



POLK COUNTY APPEARANCE COMMISSION
P.O. Box 308, Columbus, NC 28722
828-894-3301 ext 8 • beautifulfoothills.org

December 30, 2022

Conserving Carolina
847 Case Street
Hendersonville, NC 28792

Attention: Rebekah Robinson

Dear Ms. Robinson,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a letter of support for Conserving Carolina's application to the NC Department of Transportation as a community partner in the development the Saluda Grade Rail Trail (SGRT).

The Polk County Appearance Commission (PCAC, <https://www.beautifulfoothills.org>) serves under the authority of the Polk County Board of Commissioners. It is an all-volunteer body serving in an advisory role providing guidance and leadership in matters of community design and appearance. Members study the visual needs of the County, promote a public understanding of appearance issues and implement programs to enhance the visual quality of the Polk County, North Carolina area.

The beautification of a developed rail trail in Polk County would be a monumental leap forward in addressing this abandoned corridor that could be used to support recreation and economic development in the County. It would also aid PCAC and the County in addressing the invasive kudzu crisis in our County.

In late 2020, the Polk County Board of Commissioners approved a budget exclusively for kudzu eradication. The PCAC assumes oversight for the matching grant applications and disbursement of grant monies. The PCAC seeks to award kudzu eradication grants in diverse locations throughout the geographic area of Polk County, prioritizing highly visible public areas. Historically, grants are only up to \$1,000 with a dollar-for-dollar matching grant, which is helping in a small way to begin the process of kudzu eradication in public spaces. The development of the SGRT would provide access to and support for eradication of some of the key sources of kudzu in Polk County that are covering mountainsides and killing native plants. In communications with the NCDOT Division 14 Roadside Environmental Engineer we know that dollars to address the kudzu issue are limited but very helpful to address the creeping kudzu along the Scenic Byway, Hwy 176.

On behalf of the PCAC, please accept our support for your application to NCDOT to support the development of the Saluda Grade Rail Trail. We look forward to supporting next steps. If you need more information about PCAC's support for these efforts, feel free to reach out to me.

Best,

Joe Cooper, PCAC Chair
joecoopercnc@gmail.com