



The Board of Park and Recreation Commissioners of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, met at the Bette Rae Thomas Recreation Center., 2921 Tuckaseegee Road, Charlotte, NC at 6 p.m.

**PRC MINUTES  
January 8, 2013**

**ATTENDANCE**

**PRC Present:**

Rob Brisley, Chair  
Kendel Bryant, Vice-Chair  
Elaine Powell, Executive Secretary  
Jim Garges, Park and Recreation Director  
Ed Barnhart  
Doug Burnett  
Brenda McMoore  
Charlie McRee  
Norman Mitchell  
Joe Pata  
Sheryl Smith

**PRC Absent:**

Resigned/Vacant seats: Northern Towns  
North Region – N2  
Southern Towns

**Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Chair Rob Brisley, which was followed by the pledge of allegiance and introductions of each commissioner.

**Welcome and Introductions:**

Terri Stowers, Community and Recreation Center Services (Central Corridor) Manager, welcomed the Commission members and guests to the Bette Rae Thomas Recreation Center. A brief overview of key center programming, such as the “59 and Feeling Fine” program for seniors, was shared. Bette Rae Thomas was also introduced as a key partner of the Department of Social Services (DSS) Senior Nutrition Services, functioning as a daily senior nutrition feeding site. Bette Rae Thomas actively engages the senior demographic for involvement at community level, mirroring programs at Southview Recreation Center and Mallard Creek Recreation Center, which offer similar targeted programming. The PRC members were provided with a ‘Winter Program Guide’ for reference of programs available at center, to share with their respective Advisory Councils.

Director Jim Garges, offered his best regards to the facility staff and leadership and provided the historical background that the center was named after Bette Rae Thomas who passed away last year. Ms. Thomas was very engaged with the center and the neighborhood. Although the center is relatively new, Ms. Bette and the community in which the recreation center resides were/are very proud of it. Bette Rae Thomas is key to a host of unique partnerships.

#### **Proclamations and Awards: None**

Jeff Robinson, Park Operations Division Director recognized George “Skip” Martin and his family in attendance, for 34 years of service to the Park and Recreation Department. George Martin retired late December 2012.

#### **Public Appearance - None**

#### **Appointments – Advisory Councils – Applicants**

**Athletics: Motion was made** by Commissioner Pata to appoint **Robert Taylor** to an unexpired term on the Athletics Advisory Council, expiring 6/2014, which was seconded and approved unanimously

**Athletics: Motion was made** by Commissioner Pata to appoint **Jeff Greene** to an unexpired term on the Athletics Advisory Council, expiring 6/2014, which was seconded and approved unanimously

**Athletics: Motion was made** by Commissioner Pata to appoint **Tom Deming** to his 1<sup>st</sup> term on the Athletics Advisory Council, expiring 1/2016, which was seconded and approved unanimously

#### **Program Presentation -:**

##### **Central Region Advisory Council**

No presentation

#### **Director’s Report**

Director Garges reiterated the purpose of the proposed **Smoking Policy** for all Park and Recreation facilities (all sites & parks). Director Garges **requested** feedback and information regarding how the Park and Recreation Commissioners individually feel about the policy and how the advisory councils and community feels about it, as expressed to them. Director Garges **reiterated** that policy direction, as opposed to an ordinance, had been taken as the first steps.

**It is the position of Mecklenburg Park and Recreation and Director Jim Garges that Park and Recreation facilities should be viewed as health facilities (public health facilities).**

Reference Documents:

8.a Draft version of the Park and Recreation Smoking Policy

#### **Roundtable Discussion**

Commissioner Doug Burnette (South Region – S1) –

Greenway Advisory Council  
South Advisory Council

- It is a tough issue to approach as it relates to citizen concerns of the Departments position and questions surrounding, “Why is Park and Recreation considered a health agency/facility?”
- Personally “all for it”; positioning as the advocate for citizens who may not support the policy – is the Departments move toward this policy in conjunction with other government and local agency policies? Concerned we will “rub people the wrong way,” if it is not.
  - Director Garges, indicated CMS already has a similar policy. Local healthcare organizations such as Carolinas Healthcare System and Presbyterian/Novant Healthcare also have similar policies already. This policy (above mentioned) is for park land. There has been some conversation from some other county agencies regarding expanding their current non-smoking envelope around their buildings. A couple of towns, Davidson and Cornelius for example, are looking at us at what are we going to do, however have already gone and taken the ordinance standpoint for their local park land.
  - Director Garges, desires the community to understand the connection between what we offer and what we do. Citizen health concern is becoming more of the norm across the county.

Commissioner Sheryl W.Smith (Central Region – C1)  
Central Region Advisory Council

- As a non-smoker: concerned about the litter (cigarette related) and interruption of the natural environment. Encourages the Department to be careful that we are not “running people off” from using park land.
- In the line of thought of a smoker, could see how they would relate open air and open space with the right to be able to smoke. Encourages the Department to be careful that we are not “policing” citizens. Park and Recreation on this particular issue needs to be careful on where we stand and where we step. Believes it may be a little too much (in a smokers opinion) for smokers to be banned from smoking in open and airy spaces like park land.

Commissioner Kendel Bryant (North Region – N3)  
Executive Advisory Council  
North Region Advisory Council

- Will there be perhaps a “designated” smoking area for park land?
  - Director Garges, believes you should provide clear guidelines on issues such as this (designated smoking areas or no smoking areas), and support only one or the other. Believes when you come into a park, you come into a healthy environment. Does not recommend a “designated area”.

Commissioner Norman Mitchell – (At-Large)  
Golf Advisory Council  
Cultural Arts Advisory Council  
Senior Citizens Advisory Council

- It is the position of the Golf Advisory Council, as indicative by meeting minutes (available upon request), that the Golf Advisory Council does not support the proposed Smoking Policy being discussed. A great deal of support against the policy came from non-smokers. Major concern for staff at golf courses was indicated as well as golf course users.

Commissioner Joe Pata (At-Large)

Athletic Advisory Council

- It is the position of the Athletic Advisory Council (feedback included non-smokers), that the Athletic Advisory Council does not support the proposed Smoking Policy being discussed. As reported by Commissioner Pata, all members of the Athletic Advisory Council were against the policy and not in support of it. The general tones of sentiments from the AAC regarding the policy were negative.
  - Chairman Rob Brisley inquired has any concern ever been expressed in Golf or Athletics, or has any concern ever been raised about the impact of smoking/smokers at Park and Recreation events.
    - To the immediate recollection of meeting participants present representing Enterprise Services and the Athletics Advisory Council, there have been none expressed.
  - Commissioner Mitchell, provided the example of Dr. Charles L. Sifford Golf Course at Revolution Park - there should not be smoking near doors or points of entry, however this has never been a problem “un-policed”.

Commissioner Ed Barnhart (South Region – S2)

Greenway Advisory Council

South Region Advisory Council

- The discussion on this policy makes for “very interesting conversation”.
- Mixed feelings from both respective Advisory Councils, generally 50/50 as it related to support.
- One comment provided was there would be general confusion among park and park facility users as it related to being framed as a policy and not an ordinance. Concerned about enforcement.
- Commissioner Ed Barnhart shared information regarding an article on Outdoor Smoking Bans, from which he read aloud an excerpt.

Commissioner Elaine Powell (North Region – N1)

Executive Advisory Council

North Region Advisory Council

Stewardship Advisory Council

- As a small business owner – cannot imagine what it would be like for Park and Recreation managers to manage employees that smoke, with this policy in effect, and staff had to go offsite to smoke. As an employer, (she) has empathy for the management who would have to manage that issue.
- Supports idea of campaign for healthy living. But, agrees with Commissioners Barnhart and Commissioner Smith, it is a slippery slope. No one on the Greenway Advisory Council smokes, but the support was 50/50 for the policy.
  - Commissioner Smith, **noted** sometimes when we bring matters such as this to the attention of citizens, it “*brings it to their attention*”. The power of suggestion may play a role in creating a problem.
  - Commissioner Burnette, **questioned** whether there are any metrics supporting smoking complaints? In comparison to other complaints?
    - Director Garges, **informed** there are a few. Cited example of the Little Sugar Creek Greenway segment near Carolinas Healthcare (CMC Main). Also cited a Community Garden smoking complaint.
  - Commissioner Bryant, **noted** many questions surround how the policy will be enforced. Questions have been presented already about the designated smoking

areas. Also questioned whether this policy move relates to pollution or pollution numbers.

Commissioner Charlie McRee (Central Region – C3)  
Central Region Advisory Council

- It is the position of the Central Park District Advisory Council that everyone supports the philosophy of it. The reality of trying to reinforce it, presents some concerns to members.
- Commissioner McRee walks the Little Sugar Creek Greenway and in Freedom Park a lot. Near tennis courts, all employees from CHS/Carolinas Medical come there to smoke. It is not uncommon to see cigarette butts there. However as it relates to the policy, the general sentiment exists within the Central Region that “the cure is greater than the illness”.

Commissioner Brenda McMoore (Central Region – C2)

- By bringing it up, people are going to think that they can smoke in the park.
- Park users are generally conscious and do not smoke around children playing.
- Encouraging health aspects, is supported. The people we are trying to enforce this for, may not be there anyway. Does not believe it is a necessary policy. People seem to naturally police themselves. Few times she has personally seen smoking in the parks, when noted it was away from other users.
- Enforcement would be a horrendous task. Trying to enforce it would do more encouraging than limiting it.

Questions and answers followed from the Commissioners.

Chairman Rob Brisley – **inquired** for clarification, is this a County wide policy?

Director Garges, the countywide policy is indoor smoke free facilities. Director Garges is unsure if departments are required to have a designated area. Again there has been some discussion of expanding the smoke-free envelope at some facilities.

Chairman Rob Brisley – **inquired** on any data regarding the workplace environment impacts?

Director Garges indicated research or outcomes on such changes will likely occur at the Private sector level and then at the Public sector level. Presently, we do not have data.

Commissioner Burnette – **noted** if it (Smoking Policy) was targeted at County/Park and Recreation employees, it would be a different discussion. But we are targeting the citizenry.

Chairman Rob Brisley – **inquired** whether there is any opportunity to leverage the use of signage and gauge the effect before instituting a policy.

Commissioner Bryant – **inquired** what would be the next steps if the Department wanted to take action.

Director Garges, **indicated** the next step would be to prepare a recommendation for the County Executive Team, and from there it would go the Board of County Commissioners. To do so, the discussion of the Park and Recreation Commission and suggestions/advice would have to be shared.

Commissioner Burnette – **noted** the one thing we (the PRC) have agreed upon, there are certain outdoor areas (such as golf courses and athletic events mentioned by Commissioner Mitchell) and certain choke points mentioned, where smokers may be in open areas. As a compromise

strategy, it may be prudent to address those areas. Using signage and education in those targeted areas may produce positive results.

Commissioner Mitchell, **expressed concern** this would “push” (facilitate) the same level or type of enforcement coming “on down the trail”.

Commissioner Burnette agreed.

### **PRC Chair Report/Commissioner Updates**

- a) Park and Recreation Commissioner Advisory Council Assignments (2013)  
Chairman Rob Brisley commended Commissioner Mitchell for his coverage of multiple Advisory Councils and for his time and efforts above the general expectations of Advisory Council engagement, in 2012.

#### New 2013 Assignments:

Commissioner Brenda McMoore – Vice Chair of Golf Advisory Council

Commissioner Joe Pata – Vice Chair on Aquatic Advisory Council

Commissioner Sheryl Smith – Cultural Arts & Senior Citizens member

- b) Park and Recreation Commissioner BOCC Assignments (2013)  
All assignments will remain as indicated with the addition of the below:

#### New 2013 Assignments:

PRC Chairman Rob Brisley assigned to BOCC Chair Commissioner Pat Cotham

PRC Commissioner Ed Barnhart assigned to BOCC Commissioner Matthew Ridenhour

PRC Commissioner Norman Mitchell assigned to BOCC Commissioner George Dunlap

PRC Commissioner Kendel Bryant assigned to BOCC Commissioner Kimberly Ratliff

PRC Commissioner Dough Burnette assigned to BOCC Commissioner Trevor Fuller

PRC Commissioner Sheryl Smith assigned to BOCC Commissioner Velma Leake

- (will partner with PRC Commissioner Mitchell to cover BOCC Commissioner George Dunlap)

- c) All Park and Recreation Commissioner are tasked to meet and greet their assigned county commissioner within the next two months and report back to the PRC on the opportunity.
- d) The Board of County Commissioners will fill the vacant Northern Towns seat at the January 15, 2013 BOCC meeting. The candidate expected to be placed is Travis Dancy.

Director Garges requests that Kesha Meads prepare the New PRC Member Packet for Travis Dancy. His seating will be effective with the February 12, 2013 PRC meeting.

### **Consent Items:**

- (10) *Motion was made*** by Commissioner Smith to delay the approval of the November 14, 2012 PRC Minutes to February 12, 2013, in light of recommended changes/edits presented. This motion was seconded by Commissioner Pata and approved unanimously.

### **Staff Reports and Requests**

None

### **PRC Reports and Requests**

Commissioner Powell reported a successful introduction with Commissioner Pat Cotham and reported the opportunity to spend time at a recent event with Commissioner Leake, who remains an advocate for Park and Recreation.

**Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 7:33 p.m.