

MANDATORY REFERRAL-REPORT NO. MR02-17
PURCHASE OF HOMESITE FOR THE GRIER-REA HOUSE

PROJECT PROPOSAL AND LOCATION:

Mecklenburg County wishes to purchase on behalf of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission land to be utilized to relocate the Grier-Rea House currently located at 4334 Rea Rd. that is to be displaced by retail development and is scheduled for demolition no earlier than August 12, 2002. The house is proposed to be moved approximately 300 feet northwest and across Rea Road, to a parcel from which .71 acres is proposed to be subdivided from the current 2.9 acre parcel located at 4245 Rea Road. The property (as well as an adjoining parcel) is currently used for the operation of a neighborhood nursery/landscape supply business and is Zoned B-1 (CD). All other properties east, south and west of this site are residential in both zoning and use.

Upon completion, the property and house will be stabilized, and marketed as a rehabilitation opportunity to be used a single-family residence.

The Historic Landmarks Commission is currently seeking rezoning of the subject parcel from B-1 (CD) – which supports the current nursery operation - to R-3 (CD) which is appropriate for the envisioned future residential use of the structure.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION:

The Grier-Rea house is an important and increasingly rare part of the county's rural heritage. According to Rea family lore, the house was originally built about 1804 by Reverend Isaac Grier. It is one of the few remaining rural farm homes in southern Mecklenburg County. The house in its current location promises to be lost in a current development plan for the site. The house and roughly 70.75 acres were scheduled to be designated as a Local Landmark in 1989, since in the judgment of the Historic Landmarks Commission both the house and the farmstead met the criteria for such a designation at the time. Due to owner objection, at the time, the house wasn't so designated. City Council is scheduled to consider the designation issue again on June 17, 2002. The farmstead designation straddles Rea Road and includes both the current and the proposed locations for the house. The designation report cites as one of the criteria for designation the potential archaeological value of the farmstead land.

In addition, the Historic Landmarks Commission has been notified that the Grier-Rea house is historically significant, and is eligible for National Historic Designation and listing on the Registry of National Historic Landmarks. (Note: relocation of the structure may call into question its eligibility for designation/listing)

Additional locations for the house relocation were investigated. Several available sites were identified, but due to restrictions and methods for house moving and the additional economic impact to move the house significant distances, these sites were determined to be not economically feasible.

CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED LAND USE AND PUBLIC POLICY:

This project is proposed under the terms of use of the Revolving Fund of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission. This building and the site on which it currently sits are listed together as a Designated Local Historic Landmark, as is the parcel to which the house would be relocated.

The South District plan calls for this parcel to be used for single family residential development.

PROJECT IMPACT:

The subdivision of the subject parcel (to accommodate the house move) will have some adverse impact on the current use of the property. This parcel is currently leased to the owner of an adjacent parcel who in turn leases both parcels to the nursery operator. All leases expire July 31, 2002. The owner of the parcel reportedly is attempting to minimize the impact of this proposed transaction upon the nursery operation and is in negotiations to sell the remaining portion of the parcel to the owner of the adjoining property, to enable the nursery operation to remain relatively unaffected.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PUBLIC OR PRIVATE PROJECTS:

The preservation and restoration of this house can serve to enhance the surrounding residential area. The relocation of the house will provide a heavily landscaped buffer between the existing nursery operation and the adjacent Canterbury neighborhood. Investigations by the applicant have determined that the renovated residence will have a market value comparable to the surrounding residences, based on factors such as the square footage of the house, the above average parcel size, and the attractive tax credits available for renovating and owning a designated historic landmark.

There are no identified degradations to public or private projects in close proximity to the property.

This plan is subject to the approval of subdivision, and of a rezoning (Petition #2002-61) for which the Historic Landmarks Commission has applied. (The rezoning has a valid protest petition filed as of June 11, 2002, reportedly by nearby property

owners concerned with the petition's impact upon the nursery enterprise, and concerned with negative visual impacts created by the house prior to its restoration.) The public hearing on the rezoning is scheduled for June 17, 2002.

ESTIMATED PROJECT COMPLETION DATE:

Funding for this project is available through 1999 Historic Preservation Bond Funds. The anticipated completion date for the house relocation and stabilization is May 2003.

JOINT USE TASK FORCE REVIEW COMMENTS:

The Joint Use Task Force reviewed this proposal at their June 5, 2002 meeting, and determined no joint use opportunities to exist.

CMPC STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

The proposed relocation of the house calls into question the continued landmark designation of the part of the farmstead where the house currently sits, because the loss of the house from its current site (either by relocation or demolition) along with the development of the site upon which the house now sits would eliminate the archaeological potential of the site, leading to potential de-listing of the site as a local landmark. Still, public intervention to save the house, via relocation, is considered to be far superior than the loss of both the historic site (via redevelopment) as well as the historic structure (via demolition).

Inasmuch as it appears that there is no reasonable means of preserving and restoring the structure in its current location, staff recommends approval of the request, subject to the following conditions:

That the Historic Landmarks Commission secures necessary rezoning to enable the structure to be restored and used as a residential property

That the Historic Landmarks Commission secures necessary subdivision approval to create the .71-acre redevelopment parcel upon which to move the structure,

That the Historic Landmarks Commission determines to what degree the relocation may affect eligibility for National Historic Designation and/or listing on the Registry of National Historic Landmarks, and in turn the eligibility of the project to receive preferential funding considerations (i.e. tax credits) which may be central to the successful restoration of the property, and

That the Historic Landmarks Commission works with the developers of the property located at 4334 Rea Road (current location of the house) and other appropriate parties to ensure that reasonable measures are taken to secure, protect, or remove any artifacts which may remain on the property in conjunction with redevelopment.

CMPC PLANNING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Planning Committee voted to approve the staff recommendation by a vote of 6-0 at their June 18, 2002 meeting.

Mandatory Referral: MR02-17

