



The Board of Park and Recreation Commissioners of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, met at the Administrative Office Building located at 5841 Brookshire Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28216 on January 13, 2015 at 6 p.m.

PRC MINUTES
January 13, 2015

ATTENDANCE

PRC Present:

Rob Brisley, Chair
Elaine Powell, Executive Secretary
Kendel Bryant, Vice-Chair
Aubin Guinness
Jude Harding
Doug Burnett
Brenda McMoore
Tristan McMannis
Charlie McRee
Ed Barnhart
Norman Mitchell
Jim Garges
Michael Kirschman

PRC Absent:

Joe Pata
Sheryl Smith

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 6 p.m. by Chair Rob Brisley, which was followed by the pledge of allegiance.

Welcome and Introductions:

Each of the Park and Recreation Commissioners introduced themselves and their areas of representation.

Presentations:

2008 Draft Master Plan Update – Leon Younger of Pros Consulting

Leon Younger of Pros Consulting presented a draft report of the updated 2008 Master Plan. The presentation covered:

- The Survey
- Program Recommendations

- Marketing Recommendations
- Partnership Recommendations
- Greenway Recommendations
- Resource Management Recommendations
- Policy Recommendations
- Level of Service Standards
- Capital Improvement Recommendations

This updated Master Plan was a collaborative effort between Pros Consulting and the Park and Recreation Department, with Gwen Cook providing the updated Greenway Plan and Chris Matthews providing the Nature Preserves plan. In addition, the survey provided a comparative between 2008 and 2014 of changes and improvements, which clearly indicated that the investments made in the park system has made a difference in the way people view the system. In addition, capital improvements will focus more on improvements to what the Department already owns. Leon commented that the Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation staff are one of the best, most productive staffs he has worked with and that the Department should be very proud. Director Jim Garges stated that all of the recommendations in the Master Plan update are citizen need driven and is how the Department manages the entire system. Using benchmarks from 2007 the Department is constantly going back to determine the progress and setting goals that keep the Department moving forward.

Following the presentation, discussions were held and addressed concerning the following:

- **Athletic Field Repairs:** Updating/repairing current athletic fields to remove pressure on the demand for the newer, larger athletic fields. Director Garges will be pressing hard to the County Manger and the BOCC for the funds to continue addressing the backlog of deferred maintenance.
- **Funding Sources:** The funding source from the citizen survey was to continue to support financing through tax dollars. However, in the updated plan several funding options are suggested; something the Department can consider going forward if those funding options fit into our value system. In particular, funding options for walking and biking trails, might be land lease options along the trails or direct sponsorships; options that Mecklenburg County does not currently use. Private developers often do land dedications for greenways and trails (something that has been very successful for the Department), but it is not a requirement. Leon Younger commended the Department for their proactive approach of securing operational funds before an improvement comes on line.
- **Program Participation:** Look at ways through e-parks to capture the demand for programs. Currently, citizens can place themselves on a waiting list for a program that is full; this would show the level of true demand, but most do not. Michael Kirschman shared that the Department will be working with Arlington, Texas Parks and Recreation staff, Ryan Hegreness, Marketing and Enterprise Development Manager and Gary Packan, Assistant Director of Enterprise Programs, to help us begin an assessment of our current marketing strategies and ideas for future marketing. It was noted however, that many factors go into meeting demand such as the threshold limitations of space and staff. All of these factors will be considered as the Department moves forward in the marketing assessment.
- **Cost Recovery Goal:** Cost recovery takes into account the balance of an experience with how long people will stay as well as the public versus private benefit. Our Fees and Charges, which are approved by the BOCC, is how we look at and set these costs each year. Leon felt that the Department had the capability of a larger cost recovery, but Director

Garges is of the mind to make sure the tax payer's interest are considered first and keep the scale tilted on the public side.

- **Marketing/Communication:** Assistance from the Arlington, TX Parks and Recreation staff will help the Department address ways to best get information about programs and camps out to the public, which will aid in creating greater and fairer opportunity for registration. Work with Arlington staff, Gary Packan and Ryan Hegreness, will begin in mid-February. Their recommendations should be back to the Department by March 30th and will help form the basis for and justification of a budget request in the next fiscal year for marketing funds for the Department. It was noted that the County Manger also sees the issue of communicating the services of Mecklenburg County to the public and the hope is that we will see better marketing efforts not only for Park and Recreation but for all County services. In addition, Michael Kirschman shared that the Get Going Guide would be coming back in print as a magazine with a 6 month shelf life. It will not just list programs, but contain articles about our various divisions, programs and activities with website directions.

Director Garges concluded that the Commission would be provided with the finalized plan as well as an Executive Summary Report. The Department will be presenting the draft update to all of the town boards, the City of Charlotte and the BOCC.

(NOTE: This presentation can be viewed by clicking [here](#))

Motion was made by Commissioner Mitchell to accept the draft of the updated 2008 Master Plan as presented, which was seconded by Commissioner Kendel and approved unanimously.

PARTF Grant Presentation

Kevin Brickman, Planner, brought before the Park and Recreation Commission a request to approve a PARTF matching grant application to supplement the costs for the Little Sugar Creek Greenway – Access Trail to South Mecklenburg High School. This 5K trail course would be used primarily by South Mecklenburg High School and Charlotte Catholic to run and practice as well as for small meets. It would be built in concurrence with the Little Sugar Creek Greenway section from Tyvola Road to I-485 and will include at 2.5 K natural trail (ran twice for a 5K), have direct access to South Mecklenburg High School through the street network, include a future 12' wide paved greenway and two 10' wide neighborhood access trails, fitness stations and a 20 space gravel parking lot at the trail head. This application request has been approved by the Greenway Citizen Advisory Council and the BOCC.

Discussion was held regarding the capacity of the trail head parking lot. Kevin assured the Commission that the lot would be expanded and paved when the greenway comes on line. However, the high school will be the main parking area for all meets and events.

Commissioner Barnhart shared that this project was part of the 2003 Little Sugar Creek Greenway Master Plan and was in response to the tragic death of cross-country runner Ben Robinette in 1998, practicing on the busy roads near South Mecklenburg High School.

Motion was made by Commissioner Barnhart to approve the \$250,000 PARTF Grant Application to supplement the costs for the Little Sugar Creek Greenway – Access Trail to South Mecklenburg

High School and 5K Trail, which was seconded by Commissioner McMoore and approved unanimously.

Advisory Council Appointments:

Athletics:

Motion was made by Commissioner Harding to appoint **Larry Johnson** to an unexpired term on the Athletics Advisory Council, expiring 6/2017, which was seconded and approved unanimously.

North:

Motion was made by Commissioner Bryant to appoint **Nathan Stanford** to an unexpired term on the North Park Region Advisory Council, expiring 6/2015 and to also appoint **Iris Bonano** to an unexpired term, expiring 6/2015, which was seconded and approved unanimously.

South:

In the absence of a South Park Region Manager, Commissioner Barnhart deferred appointments to the South Park Region Advisory Council.

Director's Report

Roy Alexander: Director Garges shared the sad of news of the passing of environmentalist, Roy Alexander. Roy was a huge supporter of Park and Recreation and was the executive director of the Davidson Lands Conservancy. Among the many organizations in which Roy was deeply involved, was the Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Commission and the Greenway Citizen Advisory Council.

Budget: The budget process has begun. The Department will take some of the recommendations in the updated 2008 Master Plan and make ask of them to County Manager. Director Garges reminded the Commission to update their BOCC assignments and to continue their communications and encouraged them to plan on attending the budget public policy meeting to advocate for the Department's budget request. A budget schedule will be made available.

Projects: There will be many project ground breakings and dedications this year. The 1st Ward Park project, in particular, should be completed by December 2015. A PRC tour of the site will be scheduled.

Chair Rob Brisley asked about programming of the 1st Ward Park. Director Garges responded it would be programmed like Romare but with different activities. Programming ideas include a farmers market and collaboration of programming with ImaginOn and UNCC. Jim will share the 10 year plan for that neighborhood at a future PRC meeting.

Commissioner Barnhart asked if case studies could be done to show the economic impact of the Department's projects such as Romare and 1st Ward. Jim responded that the timing was excellent for these types of studies and that it would be possible to work on them with UNCC's economic group.

Department Promotions/New Staff Positions: Jim shared the recent promotion of Terri Stowers to Director of Community and Recreation Center Services. Terri fills the vacancy left by Lola Massad, who recently retired. The Department will also be hiring a Superintendent position

in the Community and Recreation Center Services Division as well as filling the vacant South Park Region Manager position left by the retirement of Patricia Poteat.

Department New Hire Orientation: Deputy Director, Michael Kirschman, has developed a Department orientation program for new hires. This orientation follows the County Orientation and provides new hires with an overview of the Department, mission and vision.

PRC Chair Report

2015 PRC Advisory Council Assignments and Meeting Expectation: Chair Rob Brisley shared the suggested 2015 PRC Advisory Council Assignments and the meeting expectations for each commissioner. Chair Brisley reminded the board of the 75% attendance policy set by the Board of County Commissioners. This policy does not allow for any excused absences. Discussion followed regarding Advisory Council meeting conflicts, chair and vice-chair appointments, scheduling of meetings and PRC Advisory Council liaison appointments. Adjustments will be made based on the concerns expressed and the subject will be deferred to the February PRC meeting for any action.

PRC Executive Committee Nominations: **Motion was made** by Commissioner Norman Mitchell, Chair of the PRC nominating committee, to make the following PRC executive team appointments:

- Chair Commissioner Elaine Powell
- Vice-Chair Commissioner Kendel Bryant
- Executive Secretary Commissioner Tristan McMannis

The appointments were accepted and the motion was seconded by Commissioner Bryant and approved unanimously.

Consent Items

Motion was made by Commissioner Harding to approved the minutes of the November 11, 2014 Park and Recreation Commission meeting and to accept all correspondence consent items as presented on the January 13, 2015 PRC agenda, which was seconded by Commissioner McMoore, and approved unanimously.

Motion was made by Commissioner Bryant to approve the Advisory Council minutes as presented on the January 13, 2015 PRC agenda, which was seconded by Commissioner Barnhart and approved unanimously.

PRC Reports and Requests

Citizen Input/Public Meetings: Commissioner Powell expressed concern regarding the process for gathering citizen input at public meetings. This concern was raised following her attendance at a public meeting in Davidson regarding the Abersham and Fisher Farm properties at which she witnessed proponents of equestrian usage placing undue pressure on other citizens to also express support of equestrian use. (Input was taken at different table stations where citizens wrote down their ideas and suggestions.) Commissioner Powell felt this pressure was at a level that created a hostile environment and asked if the Department might explore other, less intimidating, ways for citizen to provide input.

Director Garges agreed that this does happen when a subject has strong proponents but felt that it happened on a minor scale. With particular regard to public meetings on the Abersham property,

Jim said for future meetings they would make sure that it was understood that equestrian usage was not allowed on this property and also be more mindful of the input process and managing conversations. The Commission was reminded that anytime the Department has a park project in one of the towns, it requires the town's approval as well as the PRC and BOCC.

Deputy Director, Michael Kirschman, said the Department is reviewing the process of collecting citizen input and looking at ways to connect with a broader base of the population.

Commissioner Burnett raised the concern regarding a more effective method of not only communicating upcoming meetings to the public, but also methods of participation. Several suggestions were discussed including use of the Charlotte Alert System, social media, public signage, communication through Home Owners Associations and traditional postcards. Deputy Director Kirschman said the Department will be addressing all these concerns over this year to develop a better process for citizen communication and input.

Resignation of Chair Rob Brisley: Chair Rob Brisley announced his pending resignation from the Park and Recreation Commission. Brisley will be taking a full time position with the Sheriff's Department and by BOCC policy will not be able to serve on the PRC as a County employee. This will be effective possibly late March.

Adjournment

Motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 p.m., which was seconded and approved unanimously.