

**THE UNIFIED GOVERNMENT OF ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY
COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM**

SUBJECT: Acceptance of Grant Award from Riverview Foundation for Cook's Trail

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: This agenda report requests acceptance of grant funding to secure engineering services for Phase 1 of the Cook's Trail redesign project. This phase will focus on developing a rerouted alignment that will allow the southern section to reopen at project completion while strengthening the trail's overall durability and resilience from flooding.

BUDGET INFORMATION:

REVENUES: \$100,000 (Riverview Foundation)

EXPENSES:

ANNUAL: \$0

CAPITAL: \$0

OTHER:

FUNDING SOURCE: Grant

COMMISSION ACTION REQUESTED ON: February 3, 2026

PURPOSE:

To request that the Mayor and Commission:

- a. Approve the acceptance of \$100,000 grant award;
- b. Adopt a budget amendment ordinance (**Attachment #1**);
- c. Authorize the Mayor and relevant staff to execute all related grant documents, agreements, and contracts.

HISTORY:

1. In 1954, the Watershed and Flood Prevention Act was passed by Congress, enabling the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) to partner with localities to create watershed management plans and build flood control structures.
2. In 1964, an application by Clarke, Jackson, and Madison counties for a watershed project involving 28,000 acres was approved by the Soil and Water Conservation Committee. This project would create a flood-control lake on the border between Clarke and Jackson counties, named Lake Chapman, in honor of Cecil W. Chapman, a retired state conservationist who championed this project.
3. In 1973, a resident group selected land and formed the Northeast Georgia Nature Center.
4. In 1977, the dam project was completed. The dam formed a flood-control lake with a

normal pool of 260 acres and is designed to double in volume during flood events, swelling the lake to as much as 400 acres to slow flood waters and protect both Sandy Creek and Athens.

5. In 1977, the first building, known as Fireside Classroom, was completed.
6. In 1981, the Nature Center board deeded the property to the county.
7. On October 15, 1981, Sandy Creek Park opened to the public.
8. In 1981, Sandy Creek Nature Center made a pre-application to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to acquire grants for a "Greenway", which would connect the nature center and the Sandy Creek Park.
9. In 1990, the name of the Nature Center was officially changed to Sandy Creek Nature Center. Sandy Creek Greenway trail, now called Cook's Trail, connected the Nature Center to Sandy Creek Park.
10. In 2013, a boardwalk was constructed to join the two hiking trails on each side of the lake over a section of the wetland acquired in 2000. This boardwalk completed what is now known as Lakeside Trail, closing the loop originally envisioned in the park's design.
11. On December 6, 2018, Cook's Trail was closed temporarily due to flooding. This was the same incident that impacted the East Campus Connector construction.
12. On April 20, 2019, the South portion of Cook's Trail was closed permanently due to severe flooding, which activated the emergency spillway at Sandy Creek Park.
13. On August 18, 2019, a boundary survey for the Northern portion of the trail was completed.
14. In 2020, the Riverview Foundation provided \$68,000 to Sandy Creek Nature Center, Inc., to renovate the exterior restroom behind the Nature Center.
15. In the fall of 2025, the Leisure Services Department was invited to submit a proposal for the Cook's Trail project.
16. On October 23, 2025, Leisure Services staff were notified of a \$100,000 award supporting the Cook's Trail Project.

FACTS & ISSUES:

1. Cook's Trail, once a beloved 4.1-mile natural surface pathway, linked Sandy Creek Nature Center to Sandy Creek Park and served as Athens' original Greenway. Severe flooding in 2019 led to the permanent closure of the southern portion of the trail, severing a vital connection for the community.

2. For decades, the 4.1-mile natural surface path provided a scenic route through wetlands, forests, and along the Oxbow Lake, connecting families, hikers, and school groups with the natural beauty of Athens.
3. As storms intensified and flooding became more frequent, the southern portion of the trail suffered repeated damage. Temporary closures began in 2016, but by 2019, flooding forced its permanent closure. What was once a beloved link in Athens' Greenway network now sits inaccessible, awaiting a resilient redesign to ensure its next chapter.
4. Over the years, Leisure Services has requested that Cook's Trail be considered for funding via TSPLOST 2018, SPLOST 2020, and TSPLOST 2026. These requests could not be funded.
5. The Riverview Foundation Grant seeks to enrich the livability and stewardship of select communities and natural areas. The foundation's grant-making priorities include the performing arts, habitat and wildlife conservation, parks and greenways, and other projects of interest to the Trustees.
6. Leisure Services staff met with the Executive Director of the Riverview Foundation during the fall of 2025 to gauge interest in supporting the project. After the discussion, the department was invited to submit a proposal for the Cook's Trail project. The department was notified of Riverview's intent to fund the project.
7. With Riverview's support, Leisure Services will start developing the engineering plans to reroute and reopen two miles of trail along higher ground, creating a flood-resilient design that ensures long-term sustainability. This investment will lay the groundwork for restoring a treasured community resource that enhances public health, fosters neighborhood connections, and preserves the natural beauty of Athens for future generations.
8. The proposed re-route of Cook's Trail will follow the contours through the east side of the property, located mostly above the floodplain. The proposed concept alignment would reduce the amount of built structure, such as boardwalks, and consolidate any remaining boardwalks and bridges into a centralized area.
9. The redesign and reopening of Cook's Trail will impact numerous neighborhoods and communities, including those with Low to Moderate Incomes (HUD, 2025).
10. These recommendations support the following ACCGov FY26-28 Strategic Plan Goals, Strategies, and/or Initiatives:
 - Built and Natural Infrastructure Goal, Strategy A: *Adequately plan infrastructure to support our community in the future*

- Initiative 6.A.3: *Use department master plan to address service gaps and maintain existing parks, amenities, and services*

OPTIONS:

1. Mayor & Commission:
 - a. Approve the acceptance of \$100,000 award;
 - b. Adopt the budget amendment ordinance (**Attachment #1**);
 - c. Authorize the Mayor and relevant staff to execute all related grant documents, agreements, and contracts.
2. Mayor and Commission deny acceptance of the \$100,000 grant award.
3. Mayor & Commission defined option.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDED ACTION: Option #1 a, b, and c

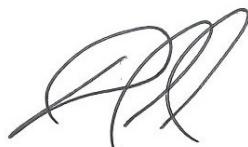
DEPARTMENT: Leisure Services

12/17/2025

Alex Bond
Interim Director
Leisure Services Dept.

Date

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMENTS:

ADMINISTRATIVE RECOMMENDATION: Option #1 a, b, and c

January 14, 2026

Bob Cowell
Manager

Date

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment 1 - Budget Ordinance
- Attachment 2 - Award Letter
- Attachment 3 - Proposed Route Map
- Attachment 4 - Riverview Contract

Attachment #1

AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE FY2026 OPERATING AND CAPITAL BUDGET FOR ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY, GEORGIA SO AS TO PROVIDE GRANT FUNDING, IF AWARDED, FROM THE RIVERVIEW FOUNDATION, FOR EXPENSES RELATED TO THE REDESIGN OF COOK'S TRAIL; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

The Commission of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia hereby ordains as follows:

SECTION 1. The Commission of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia desires to amend the Grants Special Revenue Fund to provide grant funding, if awarded, from the Riverview Foundation for expenses related to the redesign Cook's Trail. Said Operating budget is hereby amended as follows:

Grants Special Revenue Fund:

REVENUES:

Increase:	
Riverview Foundation Grant	\$100,000

EXPENDITURES:

Increase:	
Leisure Services	
Capital Expenses	\$100,000

SECTION 2. All ordinances or parts of ordinances in conflict herewith are hereby repealed.

ATTACHMENT 2

From: [Bruz Clark](#)
To: [Sara Shropshire](#)
Subject: [EXT]Re: Riverview Foundation Update
Date: Thursday, October 23, 2025 1:49:21 PM

EXTERNAL SENDER: This email originated from outside of the organization.
Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Hi Sara,

The Riverview trustees met earlier today to review grant proposals. I am pleased to announce that they approved a grant in the amount of \$100,000 for support of the Cook's Trail redesign project.

Congratulations!

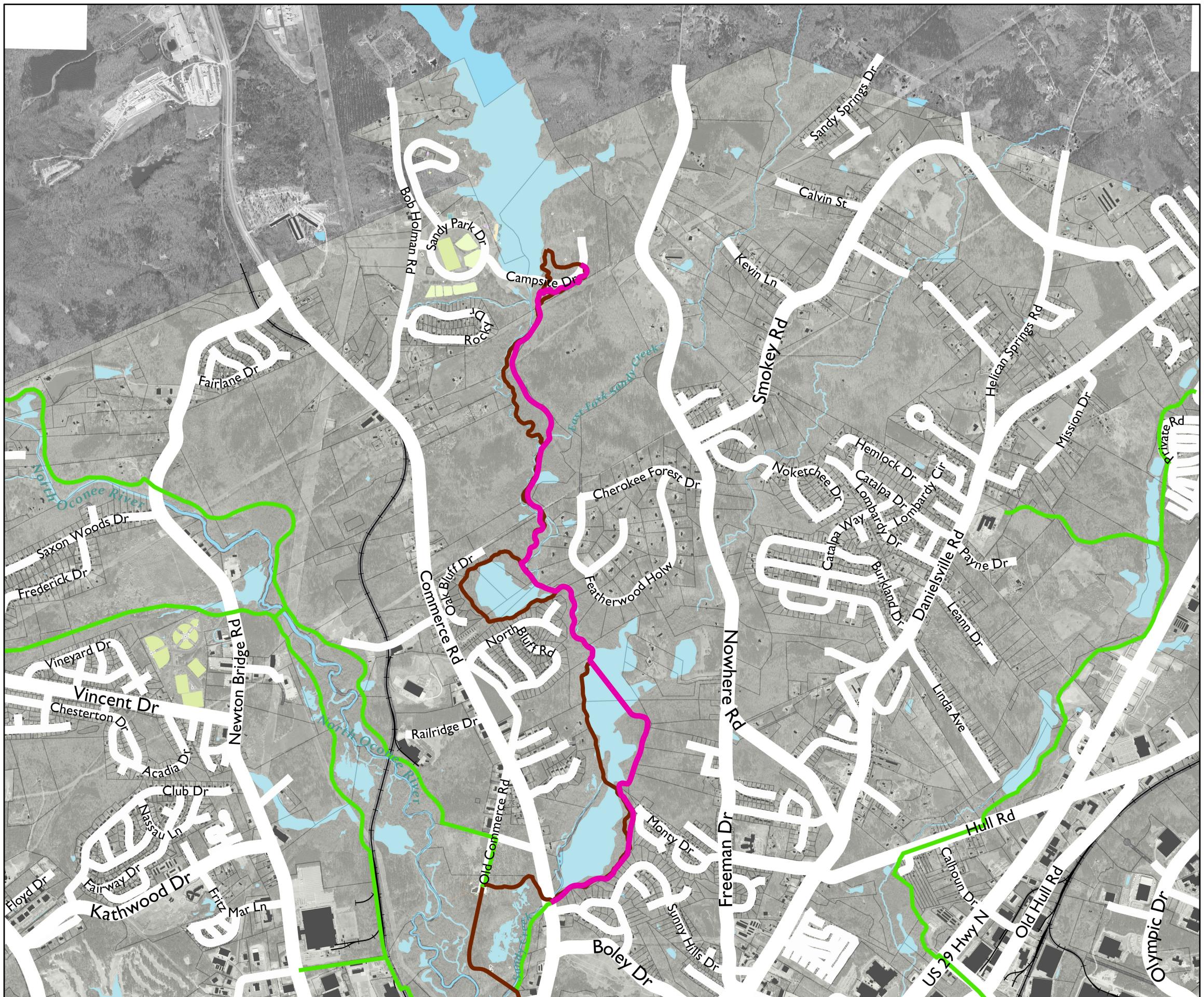
I will send drafts of the grant letter and contract to you to ensure everything is accurate and that you agree to the terms and conditions therein. Once we are good to go, I will send the final version of these documents to you via snail mail so you can sign the contract and return it to me. We will commence payment of the first installment of \$50,000 this year and follow with payment of the second installment of \$50,000 in 2026 when you are ready to engage the services of a design firm.

I look forward to hearing more about your progress as this project evolves.

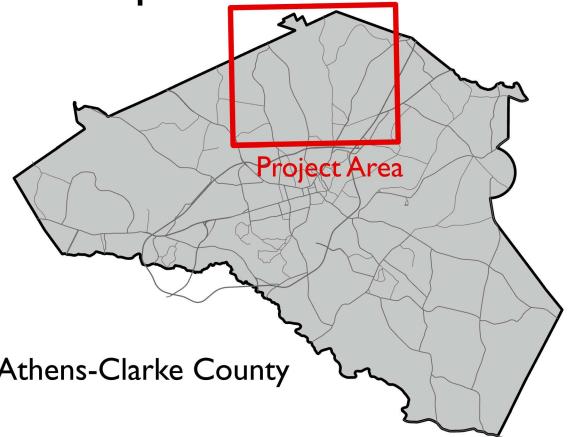
In the interim, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With kindest regards,

Bruz



Location Map



Legend

Proposed TSPLOST Improvements

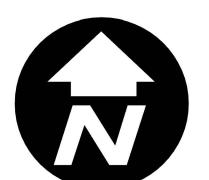
Cook's Trail

Infrastructure

- Existing Greenway
- Proposed Greenway
- Railroad
- Buildings
- Parcels

Hydrology

- Surface Water
- Stream



0 1,000 2,000 4,000
US Feet

Cook's Trail

TSPLOST 2023 Application

Athens, Georgia

August 13, 2021

Sheet 1 of 1



Organization: Unified Government of Athens-Clark County, by and through the Athens-Clarke County Leisure Services Department **Telephone:** (706) 613-3800
Address: 205 Old Commerce Road **Fax:** _____
 Athens, Georgia 30607

Project Director: Sara Shropshire, Grants Analyst **Telephone:** (762) 400-7670
Address: 205 Old Commerce Road **Fax:** _____
 Athens, Georgia

Amount of Grant: \$50,000.00 **Date of payment:** _____

Program Title: Cook's Trail Redesign and Restoration Project

Description: This grant provides support for Phase I engineering services for the Cook's Trail redesign and restoration project.

The following terms are agreed upon as conditions of this grant:

- 1) The organization is exempt from tax and is an organization described in section 509-a-1, 2, or 3 of the Internal Revenue Code (IRC). (*See # 7 below).
- 2) The funds will be used by the above named organization solely for the purpose described above.
- 3) This grant is not earmarked in any way to support or carry on any lobbying or voter registration activity.
- 4) The organization will keep and maintain records of expenditures adequate to check the use of the grant readily. A final grant report concerning budget, personnel, and program developments will be completed and returned to Riverview Foundation when the project is completed.
- 5) To the extent required by law, the organization will repay Riverview Foundation if the organization is legally determined to have breached any material term of the contract. Riverview Foundation will provide written notice to the organization of any such breach of a material term, and an opportunity to cure of at least 30 days, prior to declaring any such breach.
- 6) The organization will send to the Foundation copies of any printed publicity regarding the awarding of the grant to the program supported by the grant; the organization may, if it chooses, refer to Riverview's support in any such publicity.
- 7) The following special condition will be observed: This grantee is a governmental entity and is considered to be a public charity under IRC Section 170(b)(1)(A)(v).

The terms of this contract are accepted by:

 (Name)
 Athens-Clarke County Leisure Services Department
 (Organization)

 (Date)

 (Name)
 Riverview Foundation
 (Organization)

 (Date)