

MANDATORY REFERRAL REPORT NO. 07-03
Proposed Acquisition of School Site on Steele Creek Road
(either an elementary or a middle school)

PROJECT PROPOSAL AND LOCATION:

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools proposes to purchase approximately forty (40) acres of land located in the Lower Steele Creek area to construct either an elementary school or a middle school. The property is located on the west side of the 16000 block of Steele Creek Road between Hamilton Road and the County Line. The subject property is within Charlotte's extraterritorial jurisdiction (just west of the City boundary), and is made up of four contiguous parcels, tax parcel numbers 219-091-06, 219-091-05, 219-091-04 and 219-091-03. Each parcel contains approximately ten (10) acres apiece. The parcels are currently vacant and have an R-3 Single-family Residential zoning designation, according to the Charlotte Zoning Ordinance.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION:

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools *Long Range School Facilities Master Plan* (Interim Report-2005) identifies the need to build a new elementary school in this approximate location by 2011-2012 and a new middle school by 2012-2013.

Elementary School Proposal

CMS has initiated discussions with developers of the Palisades community, whose 2001 re-zoning specified a public elementary school site in its commercial center south of York Road. While the conditional re-zoning requires this commitment from the developer, negotiations on details regarding exact boundaries, etc. are far from complete, and the possibility of agreement not being reached exists. In this event, the subject site will be used for an elementary school, with the needed middle school sited separately.

This proposed school site is approximately 3.5 miles south of Winget Park Elementary School and lies within its 2006-07 attendance area boundaries. As of the 20th day of school (2006-07), Winget Park is 103% utilized without mobile classrooms.

Lake Wylie Elementary School is also within general proximity of the subject property, lying three miles north. Lake Wylie's 2006-07 enrollment is 130% of its capacity (not including mobiles).

Overcrowding of these two elementary schools has been caused by the population growth that has occurred in this portion of the County. The construction of a new elementary school in the proposed location would serve to relieve crowding at the two identified elementary schools and provide for long-term population at the school, since the site is in proximity to existing CMS students and near areas of anticipated growth.

Middle School Proposal

In the event that discussions with the Palisades developers (related above) yield an elementary school within the boundaries of that development, the proposal is to acquire the subject site for use as a future middle school.

This proposed school site is approximately 2.5 miles south of Southwest Middle School and lies within its 2006-07 attendance boundaries. As of the 20th day of school (2006-07) Southwest Middle is 106% utilized without mobile classrooms.

Kennedy and Wilson Middle Schools are the next closest middle schools to the proposed property. Kennedy lies 6 miles north of the site and is currently 104% utilized without mobile classrooms. Wilson lies 13 miles north of the York Road/Youngblood Road site and is currently 115% utilized without mobile classrooms.

Overcrowding at Southwest, Kennedy and Wilson Middle Schools is a result of the population growth that has occurred in this portion of the County. The construction of a new middle school in the proposed location would serve to relieve overcrowding at Southwest (and to a lesser degree at Kennedy and Wilson), and provide for long-term population of a middle school at this site, since the site is in proximity to existing students and near areas of future growth.

CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED PUBLIC POLICIES:

The subject property's R-3 Residential zoning allows the development of schools under "Uses permitted under prescribed conditions" in the City of Charlotte Zoning Ordinance.

The property's 40-acre size exceeds both Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and State of North Carolina guidelines of developable acreage suggested for an elementary school site (18 acres), and middle school site (32 acres).

The property is located near several planned and under construction subdivisions. Schools are generally considered to be compatible with residential use. The integration of schools and neighborhoods is encouraged.

CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED LAND USE PLANS:

The *Southwest District Plan* (1992) shows the proposed site as single family residential. While existing schools are shown on the plan as institutional, proposed or future school sites are not mapped. The plan notes, "Planning in advance for schools will be important, particularly as appropriate sites become increasingly scarce and as land costs continue to climb. The School Facilities Master Plan...will project school needs...and will identify general locations for future schools in the Southwest District." Elementary and middle schools generally are considered to be compatible with single-family residential land use.

PROJECT IMPACT:

The property is strategically located to address future (longer term) elementary or middle school enrollment growth in this region of Mecklenburg County.

The opening of a new elementary or middle school in this area could relieve overcrowding at the above referenced schools.

Increased traffic around the school campus is expected for two 30-minute periods in the morning and evening. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools works closely with NCDOT / CDOT and the site designers to minimize this impact.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PUBLIC OR PRIVATE PROJECTS:

As the Palisades Development continues to develop and other residential projects are proposed for southwest Mecklenburg County, a new school at this site could provide for the long-term populating and has the potential to relieve overcrowding.

The site is located on Steele Creek Road, a major thoroughfare. Charlotte Department of Transportation's map of Existing and Proposed Collector Roads shows a proposed minor collector street to extend from Steele Creek Road westward to Zoar Road in the vicinity of the subject properties. Any school site plan for this site should take this future road plan into consideration. Location of a school in proximity to such a crossroads is appropriate.

ESTIMATED PROJECT COMPLETION DATE:

The elementary school is identified as needed by 2012; the middle school by 2013.

JOINT USE TASK FORCE REVIEW COMMENTS:

The Joint Use Task Force discussed this matter at their February 7, 2007 meeting. The following discussion occurred. There are no school/park joint use opportunities on land already acquired in this general vicinity and landbanked as parkland because the parkland is further southwest and beyond CMS's identified search area. However, if the decision is made to locate an elementary school at this location (as opposed to a middle school), all 40 acres will not be needed. CMS would only consider acquiring otherwise unneeded parcels, providing a potential park opportunity on the remaining acreage in the event the county wished to acquire them.

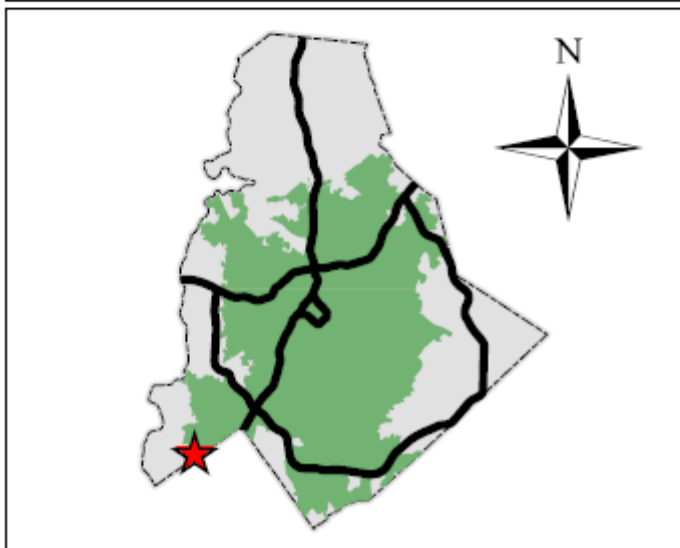
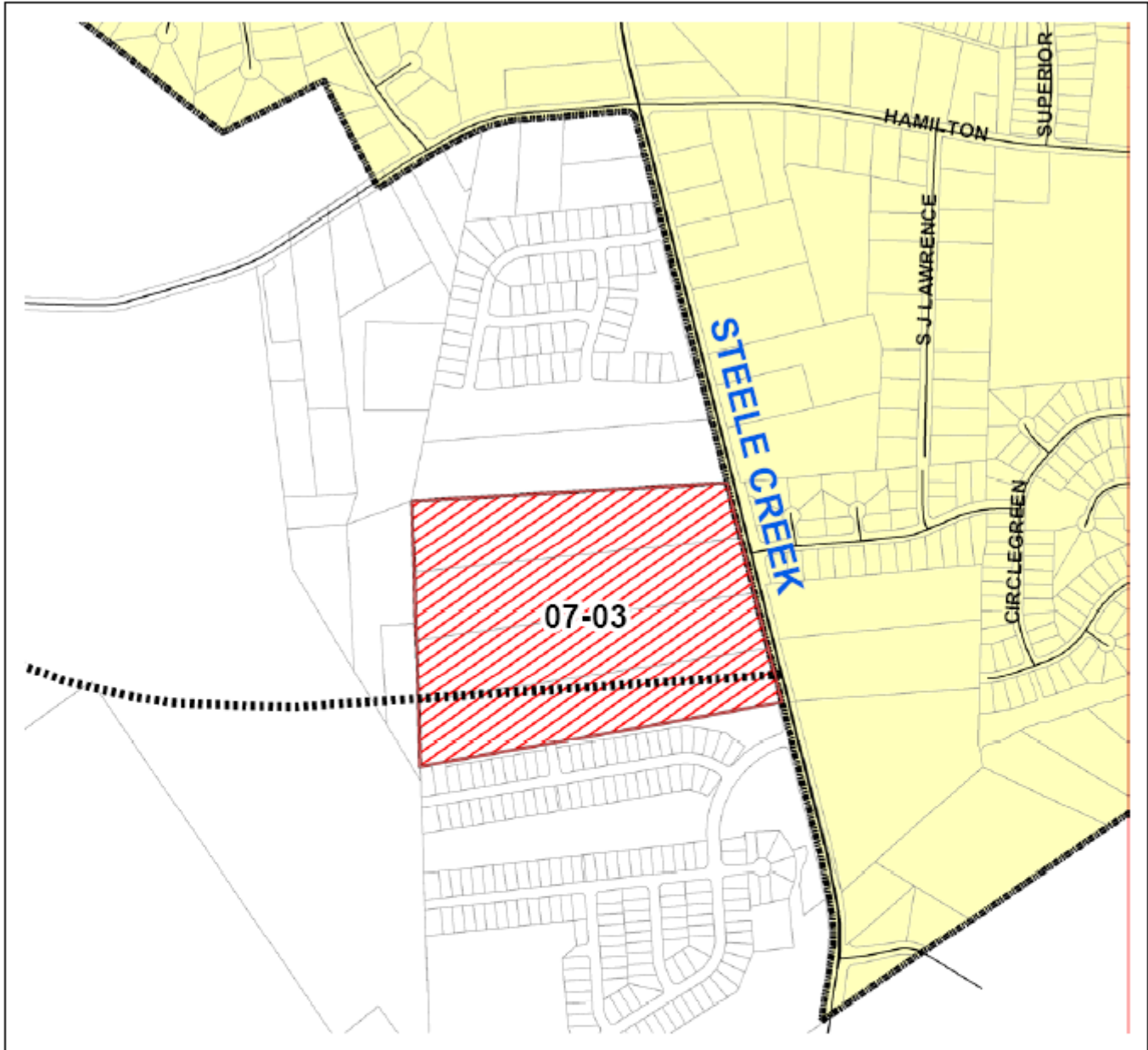
CMPC STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

The site is located very close to the South Carolina border, and hence to the edges of CMS jurisdiction, making management of attendance boundaries a challenge. Nonetheless, it is within an area of present and projected intense growth, in need of new school facilities. Land in the area suitable for school use is limited and expensive, and likely to become more so as time passes.

Planning staff recommends approval of the proposal, allowing for the contingency of purchase of all or part of the 40-acre site. The portion to be acquired should depend on the acreage needed for elementary or middle school use as other land transactions are finalized. It is further recommended that site development be coordinated with CDOT's collector roadway needs.




CMPC PLANNING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

At their February 27, 2007 meeting, the Planning Committee recommended approval subject to stated staff conditions, and to the condition that continued joint use opportunities be explored on the site, by a 6-0 vote.



Mandatory Referral 07-03

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

-  Mandatory Referral
-  Municipal Boundary
-  CDOT Proposed Minor Collector Street

