

MANDATORY REFERRAL-REPORT NO. 09-15
Proposed Acquisition of Land for a Fire Administration Headquarters

PROJECT PROPOSAL AND LOCATION:

It is proposed to purchase approximately five acres of improved industrial property located at 500 Dalton Avenue and 1222 Statesville Avenue (PID # 07902103 and 07902102), in the City of Charlotte. The land is just beyond Brookshire Freeway north of Uptown Charlotte and is bounded by Statesville Avenue, Dalton Avenue and North Graham Street. The majority of the property was formerly the Sealtest Creamery ice cream manufacturing facility, and is zoned I-2 Heavy Industrial according to the Charlotte Zoning Ordinance. The property is improved with three industrial buildings of which the office portion of the parcel located at 500 Dalton Avenue is being studied to retain along with the industrial building located at 1222 Statesville Avenue.

The proposed use of the property is to serve as the future site of the Charlotte Fire Department Fire Administration (including the Emergency Management and Fire Prevention) offices. No re-zoning of the property to accommodate this new use is contemplated.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION:

Currently, the Fire Administration and Emergency Management offices are located in leased office space located at 228 East 9th Street in the First Ward of Uptown Charlotte, adjacent to the west side of the terminus of the South Corridor (Blue) Light Rail Line. The facility does not provide adequate space for their current administrative offices and the Emergency Management Command Center is woefully inadequate (it currently shares space with a conference room) to accommodate the many agencies that would converge into Charlotte in the event a disaster were to occur in the city. Additionally, it is in an area of Uptown where redevelopment is very likely in the foreseeable future, during which time the building owner is expected to seek more profitable building occupants.

This permanent facility (to be developed, owned, and operated by the City of Charlotte) will also enable the Fire Department operations to be less decentralized by co-locating the Fire Administration Staff with Emergency Management, and Fire Prevention. In this effort, the City-owned Fire Prevention property located at 441 Beaumont Avenue will likely become surplus property (subject to a separate Mandatory Referral that would be submitted in conjunction with the marketing of that property).

Several sites were considered for this facility, but this property most closely met the site selection criteria. Site needs to be:

- close to Charlotte's Central Business District but not within the Loop (emergency command centers should be near – but not within – areas considered to be most likely targets).
- within easy access to the Government Center.
- at least 5 acres and preferably contiguous land (preference to NOT interrupt street network to assemble 5 acres)
- reasonably priced.

It is also a plus that investment in the new facility can serve as a catalyst for investment in a struggling neighborhood. It also would put greater focus in this community which is expected to reduce crime by having so many more eyes on the community.

The property is in the Lockwood neighborhood which is mostly industrial in the immediate vicinity with single and multi-family residential along the periphery. The area is just outside of the Fourth Ward but development on and around the site has stagnated for many years. The City investment should help to activate new investment in this area. The Sealtest Creamery office building is a significant structure in the community and one that City engineers and architects are looking seriously to retain and restore to serve future Fire Department use. Should it not be financially feasible, the City's intent is to construct a building that will complement the character to the neighborhood. One significant drawback to preservation is the fact that emergency command centers must conform to more rigorous seismic requirements than other types of buildings and uses. It might be difficult if not impossible to retrofit the existing structures to conform to these requirements.

CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED PUBLIC POLICIES:

Consolidation of multiple functions within the Fire Department can serve to increase efficiency. Additionally, a shift from occupancy of leased facilities to owned facilities will serve to be more cost-effective in the future, while improving the ability to make long-term investments (such as for power and technology) in the facility. Finally, investments of public facilities in areas of limited investment can have a way of increasing public confidence (and investment) in such areas.

CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED LAND USE PLANS:

The *Central District Plan* (1993) recommends light industrial uses. The proposed fire administration and management project is a use consistent with the adopted plan and is allowed within the existing I-2 (heavy industrial) zoning district as long as the building(s) do not exceed 100,000 square feet. (The I-1 zoning district – which would be a closer alignment to the land use recommendation in the *Central District Plan* allows government buildings up to 400,000 square feet.)

PROJECT IMPACT:

The Fire Administration Headquarters will be a sizable investment that should make a positive statement for the community. The industrial portion of the property is currently a huge structure that does not offer much curb appeal. If the City purchases the property, many of the industrial walls and chain link fencing will be removed giving a good opportunity to build an aesthetically appealing structure.

The location of the new facility will be entirely on I-2 zoned property and will not displace any residential housing, nor have any increase in noise or significantly impact traffic due to there being three existing industrial roads surrounding the property.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PUBLIC OR PRIVATE PROJECTS:

The new state of the art Emergency Management Command Center will be housed in this new facility whereby local, state and federal agencies will converge to address whatever major emergency situation should arise.

ESTIMATED PROJECT COMPLETION DATE:

Land acquisition is proposed to begin this fiscal year (FY2010) with completion of the building around 2012.

JOINT USE TASK FORCE REVIEW COMMENTS:

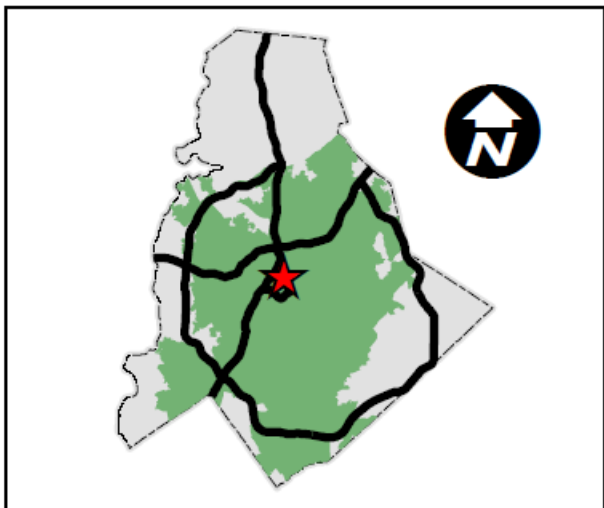
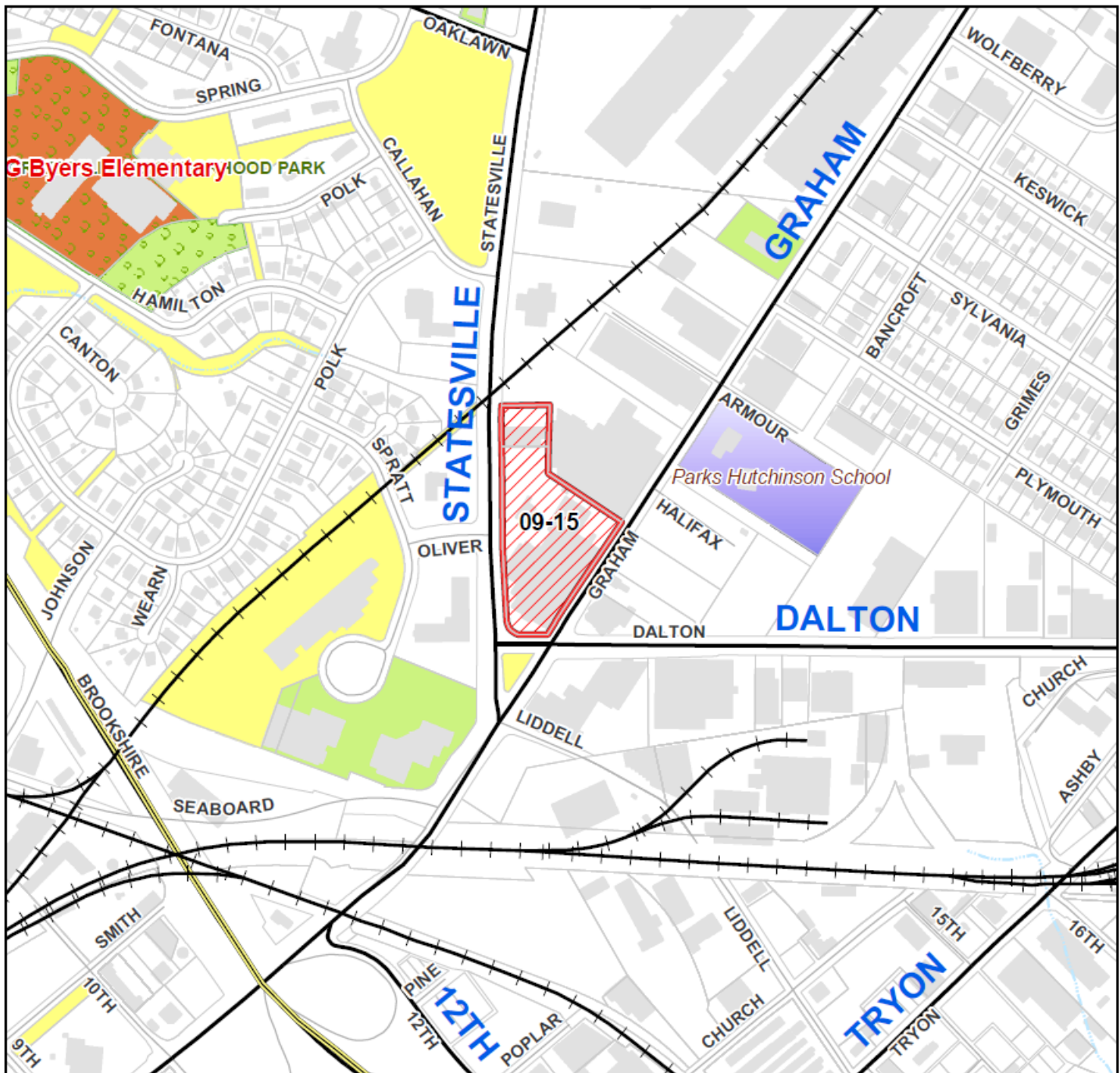
The Joint Use Task Force discussed this matter at their September 2, 2009 meeting and no joint use comments were offered.

PLANNING STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Planning staff recommends approval of this proposal.

CMPC PLANNING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

At their October 20, 2009 meeting the Planning Committee recommended approval, 6-0.



Mandatory Referral 09-15

Submitted by: City Real Estate

Initiated by: CFD

-  Mandatory Referral
-  County Property
-  City Property
-  Local Historic Landmark

