

**MANDATORY REFERRAL-REPORT NO. 04-20**  
**Long-term Ground Lease to Afro-American Cultural Center**

**PROJECT PROPOSAL AND LOCATION:**

The Afro-American Cultural Center (AACC), located at 401 N. Myers Street in First Ward in Charlotte, is requesting a long-term ground lease from the City to expand their existing facility. The subject property (i.d. 080-104-02) is owned by the City and is adjacent to the AACC facility. The property consists of 1.1 acres and is bounded by Alexander Street, Parkside Terrace Lane, and East 7<sup>th</sup> Street. The property contains two historic "shotgun" style houses, and a portion of the AACC's parking lot. An aerial picture (attached) shows the existing Cultural facility and the land being requested from the City of Charlotte.

The proposed ground lease would be contingent upon the AACC receiving authorization and funding approval for an expansion program by the Arts and Science Council (ASC) and City Council – two major funding sources for capital improvements. The proposed capital project includes renovations of the current 11,000 square foot facility, and the construction of an additional 45,000 square foot facility, the latter to be situated on the subject property. The new Afro-American arts and cultural center complex would include gallery space, artists' studios, dance and music rehearsal space, office, library/archive and genealogical research area, meeting rooms, and storage space. The property is zoned UR-2.

**PROJECT JUSTIFICATION:**

The existing Cultural Center building is too small and cannot function properly under its current situation. The exhibit space currently has less than 3,000 square feet. The plan is to have 10,400 square feet of exhibit space among three Exhibit Galleries. In addition, there are also needs for climate-controlled spaces for exhibiting master works; space for children's hands-on workshops; meeting spaces that do not disrupt gallery activity; an area to display local historical papers, photographs, books and memorabilia; and additional office and storage space (the office space is extremely limited and has poor lighting and poor heating and cooling). There is also no provision for storage space in the current facility which also is experiencing serious technology limitations and ADA compliance issues.

Given the limiting factors to the existing facility, the AACC is having a difficult time attracting quality works of art and other artifacts that would draw patrons to the facility. Without the improvements, the other programs and activities cannot grow to their full potential and become a destination spot for tourists and an active center for Charlotte citizens.

**CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED PUBLIC POLICIES:**

No applicable public policies have been identified.

**CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED LAND USE PLANS:**

The *First Ward Master Plan* (1997) envisions the property as residential or mixed use. Density in the Parkside District of which the site is a part is to transition from eight units per acre and three stories in height along 9th Street, to 24 units per acre and six stories along 7th Street. The proposed institutional and cultural use of the property is generally in keeping with the mixed use envisioned in the plan, but will necessitate careful site design to maintain compatibility with residential uses existing or proposed on three sides. It should be noted that all properties sold by the City within the First Ward redevelopment area have been sold subject to design guidelines.

**PROJECT IMPACT:**

The City of Charlotte does not have any specific plans for the subject property, which is the only other parcel on the small City block where the AACC resides. The AACC is currently occupying nearly half of the subject property with its parking and the historical "shotgun house" exhibits.

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

The subject property is located within the larger First Ward area, a largely residential mixed-use project that has been underway for a number of years.

The ASC has submitted a list of funding requests to the City totaling \$88 million. The ground lease and other monetary requests for the AACC are included in the ASC's master list. A task force comprised of four City Council members and six community members (including representatives of the ASC) were appointed by the Mayor to evaluate the identified facility needs of all of the cultural facilities contained within the ASC's Cultural Facilities Master Plan. Depending upon the outcome of this task force's recommendation for appropriating funds for those cultural facilities, the City will be in a better position to determine if the ground lease should be executed with the AACC at that time.

**ESTIMATED PROJECT COMPLETION DATE:**

Contingent upon funding, construction could begin in Winter 2005 with project completion by Winter 2008.

**JOINT USE TASK FORCE REVIEW COMMENTS:**

The Joint Use Task Force reviewed this proposal at their September 1, 2004 meeting and there were no specific joint use opportunities identified, although it was noted that the completed facility could have joint use opportunities with other nearby public facilities and programs, most notably First Ward Elementary School.

**CMPC STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

The proposed use is in keeping with the mixed-use recommendations of the *First Ward Master Plan*, provided that site design is compatible with surrounding residential uses. The proposed cultural use is permitted under existing zoning some limited prescribed conditions. Placement of this use in an area surrounded by residential uses should require additional design and use conditions to be placed on any lease of the property.

The proposed lease is recommended, subject to (1) design conditions to be placed upon development of the property, and (2) restrictions upon future changes in use or development of the property.

Specifically, the design conditions should address issues such as:

- § Building scale and placement on the site
- § Entrance locations
- § Parking and loading dock locations and access points
- § Appropriate design to complement and enhance the existing facility, which is listed by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission as a local landmark
- § Appropriate treatment of the Shotgun Houses, also listed by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission as local landmarks
- § compatibility with existing and proposed residential development (especially the single-family homes fronting on Parkside Terrace Lane)

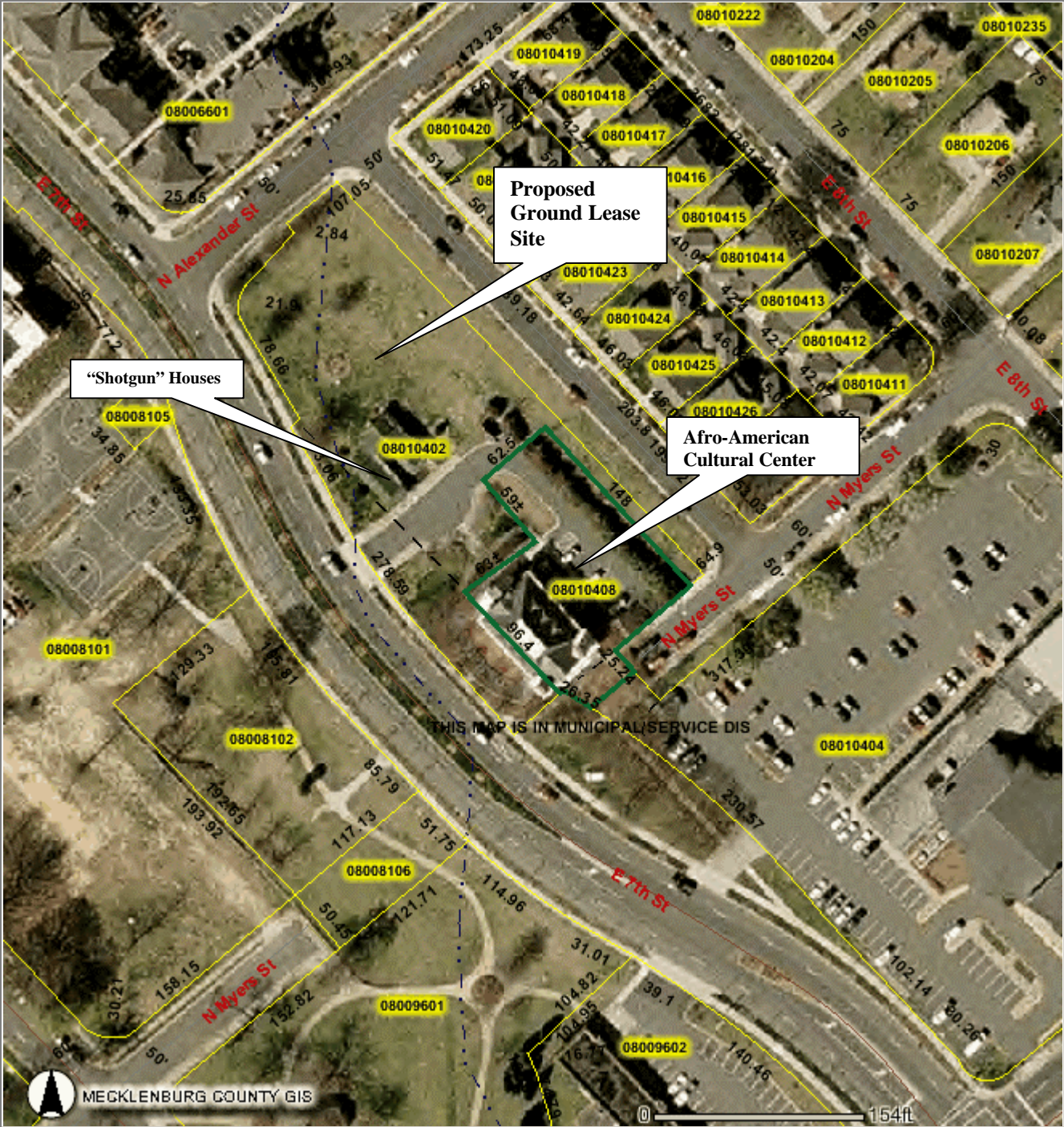
The conditions should be in the form of design guidelines, specific restrictions on future land use changes, and authority to review and approve the site plan, and should be included as an element of any lease of the subject property.

**CMPC PLANNING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:**

At their September 21, 2004 meeting, the Planning Committee recommended lease of the property for the stated purpose, subject to the conditions suggested in the staff recommendation, by a 7-0 vote.

Staff resource: Kent Main

# AACC Site





# MR 04-20

