

Meeting Summary

Date: September 2, 2020

Place: Virtual Meeting

PRESENT: Andrew Landstrom; Bruce Chinery; Mikki Fleming; John Greeson; Cecily Kritz, Haywood Rhodes; Tim Tippin; Xilong Zhao
ABSENT: Gina Reyman; Robert Smith, Michael Zelek
STAFF: David Stancil, Christian Hirni, Beth Young
Guests: Terri Buckner, Fred Dietrich, Bill Boyarsky

- I. **Call to Order:** Roll was called using by Chair Rhodes using the GoTo Meeting screen visuals.
- II. **Additions or Changes to Agenda, Meeting Summary:** No comments on the August 5, 2020 notes. Rhodes made a change to the agenda by moving Approval of the Lands Legacy plan from Old Business to follow the Mountains to Sea Trail Update under New Business to allow guest staff to go early in the virtual meeting.
- III. **Report of the Chair:** Election Process. Rhodes explained the election process for Chair and Vice-Chair for PRC. He also explained that PRC Chair/Vice-Chair elections are normally held in March of each year, however the bylaws do not specify when elections are to be held so a September meeting is allowed. Rhodes stated that the March meeting is typically a very busy meeting for PRC and suggested that holding the election at the September meeting may be a better option going forward. The Council agreed.
- IV. **New Business**
 - a. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair. Tim Tippen moved that Haywood Rhodes and John Greeson retain their positions as Chair and Vice-Chair for another one year term. Second by Cecily Kritz. Other nominations were solicited and none being raised, nominations were closed. The vote was unanimous in favor of Rhodes as chair and Greeson as vice-chair.
 - b. Mountains to Sea Trail (MST) Update – Land Conservation Manager Chris Hirni was welcomed, and gave the MST quarterly update.

Phase 1: Occoneechee Mountain to Seven Mile Creek Natural Area – The State Property Office purchased a trail corridor along the Eno, and will manage the land as part of the the Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area (part of Eno River State Park). This will allow the MST coming from Riverwalk a connection to the west. Provisional grant funding was approved for the acquisition of a large piece of land to be added to the Seven Mile Creek Natural Area. The MST may cross through a section of this property if purchased. Negotiations are underway with landowner for a conservation easement and trail easement to further connection from Seven Mile Creek to Dimmocks Mill Rd. Hirni explained that with the completion of these purchases/easements there would be three to four additional purchases/easements left to complete phase one. Rhodes asked what would be the plan from Dimmocks Mill Road. Hirni explained that would be part of discussions with NCDOT. Stancil stated discussions with DOT may include possible pedestrian signals on the Dimmocks Mill bridge.

Phase 2: Cane Creek Area – An 11-acre property was purchased south of Cane Creek Reservoir along NC 54, with a future trail corridor that could in the future connect the NC 54 property to the south boundary of Caterpillar Creek. However, for the foreseeable future the trail will use Mebane-Oaks Road. Within those negotiations staff was able to negotiate an easement donation from Ms. Duprez, who owns the Bingham Inn Bed & Breakfast. This easement connects property that was formerly the Knight tract to the intersection with Mebane Oaks Rd and NC 54. Hirni added that staff has finalized the negotiations between OWASA, Clean Water Trust Fund and the State Attorney's office to amend another landowner's easement language to allow for the trail - this will be moving into negotiations for easement donation. This potentially will provide a direct route out onto a primary road for entry/exit from the OWASA Cane Creek Reservoir property. Another trail easement within the Cane Creek OWASA boundaries is being worked on and this would allow a small parking area and trailhead. Continue to meet with OWASA to discuss future easements, possible land swap, and discussions of amendments to a Memorandum of Understanding where there is a bit more potential for trail location and future negotiation of trail construction.

Eno River State Park – Hirni stated that the friends of the MST and NC State Parks did a great job negotiating a pedestrian walkway on the proposed bridge replacement on Pleasant Green Road. This was slated to be the next major DOT project in the county, but Hirni stated there may be a stall on future bridge projects. He is following up and continues to attempt contact with a series of landowners on Lawrence Road regarding a potential crossing point – this will require negotiations across private lands.

The Friends of MST have worked on new road routes that allow connection between existing and proposed trail segments and are listed on their website. Fred Dietrich, with the Friends of the MST commented that it was great to hear the update. He stated that the Friends of MST look forward to continuing to work with Orange County on this.

Rhodes asked about the portion of the MST coming from Alamance County into Orange County. Stancil responded that Alamance County has a preferred route they want to use that will bring the trail over from Saxapahaw coming in on Morrow Mill Road as opposed to Saxapahaw-Bethlehem Church Road. In the Orange County section of this part the trail would likely use road right of way.

Zhao asked if staff know the number of people using the trail each year. Hirni explained that this is not known the MST as a whole because the sections are not completely connected. Dietrich stated that there are currently very few through hikers, probably a few hundred a year or less. But there are lots of local people using the trails. Only a tiny fraction of users are the through hikers. Hirni and Stancil will work to see if they can get some numbers from Riverwalk and/ or Eno River State Park. Zhao asked if we can get numbers for hikers and numbers for bicycle riders.

Tippin asked about the Friends of the MST website – looking for a specific one for Orange County. Bill Boyarsky, from the Friends of MST spoke saying there is

just one site but they have an interactive Google map that expands significantly and they have a specific Facebook account for Orange County.

Hirni will report to the PRC again with a quarterly update in December.

- c. Proposed changes to the Capital Investment Plan 2020-2025. Stancil presented a document of CIP priorities that will go to the BOCC September 10. He went through each year's priorities, based on the amended CIP that was adopted by the BOCC during the budget process. Council members noted that they agreed with the director's prioritizations, and request that a letter be drafted in support of Blackwood Farmhouse funding be addressed this year.

V. **Old Business**

- a. Lands Legacy Action Plan 2021-2023 Priorities – Stancil posted a written report on the screen based on the previous month's meeting. Four different advisory boards are working on this and the priority is to have staff work with the County Manager to get something for the BOCC to review after the first of the year. Based on the previous PRC meeting MST acquisitions were the top priority. Also possibly doing some sort of random sample survey of Bingham residents to gauge interest in buying and construction of the planned Bingham District Park. Those are the two items that are Lands Legacy items. Also notes of interest from PRC discussion include 1) Status of the multimodal trail proposed between Hillsborough and Chapel Hill/Carrboro 2) Cultural and natural resource opportunities are part of future parks.

- VI. **Report of the Director** –Dave Stancil stated that Chris Sousa, Recreation Superintendent, will report to the board next month regarding the changes to programming due to COVID. He also outlined changes for parks based on the Governor's phase 2.5 regulations going into effect

VII. **Council and Committee Reports**

- a. Intergovernmental Parks Work Group (next meeting Oct 14) – It is not known if this meeting will be held due to COVID.

VIII. The meeting adjourned at 8:00PM. The next meeting will be held virtually (pending County Manager's approval) October 7, 2020, 6:30pm.