

July 2017

To The Honorable Orange County Board of Commissioners:

On behalf of the undersigned Orange County residents, thank you and the County staff for your leadership over the past year for the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. We appreciate the work that has been done to develop a draft plan to build the MST in Orange County, and we are eager to see it presented and adopted by the Board of Commissioners. In support of your efforts, we offer the following suggestions to continue to build momentum to complete the MST in Orange County.

- 1) Set a target date for when the MST in Orange County will be completed. Having no goal for a completion date may diminish the public's understanding of the plan. One possibility would be to set target dates for completing the trail in increments. For example;
 - a. By December 31, 2020: Completion of a total of five miles of trail in the vicinity of Seven Mile Creek and the Cane Creek Reservoir.
 - b. By December 31, 2023: Completion of an additional five miles.
 - c. By December 31, 2026: Completion of an additional seven miles.
 - d. By December 31, 2030: Completion of the entire MST in Orange County.
- 2) Create a schedule for frequent public updates on the status of the project.
- 3) Empower staff by setting clear direction, prioritizing construction of the MST on public land and private land where easements have been granted, working with MST supporters and private landowners to secure new easements, and securing the MST in the County's planning and budgeting process.
- 4) Expand the plan's focus area to take advantage of opportunities to secure land along the entire route. The draft plan recommends focusing first on the area from Seven Mile Creek to Hillsborough. We agree this area should be a high priority, but we are concerned that ignoring other areas until that section is complete will result in missed opportunities. For example, several landowners have offered to donate easements for the trail and a parking lot in the Cane Creek area. Waiting to act on their offers until the trail is complete between Seven Mile Creek and Hillsborough may mean that those opportunities are lost and community energy may diminish.
- 5) Enter into a formal agreement with Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (Friends) to assist with trail construction and maintenance in the Seven Mile Creek area and in other parts of the trail as they come on line. Friends provides these services to many local governments and land managing agencies across North Carolina, including Alamance County and the Eno River State Park.

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6) Explore incentives for landowners willing to donate land or easements for the trail. One proposal is to explore developing the necessary mechanism (or legislation) to tax land with a donated public recreational trail easement at present-use value.

7) Explore the proposed “multi-modal trail” as a concept separate from the MST. The idea is visionary in the way the MST was visionary when it was conceived four decades ago. However, it would provide a different trail experience than envisioned for the MST, it has a different set of stakeholders, and needs more study and public input before an implementation plan can be developed.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input, and we look forward to supporting Orange County in its efforts to complete the MST.

With respect and gratitude,

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