

**TOWN OF SEVEN DEVILS
TOWN COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING
PARKS & RECREATION TRUST FUND GRANT - PARTF
February 14, 2019
11:00am**

The Seven Devils Town Council met for a Public Hearing for the Parks & Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) Grant on Thursday, February 14, 2019 at 11:00am. Present were Mayor Larry Fontaine, Mayor Pro Tem Brad Lambert, Council Member Tina Bailey, Town Manager Debbie Powers. Also present were Eric Hiegl-Blue Ridge Conservancy, Charlie Brady-Blue Ridge Conservancy. The minutes were recorded by interim Town Clerk Emma Wynn.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Fontaine called the meeting to order at 11:00am. He welcomed everyone to the Public Hearing to discuss the PARTF Grant.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Council members and citizens recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

OPEN PUBLIC HEARING

Mayor Fontaine explained the Public Hearing is a presentation of the Parks & Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) grant opportunity; have applied twice before. Citizens attending who want to speak during the Public Comment session will need to sign up to speak. Comment time is limited to three (3) minutes for each citizen speaker. The Town Clerk will control the timer.

Manager Powers provided a summary on the PARTF; the grant provides dollar for dollar matching grants to local governments for projects to serve the public. There is a nine (9) member authority that allocates money from the Trust Fund; three (3) members appointed by the Governor, three (3) members appointed by President Pro Tem of the Senate, and three (3) members appointed by the Speaker of the House and are appointed for three (3) year terms. The Town of Seven Devils has been a recipient of PARTF funds twice before in the creation of Otter Falls, phases I & II. This project will cost approximately \$160,000. If awarded, the grant would provide \$80,000 with the remaining \$80,000 paid from Town funds and in-kind labor and donations. The Town funds have been set aside in the CIP (Capital Improvement Program) for the last three (3) years at \$20,000 each year. An additional \$20,000 will be funded in 2019-2020. The grant application deadline is Wednesday, May 1, 2019. The Authority will meet in August to review all applications and determine awards. Kelly Coffey, Senior Planner from the High Country Council of Governments, will coordinate the submission of the grant.

PUBLIC HEARING PRESENTATION – Eric Hiegl-Blue Ridge Conservancy

Manager Powers introduced Eric Hiegl, Director of Land Protection & Stewardship at the Blue Ridge Conservancy, who is the owner of the property, to discuss this opportunity.

Eric Hiegl stated the Blue Ridge Conservancy is a private, non-profit land trust that partners with local communities and landowners to protect land with agricultural, cultural, ecological, recreational and scenic significance. Blue Ridge Conservancy purchased a 265 acre tract on Peak Mountain in 2016. An additional 40 acres was acquired in Avery County giving the trail over a 1 mile of ridgeline. The Conservancy and the Town have a mutual interest in extending the Otter Falls Park trails into the Peak Mountain property. The trail would extend from Otter Falls Park across the ridge of the mountain and terminate at the end of Skiview Road. Usually, once property is acquired it is transferred to a long-term management entity. Blue Ridge Conservancy and the Town will partner to maintain the trails. There will be a lot of volunteer possibilities. The trail will be approximately 2 ½ miles long. A professional trail builder will be hired to construct the trail. There is a 25 year easement which can be renewed.

Mayor Fontaine added that the Peak Mountain project will tie into the Otter Falls Trail. A bridge is planned to be constructed over Valley Creek and the trail will end at the parking area by Skiview. From Otter Falls, the hike to the top will be rigorous with 6 to 7 switchbacks, going up 1200 feet in elevation. There will be 15 parking spaces with 5 designated as handicapped. There is room to add additional spaces. There will be not parking on Town roads. The top portion will give easy access for seniors and handicapped individuals to see the beautiful views.

The following questions were asked:

- 1) Why wasn't the grant approved in 2018? Manager Powers explained that there is a lot of competition for the grants. The Town was awarded 2 grants in the past for the Otter Falls project which has been a great success.
- 2) What happens if cost is greater? Mayor Fontaine strongly felt that the Town can stay within the budget and would sign a contract with the trail builder.
- 3) How long to finish? Mayor Fontaine stated that from start to finish should take about a year. The grant requires completion within three (3) years. Once grant is awarded, the trail builder will be contacted.
- 4) Who maintains the trail once completed? Mayor Fontaine stated that the Town is responsible for maintaining the trails. Mr. Hiegl added that Blue Ridge Conservancy will coordinate some Volunteer Days to help with the maintenance.
- 5) Is the Town liable? Mayor Fontaine stated the Town is liable for all its recreation facilities. Signs will be posted stating that it is a rigorous trail, etc. There was concern regarding young people jumping from the falls at the Otter Falls Trail.

- 6) Is biking allowed on the trails? Mayor Fontaine stated that no biking is allowed on the trails, only hiking or jogging. Contact the Town if residents see bikes on the trail. It was suggested that signs be posted stating "no biking allowed" on the trails.
- 7) How many visitors are estimated to use the trails? Mayor Fontaine stated that most traffic is generated by the snow tubing and ziplining at Hawksnest. The PBSO purchased traffic counters to track the amount and type of traffic in the area. It was noted that a three (3) day weekend in the Summer 2018 there were 10,000 vehicles counted.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Anne Fontaine, 127 W. Rocky Top Trail, is in support of the project stating it aligns with the Town's Recreation Master Plan. In a recent survey of recreational needs completed last summer, the number one (1) item requested was hiking trails in the area. The trail will offer many recreational opportunities to our residents and our visitors. It encourages people to get out in the fresh air, gives a sense of community, creates greater community connections, and promotes a healthy relationship with the Blue Ridge Conservancy. Studies have shown that property located next to or adjacent to trails offering amenities to potential buyers may increase property values by 4-6%. Having a parking area at the end of Skiview will provide senior citizens and handicapped individuals access to an area where they can enjoy beautiful views of Grandfather Mountain. The trail will be a compliment to the existing Otter Falls Trail. The TDA & Parks & Recreation Commission, which Ms. Fontaine chairs, are both in support of the project.

Mayor Fontaine thanked everyone for the comments and questions & concerns. Letters of support were distributed to the citizens in attendance. He encouraged everyone to sign the letters. Manager Powers stated that letters of support are on Seven Devils website as well as extra copies at the Town Clerk's desk.


Charlie Brady, CEO of the Blue Ridge Conservancy thanked the Town for its initiative and feels it will be a good partnership.

CLOSE PUBLIC HEARING


Mayor Pro Tem Lambert made a motion to close the Public Hearing. Member Bailey seconded the motion. The members agreed unanimously.

ADJOURN

The Public Hearing adjourned at 11:45am.



Larry Fontaine, Mayor



Debbie Powers, Town Manager