

**MANDATORY REFERRAL REPORT NO. 14-32**  
**Proposed Acquisition of Land to Expand Steven's Creek Nature Preserve in Mint Hill**

**PROJECT PROPOSAL AND LOCATION:**

This transaction is the proposed acquisition of ±64.54 acres (Tax Parcels 195-141-01, 195-141-02 and 195-141-15) located off Thompson Road in the Town of Mint Hill for expansion of the adjoining Steven's Creek Nature Preserve. The property contains a single family home and silo that will be removed. It is zoned R (Residential District) under the Town's Zoning Ordinance. South and west of the property is the existing +/- 230 acre Steven's Creek Nature Preserve. The area is largely rural with scattered residential dwellings. A portion of the site abuts Interstate 485.

**PROJECT JUSTIFICATION:**

As the County continues to develop, the opportunity to preserve the area's natural habitat and vegetation will become increasingly rare. Acquisition of this property takes steps toward achieving continuous uninterrupted property ownership for the nature preserve. Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation has found that nature preserves function better with large uninterrupted stretches of property so that plant and animal life can be maintained and protected.

As part of its adopted Capital Improvement Program, the County has approved \$7.2 million towards the design and construction of a nature center for Steven's Creek Nature Preserve in FY16. Approximately 20 acres of the property consists of open fields and another 29 acres are a former borrow pit that now supports early successional habitat including pioneer woody species. Park and Recreation has determined that this area which is closest to Thompson Road will serve as the ideal location for the future nature center and associated amenities. Locating the center here will allow Park and Recreation to preserve the more environmentally valuable land that sits to the south and west which is part of the existing nature preserve.

**CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED PUBLIC POLICIES:**

This acquisition is consistent with Mecklenburg County's adopted *2008 Park and Recreation Master Plan* in which citizens encouraged the expansion of nature preserves and the protection of the area's natural habitat and wildlife.

Development of a park at this location would require a re-zoning with a CD (Conditional) classification that would be specific to the development plans of the property for use as a nature center.

**CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED LAND USE PLANS:**

The Town of Mint Hill's *Lawyers Road and I-485 Small Area Plan* (2011) encompasses this geography and recommends medium density residential land use for the property. Consistency with the area plan is dependent upon the specifics of the land development proposal. The Plan calls for residential development to provide ample open space as an amenity for its residents and to preserve environmentally sensitive areas, which is consistent with the proposed land use as a nature center.

The Plan also calls for the disconnection of Country Woods Drive from Lawyers Road given the intersection's proximity to the I-485 interchange. The Country Woods neighborhood's alternative means of ingress/egress would be the extension of Maple Hollow Lane out to Thompson Road (which would cross the subject parcels and would have been developed as part of the land development process were this property to have been allowed to be developed residentially). The property's use as a nature preserve would therefore need to be accompanied by development of a park road access to the neighborhood through the proposed nature preserve in order to accommodate the planned closure of County Woods Drive.

The Town's Small Area Plan for this area can be viewed with the following link:

[http://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/3345838/SAP/MintHill\\_SAP\\_final.pdf](http://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/3345838/SAP/MintHill_SAP_final.pdf)

**PROJECT IMPACT:**

Acquisition of this property takes this tract out of play for future development and expands the area protected by Steven's Creek Nature Preserve.

**RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PUBLIC OR PRIVATE PROJECTS:**

This property is to be utilized as nature preserve land and the site of a future nature center. It does not affect any other known public projects in this area.

**ESTIMATED PROJECT COMPLETION DATE:**

Land acquisition is expected to be completed by late summer 2014. Design and construction for the nature center is planned for the 2016 fiscal year.

**JOINT USE TASK FORCE REVIEW COMMENTS:**

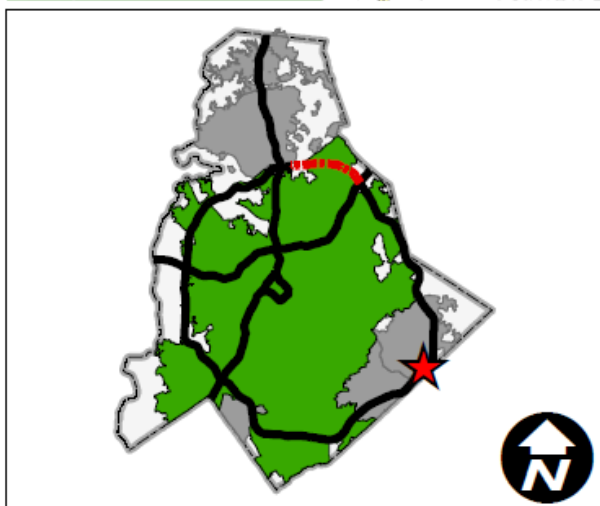
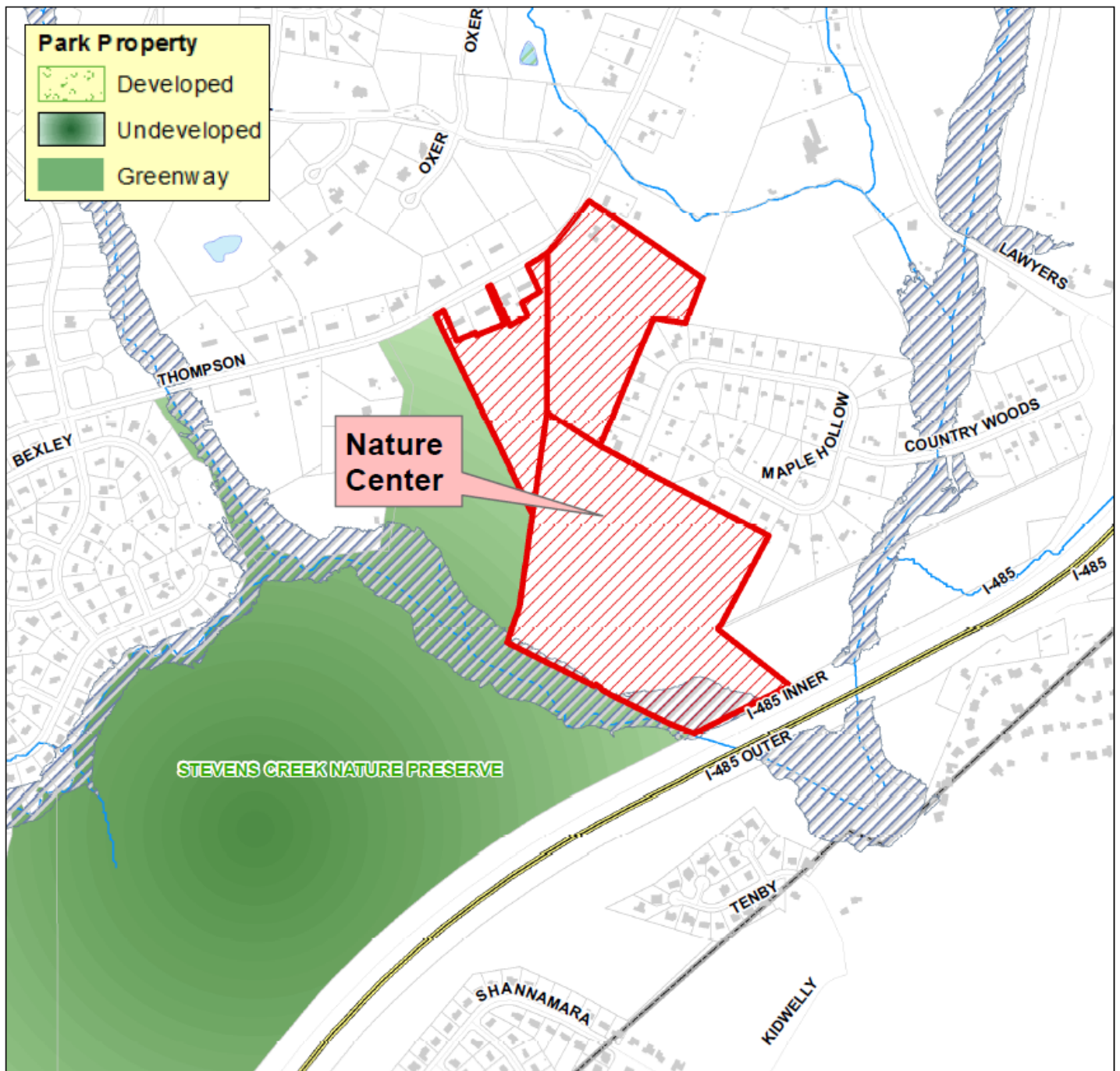
The Joint Use Task Force discussed this matter at their July 2, 2014 meeting and no joint use comments were offered, however the issue of providing connectivity between the Country Woods neighborhood and Thompson Road was discussed and both Park & Recreation and County Real Estate staffs in attendance acknowledged that an arrangement would need to be worked out with Mint Hill.

**PLANNING STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Mint Hill Planning staff reports that they support the proposed transaction and the intended land use. Planning staff therefore recommends approval of the transaction for the intended use.

**CMPC PLANNING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:**

At their July 15, 2014 meeting the Planning Committee recommended approval by a 5-0 vote.



## Mandatory Referral 14-32

Initiated by: Park & Recreation  
Submitted by: County Real Estate

- Mandatory Referral
- FEMA 100 Year Floodplain
- Interstate Highway

