

October 12, 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 Transylvania Economic Alliance supports the efforts of the City of Brevard to pursue the 2022 NSFLTP Grant application to fund the plans and development of the The Ecusta Trail: A Multimodal Gateway to the Pisgah National Forest and the Blue Ridge Parkway. This project will connect or enhance our existing assets, including the abandoned Ecusta Trail rail corridor, Pisgah National Forest, Dupont State Forest, the Bracken Preserve, downtown, and many of our best historical, cultural, commercial, and service assets.

Most importantly, this project helps to facilitate an economic transition in our county. In the early 2000's the Ecusta Paper Mill- the trails' namesake- closed its manufacturing operations in Transylvania County, impacting well over 1,000 employees and leaving a devastating and enduring impact on our local economy. In the two decades since the mill's closure, Transylvania County's economy has gradually shifted its reliance from heavy industry to its outdoor industry as a primary economic engine. Our outdoor assets and quality of life provide irreplaceable value to our efforts to attract investment and job creating economic development prospects.

The mission of the Transylvania Economic Alliance is to lead responsible economic development, through engaging the private and public sectors to develop community assets that are needed to maximize opportunities for investment and quality job creation. We believe the Ecusta Trail aligns with this mission and that the long-term job creation and investment associated with the trail's development will provide generational economic change.

The outdoor industry contributes over \$12 billion annually to North Carolina's economy and employs over 150,000 people in western North Carolina. With over 50% of our county land mass dedicated to public management, Transylvania County's economic development and industrial capacity is highly limited by lack of land suitable for high value industrial growth. However, our access to public lands positions us to become the center of North Carolina's outdoor recreation industry- the trail solidifies this position, strengthens connectivity to our existing assets and provides access a rare opportunity for economic growth and investment.



A combined study of just four greenway trail systems in NC including City of 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 greenways
- 4) \$48.7M in estimated business revenue from greenway construction
- 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 Transylvania Economic Alliance thanks you for your consideration for the 2022 RAISE Grant funding.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Burton Hodges', is written over a light gray rectangular background.

Burton Hodges
Executive Director

