

Friends and Neighbors of Swannanoa (FANS)
PO Box 697
Swannanoa, NC 28778

August 11, 2024

Passive Recreation Lands Subcommittee
200 College Street, Room 310
Asheville, NC 28801

Re: Woodmen Trailhead and Educational Park Grant Application

Dear members of the Passive Recreation Lands Subcommittee,

We are writing to provide you with an update pertaining to landowner negotiations and grant-seeking, regarding our grant application for Passive Recreation funding. In the time since we presented to the full subcommittee, we have had a follow up meeting with Mike Stewart, the landowner on the south side of the Swannanoa River. He provided detailed information regarding his willingness to sell land or an easement to the county, for the benefit of this project and the future Fonta Flora State Trail. We provided this letter to the subcommittee last week.

On August 7th, Brent Campbell Architects (BCA) closed on the Woodmen of the World property. We met with the BCA team on the 7th, and they reaffirmed their interest in working with FANS and Buncombe County, to determine how the future use of their land could accommodate the Fonta Flora alignment.

Our team has also met with representatives of the Great Trails State (GTS) Program, and have determined that we will be applying for approximately \$100,000 of grant funding this September through GTS. These funds will support an update to the Swannanoa Greenway Feasibility Study with a possible 2-mile expansion of the original 4-mile study area. FANS has already raised \$60,000 to support this update, and has selected Equinox as our consultant for this work. Additional funding will allow Equinox to provide in-depth landowner outreach, a bridge evaluation for the proposed pedestrian bridge in the Woodmen Trailhead project area as well as an enhanced study area of the Woodmen Trailhead, and potentially design documents within portions of the original 4.2-mile corridor. Upon completion of this expanded study, this segment of the Fonta Flora State Trail (FFST) will be competitively positioned and eligible to receive funding for implementation.

Given Mike Stewart's willingness to sell land or an easement stretching westward to the Whitson Ave. Bridge, this project would now provide for 2,700 linear feet (over half a mile) of riverfront property for inclusion in the future Fonta Flora Trail alignment, in the heart of Swannanoa. The property that Mike Stewart is willing to sell or provide an easement over also makes it possible

to build a pedestrian bridge and greenway within our project area without the need to utilize any of the Woodmen of the World property. While it is our hope and expectation that negotiations with Brent Campbell Architecture will lead to the sale of a riverfront easement that would accommodate a greenway, we want to make it clear to the review committee that the success of this project does not depend on that negotiation. A half mile of greenway alignment could be secured using only the commitments we already have from other landowners in the project area.

This project has the potential to be so transformative precisely because of its strategic location; the Woodmen Trailhead is uniquely situated to provide connectivity along the FFST to both Beacon Village and Grovemont, making it a critical nexus for a future walkable Swannanoa.

Friends and Neighbors of Swannanoa is continuing to make significant progress in our efforts to bring the FFST and other pedestrian safety improvements to Swannanoa. We ask that the Passive Recreation Subcommittee members see this project for what it is: a unique and time-sensitive opportunity to secure the future of the FFST in an area of the County that is under increasingly intense development pressure. Securing key parcels of land will become more difficult and cost-prohibitive as the Beacon Village Bike Park and outdoor recreation complex that is currently under construction continues to transform Swannanoa's real estate market. The time to act is now. Opportunities that are here today will be gone tomorrow.

FANS is working hard to ready this corridor of the FFST for design and construction. We ask that the review committee help us secure this key property now, while funds are available and landowners are willing and excited to be a part of this important project.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

Megan McCreary, FANS

Carol Groben, FANS

RJ Taylor, FANS

Brad Spiegel, FANS

Rachel Sudnik, Greybeard Realty

Julia Weatherford, Friends of Fonta Flora State Trail & Black Mountain Greenways & Trails Committee