



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

August 2, 2022

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Eric Spengler, Executive Director, Friends of Queens Park

by **Elly Clary**

A 140-acre greenspace just north of center city: Possibility or pipe dream?

Attorney Eric Spengler believes it's a possibility. He told Rotarians how he and his non-profit organization are pushing to make Queens Park a reality.

Spengler's Friends of Queens Park group has identified two sizeable parcels between North Tryon and North Brevard streets for a proposed greenspace that could be 50 percent larger than Freedom Park.

"The vision for Queens Park is two-fold," said Spengler, a partner in Charlotte's Spengler & Agans law firm. "The larger vision, which we're keeping on the back burner now, is to acquire a 110-acre railyard that's owned by Norfolk Southern."

The near-term goal involves acquisition of a 25- to 30-acre parcel on the north side of the bridge near where Matheson Avenue feeds into North Tryon Street. Excluding a few private parcels, that land is publicly owned, he said, and Mecklenburg County has budgeted significant funds to acquire park land. His organization has been in contact with Lee Jones, director of Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation.

"Our near-term goal for the next year or two is to push for this starter park," Spengler said, "while trying to keep alive the larger vision and see what happens with the railroad in a few years."

The railyard abuts the smaller parcel. It's on the other side of the Matheson Avenue bridge.

"If we're ever able to achieve the longer-term vision," Spengler said, "the two parcels could be put together into one really large, incredible park."

Either version of the proposed park plays into the Friends of Queens Park core values, he said, which are culture, community and quality of life. "For a city that's got as many great things going for it as Charlotte does," he said, "we contend that we need an iconic urban park as a public gathering space."

Joining Spengler in his presentation was Friends of Queens Park board member and architect Rugel Chiriboga, project executive and studio design leader at Gresham Smith in Charlotte. Spengler and Chiriboga explained the status of the railyard land.

Since the Charlotte Intermodal Logistics Center opened at Charlotte-Douglas International Airport, a large part of Norfolk Southern activity has moved there. The railyard that parallels North Tryon Street is mostly a parking area for trains not in use. But so far, the railway has not been willing to sell the land.

Possibilities to change that situation include working with the North Carolina Railroad Commission or seeking leverage at the federal level. Another idea is a land swap in which Norfolk Southern would acquire more real estate at the intermodal facility.

"We welcome any kind of advocacy," Spengler said. That includes exploring creative ways to engage Norfolk Southern. He encouraged visiting the queensparkclt.org website and he welcomed support on social media.

The north side of center city could grow in a different way from South End, Spengler said. "There is not a single piece of grass anywhere in South End," he said. "And there's not any affordable housing there." For the area just north of center city, he said, "we want some green space and affordable housing."

*A recording of the program is available here: <https://vimeo.com/735934970>
The speaker's presentation begins at 20:45 minutes.