



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### *Mecklenburg Sales Tax Referendum*

#### **Why are we voting on a sales tax referendum?**

The Mecklenburg County Commission authorized a voter referendum to consider a one-quarter cent sales tax dedicated to add funding to expand our parks and recreation programs; to ensure geographic equity and access to arts, science and history programs; to provide additional funding for our public school teachers and classroom support, and new revenue for local governments across the county to fund their parks and arts programs.

#### **How much is this referendum going to cost me?**

This will amount to one-quarter cent more in sales tax – 25 cents per every \$100 spent in Mecklenburg County.

#### **Don't we already have great parks in Mecklenburg County?**

Mecklenburg County does have a parks system, but it is among the most underfunded parks systems in the country, according to a [2019 ParkScore ranking](#).

In fact, the local government spends just \$48 per year for parks; compared to the national average of \$87. Also, the study found only 36% of Charlotte-Mecklenburg residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, compared to 72% of the national average.

#### **How will this referendum benefit school children in Mecklenburg County?**

As you may have heard, an increasing number of public school field trips to local museums and cultural attractions have been reduced or eliminated due to lack of funding. New revenue from the sales tax referendum will be allocated to restore these events and other cultural programming for children in neighborhoods all across the county. In addition, students will benefit from new revenue that will fund classroom staff, including teacher assistants and school counselors.

#### **How will CMS classroom teachers benefit from the sales tax referendum?**

If voters approve the referendum, the county commissioners will dedicate funding to CMS schools for teacher supplements; additional teaching assistants and classroom support.

#### **How will the new funding compare to money already allocated by Mecklenburg County to these issues?**

In the 2019-2020 fiscal year budget, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools were funded at a level of \$534 million, while \$51 million was allocated to parks and recreation and \$2 million was allocated to arts, science and cultural programs. Much of the monies dedicated to the parks and arts programs will directly benefit students within CMS. If we are successful in passing the November referendum, based on current budget levels, schools will receive approximately \$542 million, parks and recreation will receive a total of \$68 million, and \$24.5 million would go to arts, science and history programs in schools and neighborhoods across the county.

#### **Will we see direct benefit from the investments in our arts, science and history programs?**

The sales tax revenue will be used to eliminate barriers to participation, reduce racial disparities and enable programs to reach deep in neighborhoods across the county to ensure residents have access to programs regardless of where they live or what they can afford. This investment will go a long way in serving every community across Mecklenburg County.

### **Who will be managing this money?**

The Mecklenburg County Commissioners will be collecting and distributing the revenues from this sales-tax. All programs receiving funding will be subject to standard audit and operational procedures under the accounting and reporting guidelines defined by the Mecklenburg County Commissioners and the NC Local Government Commission.

### **Why are you pursuing a sales tax rather than seeking funding through the county's annual budget process? Were there alternatives for funding arts & culture?**

This will provide a dedicated source of revenue to sustain our arts & cultural community and to expand the reach of programs across Mecklenburg County. The annual budget process has provided some funding for the areas represented in this referendum, but not enough funds to meet growing needs. Many communities across the country generate dedicated revenue generated through sales and use taxes to fund cultural programming and to ensure access to that programming. We studied those other approaches when deciding to move forward with this recommendation.

### **What happens as the County Commission membership changes over time – could future County Commissions redirect these funds for other purposes?**

There will annual reporting on the use of the sales tax proceeds to provide transparency and accountability, no matter who serves on the county commission at a given time. We expect there will be close scrutiny and transparency over the distribution of funds every year and welcome that level of engagement. In the end, the voters will be responsible for holding the commissioners, whoever they may be, responsible for maintaining the funding allocations established by this referendum.

### **What will be the role of the Arts & Science Council going forward – will ASC receive the \$22.5 million in funding?**

Under a proposal approved in a 7-1 vote of the Mecklenburg County Commission on Wednesday, September 04, 2019, the Arts and Science Council will be re-commissioned with direct appointees of elected officials from the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners and the Charlotte City Council.

The Arts and Science Council will maintain its brand, but its mission will change – where now they solicit and manage local arts, science and history programs – under the new structure, ASC will manage tax dollars directed to the organization from Mecklenburg County.

The mission of the Arts and Science Council will be dedicated to managing and directing arts, science, history and cultural grant programs on behalf of the county. The Mecklenburg County Commissioners want more transparency and accountability from the organization as they move forward.