

## **LWVCM- Environmental Action Team comments at BOCC Budget FY2020 May 9<sup>th</sup> hearing**

I am Margaret Howe-Sope and I live in County Commissioner District 5.

Parks and recreation have three values that make them essential services: economic value, health and environmental benefits, and social importance.

In Mecklenburg County, parks and greenways reflect truly public dollars because they benefit all, regardless of race, age, gender, or income. The concern is that only certain areas of the county have access to these truly public spaces, namely: NOT the socially vulnerable populations that need them the most. I am speaking specifically of the communities in east and west Charlotte as well as the more rural areas of the County.

According to the Trust for Public Lands 2018 ParkScore analysis, Charlotte-Mecklenburg spends just \$47.14 /resident for parks as compared to the National ParkScore average of \$87/resident. The County is way behind, and with the rapidly growing population, at this rate we'll never catch up. Furthermore, we'll never be able to spend the \$30 million on 30 miles of greenways by 2030 with the proposed budget funds and staff allocation.

It is no secret that land values are increasing and available land is decreasing. The proposed budget attempts to maintain and enhance existing facilities due to a history of budget neglect...but does NOT accelerate the immediate need to acquire and protect land for future public use.

Our suggestions are the following:

1. Increase the proposed land and environmental services expenditures to more than 0.5% in the FY2020 budget.
2. Dedicate monies to bolster staffing and acquisition of land for parks and greenways.
3. Include mechanisms that will allow a developer/property owner to receive reduced capital gains, storm water fees, or county property tax assessments NOW and the future for deeded public greenway access and land allocation.
4. Ensure ALL development projects (utility, transportation, transit, public housing, commercial developments) includes a review of how the project may serve to enhance public benefit and connection to parks and greenways.
5. Consideration of adding a voluntary donation check box to parks and greenways on the County tax bill to allow taxpayers to donate additional funds dedicated to parks greenway, and trail acquisition.
6. Consideration of a shared tree planting program wherein the property owner pays ½ of the cost of planting approved trees in City/County approved places and the City/County pays the other half of the cost.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these ideas. We will be happy to share written copies of this presentation upon request.