

**MANDATORY REFERRAL REPORT NO. 04-26**  
**Proposed Land Exchange – Robbins Tract at West Catawba Avenue in Cornelius**

**PROJECT PROPOSAL AND LOCATION:**

It is proposed to exchange a portion of a 100-acre Mecklenburg County-owned parcel (Robbins Tract) with a developer. The County-owned property is Parcel # 005-071-12 (101.698 acres), and the privately owned property (the "Westmoreland property") is Parcel # 005-071-11 (74.856 acres).

Both properties are located on West Catawba Avenue within the Cornelius extraterritorial jurisdiction. Both tracts are currently undeveloped with the exception of two single-family houses (one on each parcel) and outbuildings. The County currently has an agreement with the Town of Cornelius to develop a District Park on 50 acres of the Robbins Tract. Another 50 acres of the Robbins Tract is protected under a conservation easement and for watershed protection.

The Westmoreland property is optioned to a developer who initially planned to construct a single-family subdivision upon it. The proposed land exchange would rearrange the land uses within the combined +/-175 acres to better utilize the property for residential, recreational, and conservation purposes. Approximately the same number of dwelling units will be constructed under the land exchange scenario as were previously proposed for development on the Westmoreland property. Specific unit locations will be determined upon completion of an overall master plan, that will be finalized with approval of the land exchange.

The net result will be that the County will maintain +/- 116 acres for future park development (as opposed to the current 101-acre tract), broken down as follows: 50 acres of natural area, 50 acres active park and 16 acres of greenway on McDowell Creek. Since the County has leased 50 acres of this land to the Town of Cornelius for a District Park, the town will fund the park's development.

A conservation easement protects 50 acres that will be preserved as a natural area and for watershed protection. The small stream flowing into McDowell Creek and a section of McDowell Creek and its floodplain are included in this natural area.

**PROJECT JUSTIFICATION:**

Planning staff from the Town of Cornelius proposed the "rearrangement of uses to create a more suitable relationship" between housing, traffic (ingress/egress at West Catawba Avenue) and other land uses in the immediate area.

The proposal to exchange the properties slightly increases the amount of public park area and does not infringe on the portion of the property within the established 50-acre conservation easement. The same amount of acreage will be available for the town to develop as an active park as with the current agreement for the Robbins tract.

**CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED PUBLIC POLICIES:**

The Cornelius planning and park staff as well as the Mecklenburg County park staff have worked together to create the proposed reconfiguration of the property.

**CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED LAND USE PLANS:**

The Cornelius 1999 Land Use Plan calls for low density and mixed use residential and open space preservation, which is considered to be consistent with the proposed development scheme.

**PROJECT IMPACT:**

The Cornelius planning staff feels this proposed reconfiguration will work better in managing traffic issues at West Catawba Avenue. Essentially the same amount of residential development would occur with the exchange; a net increase in park/open space area would result from the exchange.

This area is in the Mountain Island Watershed where the watershed regulations will apply. The town has permitted around 35-40% coverage on more recent developments. The project will also increase control over environmentally sensitive areas within the McDowell Creek basin.

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

Public recreation has been the only proposed use for the Robbins tract prior to this exchange proposal. Public accessibility to 1,200 linear feet of greenway will be ensured, as well as enhanced park access for surrounding residents of Alexander Chase, Birkdale Village and adjacent neighborhoods.

The increase in connectivity and improved options for traffic management including vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle mobility will also have a positive relationship with surrounding projects.

The plan also has the potential to increase public/private partnerships with the planned youth "Sportsplex" complex that is immediately to the north of the Westmoreland property. These privately-developed athletic facilities could be managed to serve as an extension of the proposed County park.

**ESTIMATED PROJECT COMPLETION DATE:**

The date of park development by Town of Cornelius is currently unknown. (The Robbins Tract was acquired with 1999 Land Bonds.)

**JOINT USE TASK FORCE REVIEW COMMENTS:**

There have been preliminary discussions with CMS concerning the possibility of an elementary school at this location. However, there may be difficulties accommodating a school, the proposed private development, and the watershed protection area. The school district could economize on land requirements by contracting with the owner of the adjoining private ball fields to enable exterior play space required by the school to be accommodated on this private property.

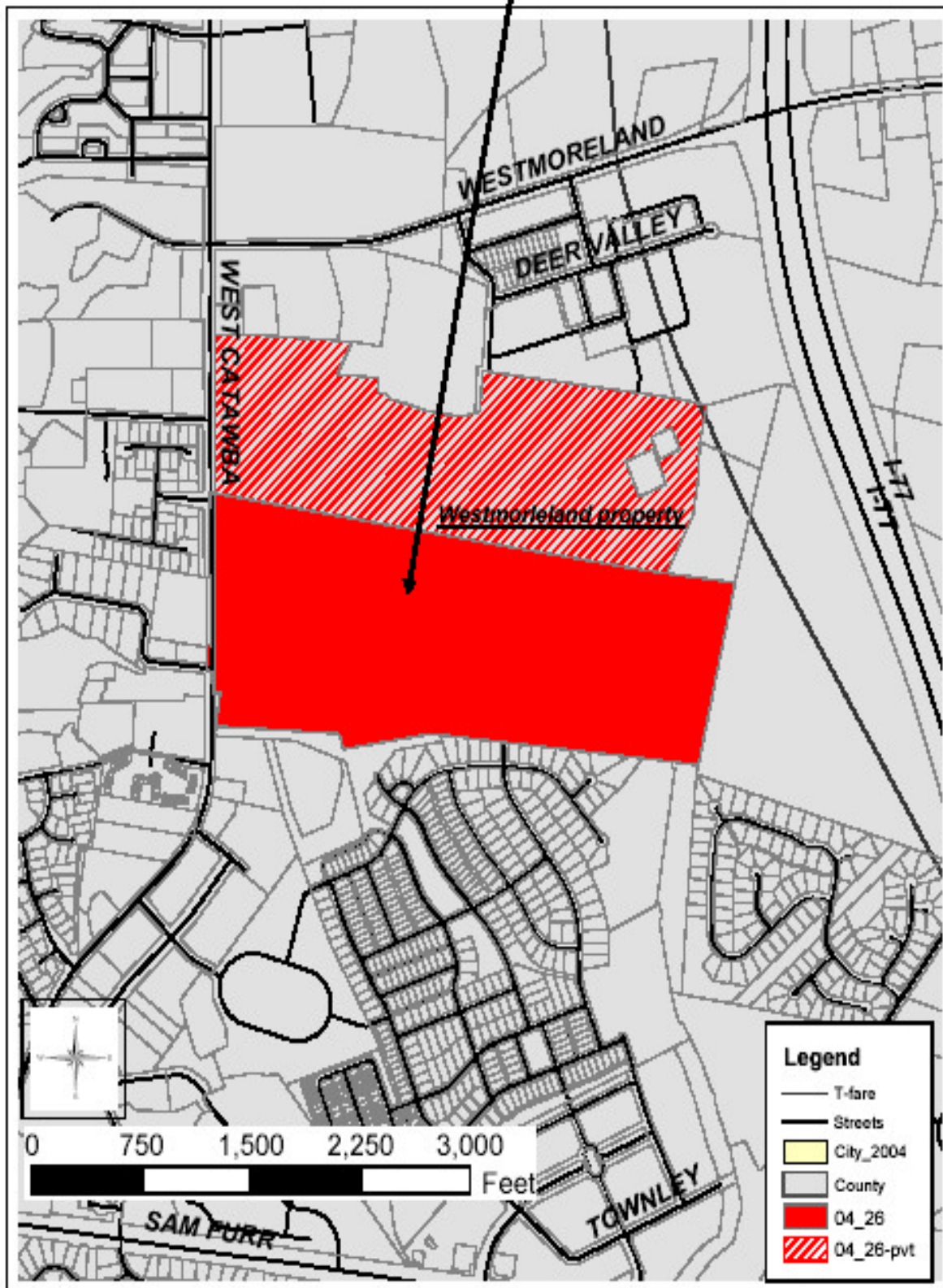
**CMPC STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Planning staff supports recommends approval of this proposed land exchange to accommodate the proposed land uses.

**CMPC PLANNING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:**

At their November 16, 2004 meeting, the Planning Committee voted 7-0 to recommend approval of the proposed real estate transaction for the purpose stated on the application.

# MR 04-26





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November 5, 2004

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Mayor Pro Tem:

SUSAN A. MEDLIN

Council Members:

JAMES BENSMAN

HANK KAHN

THURMAN ROSS

THOM TILLIS

Town Manager:

ANTHONY ROBERTS

Mr. Greg R. Burnham, AICP  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission  
600 East Fourth Street  
Charlotte, North Carolina 28202

Dear Mr. Burnham:

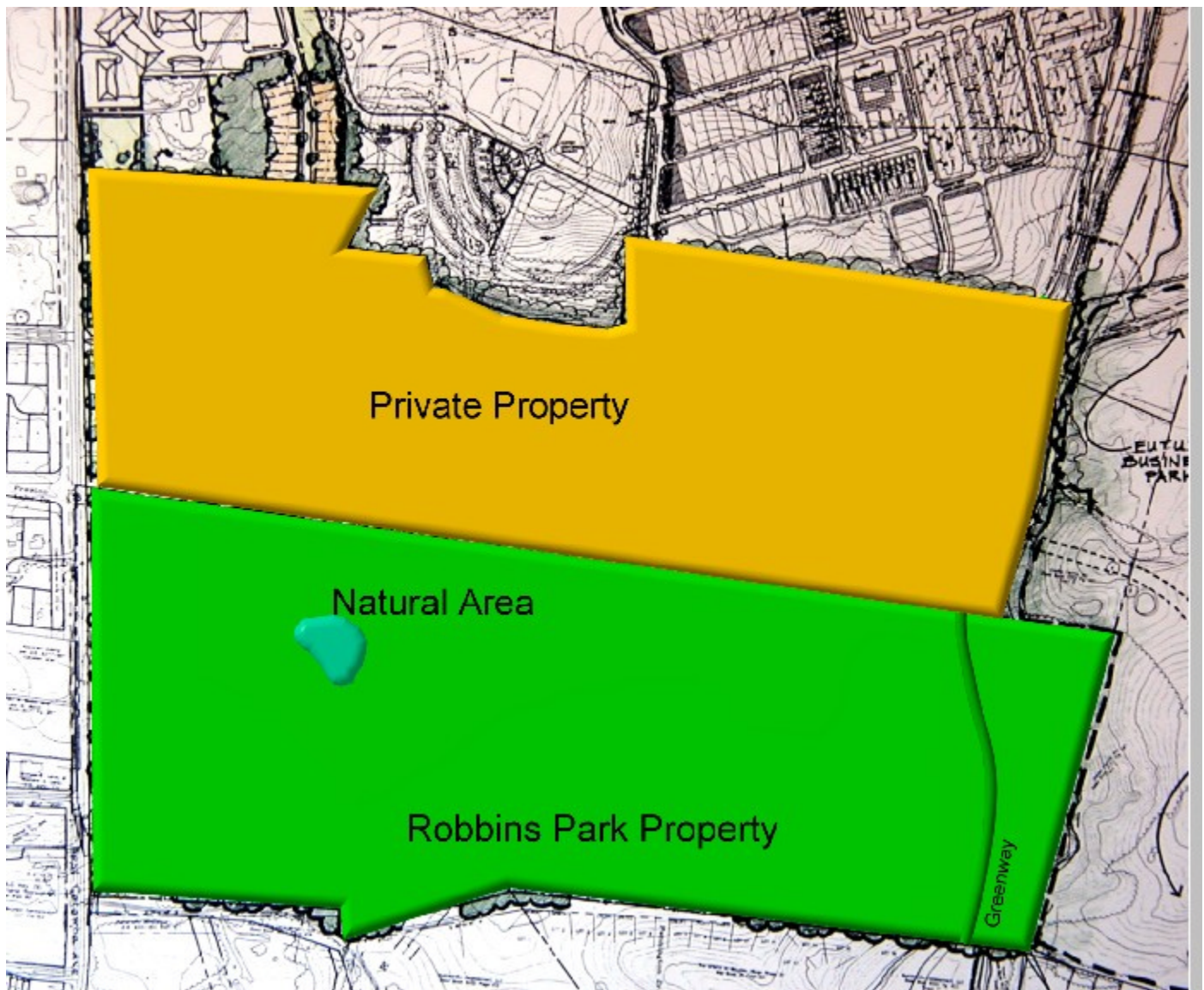
I am writing to assure you of our enthusiastic support for the proposed land exchange at Robbins Park. In 2001 Robbins Park, located in Cornelius, was purchased as a high priority by Mecklenburg County to protect environmentally-sensitive McDowell Creek watershed. In 2002 the Town of Cornelius and Mecklenburg entered into an InterLocal Agreement to lease the property for a period of 50 years. The Town agreed to develop and operate the Park with all improvements being approved by Mecklenburg County in advance. During this time, the Town has negotiated an agreement with a private developer to assist in construction of the Park, increasing park acreage and enhancing greenway/watershed protection. This agreement creates many opportunities such as public/private funding that will accelerate the development of the park. Over sixteen (16) acres of park land will be added increasing public management of fragile watershed resources. The realignment of the park boundaries provides greater access to potential public/private partnerships with a planned youth "Sportsplex." Over 1200 feet of greenway will be added that is publicly accessible. Surrounding residents of Alexander Chase, Birkdale Village and adjacent residential developments will have greater access into and out of the park. Increased connectivity and improved options for traffic management and transportation mobility will enhance connectivity.

We highly recommend approval of this land exchange as a win/win opportunity for the residents of Cornelius and surrounding communities.

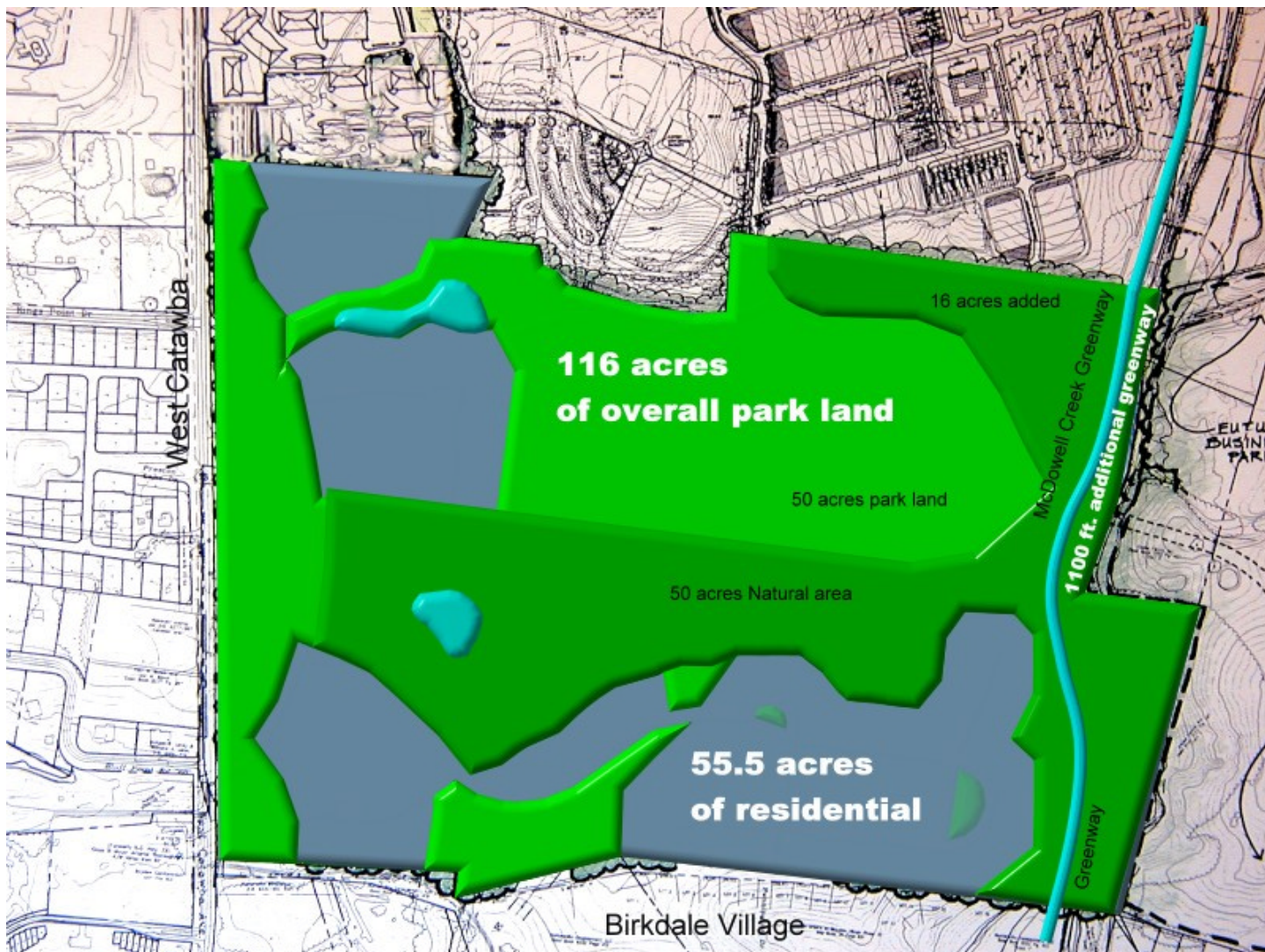
Sincerely,

Gary T. Knox  
Mayor





Current



Proposed