

MANDATORY REFERRAL-REPORT NO. 08-07
Proposed Lease and Joint Use of City-Owned Property at Alexander Street

PROJECT PROPOSAL AND LOCATION:

The City of Charlotte proposes joint use between the Charlotte Area transit System (CATS) and Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation (P&R), of a City-owned parcel for CATS expansion (administrative/operations space) and park expansion and ballfield construction. The property, the site of the former Alexander Street Recreation Center, is located at 910 N. Alexander Street (PID 081-086-07), across the street from the existing CATS facility at 12th Street and N. Alexander Street, and north of (and adjacent to) Mecklenburg County's Alexander Park. The total area of the property is approximately 3.65 acres and is zoned O-2 (Office). The City of Charlotte proposes to retain ownership of the property.

A third partner in this transaction is Trinity Episcopal School (TES), located at 750 E. 9th St., few blocks away from the subject property, who desires expanded outdoor recreational opportunities for its students.

The proposal calls for the construction of a 15,000 square foot administration/operations building to accommodate CATS Special Transportation Services personnel at the northernmost corner of the site, and development of the remainder of the property by P&R to include a baseball field with bleachers and restroom facilities for use by TES during school hours, and by the public at other times. The portion of the property to be developed by P&R will be leased to them by the City. P&R will be responsible for operation, management, and maintenance of the recreational portion of the property.

In order to accommodate the parking needs of the CATS facility across Alexander Street, CATS also proposes the construction of a parking deck on its property adjacent to the subject property. The current proposal includes a three level deck with 319 parking spaces, with approximately 50 spaces open to the public for parking in relation to park use with the remainder of the deck available for CATS employees only via card-access. (Details of the parking deck such as its configuration and size are subject to change). CATS is proposing to construct a maintenance facility for STS buses on the surface parking lot on Linden Lane. The proposed parking structure will replace the spaces lost to construction of the maintenance shop.

Better than half the site lies within a FEMA-designated flood zone, and the redevelopment scheme represents an opportunity to utilize property that would otherwise have limited uses.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION:

P&R has been working with the Charlotte Housing Authority (CHA) and TES to expand the nearby Alexander Street Park that will include a segment of Little Sugar Creek greenway, six lighted tennis courts, and a soccer field. P&R plans on relocating the existing playground equipment, shelter, and basketball court to the Seigle Point (redeveloped Piedmont Court property) side of Little Sugar Creek to make room for the soccer field. P&R is leasing a portion of Seigle Point from CHA for this change, with CHA constructing two half-court basketball courts between the proposed tennis courts and the new playground location. TES is also providing capital contributions to fund a portion of the construction.

This scheme will also enable P&R to construct a pedestrian link between the Little Sugar Creek greenway and the McGill Rose Garden, located at 940 North Davidson Street.

CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED PUBLIC POLICIES:

This proposal is consistent with City Council's Housing and Neighborhood Development focus area whose emphasis is on "Creating great neighborhoods in which to live, work and play." This proposal also supports the focus on the environment as creating playing fields on this property rather than surface parking preserves green open space in what could be considered an environmentally sensitive area as it is near Little Sugar Creek and because it will be a point along the County's Greenway system.

Additionally, it is likely that dimensional variances will be needed to minimize setbacks of the proposed parking structure along N. Alexander Street.

CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED LAND USE PLANS:

The *Belmont Area Revitalization Plan* (2003) recommends open space as the future land use on PID's 08108607, 08108608, 08108501, 08108604 and a small portion of 08108601 due to the FEMA and Community floodplains. Therefore, the plan to develop recreational facilities is consistent with the plan, but the plan to build CATS facilities on this parcel is inconsistent with the adopted plan.

PROJECT IMPACT:

CATS had initially expressed interest in developing this entire parcel for its STS operations, but further evaluation revealed the operation could only be accommodated with structured parking, and that locating the administrative building

on the site (with structured parking and maintenance shop on nearby CATS property) offered a superior overall solution inasmuch as it could also meet several recreational needs of the area.

Recreational impacts include enhancing opportunities for future residents of Seigle Point, supporting expansion of the Little Sugar Creek Greenway, and supporting the athletic program at TES.

The proposal will increase pedestrian traffic between the site and TES during school hours, and from neighboring residential areas using the park. When the site hosts team sports, increased vehicular traffic could be expected. These site visitors will have access to the proposed CATS parking structure.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PUBLIC OR PRIVATE PROJECTS:

Other City projects planned for this area that would tie nicely to this proposal include the Belmont Gateways and Seigle Avenue Streetscape projects. P&R is also working with Charlotte Department of Transportation and Charlotte Engineering & Property Management for pedestrian improvements at the intersection of 10th and 12th Streets to bring additional aesthetic appeal to the area.

ESTIMATED PROJECT COMPLETION DATE:

Tennis court construction is expected for late summer, 2008, with soccer fields in spring 2009 and baseball field in summer 2009.

JOINT USE TASK FORCE REVIEW COMMENTS:

The Joint Use Task Force discussed this matter at their May 7, 2008 meeting. Extensive discussion ensued with personnel from P&R, CATS, and TES in attendance. CATS expressed concern with proceeding with the current arrangement inasmuch as (1) structure parking would require greater capital commitments than would alternatives involving the development of surface parking, and (2) a more thorough evaluation of CATS' future facilities needs in this area would be required prior to CATS achieving a reasonable comfort level with the proposed land use of the subject parcel. However, CATS could not commit to a specific timeframe within which such an evaluation could be conducted.

PLANNING STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Planning Staff recommends deferral of this Mandatory Referral until CATS provides (1) a timeframe within which a space assessment can be conducted, and (2) a plan and schedule for the manner in which their future space needs may be accommodated on (and in the vicinity of) the site. Planning staff further recommends that if the decision is made to develop this site for uses other than that prescribed in the *Belmont Area Revitalization Plan*, (open space) that a Plan Amendment process be considered as a pre-requisite.

CMPC PLANNING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

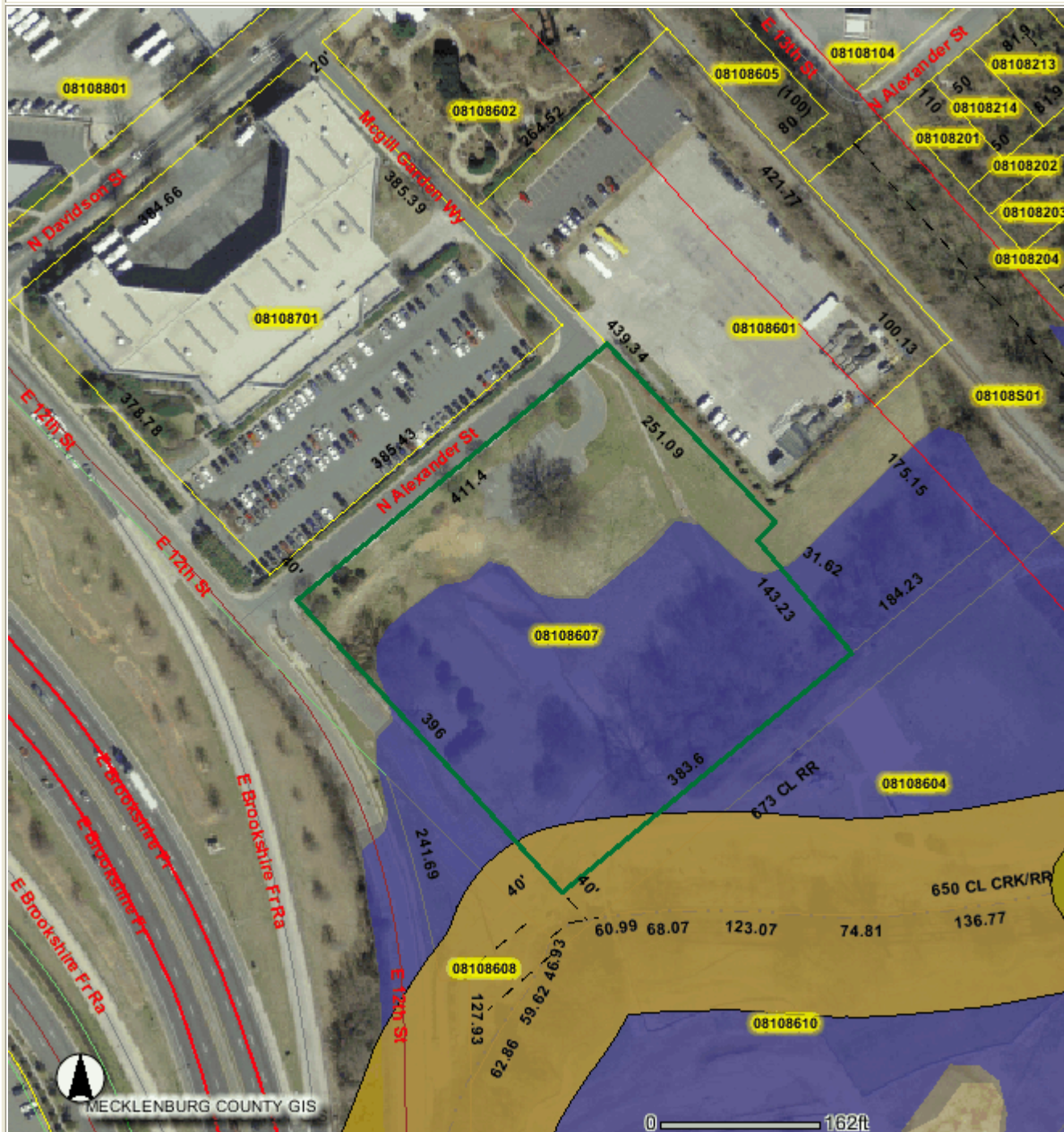
This MR was deferred and re-submitted as MR09-06

Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

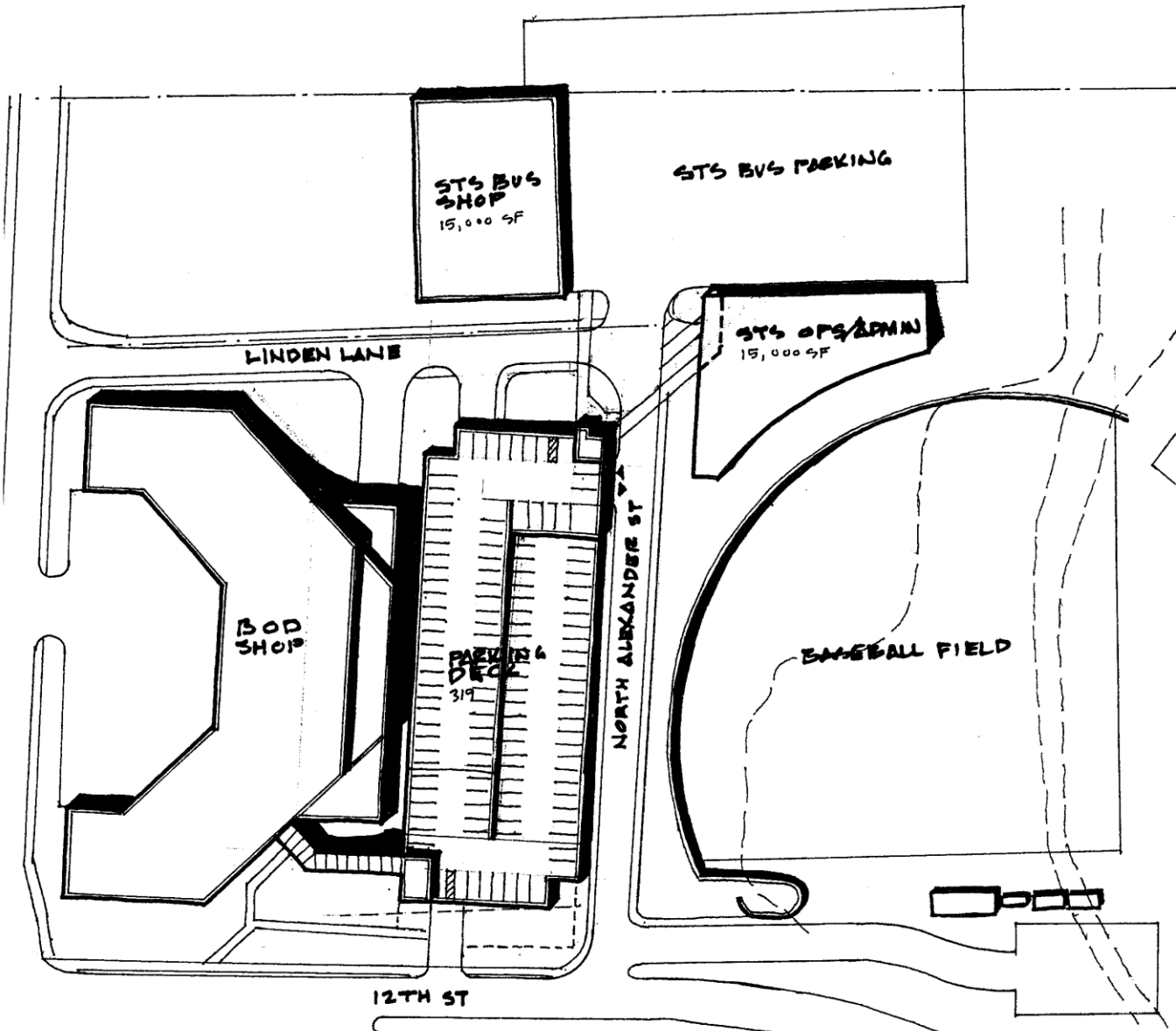
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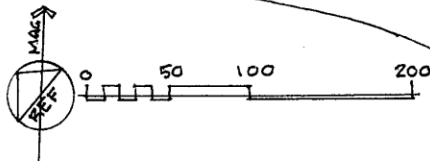
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CATS N Davidson / STS
PB / MBA 01-14-08



Scheme B