

**MINUTES – REGULAR MEETING
BOONE TOWN COUNCIL
November 29, 2023**

CALL TO ORDER

A regular meeting of the Boone Town Council was called to order at 6:03 p.m. on Monday, November 29, 2023 in Courtroom One of the Watauga County Courthouse located at 842 West King Street in Boone. Mayor Tim Futrelle presided. Councilmembers present included Mayor Pro-Tem Edie Tugman, Virginia Roseman, Dalton George, and Becca Nenow. Staff present included Town Manager Amy Davis, Town Clerk Nicole Harmon-Church, Emergency Management Coordinator Matt Krause, Public Works Director Todd Moody, Lieutenant Jon Houck, and Sustainability and Special Projects Coordinator George Santucci. Town Attorney Allison Meade was also in attendance.

TENTATIVE AGENDA ADOPTION

Upon a motion by Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman, seconded by Councilmember Roseman, Council voted to approve the agenda as presented.

VOTE: Aye: Tugman, Roseman, George, Nenow
 Nay: None
 Absent: Carter

**DISCUSSION & POTENTIAL ACTION REGARDING PROPOSED MOUNTAIN BIKE
PARK ON WINKLER'S CREEK**

ERIC WOOLRIDGE - DESTINATION BY DESIGN

Eric Woolridge of Destination by Design gave a presentation regarding the proposed mountain bike park on Winkler's Creek. A complete copy of the presentation can be found at <https://boonenc.igq2.com/Citizens/default.aspx>

PUBLIC COMMENT

Jim Zellner of Saddle Way stated that the neighbors paid to have a flyer printed to inform residents in the area of the project. He stated that he had walked the trails at Rocky Knob and found the trails there to be impressive, with no erosion. Mr. Zellner was mostly concerned with the parking situation on Winkler's Creek if the bike park was approved. He felt that Rocky Knob was ideal since there were no neighbors to impact.

Catherine Reczek of Saddle Way stated that water is life and expressed concern about the impact on the Town's water supply. She was also concerned with the increased traffic, trash, and potential increase in the homeless population the park would attract. Ms. Reczek also felt that the Destination by Design website did not give enough information on the project.

Eric Brinker of Flannery Fork Road expressed his desire to try to conserve the proposed park area since his family had been property owners near there since 1955. He indicated that he was pro-bike and pro-hike and would like to see a park in the area, just not at the proposed area. Mr. Brinker stated that many natural resources would be impacted, including the water supply for the Town of Boone. He was also of the opinion that the road could not handle the increase in traffic if the park was approved. Mr. Brinker reiterated that there was a huge difference between Rocky Knob Park and the proposed Winkler's Creek Park.

Holly Corell of Flannery Fork Road indicated that her family members had also owned land in the area since 1955 and was concerned that the traffic would be a big problem if the project was approved. She stated that she had almost been hit head-on three times recently because of drivers speeding around blind curves. One of those blind curves, Ms. Corell noted, was where the parking lot was slated to go in the presentation. She was concerned about the increase in trash, as well as the aesthetics and other adverse effects of a portable toilet on the side of the road.

Kathleen Collins of Winkler's Creek Estates was concerned about the increase in trash, although she believed it was important for people to be outdoors and active.

Emily Brinker of Winkler's Creek Road indicated that Flannery Fork Road was dangerous in the wintertime since it was gravel and could not be scraped. She encouraged members to drive the road and stated that it was scary and narrow. Ms. Brinker added that the park looked lovely but the location was terrible. She finished by saying the parking lot for the proposed park was a tragedy waiting to happen due to small children running into traffic.

Travis Hutchins of Poplar Hill Drive stated that he supported trails like this. He added that he biked all the time and did not believe the proposed park and the 7% increase in traffic would negatively impact the area.

Dr. Eric Plaag of Boone stated that he believed this project could only be done successfully by working with NCDOT to install speed breaks on Winkler's Creek. He spoke to the historical significance of the dam that was formerly located on the property and urged members to ask the Historic Preservation Commission to research the site to see if the site should be preserved. Dr. Plaag was also concerned about the erosion of trails near the Town's drinking water. Further, he suggested Council look into implementing a fee structure for admission to the park similar to parks he had visited out west.

Charles Davis of Flannery Fork Road indicated that he lived along the southern border of the property in question and that traffic has increased significantly recently. He strongly disagreed that the suggested 7% increase in traffic was not significant.

Ann Werner of Winkler's Creek Estates echoed that the road was dangerous. She reiterated the concerns regarding the fact that the road was privately maintained, increased traffic, and the visuals of a portable toilet on the side of the road.

Lauren Hutchins of Poplar Hill Drive stated she was a biker and occupational therapist. She said that she was excited about the proposed park and thought that it would allow access to a demographic of bikers that Rocky Knob currently does not. She added that many bikers who were not served by Rocky Knob traveled to Wilkes County to bike.

Kristen Morrison of Boone stated that she cared a great deal about nature but did not want to be ignorant about safety concerns. She added that biking was a life-giving sport for her own family since it was something they could do together, but noted that they could not all bike at Rocky Knob due to varying experience levels.

Will Brinker of Flannery Fork Road stated that this project was a want, not a need, like clean drinking water for the Town. He felt that the project needed to be thoughtfully and thoroughly addressed and expressed concern at the lack of involvement of the public thus far. It was his opinion that everything was good with the project so far except for the location. Mr. Brinker was concerned with what would happen if the park became over-used. He added that the proposed 7% increase in traffic is a significant increase but was worried about what the maximum increase might be on a busy day. Mr. Brinker expressed that he was not against the project but that it needed to be done right and not rushed.

Rodney Thomas of Boone stated that he used to live in the area and believed the park could be suitable for all, though he was concerned about a potential increase in trash.

Rachel Cathey of Boone announced that she was a senior at Watauga High School and was involved in mountain biking. She felt the proposed park would be good for the community as a whole and noted that she currently had to travel to Wilkes to ride.

Zoe Meinekie of Boone reminded members that Shulls Mill was also a dangerous road to drive and believed that there would be accidents no matter where it is due to where we live. She stated that it was important to get outside and believed this to be a good way to preserve 150 acres in Boone.

Maritza Greene of Boone stated that she was unaware that Boone owned property on Winkler's Creek and that the Town had sold its soul to ASU. She indicated that she would rather the Town preserve the property by way of this park than sell it to ASU.

Joy Selner expressed safety concerns. She informed members that she organized the annual trash pick-up in the area and was displeased with Boone Police enforcement in the area.

Josh Taylor stated that he was involved in Gaston County Parks and Recreation and believed that recreation was equal to conservation. He was of the opinion that none of the concerns expressed were valid.

Kelly Edwards said that she had to travel to Wilkes County so that her kids could have a place to mountain bike. She stated that her family had to stop biking together because her four year old child was not able to participate at Rocky Knob. Ms. Edwards felt that the area needed an outdoor opportunity for kids to bike and believed that bikers would pick up their litter.

Josh Pierce asked Council to consider installing a disc golf course at the site in addition to the trails.

Christopher Brown said that his daughter learned how to mountain bike in Town and felt that the area lacked beginner/intermediate, family-friendly, and disability-friendly trails. He expressed support for the project and indicated that the Watauga County High School mountain bike team takes good care of the trails at Rocky Knob.

Mr. Parker stated that he lived near the Rocky Knob trails and never had issues with trash. He added that he frequently saw wildlife in the area and felt that the proposed park would be a great way to include mountain biking into the Town.

Ms. Cooper indicated that she was on the Watauga High School mountain biking team and that it had helped her to become more active and make friends. She felt that a new trail system would allow races to be hosted in Town and would be inclusive of more people of different levels.

DISCUSSION & POTENTIAL ACTION REGARDING PROPOSED MOUNTAIN BIKE PARK ON WINKLER'S CREEK

Councilmember Roseman asked how long it took to construct the park at Rocky Knob. Mr. Woolridge indicated that it took less than two years, beginning in 2010. He noted that Rocky Knob progressed quickly in part because the Watauga County Tourism Development Authority was aggressive in its approach toward bringing outdoor recreation to the area. Mr. Woolridge noted that Watauga County also donated funding through in-kind services and stated that if funding was in place right now, the proposed Winkler's Creek project could be completed in two years as well. He was confused by the statement made by a member of the public that the project was moving too fast and stated that the concerns mentioned would be addressed. Councilmember George stated that he was under the impression that the neighbors in the area knew more about the project and agreed that the project might be moving too quickly. He communicated his feeling that public land should be accessible to all and that recreation should not be this divisive. Mr. Woolridge responded that he was currently working through ideas to get to the best way to move forward and noted that any extra meetings scheduled would slow the process further. Councilmember Nenow asked how much grant funding has been received for the project. Mr. Woolridge answered that he has received two grants totaling approximately \$800,000 and noted that a PARTF grant would require a 50% match from the Town. He explained that this grant could be used to stack on top of the other two. Councilmember Nenow asked staff to speak to the concerns raised by the public regarding the Town's water resources. Public Works Director Todd Moody indicated that the Town had three water intakes and that the Winkler's Creek reservoir was a backup supply. He added that the possibility of needing to use this supply was low. Ms. Nenow asked Mr. Woolridge if it was possible to reduce back-and-forth traffic in the parking lot to decrease surface area. Mr. Woolridge answered that he could cut ten spaces and part of the retaining wall for a cost-benefit and surface area decrease but he felt that this park deserved more parking spaces. Discussion regarding passive recreation ensued, with Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman expressing concern that the trails presented in the plan seemed more advanced due in part to the steep grade. Mr. Woolridge responded that there would be a climbing element to the trails, but it would be harder to feel due to the inclusion of switch-back turns and an increased distance and grade. In response to a public comment that the Town had sold its soul to ASU, Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman wanted people to understand that the Town of Boone did not control the area of Watauga County in which the proposed park was situated. She added that the Town often struggled with ASU and did not have the level of authority over ASU that people thought that it did. Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman continued by saying there was not a level playing field between the Town of Boone and ASU and that if a way to work with ASU could not be found, that ASU could go to the legislature to get what it wanted by way of a

local bill. She added that the Town had no control over property outside of the Town limits. Councilmember Roseman reiterated that the Town had not sold its soul to ASU and informed the audience that the Town was 6 square miles in size. Of that 6 square miles, Ms. Roseman stated that 42% of the property located within was non-taxable, with the bulk belonging to ASU. She then asked how close the trails were to the homes near the property line and wanted to know how the trails would affect the lives of the neighboring homeowners. Councilmember George stated that he had received a communication from the High Country Audubon Society asking if the Town and Destination by Design would be invested in identifying and protecting rare plants, birds, and other wildlife. Mr. Woolridge ensured Council that biologists would be involved in the project's entirety. Lieutenant Jon Houck addressed concerns voiced earlier in the meeting regarding Boone Police enforcement in the proposed park area. He indicated that people were often confused as to the jurisdiction of Boone Police Department but that the State Highway Patrol and Watauga County Sheriff's Office had jurisdiction in this area, not Boone Police Department. Lt. Houck stated that should a crime occur on this or any Town-owned property, Boone Police would attend to that crime. He stated that Boone Police could technically pull over a motorist if they were within one mile of Town of Boone property and that there was a mutual aid agreement with other area law enforcement agencies in place should the need arise. Mayor Pro-Tem asked that Mr. Woolridge and his team make themselves available to the neighborhood and community members to discuss the project. She hoped that the project would evolve into more of a multi-use, family-oriented park with activities, including disc golf. She stated that she felt it was excessive to have two mountain bike parks in Boone. Mr. Woolridge responded that the plan included dual-use trails, with Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman stating that it was not practical to expect people to walk and hike on dual use mountain bike trails. It was the consensus of Council not to move forward with the project and to give further direction in the to the Town Manager, who would then communicate that direction to Destination by Design team members.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a motion by Mayor Pro-Tem Tugman, seconded by Councilmember George, Council voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:41 p.m.

VOTE: Aye: Tugman, George, Roseman, Nenow
 Nay: None
 Absent: Carter

Nicole Harmon, Town Clerk

Tim Futrelle, Mayor