination ongoing
- | Amenities coordination
- | Trail safety rail design incorporated into model

Next Steps → Working toward April 2027 NCDOT Let

- | Inventory ROW/Easement donation locations
- | Update overall costs (so we know what we have for amenities)
- | Design submissions



Amenities Recap

What is grant funded?

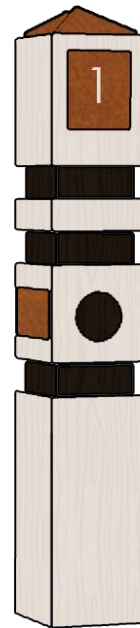
		ELIGIBLE FUNDING SOURCE			
ITEM	NOTES	DA	RAISE*	NSFLTP*	LOCAL
Design Based Aesthetic Elements					
Landscaping	vegetative screening/landscape buffers		X		X
Retaining wall aesthetics/fencing etc			X		
Level 1					
Bike Racks			X		X
Waste Receptacles	Dog Waste Station Questions?		X		X
Drinking Fountains					X
Bike Fix-It Stations					X
Benches			X		X
Trail-related Information Signage		X	X		X
Shelters	transit shelters only		X		X
Mile Markers		X	X	X	X
Trail Counters					X
Stations: Information Kiosks	related to trail information only		X		X
Level 2 Requires ROW					
Parking Lots (grading and drainage etc)	only in connection with trailhead or adjacent to trail		X		X
Public Restroom	Basic - nothing fancy		X		X
Trailheads	could include parking	X	X		X
Level 3 - Local Funded Independent Items					
Outdoor Interpretive Exhibits					X
Public Art					X
Asheville Highway Bicycle/Ped Enhancements					X
Enhanced Maintenance					X
Gateway Features					X

Amenities Recap

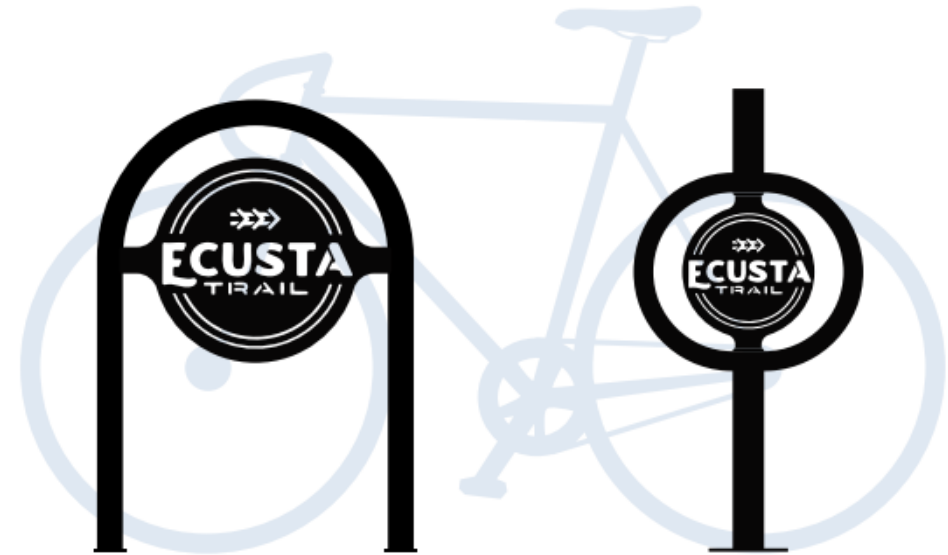
Grant Funded Level 1 Amenities

Grant funded amenities:

- | Benches
- | Mile posts
- | Information related trail signs
- | Bicycle racks
- | Waste receptacles
- | Stations” (covered benches and kiosks)



Mile posts



Other amenities

Not Grant Funded

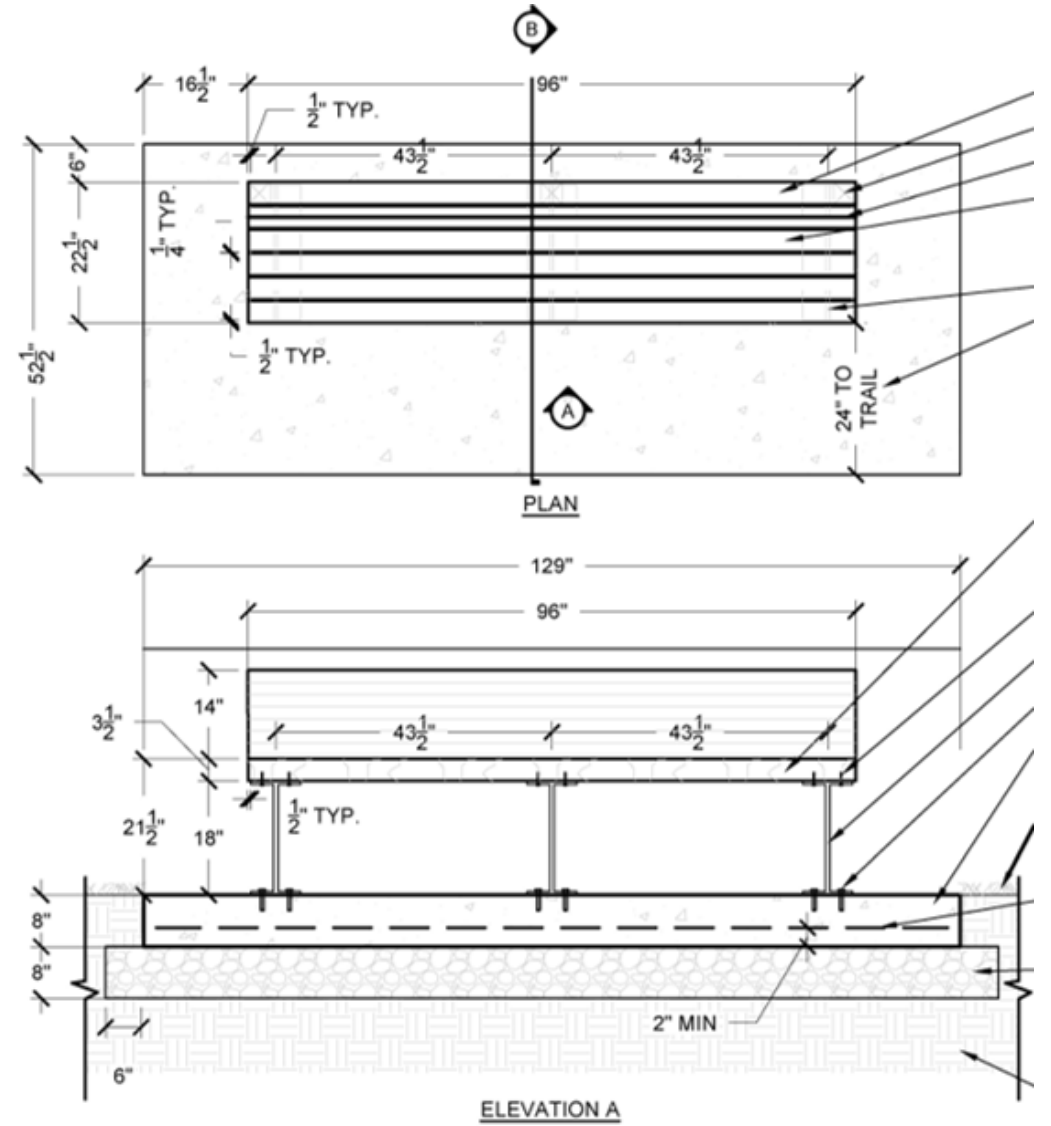
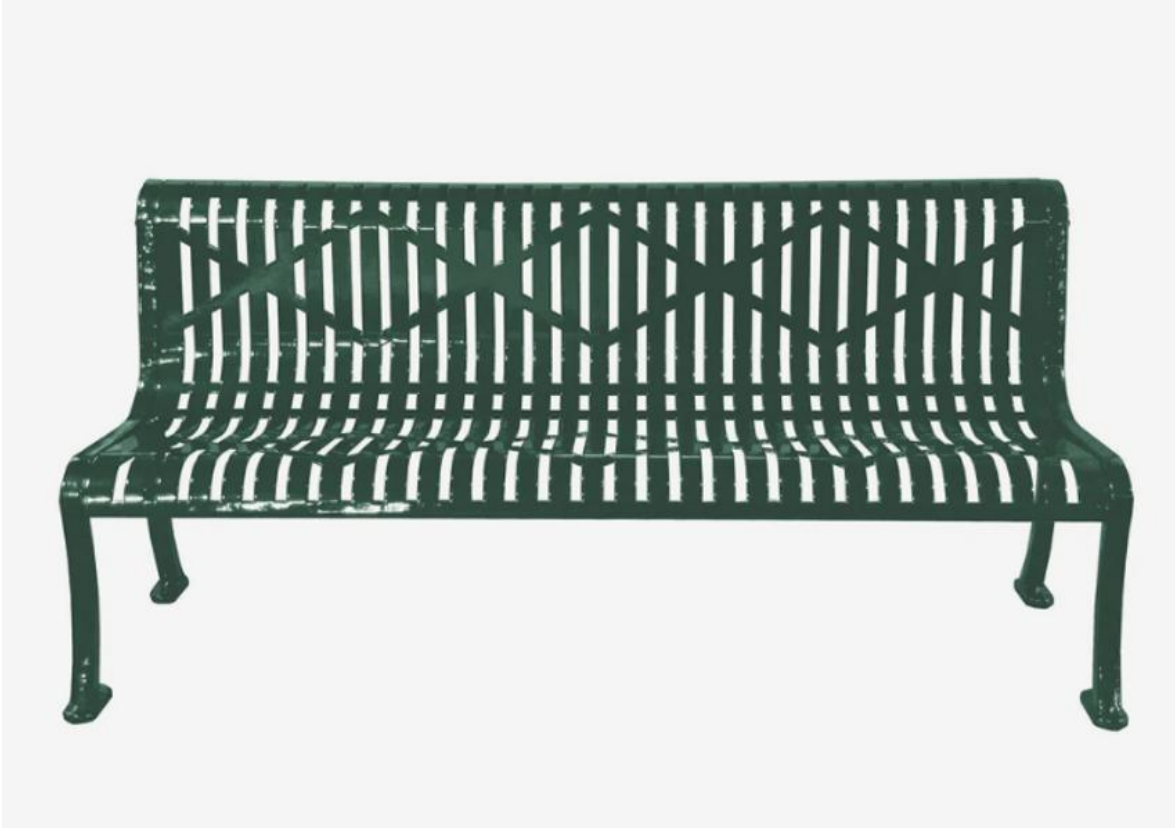
Must be locally funded:

- | Bicycle repair stations
- | Trail counters
- | Interpretive signs
- | Drinking fountains
- | Other amenities such as art or shelters



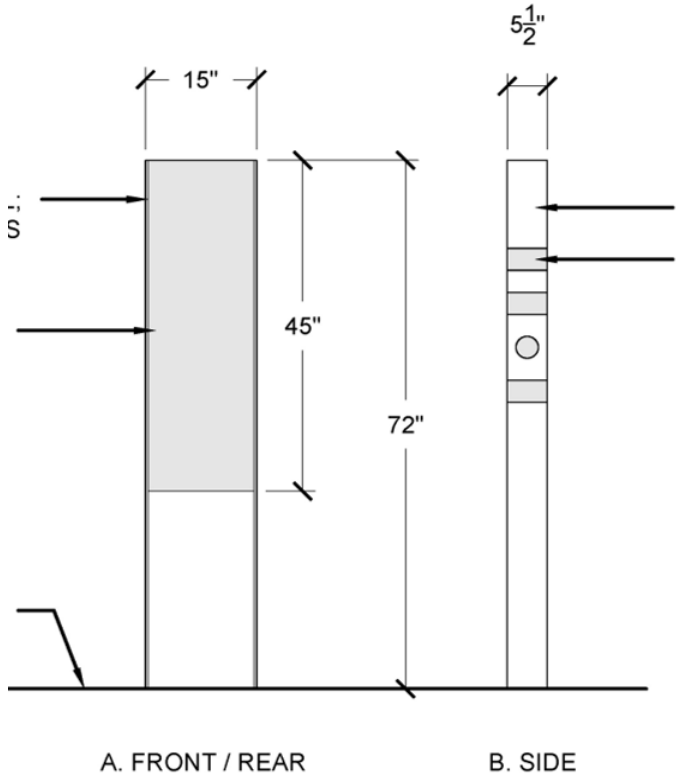
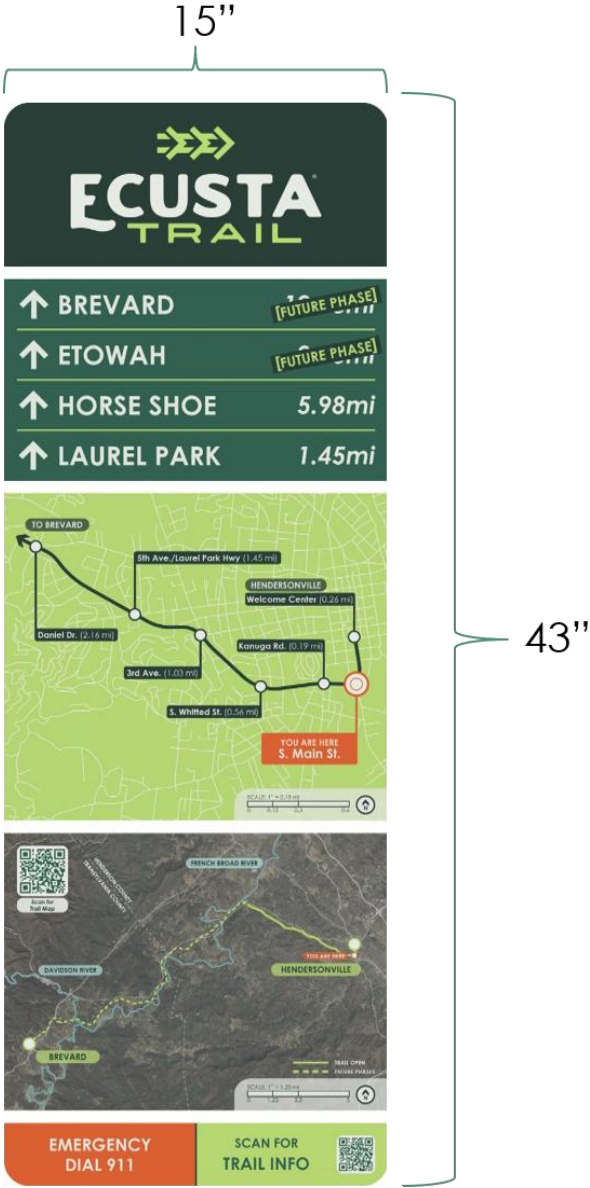
Amenities

Bench used in Henderson Co. urban area



Amenities

Orientation Signs



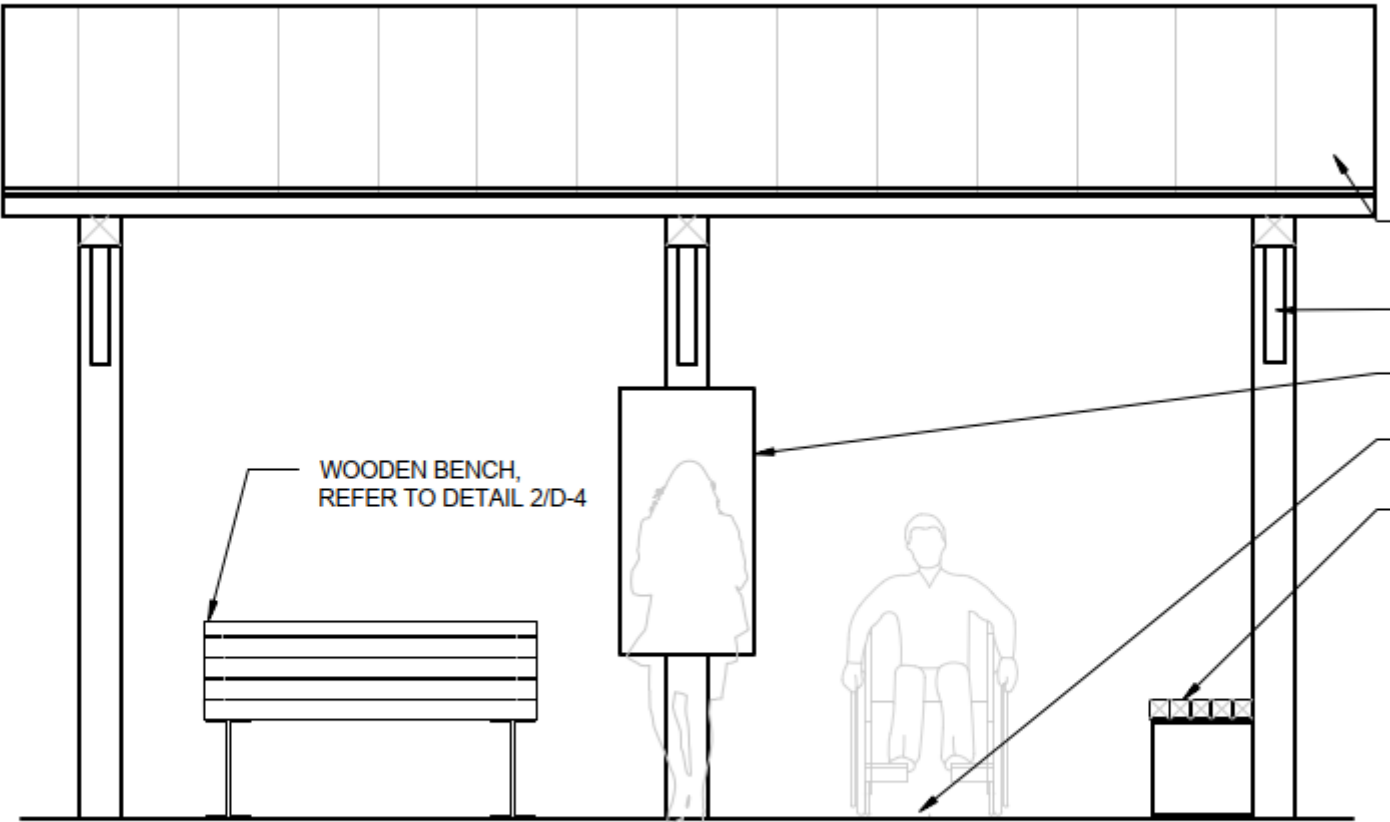
Amenities

Stations

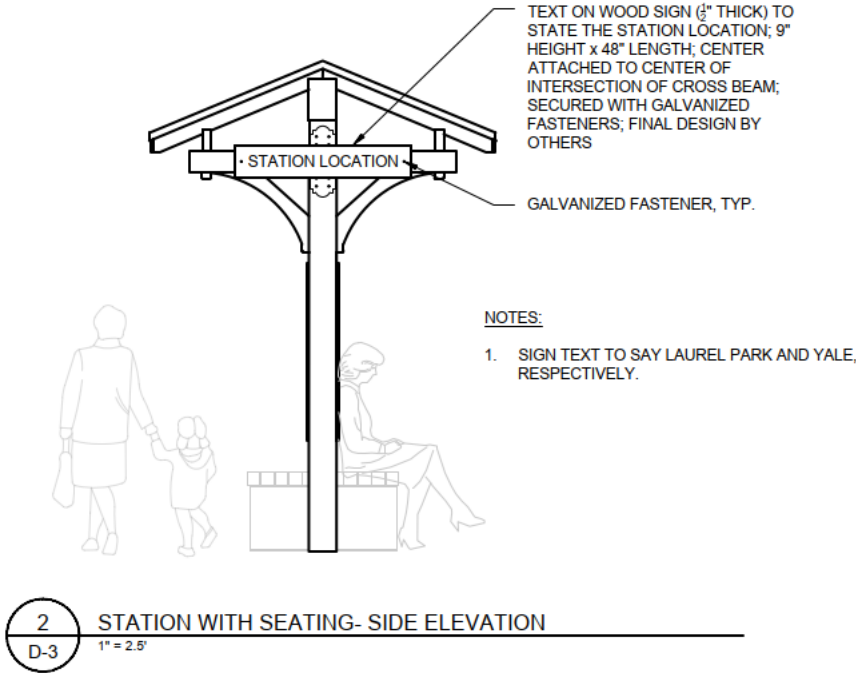


Amenities

Stations



1 ACCESSIBLE STATION WITH SEATING - FRONT ELEVATION
1" = 2.5'

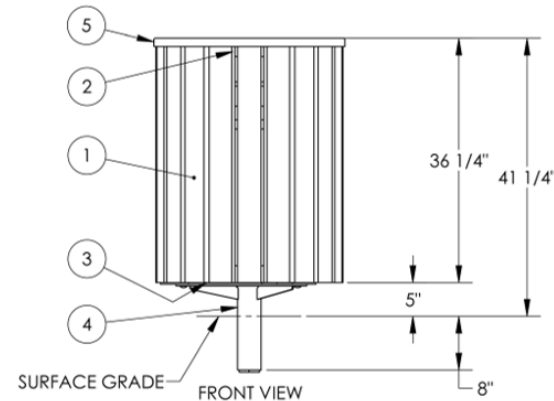
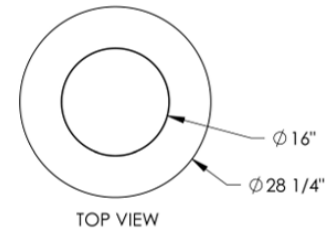


Amenities

Waste Receptacles

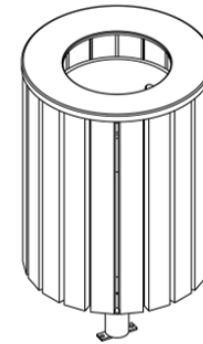


Available in powder coat and DuraCoat finishes



Materials List

- (1) Vertical Slats - 2" x 4" Nominal Ipe Wood
- (2) Support Ring - 7 Gauge Laser Cut Steel Sheet
- (3) Support Bars - 3/8" x 3/4" Steel Flat Bar
- (4) Embedded Tube - 3" Schedule 40 Steel Pipe
- (5) Lid - $\phi 28"$ x .075" Wall Steel Lid
Attached to Basket with Stainless Steel Airline Cable
- (6) 32 Gallon Rigid Plastic Liner with Handles Included



6

Amenities

Station Signs



LAUREL PARK HISTORY

A MOUNTAIN TOWN RETROSPECTIVE

THE TOWN OF LAUREL PARK
Two distinct waves of development have shaped the Laurel Park community. The first occurred in the early 1930s when the lower part of the mountain was developed to attract summer tourists. The second occurred in the 1970s when the upper part of the mountain saw a rebirth due to real estate and commercial development. Unlike the first wave, the second wave was subject to an economic boom and bust, followed by the Great Depression. Yet, Laurel Park has persevered and thrived.

THE FOUNDERS AND THE IRON HORSE
Laurel Park began in the early 1930s as a summer resort at the base of Mount Ocoee. In 1933, the U.S. Army established a hotel, barracks, and bathhouse on the mountain. Created from the U.S. Army's first camp for new hoteliers, and the park provided space for more services, and the park provided space for more services, and the park provided space for more services.



LAUREL PARK HOTELS AND THE FLEETWOOD
By 1972, Laurel Park was a major tourist destination. Smith built the hotel into a U.S. Marine Hotel, a seasonal resort. The hotel was built on the site of the old hotel, and the hotel was built on the site of the old hotel.



BOON, BUST & RECOVERY
A boom in local real estate activity peaked in 1975, ending abruptly in 1980. When a local real estate developer's hotel there was heavily damaged, construction was stopped. In 1980, the hotel was heavily damaged, and construction was stopped.





RAIL-TO-TRAIL HISTORY

AN EVOLVING CORRIDOR

1873 | FIRST CHARTERED
The Spartanburg and Asheville Railroad is first chartered and is consolidated with the French Broad Railroad Company the following year.



1879 | HENDERSONVILLE
The railroad reaches Hendersonville, forever changing the physical and economic landscape.



1891 | NEW PARTNERS
J.C. McNeely and engineer Thomas Howell acquire the French Broad Railroad Company, renaming it the Hendersonville and Brevard Railway Company.

1903 | SOUTHERN RAILWAY
249 shares of the Transylvania Railroad Company are purchased by Southern Railway, making it the controlling shareholder. Southern Railway fully absorbs the Transylvania Railroad in 1906.

1939 | ECUSTA PAPER MILL
Harry Shouse opens the Ecusta Paper Mill in Brevard, manufacturing cigarette papers and quickly becoming a prominent user of the rail corridor.

1968 | END OF AN ERA
The last passenger service on the railway ends. Freight trains of coal, wood chips, and other materials still pass through the corridor daily.

1983 | RAILBANKING
Congress amends the National Trails System Act to establish railbanking, where a voluntary agreement with a railroad company allows their out-of-commission rails to be temporarily converted to recreational trails.

2002 | ABANDONED RAIL
The Ecusta Paper Mill, being the last industry to use the rail corridor, closes.

2009 | FOETI
The non-profit Friends of Ecusta Trail is formed.

2021 | FINAL ACQUISITION
EcustaBathTrails LLC, under Conserving Carolina, purchases the rail from WECOA.

2025 | GRAND OPENING
On July 18th, the Ecusta Trail celebrates the grand opening of the first 6 miles of trail from Downtown Hendersonville to Horse Shoe.



LAUREL PARK STATION



TRAIL RULES AND ETIQUETTE

- STAY ON TRAIL
- TRAIL OPEN 24/7
- PEDAL ASSIST E-BIKES PERMITTED
- WHEELS YIELD TO PEDESTRIANS
- KEEP RIGHT EXCEPT TO PASS
- GIVE WARNING BEFORE PASSING
- LISTEN FOR APPROACHING TRAFFIC
- HELMETS ARE RECOMMENDED
- HELMETS ARE REQUIRED FOR CHILDREN 14 YEARS AND UNDER
- BICYCLE LIGHTS ARE REQUIRED FROM DUSK TO DAWN
- DON'T BLOCK THE TRAIL
- PETS MUST BE ON A SHORT LEASH
- CLEAN UP AFTER YOUR PET
- ALCOHOL POSSESSION OR CONSUMPTION IS PROHIBITED
- SMOKING IS PROHIBITED
- SPEED LIMIT IS 15 MPH
- NO LITTERING



Scan For Trail Map



EMERGENCY DIAL 911

SCAN FOR TRAIL INFO

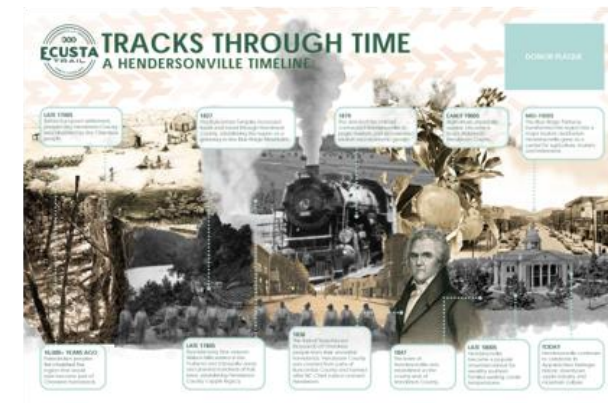
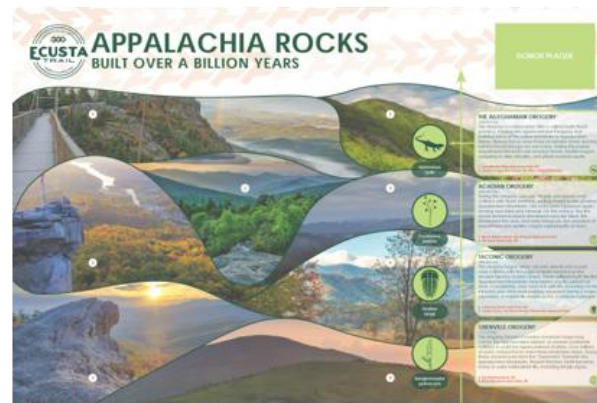
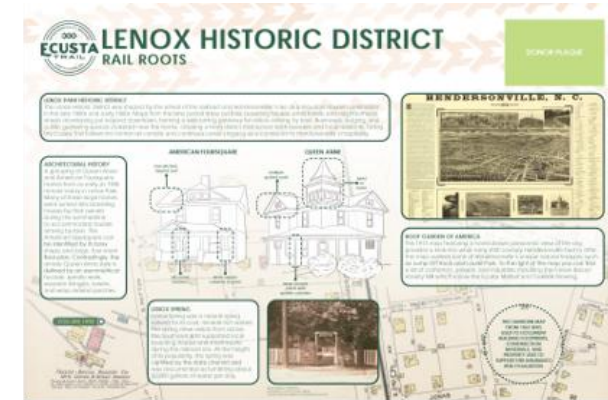
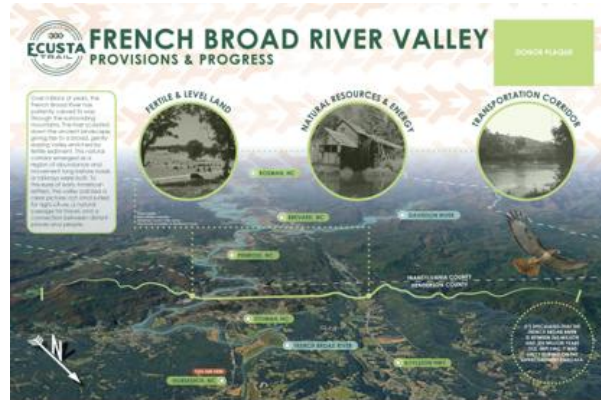
Amenities

Etiquette Signs



Amenities

Interpretive Signs



24"

36"

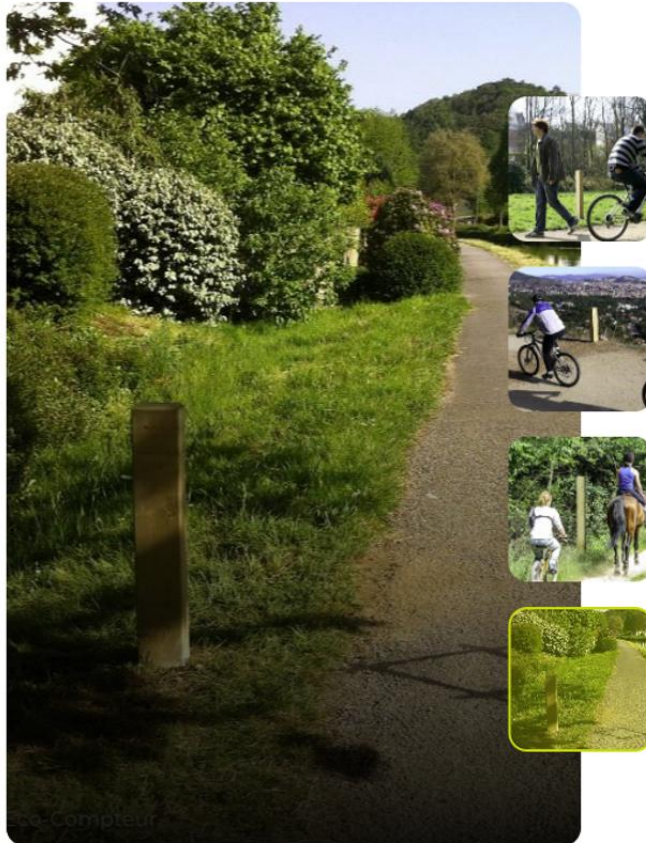
Amenities

Bike Repair Stations



Amenities

Trail Counters



MULTI Range

MULTI Nature

Permanent pedestrian and bike counter for rural settings.

Bicycle Tourism

Natural Areas

Benefits :

- Counts and differentiates between pedestrians and cyclists
- Measures the direction of travel
- Turn-key solution
- Seamless data transmission to our software
- Battery powered - 2-year battery life
- Works in all weather conditions

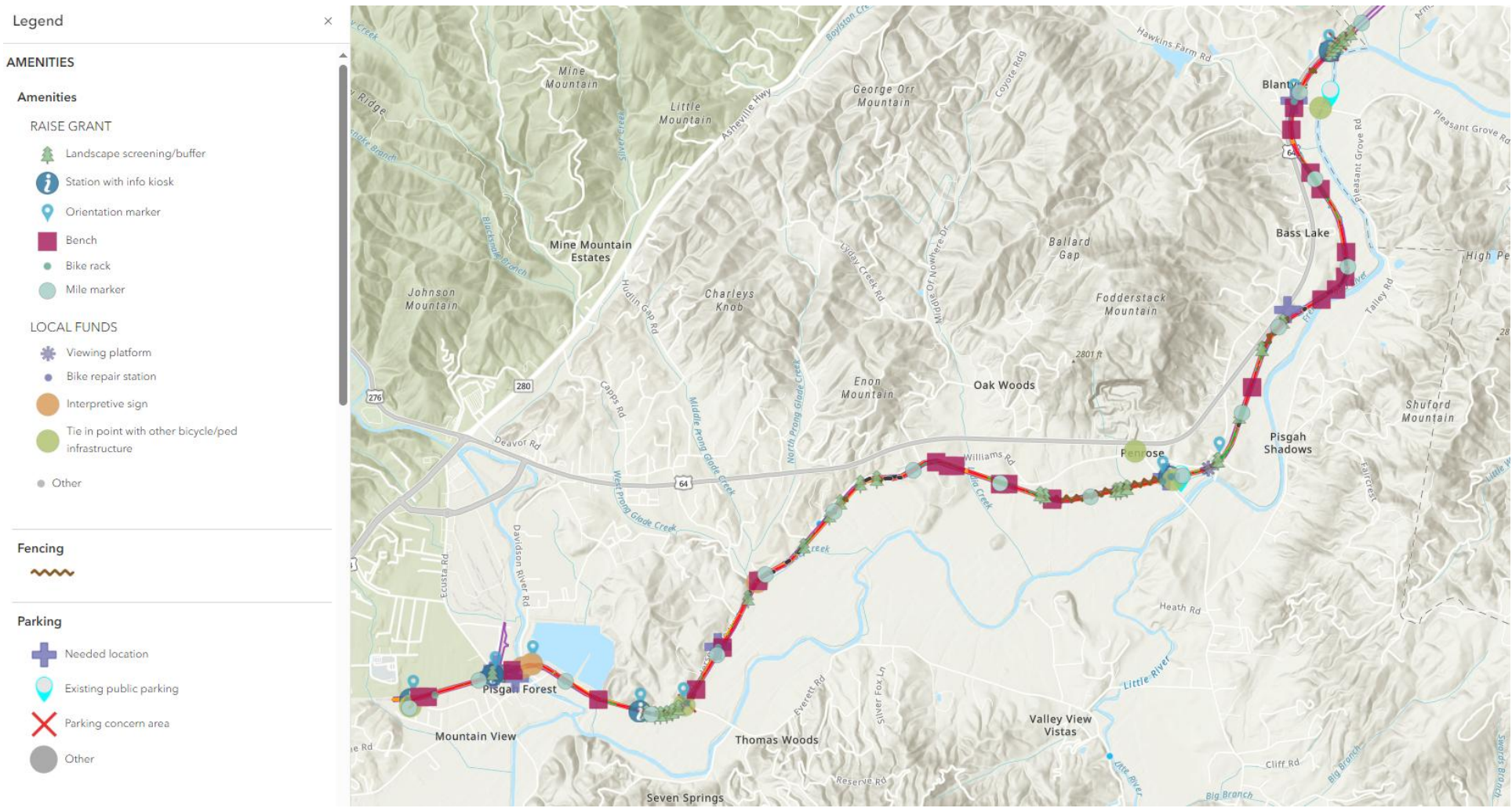
Quote request



IP 68

What We've Been Working On

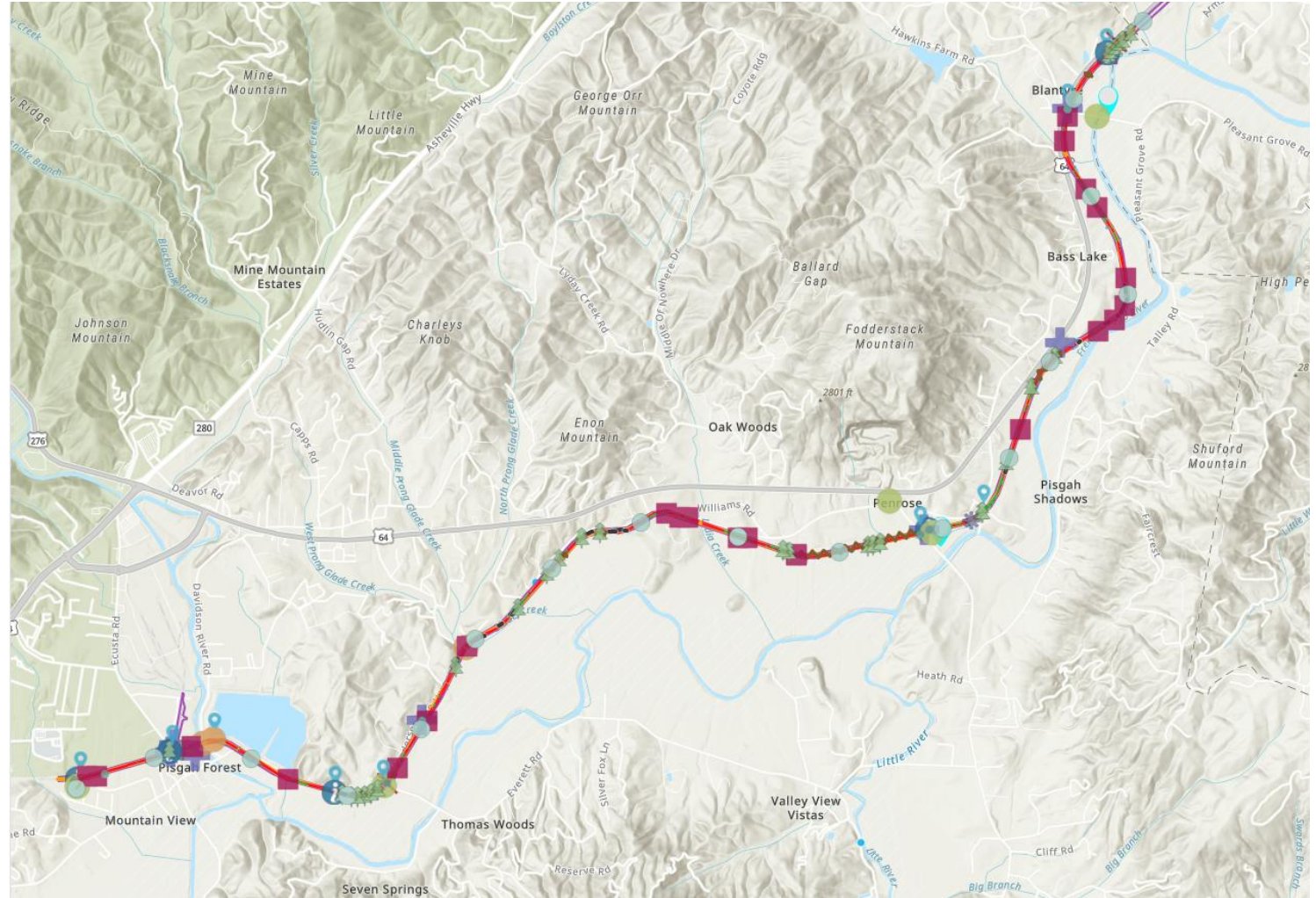
Locations



What We've Been Working On

Amenities

- Placement for benches (16), stations (3-4), sitting and viewing areas (5)
- Cost estimates
- Signage plan
- Trail access sites
- [LINK TO GOOGLE EARTH]



Trail Access

- | Property owner open to trail access on southern portion of property
- | Coordination with NCDOT driveway access (driver's sight line challenges)



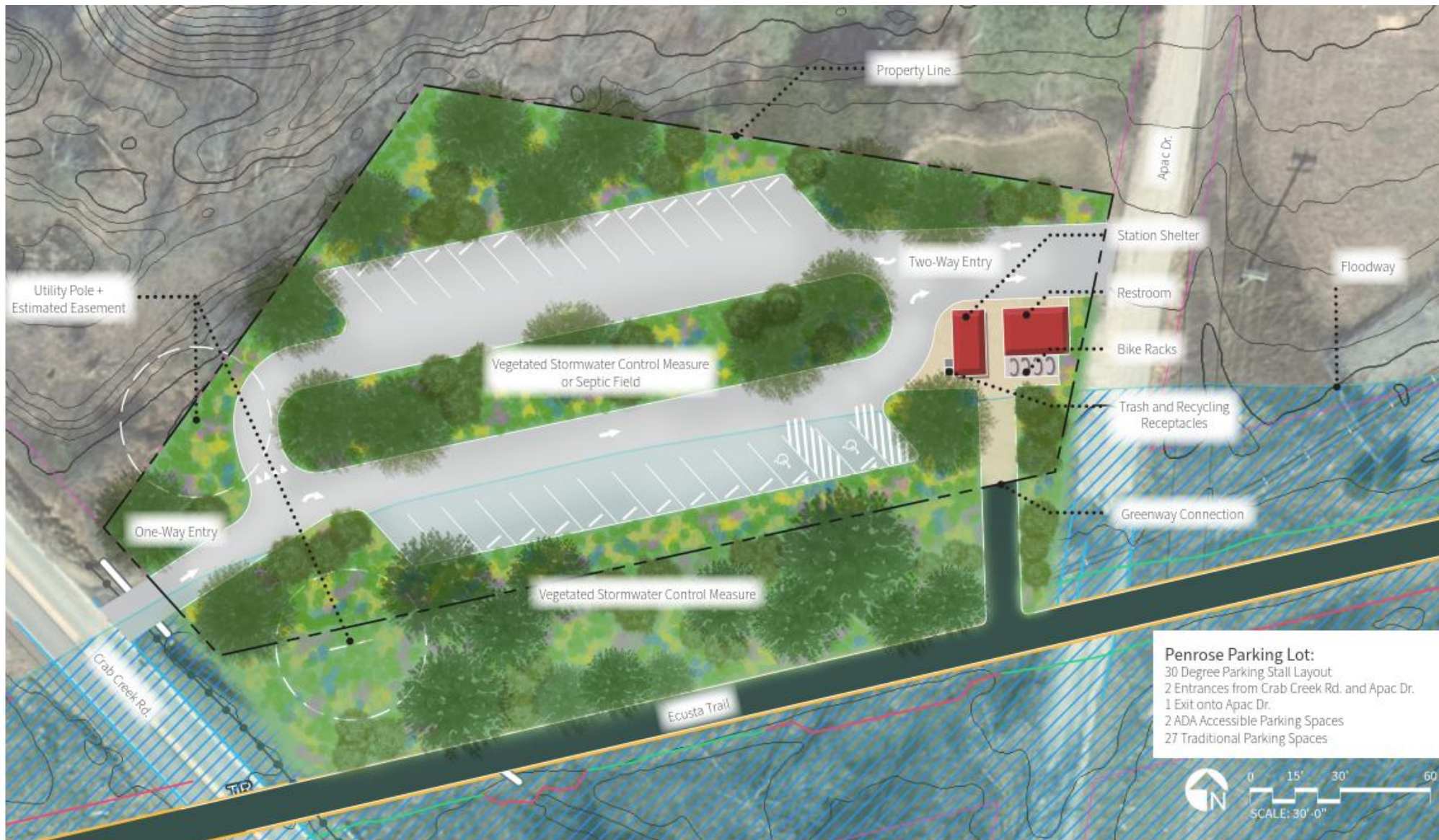
Concept from RAISE grant application



Trail Access

- Penrose: Crab Creek Rd. and Apac
- Close to French Broad River access
- Parking here will take some pressure off river access parking





Penrose Parking - Ecusta Trail Access Point



Next Steps

- | Structural review of custom amenities
- | Coordinate quantities of amenities
- | Trail access / pocket park concept plans
- | Landscape plans
- | Special Provisions



Thank you

