



Buncombe County Open Space Bond: Passive Recreation Lands Subcommittee

Minutes 19 March 2024

Subcommittee Members in Attendance: Kevin Conrecode, Anne Babcock, Bob Gale, Lena Richards, Bob Turner, Matt Fusco

Staff: Allison, Jennifer, Rachael, Catalina, Jill, Thomas

Buncombe County Administration: The March 19, 2024 meeting of the Buncombe County Passive Recreation Lands Subcommittee was called to order at approximately 12:06pm. Six subcommittee members were in attendance.

Approval of March 2024 Agenda

The Subcommittee voted to approve the agenda for the March 19 meeting.

Approval of January 2024 Meeting Minutes

The Subcommittee voted to approve the minutes from the January 16 meeting.

Open Space Bond Update

Jill Carter, the Open Space Bond Project Manager and Secretary of the Subcommittee, presented an update on the status of the Open Space Bond. The update included the following items:

- The Buncombe County Finance Department learned that Bond funds cannot be used to pay the salaries of the Open Space Bond Project Manager and the Affordable Housing Bond Project Manager. As a result, the Bond Project Manager positions will be terminated and the responsibilities will be distributed among the staff.
- On February 06, 2024 the Board of Commissioners voted to approve two Bond-funded conservation easement projects. The Lake Eden Preserve in the Swannanoa area includes 336 acres and the Bond allocation for this easement is \$250,000. The Bond funding helped to close the funding gap for the Lake Eden Preserve, which had exhausted all other funding sources. The Parham-Fortner Farm includes 30 acres in the Sandy Mush area and the Bond allocation for this easement is \$150,000. In total, \$400,000 of Open Space Bond funds have been allocated towards these projects.
- As a reminder, the Passive Recreation Lands Application Window will close on March 31. There are approximately 12 anticipated applications, including both acquisition and

improvement projects. These 12 projects range in funding requests from \$100,000 to \$3 million.

The Subcommittee also discussed the following items:

- Of the anticipated applications, there are three acquisition projects – one is led by a nonprofit, one by a Land Trust, and one by an individual landowner.
- There are a few anticipated projects that are on land currently under protection through conservation easement or other legal measure. While these are already conserved lands, these projects would open new acreage to public access and use.
- Minor improvements are permissible through the Passive Recreation Lands definition – any development must be within the spirit of Passive Recreation. ADA accessibility will also be considered in whether or not improvements are permissible. These restrictions would be built into the contract language.
- There are multiple mechanisms the County can use to protect the land in these projects – easements are only one option. The land should be protected in perpetuity, and the applicants need to demonstrate their ability to maintain and manage the land in the long term. These mechanisms will be determined in the contract negotiation process.
- The Subcommittee’s recommendations for funding will likely be shared with the Commissioners both in a briefing and in a regular meeting. These presentations will provide an opportunity for the Subcommittee to justify their recommendations and for the Commissioners to ask questions.
- The Subcommittee will need to consider how projects meet the spirit of the Bond and the priorities outlined in the evaluation criteria and application guidelines.

Discussion: PRL Score Report

Jill Carter shared the score report template that will be shared with Subcommittee members following the evaluation of applications by the Scoring Committee. The Subcommittee was satisfied with the structure of the score report and the plan for its distribution.

Note: The Subcommittee has the prerogative to decide which projects to review further. The Score Report is intended to help with that decision, but the Subcommittee can hear presentations/site visits from any of the projects, regardless of their score. The Subcommittee will not be scoring the projects but will make the recommendation to the Commissioners.

Public Comment

No members of the public wished to comment.

Next Meeting Date: April 16, 2024 at 12 PM

Meeting Adjourned: 1:04pm.