

**MANDATORY REFERRAL-REPORT NO. 02-33**  
**ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY FOR AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN THE HIGHLAND CREEK AREA**

**PROJECT PROPOSAL AND LOCATION:** Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools proposes to purchase 18 acres for an elementary school in Northeast Charlotte in the Highland Creek area. The site includes parcels 029-472-03, 04 and a portion of parcels 029-472-01 and 02. It is located between Highland Creek Parkway and Ridge Road, on the corner of Maple Drive and Street Avenue. The parcels are zoned R3 with a single family residential home located on parcel 029-472-03. The majority of the remaining area is zoned R3.

**PROJECT JUSTIFICATION:** The site is located in the North Search Zone as identified on the School Facilities Master Plan 2001/02-2010/11. The Master Plan projected a need for ten new elementary schools in the North Search Zone within the 2010/11 planning timeframe. This need is based upon projected student growth, as well as other issues related to school capacity needs. Sites in the entire northern portion of the county were considered based on the growth projections from the Master Plan.

The site lies within the 2002/03 Blythe home school boundary (area east of I-77). Blythe Elementary School is approximately 4.1 miles west of proposed site and is currently 115% utilized requiring the use of seven mobile classrooms. Mallard Creek Elementary School is also within close proximity to the prospective property, lying three miles south of the parcel. This elementary school is 97% utilized requiring the use of one mobile classroom. David Cox Elementary School is 3.6 miles to the southwest of this site. It is 124% utilized requiring the use of eight mobile classrooms.

In summary, the construction of a new elementary school in this location would have the potential to relieve overcrowding at Blythe, David Cox and/or Mallard Creek Elementary Schools. The proposed property is located near existing densities of CMS elementary school students, as well as near areas of future growth, thus providing for the long-term population of a school at this site.

**CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED LAND USE PLANS AND PUBLIC POLICY:** The proposed school site has a R3 zoning classification, which permits elementary schools under prescribed conditions. Its size meets both CMS and state guidelines of developable acres for an 800-student elementary school. CMS will purchase 16 acres and the remaining 2 acres will be assembled from road abandonment and homeowner association property.

From a land use perspective, Northeast District Plan recommends low density (4 DUA) residential development on these parcels and does not recommend specific school locations. However, the plan does recognize the need to plan in advance for schools and encourages the integration of schools in neighborhoods so that they can be accessed easily by the surrounding neighborhood. In addition, school uses are generally considered to be compatible with residential uses and the integration of schools and neighborhoods is encouraged.

**PROJECT IMPACT:** Highland Creek is one of the largest residential developments in Mecklenburg County approved during the last few years. This site could potentially create a safe walk zone with direct connectivity into the surrounding residential neighborhoods. CMS proposes to work with its traffic consultant, the Highland Creek development group, the homeowners association and CDOT in providing pedestrian and vehicular access to and around the site. However, at two points in the day for about 20 minutes there will be additional traffic generated by the school.

The school has the potential to be an asset to the community if it is designed to integrate the surrounding neighborhood. It is imperative that the site be designed to recognize its relationship to the neighborhood and to encourage multi-modal access – pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle. Safe pedestrian and bicycle access from the surrounding neighborhood is of primary importance. However, as part of the subdivision permitting process for Highland Creek, a “strip” of common open space was dedicated between the site and Highland Creek Parkway. The City of Charlotte Zoning Ordinance requires that schools have access from a collector, which in this case would be Highland Creek Parkway (as opposed to Maple Drive or Street Avenue upon which these parcels have frontage) In order for this site to be developed as a school site, access to Highland Creek Parkway would need to be made through acquisition, by CMS, of a portion of the dedicated common open space, which would then need to serve as the “front door” of the school site.

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

- There is interest by the Library to co-locate in this area plans have not been finalized although it appears the location would be a good fit for both agencies.
- Fire Station #31 has recently been constructed along Shelley Avenue near this site.

**ESTIMATED PROJECT COMPLETION DATE:** The site would be purchased with 1999 Land Banking funds, and construction would be considered under a future Bond. Estimated cost, developed in conjunction with CMS Capital Needs Assessment process is approximately 13.5 million dollars including construction, furnishings and equipment, design and project management.

**JOINT USE TASK FORCE REVIEW COMMENTS:** At its October 2, 2002 meeting, the Joint Use Task Force discussed this matter, and the prospect of the libraries locating on an adjoining parcel was identified as a possibility, although the library system is evaluating multiple locational possibilities at this time.

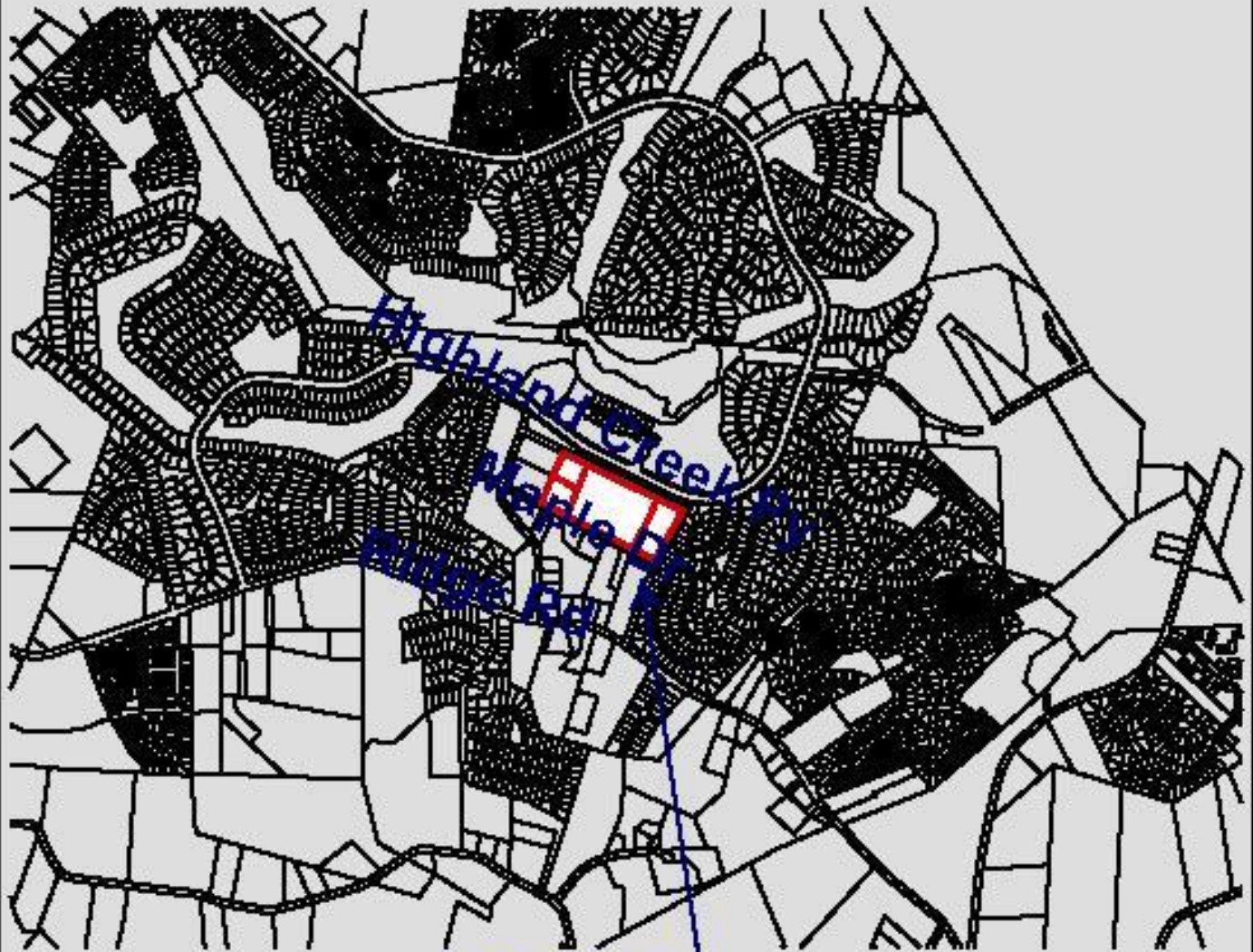
**CMPC STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends approval of the CMS proposal to acquire this site for an elementary school, conditioned upon the following:

The school district must successfully negotiate acquisition of roadway frontage upon Highland Creek Parkway such that the “front door” of the school is on Highland Creek Parkway.

The school district must commit to a site design which would maximize bicycle/pedestrian and vehicular connectivity between the site and the adjoining residential neighborhoods, most notably with connection to Highland Creek Parkway.

**CMPC PLANNING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:** At its October 15, 2002 meeting, the Planning Committee recommended approval by a 6-0 vote.

# Mandatory Referral: MR02-33



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