

**Great Smoky Mountains Regional Greenway Council (RGC)
Fund Development Feasibility Assessment for Maryville-to-Townsend Greenway Plan
October 2015 - Findings and Conclusions**

The Maryville- to-Townsend Greenway Master Plan clearly lays out the opportunities and challenges of each phase in terms of constructing the route. This study identifies the following funding opportunities and challenges:

- **This project's components benefit** from public lands and right-of-way easements, connections to local schools (including Maryville College), retail establishments, public and private employment centers, a hospital and related offices, local parks and a national park. These elements enhance eligibility for the guidelines of several DOT, TDOT, TDEC and TECD funding grant programs.
- **Widespread Support Exists** – Local governments are most supportive, the Master Plan has community buy-in, and our state's Governor, Legislative Body, Departments of Tourism, Economic Development, Transportation and Environmental Conservation officials appreciate the value of Recreational Tourism. The project also has the support of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park leadership. Our congressional delegation is supportive as well. Preliminary discussions with three Blount County legislators indicate that support for legislative or administration funding could be possible.
- **The Plan Cost Estimate is the greatest challenge** with a total cost of \$24,460,000 and estimates that the project would be executed over 10 years in four phases. The Plan recommends that Phases 1 & 4 should be initiated simultaneously and then work to connect Phases 2 & 3. If that recommended approach were to be pursued initiating Phases 1 @ \$665,000 and 4 @ \$136,000 are the least expensive to fund and could be the catalyst in the first 2 years to jumpstart the public/private campaign to fund the more expensive Phases 2 and 3.
- **Alternative Building Products could reduce cost** and one option has been identified that could potentially significantly reduce the cost of Corridor 3 by utilizing customized manufactured aluminum bridges including pedestrian and trail bridges which can be installed in remote locations and that could significantly reduce construction cost for Phase 3
- **Private Sector Financial support** for this project will likely be the next most challenging issue and may in the end only represent an estimated \$3-5 million, which is 15-20% of the total project cost. This estimated support from the private sector is low primarily due to having a smaller pool of corporate headquarters and private foundations to draw upon in Blount County and East Tennessee.
- **In-kind Corporate support** could be a good option for smaller to mid-sized companies in Blount County. Examples of corporate in-kind support could be donations or significantly discounted materials or services; and/or conducting volunteer workdays on a portion of the trail. Many opportunities also exist for smaller corporate sponsorships of materials, benches, pavers, markers and signage along the trail. Over time grassroots support will also gain momentum as progress continues to be made and project awareness grows, and annual events and membership drives can be developed.
- **Numerous Case Studies across the country and here in Tennessee serve as successful models and document that regional greenway/trails projects of this type can be accomplished.** These models also serve as a guide to innovative fundraising strategies and collaborative alliances of local and state governments, non-profits and the private sector.

- **All Case Studies document the following similarities and are recommended elements:**
 - A long-term and sustainable public/private partnership to be established;
 - A committed and connected volunteer group to assist in the private sector fundraising campaign;
 - A dedicated organization with a full-time staffing component to guide, coordinate and facilitate the work of all the partners. Options include an existing group like the Legacy Parks Foundation, a conservancy, an alliance of local governments, or a new 501(c)(3) non-profit.

Specific Potential Funding Sources Identified to Date

Local Government Support: A survey of local governments in Blount County found there is overall strong local support with respondents affirming the potential for local public funding and support efforts to seek and match available state and federal funding.

State and Federal Grant Programs Available: There are considerable state and federal resources available through competitive grant programs requiring varying levels of matching funds. The most likely funding sources are:

- US DOT Tiger Grant Program – 50/50% match and generally range in \$10-\$15 million or more level
- TDOT Multimodal Access Fund – 95/5% match with \$1 million cap per grant
- TDEC Recreational Trails Program – 80/20% match typically at \$200,000 level
- TDEC Local Parks and Recreation Fund – 50/50% match
- TECD newly established Rural Development Fund – Announced Oct. 2015 with \$1 million set-aside for tourism development
- TDOT Safe Routes to schools – 100% funding and capped at \$250,000 per project
- TDOT Transportation Alternatives grants – typically average approximately \$350,000
- The new federal transportation bill approved by Congress in December 2015, the FAST Act, expands access to a revolving fund that finances transportation projects, including greenways. The TIFIA program (Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act) has been updated to enable it to be better utilized by rural areas and more accessible for small projects.

Private Foundation Support – Private Foundations supporting environmental projects including greenway trails generally focus on a specific geographic area of the country and or the service area around corporate headquarters' geographic locations. East Tennessee's specific foundations are limited to less than 10 potential sources with the largest being ALCOA Foundation.

Local Private Corporate Support Potential – Interviews with a select group of corporate leadership of the larger companies in and around Blount County including Pilot Flying J., Clayton Homes, Brookfield Renewable Energy Partners, and PetSafe Corporation indicated there would be support ranging in 5-7 figure gifts if assured the rest of the funding was committed. The number of local companies able to give at that level is also limited to 10-12. Inquiries with TVA, DENSO, Ruby Tuesday and Blackberry Farm are currently underway. Opportunities certainly may exist and/or can be cultivated with large regional and national businesses in the coming years.

Local Small Business Corporate Support – Sales of “Naming Right Sponsorships” to small to medium-size companies have been successful in other communities for the amenities and trail features along the greenway. Those would include anything from bridges, trail markers, benches, trailhead pavers, pavilions etc. Corporate in-kind support through contributions of products and services can produce cost-savings for different phases of the project i.e. building materials, landscaping, work groups, etc.

Private Grass Roots Support Opportunities used successfully in other parts of Tennessee and the country include Social Media Fundraising via Crowdsourcing Sites, Signature Fundraising Events and Friends Groups.

Overall Conclusion: The project's fund development is feasible with a dedicated staffing component that is funded at the outset by local governments and/or other public sources of funding and the support of a strong and connected volunteer fundraising group committed to the vision.

However, the majority of the funding will have to come from federal, state and local government sources over the 10-year period. The level of private sector financial support projected to feasibly come from foundations, business, and individuals is projected to be in the \$3-\$5 million dollar range.

The effort must ensure that all potential players are on board and at the table with the Great Smoky Mountain Greenway Council as part of the collaborative effort including local governments, Blount Partnership, National Park Service, Legacy Parks Foundation, Knoxville Regional TPO, East TN South RPO, Little River Watershed Association and Foothills Land Conservancy.

Support from the region's state legislative delegation and congressional delegation is also absolutely necessary to the project's success.