

MANDATORY REFERRAL REPORT NO. 12-21
Proposed Acquisition of Land on Winget Road to Serve as a Natural Heritage Site

PROJECT PROPOSAL AND LOCATION:

Mecklenburg County proposes the acquisition of Tax Parcel 199-151-06 (+/- 11.399 acres) in southwest Mecklenburg County in Charlotte's extraterritorial jurisdiction. The property is currently vacant and is adjacent to the County's Winget Park (Mandatory Referral MR08-36). Adjoining areas are generally rural, with a residential subdivision (Chapel Cove) under development to the north and a CMS elementary school (Winget Elementary) to the east.

The subject property is home to the Schweinitzii sunflower, a federally endangered species, found only within a 75 mile radius of Charlotte and discovered on the property by the NC Natural Heritage Program in the late 1980's. The Natural Heritage survey of Mecklenburg County reconfirmed the existence of the sunflower in 1993 and again in 1995. The Park & Recreation Department has since monitored and maintained this sunflower, much of which is currently on adjoining County-owned land.

The property is zoned R3/LLW-CA (Single family residential/Lower Lake Wylie Critical Watershed Area) under the City of Charlotte's Zoning Ordinance. The adjacent County owned Winget Park (parcels 199-151-07 and 199-151-08) contains Piedmont Prairie grass that is native to this area and used to exist in greater quantities prior to European settlement and today exist only in very small pockets of the community. It is proposed that application be made for the subject parcel along with the Winget Park site to receive the natural heritage site designation at a later date and then undergo a restoration of its natural Piedmont Prairie grass lands. The "natural heritage" designation is made by the NC State Division of Environment and Natural Resources when properties contain important plant life, water bodies, or physical features. Other County-owned properties that have received this designation are portions of Latta Nature Preserve, McDowell Nature Preserve, and Shuffletown Nature Preserve.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION:

This project is consistent with the *2008 Mecklenburg County Parks Master Plan* objectives which identified the need for preservation of natural habitats and natural heritage sites. The NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) designated this property as a natural heritage site of national significance through its field work to identify and support conservation of the rarest and most outstanding form in the state of North Carolina. Failure to protect this property will mean the loss of this plant life to development.

CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED PUBLIC POLICIES:

This acquisition is consistent with the County's *2008 Parks Master Plan* which identified the need to preserve significant natural habitats and natural heritage sites. The NC Natural Heritage Program also identified the need to protect the Schweinitzii sunflower during its 1998 field survey of Mecklenburg County.

CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED LAND USE PLANS:

The *Steele Creek Area Plan* (2012) prescribes this parcel to be developed residentially with a density not to exceed one dwelling unit per acre. Open space is generally considered to be an appropriate use in areas prescribed for future residential use.

PROJECT IMPACT:

Acquisition of this property expands Mecklenburg County's effort to protect significant and endangered natural habitats.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PUBLIC OR PRIVATE PROJECTS:

This property is to be utilized as nature preserve and habitat restoration land. It is within the area of the proposed extension of Carowinds Blvd (Winget Road). County staff will work with the Charlotte Department of Transportation to determine the extent of its impact to the sunflower population and an appropriate response to the proposed road extension.

ESTIMATED PROJECT COMPLETION DATE:

This project is for land acquisition only and is expected to be completed by December 31, 2012.

JOINT USE TASK FORCE REVIEW COMMENTS:

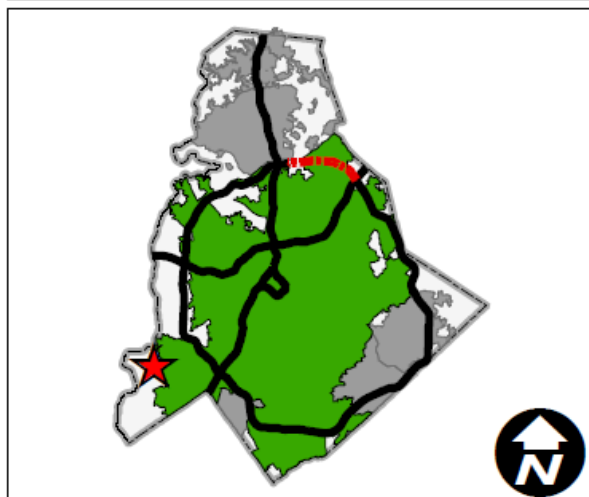
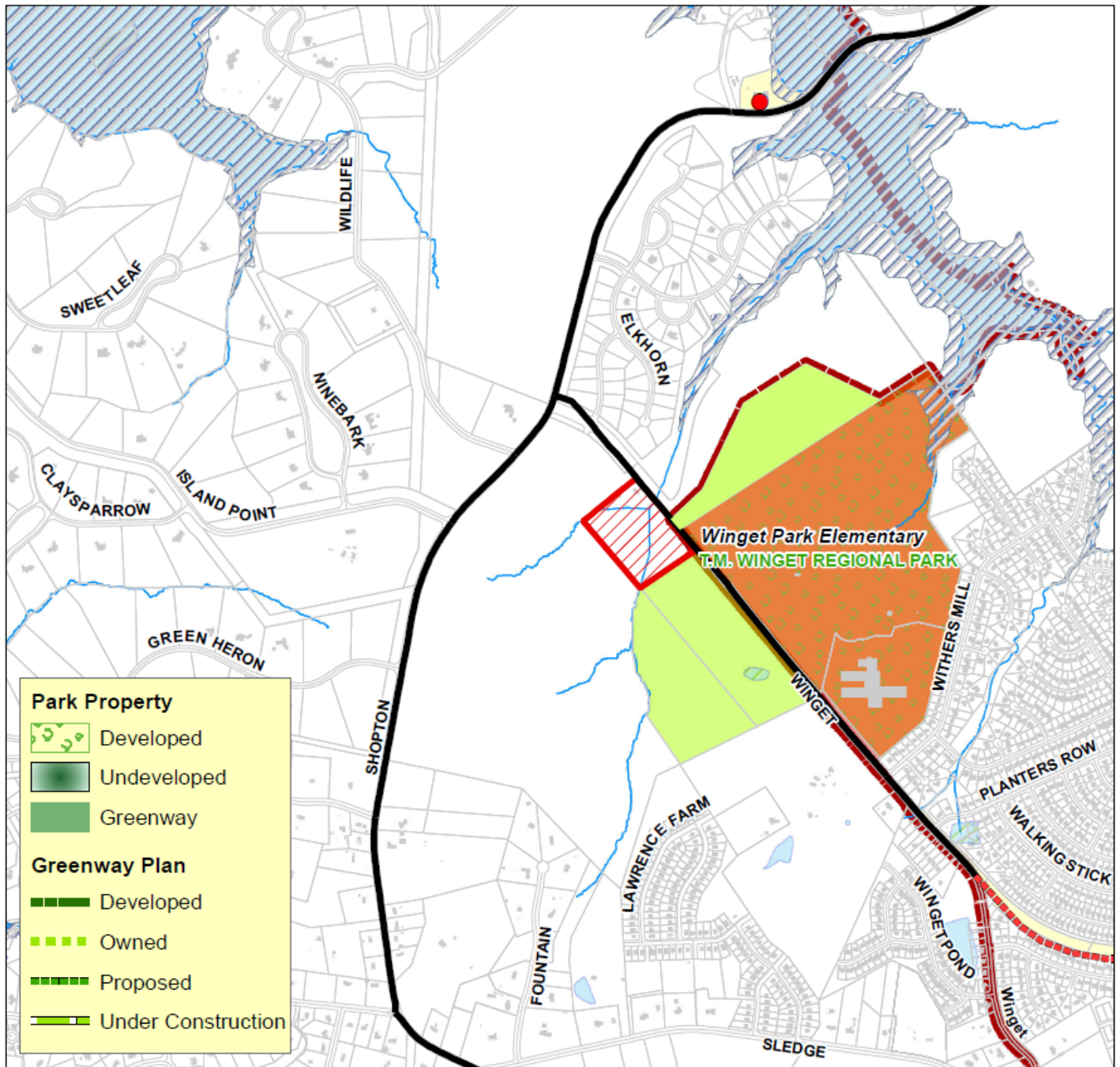
The Joint Use Task Force discussed the matter at their November 7, 2012 meeting and MUMPO staff noted that there is a planned major thoroughfare that will impact the property. This project will require relocation of rare sunflowers on the site. (Park and Recreation staff has indicated that the sunflowers can be relocated elsewhere on the site to accommodate the road project.) The original plan was to build four lanes for Carowinds Blvd Extension; however, current plans only call for two lanes.

PLANNING STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Planning staff recommends approval on condition that property along the front of the site be reserved for the Carowinds Boulevard Extension road project.

CMPC PLANNING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

At their November 20, 2012 meeting the Planning Committee recommended approval by a 5-0 vote.



Mandatory Referral 12-21

Submitted by: County Asset & Fac Mgt

Initiated by: Park & Recreation

- County Property
- City Property
- FEMA 100 Year Floodplain

Produced by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department

