

Carrboro Greenways Commission
Minutes
March 15th, 2010

At –Large Members Present

*George Daniel (Chair) – At Large
*Robert Kirschner – At Large
*Salli Benedict – At Large

Representatives Present

*Ranee Haven-O’Donnell – Board of Alderman
*Gary Junker – Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools
*Dave Otto (Vice chair) – Friends of Bolin Creek
*Johnny Randall – Morgan Creek Valley Alliance/NC Botanical Garden
* Robin Michler – Transportation Advisory Board
*Matthew Arnsberger– Environmental Advisory Board
*Eric Allman – Recreation and Parks Commission
Ray Magyar – UNC
Nick Parker – OWASA

Staff Present

Randy Dodd- Town of Carrboro Planning Department
Jeff Brubaker—Town of Carrboro Planning Department
Brendan Moore- Town of Carrboro Recreation and Parks Department

Absent

*Amber Wagner – At Large
Marabeth Carr – Orange County Environmental Resources and Conservation Department
Bill Webster – Town of Chapel Hill

Guests

* indicates voting member

- I. **Call to Order:** George Daniel called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.
- II. **Administrative Matters:** The Greenways Commission approved the minutes of the February 15th meeting (unanimous) with one correction.
- III. **Bolin Creek Greenway project update:** Randy Dodd provided an update on the connection to the existing Claremont Greenway from Homestead Road. There are two alignments being reviewed, the one presented by Greenways Inc. and the one by the developer. The route proposed by Greenways Inc is assessed to meet AASHTO standards regarding slope. This route would require protection of the root zones of numerous “specimen” trees. This route would also require a geotechnical company to do boring work to determine where the bed rock is located. Phil Post, the Claremont engineer, presented an alignment that would remain closer to Homestead remain with two switchbacks. Charlie Musser from Sungate Engineering reviewed the alignment on site and has concerns that the design does not satisfy AASHTO requirements. He is also concerned about drainage with this route. This route does have a smaller overall footprint, less tree clearing, and a lower cost. The Commission requested information on the parking availability in Claremont. The concern is that the club house would become trail head parking and the Commission would like clarification on what type of parking is allowed. Jeff Brubaker also raised an issue that needs to be resolved between the developer’s proposal for an 8 ft wide trail

under the bridge and Greenway, Inc.'s proposal for a 10 ft trail. Some discussion will need to take place to determine the most beneficial design choice. The Commission would like to table this discussion to the next meeting after reviewing the plan, the plan approved by the Board of Alderman, and visiting the site Sunday, March 28th at 2:00.

IV. **Wilson Park Multi-Use Path.** Jeff Brubaker provided an update. The Town has received a draft municipal agreement with NC DOT and funding is available this cycle. The Board of Alderman will have to approve it as well as the NC DOT board. Once approved, the project should go out for construction drawings this year. The Town has met with OWASA about the route and they are comfortable with the route barring review of the final construction plans.

V. **Bolin Creek Greenway Conceptual Master Plan.** The Commission held a discussion reviewing the plan. Salli Benedict presented her perspective on the current plan prepared by Greenways Inc. (appended after minutes). The Commission discussed how best to approach the differing opinions on phases 3 and 4 and how best to review the document and provide feedback per the Board of Alderman's request. After a lengthy discussion on what the charge of the BOA was, Salli read her opposing viewpoints to the Commission. Robert Kirschner motioned to include the viewpoints in the minutes and table the discussion until the next meeting, 2nd by Dave Otto, Motioned passed unanimously. Gary Junker asked how these points would affect the Morgan Creek Project.

IV. **Other Business:** Randy Dodd announced, per Town Code, that elections for new officers will be held in April. Staff also shared a proposal to amend the Town Code to drop the number of the Greenways Commission from 15 to 11 voting members. This would eliminate both school reps, one board liaison, and two at large members. It would also reduce the number needed for a quorum from 8 to 6. Staff announced that CJT will be presenting the conceptual plan for Morgan Creek to the BOA on Tuesday, March 16th. A digital copy can be made available. Randy Dodd mentioned that there is Advisory Board training March 31st. Randy clarified that several Op-Ed pieces in the paper recently erroneously listed him as a contributor.

V. **Upcoming Meetings:** Next regular Greenways Commission meeting: Monday, April 19th from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Century Center, Room 2/3.

VI. **Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Response to Bolin Creek Greenways Inc. Report

Salli Benedict

The report contains a number of flaws. The principle reasons are as follows:

The plan did not examine in detail alternatives to the creekside route, including the larger context of bike lanes planned as part of UNC's new campus. See attachment 1.

- The plan did not resolve the inconsistency of recommending pavement creekside with the recommendations of the North Carolina Ecosystem Enhancement (EPP) project report that specifically puts the highest priority for preservation for this section of Bolin Creek. See attachment 2.
- The plan does not take in account the availability of "cleared area" in the sewer easement. For the majority of the route, the easement runs within the state-mandated protected 50-foot riparian buffer. The pavement must be 3 feet from the manhole so in some places the cement path would be up against the creek, radically changing its nature and appearance. The alternative on the outside of the manhole would cut into the hillside, requiring major retaining walls to stabilize the steep bank.
- Installing a paved concrete surface will not meet water quality objectives, one of the lead objectives of the report.
- The report states a paved corridor will be good for animal wildlife. Any loss of trees and vegetation will adversely affect wildlife.
- This proposed route would not establish a needed transit connection. Bike lanes can be met in existing plans and paving here would be redundant. See attachment 1
- Federal funded bikeways mandate heavy machinery used for street construction. Actual disturbance will be much greater than 14 feet as building needed storm water diversions will require clearing up to 50 feet. See the practical impacts for an existing Greenway at Booker Creek in Chapel Hill.
- The cleared utility easement along Bolin Creek is as narrow as 15 feet or less. Construction would require tree clearing as well as grading, with adverse consequences to the sensitive riparian buffer.

While it is possible to obtain an exception from the Department of Water Quality, the Jordan Lake rules do not allow disturbance within 30 feet of a stream bank. We as a community hold an obligation to maintain high standards which protect the quality of a drinking water supply for our region.

- Removing trees on a stream bank is regarded as the ultimate harmful action affecting water quality and stream-bank integrity. Reduced vegetation means a decrease of rainwater infiltration into the ground and more soil erosion into the creek. With less shade, temperatures rise, and dissolved oxygen in the creek decreases. Macro-invertebrates (a fancy name for anything without a spinal cord) die off and creek health declines.
- Storm-water diversion and construction of basins will turn the natural creek and its woods into a man-made grass-filled landscape.
- Estimates for paving are \$3 to \$4 million are low and would not cover engineering and permits. Even so with just this estimate, that's \$1.5 to \$2 million per mile. Not calculated is the economic benefit such a resource provides the community.

Paving runs counter to Carrboro's past recommendations and efforts to protect the Bolin Creek Valley: Carrboro and Orange County purchased the 27-acre Adams Tract along Bolin Creek as a nature preserve. Carrboro negotiated with UNC to keep the forest above the stream protected, as specified in the Carolina North agreement. The town's most recent Parks & Recreation Master Plan suggests portions of Bolin Creek be designated as a nature preserve. Most of the area remains in its natural state with a stunning creek, wildlife, specimen trees and wildflowers.

The Carolina North Development Agreement between UNC and Chapel Hill designates the Bolin Creek corridor as the highest priority for natural preservation in the Carolina North tract. The N.C. Department

of Natural Resources has also identified the Carolina North tract as the most important to preserve in the entire "Little Creek" drainage area.

An estimated seventy percent of the length of Bolin Creek will be eventually paved. The unpaved natural experience is equally important to humans, including wheel chairs, walkers and runners, and to resident wildlife. Significant elevation drops at entrance points would make access difficult by wheel chair, no matter what the surface is. All terrain wheel chair can handle natural surface trails.

Bikeways are an integral part of good transit planning. It makes sense to focus on the planned connector to campus, and the already designated routes for Seawell School Road; these routes offer gentler slopes, better connectivity and lower construction costs. See attachment 1

Attachment 1

As our Towns grow and Carolina North is built we need to make sure we include safe bike ways to provide alternatives to more autos on the road. Save Bolin Creek supports building bike facilities to fulfill the need for a north- south connector for cyclists from Carolina North to northern Carrboro and Chapel Hill neighborhoods.

Many people do not know that the Carolina North Agreement signed in June 2009 between Chapel Hill and Carrboro commits to building future bike facilities that will provide that north – south bike connector between central campus and Carolina North. The agreement specifies in section 5.8.18 and 5.8.19 that bicycle facilities shall be built:

1. “on both sides of Estes Drive from Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd to Seawell School Road;
2. and both sides of Sewell School Rd between Estes Drive and Homestead Road”,
3. and in 5.8.19 “that the Town and University shall work cooperatively to identify a greenway-bike connection between the Carolina North tract and UNC’s central campus.”

The Carolina North agreement also says in section 5.8.4 that “the schedule shall provide that improvements are made prior to occupancy of the building development that generates the need for those improvements.” In other words, when the new campus is growing and traffic increases, the facilities (both bus transit and bicycle) will need to be built at the same time.

Campus to Campus Bike Connector (CCBC), an advocacy group, is pushing for the Towns and UNC to identify the route in one year and construct the bike facility within 3 years in advance of other infrastructure on the Carolina North campus. CCBC has identified three potential routes between central campus and Carolina North. Both of these potential campus connector routes, the railroad route via Libba Cotton or the Tanyard Branch bike route, will line up with the north-south bike lanes that will be built on Seawell School Road.

In conclusion the planned bike ways on the drawing boards will provide a cyclist a convenient commute from the central UNC campus north to Estes Drive, and then on to northern neighborhoods via the bike facilities on Seawell School Road, with a mid- point stop at the Carolina North campus.

Once built, these bike routes will make a paved transit corridor along the Upper Bolin Creek between Estes Drive and Homestead redundant. Save Bolin Creek supports preserving Bolin Creek and opposes the proposed paved transit bike route through the Bolin Creek valley. We oppose this route because it would alter the natural landscape, deteriorate stream ecology and harm wildlife habitat in this large 400+tract of unbroken forest. Transit funds should be put toward existing plans.

Attachment 2

North Carolina Ecosystem Enhancement (EPP) project report. The Report does not take in account the findings of the North Carolina Ecosystem Enhancement (EPP) project report that specifically put the highest priority for preservation for this section of Bolin Creek where pavement is proposed. The primary goal of the EPP study was to provide data on existing problems, assess the risks for future watershed degradation, analyze the two towns' storm-water ordinances and make specific suggestions for improvement. Most importantly, the study was to identify the specific undisturbed parcels of land targeted for preservation that were pinpointed at the "highest levels of functional health".

Each sub-watershed was broken down into quartiles and assigned point scores. Two areas, now the main focus of the current pavement controversy – the P.H. Craig Tract and the UNC tract — were given the highest priority scores for preservation. They received this score due to their highly rated habitat and natural heritage features.

From a biological perspective, it is well understood that certain species can only survive in large contiguous forests. Given this, as seen in the map below, the EPP study identified most of the Bolin Creek Valley between Estes Drive and Homestead Road as the highest priority for preservation.

Bolin Creek EPP - [click for full map](#)

Of the UNC land, the report states on page 4-4: "The Horace Williams tract owned by UNCrepresents the largest contiguous area of undisturbed forest cover in the entire Bolin creek watershed."

The final EEP study and recommendations were approved and accepted by all participating local governments, including Orange County, Carrboro, and Chapel Hill elected officials, at the September 2004 Assembly of Governments meeting.

As written, the consultant's report would lead to damage of wildlife habitat, destruction of native trees in a forest worthy of permanent preservation, and deterioration of water quality in a watershed we have pledged to protect. The report should be rejected.