



October 19, 2022

Secretary Pete Buttigieg
U.S. Department of Transportation
Office of the Secretary
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

The Heart of Brevard enthusiastically supports the efforts of the City of Brevard to pursue the 2022 NSFLTP Grant Application to fund the plans and development of the Ecusta Trail in Transylvania County. This project will connect or enhance our existing assets, including the abandoned Ecusta Trail corridor, Pisgah National Forest, Dupont State Park, the Bracken Preserve, downtown, and many of our best historical, cultural, commercial, and service assets.

I serve as the Executive Director for the Heart of Brevard, a nationally accredited nonprofit organization affiliated with the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program. Main Street American is a nationwide program designed to promote and maintain rural downtowns as vital economic community centers. Our revitalization efforts include strengthening community, business recruitment, retention, and expansion, assisting with building rehabilitation, historic preservation and maximizing pedestrian comfort and safety. We have all worked hard to diversify our economy since suffering major manufacturing losses and to elevate our quality of life by leveraging these assets. Transportation infrastructure improvement projects, such as the Ecusta Trail, are the key to our success. We cannot afford to complete this project on our own. The ability to secure an alternative funding source, such as the RAISE grant, would permit us to deliver this widely supported project, meet several of our transportation needs at one time and create an economic synergy we could not experience otherwise.

Funding from the 2022 NSFLTP will enhance and elevate local investment and our tourism economy. Brevard has undergone a major transformation over the last two decades and has grown into a robust mountain destination for tourism. In our downtown district we have seen record levels of public and private investment from our business community. We are widely known for our many summer camps, waterfalls, national and state parks, Brevard Music Center, Brevard College, a vibrant arts community, and access to world class outdoor recreation. We have also been recognized as the best mountain biking destination east of the Mississippi by cycling enthusiasts.

Our downtown seeks to serve as the crossroads to outdoor recreation and 2022 NSFLTP Grant funding will allow us to better connect our historic downtown with local biking and hiking trails and adjacent neighborhoods while providing greatly enhanced pedestrian and cyclist safety. The development of the 8 miles of the Ecusta Trail will add access to additional walking, biking and micro mobility to our community and our national brand.

RAISE funded projects greatly elevate the quality of life in the communities they have supported. We are extremely excited about the possibilities that the 2022 RAISE Grant funding will provide and the economic impact that it will on our local and regional economy. A combined study of just four greenway trail systems in NC including Brevard's Estatoe Trail, found that their combined one time cost to construct them at \$26.7M resulted in the following returns: 1) \$19.4M of estimated annual sales revenue at local businesses along the greenways, 2) \$684K of estimated annual local and state sales tax revenue from businesses along the greenways, 3) \$25.7M in estimated annual savings due to more physical activity, less pollution and congestion, and fewer traffic injuries from the use of the green-ways, 4) \$48.7M in estimated business revenue from greenway construction, and 5) 790 jobs supported annually through greenway construction. Therefore, experience in NC supports that, for every \$1.00 of trail construction invested, \$1.72 is returned annually in local business revenue, sales tax revenue, and benefits related to health and transportation. That would mean the Ecusta Trail could generate \$34.2M annually to the local and regional economy.

The Heart of Brevard thanks you for your consideration for the 2022 NSFLTP Grant funding.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Nicole Bentley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

J. Nicole Bentley
Executive Director
Heart of Brevard