

**Rotary**  
Club of  
Charlotte



# THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

August 20, 2024

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## *Ed Driggs, District 7 Representative, City of Charlotte*

by **Susie Masotti**

Rotary member **Jim Rogers** introduced this week's speaker – **Ed Driggs**, District 7 Representative Charlotte City Council. Jim's introduction started with the statement that leadership makes things happen and that truly describes **Ed Driggs**. When he moved here, he got involved in the Council, Public Television through WTVI, and CMS, and worked with the NC League of Municipalities. He has been honored for his leadership in public television and he is a proud volunteer with Classroom Central. Ed has been on the City Council since 2013 and represents all of Charlotte's citizens. A graduate of Princeton University, he also studied at Berlin and Oxford Universities and is fluent in German. Ed is a Rotary Paul Harris Fellow, and a talented musician (both with a guitar and singing). If you'd like to see him in action, you can find him on his own YouTube Channel. He is married to Caroline and is the proud parent of 2 children.

Ed began his remarks by thanking everyone for having him appear. He began his remarks by focusing on the transportation issues facing Charlotte. He reminded us that in 1998 a ½ cent sales tax was approved for the transportation department to fund new projects. In 2006 when that fund had grown large enough to begin work, the Transit Plan was released which featured the new Lynx plan that would provide three commuter lines. CATS is responsible for the transit plan, but the budget is overseen by the city itself. Ed feels the Lynx lines have increased Charlotte's ability to move throughout the city without having to drive. Currently, the red line

has hit a snag with Norfolk Southern. Because of this hold-up, the blue and gold lines were started. The General fund was used to create the 4 miles of the Blue Line. Lately, they have focused on scaling back the future. In 2020 the city appointed the Charlotte MOVES Task Force that recommended a 1-cent sales tax to pay for new bike lanes, pedestrian lanes, greenways, and more.

This evolved into a Strategic Mobility Plan which is meant to get people out of their cars and use public transportation or even the greenway to travel around town.

The Task Force has identified two issues – the Plan had included Mecklenburg County but involves working with other municipalities to create the new line to run the Northern part of the city. Charlotte had to move ahead with that line and the city will be buying the tracks and eventually reimbursed when other municipalities get involved. The Legislature must approve anything that we work on, and they thought we were out of our minds with the 1-cent sales tax increase. The Legislature believes we need to involve more roads. The new plan includes 40% going toward roads, 40% going toward transit, and 20% to buses. Ed is not sure it will pass on the first try and if it is passed then towns would be involved but the lines will be run by Charlotte.

The new structure for the advisory committee would be:

Charlotte – 12 seats

Mecklenburg – 6 seats

House/Senate – 1 seat each

Governor – 1 seat

Other towns – 1 seat

We think this is fair since Charlotte shoulders most of the structure as well as the management. Everyone is a member of the Metro Transit Committee except Matthews, and all have agreed on the submission. Matthews is upset because the redirection in rail funds means the Silver Line is most likely moving out in the future.

If the plan passes in 2025, work will begin in July of 2026 (when funds have accumulated enough to begin). All of this points to the impact of access and mobility to keep Charlotte moving forward and leads to lower job costs and lower housing costs.

Ed then moved on to the new Land Use Plan. When work began, we initially agreed that we couldn't rewrite the rules for the future without a plan that gives inclusion to the environment, mobility, and housing. The controversial position of the new Plan is the elimination of all single-family zoning – the lowest use now includes single-family, duplex, and triplex, etc. to encourage more housing and slow the cost of the increase in the cost of housing. Communities were obviously upset, and they didn't want multi-family living next door. However, we continually remind each neighborhood that if there are restrictive covenants in place (which is true in most

areas of greater Charlotte) that address the type of housing allowed the Restrictive Covenant supersedes this new Land Use Zoning.

We also wanted to require developers to create benefits for the community (i.e., green space, walking trails, trees, etc.). We would not get that done so the focus changed to layers of density within zoning – an example would be if in the past you were in an R3 zoning area (meaning three houses per acre) you would now apply with 1N1A which provides more housing, but requirements are higher for the use of the land.

The policy map of Charlotte was created to better align what was going on with the new plan. This was adopted in April 2022, and the first use was in April 2023, and by April 2024 you were required to use the new rules. There have been numerous situations where staff come in with recommendations that we feel don't fit the plan, but the staff think it is worth the exception. We are always improving the plan to align with reality rather than being rigid. Almost all applications coming in were asking for a density bonus. Developers are adept at looking for areas they can take advantage of or "loopholes" – we on the Planning Committee feel that it is our job to close some doors while opening others leaving room for development but falling within the plan. We found that all our requirements were making developers build \$400,000 houses which is NOT what we are looking for when trying to increase affordable housing.

Many provisions, specifically for affordable housing, can accelerate the process for them and include workforce development. A few colleagues figured out how to use the funds to the highest and best use. Looking ahead the outlook is exciting. Charlotte is seen as a leader in this area, and we cannot allow ourselves to slow the pace. We acknowledge the Mayor and City Manager and the vision they have and appreciate their cooperation in moving Charlotte forward. Charlotte also has a wonderful Staff of the City who are all dedicated professionals. Ed then took questions from the group:

It sounds like the old rules were cumbersome and your team worked to create new rules to simplify. Ed answered that they are working hard to make the rules easy and clear (including the inclusion of sidewalks, trees, sizes of buildings, etc.). It's a work in progress.

Next, Ed was asked what Providence Road is going to look like in 10 years. It's a mess now. Ed agreed that it's a challenge but reminded everyone that Providence Road is a State Road, so they are responsible for the movement on that road. It's a battle that we're working on with engineers and new traffic patterns. Currently, the NC Department of Transportation has no plans to upgrade.

Ed was asked if Landlords of Affordable Housing areas receive tax credit and Ed replied that they do not. It's easier to create a subsidy than a tax credit which is what our team works on.

The question was asked if you add it all up, the tax on prepared food is nearly 10%. How are you going to get people to vote for that? Ed stated that the plan was to focus on housing and create a plan from there to sell it so that the referendum passes.

Ed was asked what's going on with Matthews where \$46 million has already been spent on the Silver Line. Ed replied that if everyone would remember Pineville originally blocked that line and used to help but when Ballantyne grew that opinion changed. Jack Edwards, Mayor of Pineville, has been a great partner to work with and we look forward to working with Matthews in the future when we can work out differences.

The last question was in remembering that I485 was built and was immediately outdated, and it was expanded almost as soon as it was complete. How is the Planning Commission working to avoid the same issue with the new transit plan? Ed replied that there will be a referendum on future plans and that planning does look 20 years in the future and beyond. We don't always get it right, but we're always looking.

A recording of the meeting can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/1002310807>  
The program introduction begins at approximately 16 minutes 55 seconds.