

MANDATORY REFERRAL-REPORT NO. 04-11
Acquisition of Property for a Middle School in the Highland Creek Area

PROJECT PROPOSAL AND LOCATION:

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools proposes to purchase 28 acres for a middle school in northeast Charlotte in the Highland Creek area. The site includes parcels 029-471-01 through 17 and parcel 029-281-09. It is located between Maple Drive and Ridge Road. The parcels are zoned R3 with a single family residential home located on several parcels. The majority of the remaining area is zoned R3.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION:

The proposed Ridge Road middle school site is approximately 4.1 miles east of Alexander Middle School and lies within the 2003/04 Alexander home school boundary. Alexander Middle School is currently 154% utilized without mobile classrooms.

Martin Middle School is also within close proximity to the proposed property, lying 5.3 miles south of the Ridge Road site. Martin Middle School is currently 122% utilized without mobile classrooms.

The construction of a new middle school in the northeastern portion of the district would have the potential to relieve overcrowding at Alexander and/or Martin Middle Schools. The proposed property is centered near existing densities of CMS middle school students, as well as near areas of future growth, thus providing for the long-term populating of a school at this site.

CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED PUBLIC POLICIES:

The site is located in the northeastern Mecklenburg County target area as identified on the Long-Range School Facilities Master Plan 2003/04—2012/13. The Master Plan projected a need for one new middle school in this target area within the 10-year planning horizon as identified by the Capital Needs Assessment. This need is based upon projected student growth, as well as overcrowding at existing middle schools in this area.

CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED LAND USE PLANS:

The proposed school site has a R3 zoning classification, which permits middle schools under prescribed conditions. Its size meets both CMS and state guidelines of developable acres for a 1200-student middle school.

From a land use perspective, Northeast District Plan recommends low-density (4 dwelling units per acre) 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.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PUBLIC OR PRIVATE PROJECTS:

An elementary school is planned for a site across Maple Drive, and there is interest by the Library System to co-locate in this area. Co-location 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 the CMS Capital Needs Assessment process, is approximately 24.7 million dollars including construction, furnishings and equipment, design and project management.

JOINT USE TASK FORCE REVIEW COMMENTS:

The Joint Use Task Force discussed this matter at its April 7, 2004 meeting and the following points were made. This site (and the adjoining "Highland Creek elementary" site) have significant joint use opportunities with parks and libraries already discussing design and operational aspects. In addition, about two acres of nearby surplus land left over after the construction of a fire station should be considered as an addition to this campus.

CMPC STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the CMS proposal to acquire this site for a middle school, conditioned upon the school

district undertaking site design that maximizes multi-modal connectivity between the site and adjoining residential neighborhoods.

CMPC PLANNING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

At their April 20, 2004 meeting, the Planning Committee recommended approval by a 7-0 vote.

Staff Resource: Kathy Cornett

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