

MAKING THE DREAM REAL



Case for Support



Executive Summary

The Ecusta Trail, when complete, will be a 19.4 mile, multi-use greenway along an unused railway corridor ('rail-trail') connecting Hendersonville and Brevard. This 'linear park' will beckon people of all ages and abilities to reach destinations by walking, running, biking and wheelchair. The rail line meanders through fields and forests, beside streams, pastures and country churches, offering a picture-book walk through a life nurtured and cradled in the mountains of Western North Carolina.

Our dream is to convert this abandoned rail line into a "new cultural main street" connecting communities, promoting health, enriching the quality of life and the economy for everyone. In time, we envision the Ecusta Trail becoming the premier destination greenway in the Southeast.

Since its construction in 1894, the railroad mainly supported the local paper and timber industries. Rail service stopped in 2002. A grassroots effort formed a 501(c)(3) in 2009 called the Friends of the Ecusta Trail with the mission to build a multi-use greenway on the unused rail line. A key breakthrough occurred in 2019, when Blue Ridge Southern Railroad, a division of Watco Companies (owner of the rail corridor) offered to federally "railbank" the line for trail use. As a relatively young 501(c)(3), the Friends of Ecusta Trail reached out to Conserving Carolina for expertise and guidance in navigating the purchase of the rail line for the purpose of building a rail-trail. Ecusta Rails2Trail, LLC (a subsidiary of Conserving Carolina) then purchased the railbanked corridor with grant awards from NC DOT, the Henderson County Tourism Authority, and the Transylvania County Tourism Authority. A timeline of the history and accomplishments can be found at www.ecustatrail.org/timeline.

Total costs for construction are estimated at \$31.1 million with a required 'local match' of \$6.5 million. Although funding will predominantly come from federal, state, local and foundation grants, the local match will be funded through a partnership between the Friends of the Ecusta Trail and Conserving Carolina focusing on contributions from local businesses and individuals. This will include a pledged, capital campaign over 5 years called **Making the Dream Real**. Planning and construction will occur in phases over several years, dependent on funding availability, with the first phase starting in 2022.

The Ecusta Trail will increase local **ECONOMIC VITALITY**, attracting commerce as rail-trails are 'economic engines' that jumpstart businesses; **TOURISM**, stimulating community revitalization, tourism and recreation spending; **HEALTH**, promoting wellness and exercise, reducing stress; **TRANSPORTATION**, providing alternative, safer, human powered ('active') transit options to reach our destinations that are healthy, non-polluting and avoid auto traffic; **QUALITY OF LIFE**, designing comfortable, welcoming and active outdoor places that people seek out; **ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS**, restoring stream banks along waterways resulting in less flooding and soil erosion while improving water quality and continuity of wildlife corridors; and **CONNECTIVITY**, fostering connections between people and communities.

To realize the full potential of the Ecusta Trail, we need the support of donors, volunteers and all who care about the health, livability, connectivity and economy of our area. Help us make the Ecusta Trail a generational legacy; one that is loved and cherished by all.

To make the dream real, we need to raise \$6.5 million to meet the local match and other costs.

The Campaign

The Ecusta Trail is a proposed 19.4 mile, multi-use greenway along an unused railway corridor (aka. 'rail-trail') connecting Hendersonville and Brevard. The rail line meanders through fields and forests, beside streams, pasture land and country churches. It offers a picture-book walk through life in small-town America, a life that is nurtured and cradled in the mountains of Western North Carolina. The Friends of Ecusta Trail is a 501(c)(3) formed in 2010 whose mission is to plan and construct the Ecusta Trail and to promote connectivity through a local network of multi-use trails. Our dream is to raise the necessary funds through a focused capital campaign called **Making the Dream Real**, to turn this abandoned rail line into a "new cultural main street" that beckons people of all ages and abilities to reach destinations.

The Ecusta Trail will increase connections between people and communities, improve our physical and emotional well-being, and generate an appreciation of our region and heritage. This trail will become a generational legacy, loved and cherished by all.

Help us create the premier destination rail-trail in the Southeast connecting our communities, promoting health and enriching the quality of life and the economy for everyone.



Mission

Our Mission is to raise the needed funds to successfully construct the Ecusta Trail. This will be accomplished through a fundraising partnership between Conserving Carolina and the Friends of the Ecusta Trail.

Vision

Our vision is that the Ecusta Trail will be the premier greenway in the Southeast, connecting our communities, promoting health, and enriching the quality of life and the economy for everyone.

History and Accomplishments

The history of the Ecusta Trail actually begins with the construction of the rail line by the Hendersonville and Brevard Railroad, Telegraph, and Telephone Company in 1894. The railroad was used mainly for supporting local paper and timber industries. Even before the end of its active use in 2002, there was speculation about repurposing the corridor into a hiking and bicycle trail. A grassroots effort began in 2008 to explore a strategy for creating a multi-use greenway on the unused rail line. Since 2009, numerous volunteers, civic, county and state leaders have worked to make the Ecusta Trail a reality. A key breakthrough occurred in 2019, when Watco (owner of the rail corridor) decided to seek federal railbanking protection of the line. A willing buyer, Ecusta Rails2Trail, LLC (a subsidiary of Conserving Carolina - www.conservingcarolina.org) then purchased the rail line for the purpose of building a rail-trail ('railbanking') through a NC DOT grant. A timeline of the history and accomplishments to achieve **Making the Dream Real** can be found at www.ecustatrail.org/timeline.

Cost & Phasing of the Ecusta Trail

Ecusta Trail Construction Phases	Length (Miles)	Estimated Start Date	Estimated Completion	Construction Cost Total	Federal/DOT Funding (80%)	20% to be Raised by CCI/FOET	Project Administration	Fundraising Needed Total
Henderson County								
Phase 1	1.3	2022	2023	\$1,427,547	\$1,142,038	\$285,509	\$14,275	\$299,785
Phase 2	2	2023	2024	\$1,898,094	\$1,518,475	\$379,619	\$18,981	\$398,600
Phase 3	2.6	2024	2025	\$3,018,381	\$2,414,705	\$603,676	\$30,184	\$633,860
Phase 4	2.2	2025	2026	\$7,224,422	\$5,779,538	\$1,444,884	\$72,244	\$1,517,129
Phase 5	3	2026	2027	\$4,739,286	\$3,791,429	\$947,857	\$47,393	\$995,250
Henderson County Total	11.1			\$18,307,730	\$14,646,184	\$3,661,546	\$183,077	\$3,844,624
Transylvania County								
Phase 1	2.4	TBD		\$3,745,921	\$2,996,737	\$749,184	\$37,459	\$786,643
Phase 2	1.4	TBD		\$2,716,016	\$2,172,813	\$543,203	\$27,160	\$570,363
Phase 3	1.7	TBD		\$2,534,929	\$2,027,943	\$506,986	\$25,349	\$532,335
Phase 4	2.8	TBD		\$3,813,577	\$3,050,862	\$762,715	\$38,136	\$800,851
Transylvania County Total	8.3			\$12,810,443	\$10,248,354	\$2,562,089	\$128,104	\$2,690,192
Ecusta Trail Totals	19.4			\$31,118,173	\$24,894,538	\$6,223,635	\$311,182	\$6,534,816

Trail building experts have analyzed the corridor and estimate the total cost of design, engineering, and construction for the trail to total \$31.1 million. Federal DOT grants will likely be the source of 80% of the costs. That is typical for these types of projects, and they have already been secured for the first three phases in Henderson County. These grants require a local “match” of 20%, bringing the total fundraising need, including expenses, to \$6.5 million. 10% of contributions will be used to support project administration.

DONATE to Making the Dream Real Campaign

Please make a generous gift to build this exciting new rail trail! Your tax-deductible donation goes through Conserving Carolina as the **Making the Dream Real Campaign** is a partnership between the Friends of the Ecusta Trail and Conserving Carolina. Together we seek to raise \$6.5 Million. Here are options for how to give:

Write a check: Make your check out to Conserving Carolina with “Ecusta Trail” in the memo line. Mail the check to Conserving Carolina at 847 Case St., Hendersonville, NC 28792.

Give online: Go to www.conservingcarolina.org/ecusta to make your secure donation to the Ecusta Trail campaign.

Give by phone: We can take credit card donations by phone during regular business hours. Just let us know that your gift is for the Ecusta Trail. Call Conserving Carolina at 828-697-5777 x. 200.

Make a pledge: You can spread your gift over 3 to 5 years. Pledge Forms are available at www.conservingcarolina.org/ecusta.



Give stock: To make a gift of stock or other liquid securities, call Conserving Carolina's development director, Lynn Killian at 828-697-5777 x. 202 or email lynn@conservingcarolina.org.

More ways to give: You can support this campaign through gifts of real estate or other personal property. You can also make a bequest or other planned estate gift to support the campaign. To discuss your gift call Lynn Killian at 828-697-5777 x. 202 or email lynn@conservingcarolina.org.

Funds raised in excess from the **Making the Dream Real** capital campaign goal will be used for maintenance, management, public art, landscaping and beautification for the Ecusta Trail.

Data Sharing Privacy Statement

This fundraising campaign is a partnership between Friends of the Ecusta Trail and Conserving Carolina. As such, gifts and donor information will be shared between both organizations for the term of the **Making the Dream Real** campaign **only**. By making your gift to the Ecusta Trail campaign you are giving your permission for your information to be shared in this limited manner. If you do not wish your information to be shared, please contact us at info@conservingcarolina.org.

Major Gift Donors and Recognition

The success of the **Making the Dream Real** campaign depends on a select group of donors who are willing to make **significant and impactful** gifts over a period of three to five years. It provides for a variety of opportunities for individuals, businesses, civic organizations, social groups and foundations to help create this unique new asset for our community.

All contributions are needed and will be greatly appreciated, promptly acknowledged and recognized in our periodic listing of **Making the Dream Real** campaign contributors. Major gift donors of \$5,000 or more will be more permanently recognized at both trailheads in Henderson and Transylvania Counties.

Donation Levels

One million dollars & above	Dream Makers
\$500,000 to \$999,999	Visionaries
\$250,000 to \$499,999	Trailblazers
\$100,000 to \$249,999	Marathoners
\$50,000 to \$99,999	Explorers
\$25,000 to \$49,999	Cyclists
\$10,000 to \$24,999	Hikers
\$5,000 to \$9,999	Walkers

Thank you for your generous gift to the Ecusta Trail!

Commemorative Naming Opportunities

To honor those making campaign donations of \$5,000 or more, the **Making the Dream Real** campaign offers opportunities to name selected Ecusta Trail spaces and components.

Selecting one of the naming opportunities allows donors to honor the memory of a loved one or to initiate or to perpetuate a tradition of philanthropy in the donor's own name. Examples: Etowah Rain Shelter – a gift of John Doe.

Dollar amounts represent commemorative values, not actual design, construction, or installation costs. Donors are invited to combine gifts to reserve a naming opportunity. A list of commemorative naming opportunities will be made available separately before construction begins. Because of the continuing evolution and design of trail amenities, updated naming opportunity lists will be issued periodically.



Why is the Ecusta Trail so important?

ECONOMIC VITALITY: 'Trails and greenways are no longer viewed as just community amenities; they are essential infrastructure for quality of life, for economic development in our community, and for creating a tourism destination.' - Bill Lapsley, Chairman Henderson County Board of Commissioners

Huge economic development potential is found converting unused rail lines from littered, overgrown eyesores to vibrant 'linear parks' that benefit everyone.

A 2011 national study indicated that every \$1 invested in land conservation (including parkland) returned \$4 in economic value – not including potential jobs and tourism – by enhancing residential property values, generating jobs and tax revenue, and attracting retirees and small businesses.

At the Outer Banks, a 'one-time investment' of \$6.7 million on bicycle infrastructure has resulted in an **annual** nine-to-one return.

The Swamp Rabbit (rail-)Trail in Greenville, SC resulted in more than \$100 million in private sector investment, and in nearby Travelers Rest, 19 struggling businesses turned into 64 thriving businesses.

Numerous studies of rail-trails from across the country have shown the increase on adjacent residential property values ranges between 5 - 20%.

TOURISM: 'Tourists come to check out the trail; residents use it for their entire lives. One leaves money here, one gives the community an annuity.' - Ty Houck, Director of Greenways (Greenville County, SC home of the Prisma Health Swamp Rabbit Trail)

Rail-trails provide safe, public access to natural open spaces that *attract tourists*. Tourists pay for

our trails when they visit, use our businesses, eat, stay overnight, and pay sales and tourism taxes. This defrays our public service costs without adding to the local citizen tax burden. When built, local residents and our communities benefit from the trails year round, allowing us to build even more local amenities, improving our quality of life, and spurring even more economic development.

Longer and connected trail systems put more 'heads in beds' with increased spin-off business for the local retail, food and beverage industries. The Ecusta Trail is critically important for the proposed 140+ mile regional trail system (the 'Hellbender') that would link 5 western NC counties.

HEALTH: 'Building trails is cost beneficial for public health.' - Wang G, et al. Am J Public Health. 2004

Rail-trails provide safe, convenient, attractive options to 'keep our bodies moving' and get more exercise while reaching our destinations.

Recent reports (2017) have estimated the annual direct medical cost of physical *inactivity* in North Carolina at \$3.7 billion, plus an additional \$4.7 billion in lost productivity. Primarily due to lack of adequate exercise, 65% of adults in NC are overweight or obese. Childhood and adolescent obesity rates are also rising.

Exercise reduces chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes which are among the most prevalent, costly, and preventable of all health problems, accounting for 2/3 of all USA deaths.

Health Returns on Investment (ROI):

- Each \$1 spent on greenways ('linear parks'), returns \$3 annually in health care savings.
- For each hour of exercise, one gains about two hours of additional life. (American Heart Association)

'There is no health without mental health' - Gil Penalosa

Studies show that physical activity reduces by ~17% the odds of developing depression - the #1 cause of disability in the USA.

Physical activity in the presence of nature (i.e. 'green exercise') is the best prescription for "when we get closer to nature, we do our overstressed brains a favor" (National Geographic). 'Green exercise' leads to less social isolation and enhanced self esteem. Additionally, sharing time in the outdoors connects people of different backgrounds and social classes, bringing more cohesion to our society.

In short, the active living promoted by the Ecusta Trail is itself a "pathway" to improved public health.

TRANSPORTATION: 'Active Transit ('human powered') is 'the priceless' prescription' - National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA)

The constructed and connected Ecusta Trail allows us to redesign our community, making active transportation and natural movement the easy choice with safe routes to destinations. More transportation choices increase 'livability', defining a high quality of life as our standard of living, and our communities as healthy, active and attractive places for people and business.

Alternative, 'active' transportation means decreased use of automobiles, less traffic and air pollution (a leading cause of asthma and other health problems). It encourages physical activity that improves our bodies and mental health.

LIVABILITY ('QUALITY OF LIFE'): 'The best way to predict the future is to create it yourself.' - A. Lincoln

Well-designed communities featuring active transportation options and protected open recreational spaces are incredibly popular. They welcome and comfort us. They connect us to other

people and enhance our quality of life, infusing it with entrepreneurial spirit and vitality. This fosters more opportunities for our children (and their children) to seek local, gainful employment.

ENVIRONMENT: 'Preservation of our environment is not a liberal or conservative challenge; it's common sense.' - Ronald Reagan

Greenways reduce the cost of public services by reducing pollution, improving water quality, and mitigating flood damage.

We anticipate increased public environmental awareness through educational displays on the Ecusta Trail emphasizing the environmental benefits (flood/runoff mitigation, water purification, connecting fragmented wildlife corridors/refuges, protecting plant and animal species, less pollution, etc.) of conserved public lands.

How communities manage natural resources and 'greenspace' matters to business because healthy people and a good economy mean good business.

CONNECTIVITY: 'Build it and they will come (to walk, run and ride).' - Dan Burden, Blue Zones Project

The Ecusta Trail will connect people to where they live, work, learn, shop, and play including parks, playing fields, playgrounds, dog parks, open fields, nature trails, picnic shelters and exercise stations, as well as schools, libraries, commercial/shopping districts, historic, cultural, and natural sites.

A multi-use trail system, connecting sidewalks, bike lanes and greenways, creates a cohesive network for recreation and 'active' transportation which links destinations, community resources and people. Connectivity amplifies the collective benefits to our economy, health, quality of life, environment and general community.

*We Want To
Hear From You*

To build the Ecusta Trail, we need the support of donors, volunteers and all those who care about the health, livability, connectivity, and economy of our area. Your insights and comments are welcome. We need help from everyone to create this generational legacy.

For more information please visit

ecustatrail.org or conservingcarolina.org

To Donate, please mail checks or pledges to
Conserving Carolina, "Ecusta Trail" in memo line,
847 Case Street, Hendersonville, NC 28792
or donate online at www.conservingcarolina.org/ecusta,
specifying "Ecusta Trail" in the drop down menu.
Or call Conserving Carolina at 828-697-5777.

