

## **MANDATORY REFERRAL REPORT NO. 14-15**

Proposed Expansion of Auten Nature Preserve in Huntersville ETJ

### **PROJECT PROPOSAL AND LOCATION:**

This transaction is the proposed acquisition of ±13.19 acres (Tax Parcel 013-032-23) located off Neck Road in the Town of Huntersville's ETJ for the expansion of Auten Nature Preserve. The property which is currently for sale contains a mobile home unit and several outbuildings that are in poor condition and will likely be removed by the County following acquisition. It is zoned R (Rural District) under the Town of Huntersville's Zoning Ordinance. The property is surrounded by the existing Auten Nature Preserve, adjoins the Rural Hill Nature Preserve (also County-owned), and is also within close proximity to McDowell Creek Greenway with the creek lying north of the property.

### **PROJECT JUSTIFICATION:**

As Mecklenburg County continues to develop, the opportunity to preserve the area's natural habitat and vegetation will become increasingly rare. Acquisition of this property takes steps toward achieving continuous uninterrupted property ownership for the nature preserve. The Park and Recreation Department has found that nature preserves function better with large uninterrupted stretches of property so that plant and animal life can be maintained and protected. Park and Rec's investigation of the property determined that the majority of the property consists of mature woods. The property is also home to Carolina Buckthorn, a shrub layer, which is on the state's watch list species and classified as rare. The property is considered Basic Oak-Hickory and is a natural community type that is uncommon in this region.

In addition to expanding the nature preserve, acquisition of this property contributes to the County's water quality, as the property is located within the McDowell Creek Watershed, Critical Area Three and feeds into Mountain Island Lake which is the County's primary source of drinking water. Acquisition of the property removes the risk of future development of the site that could contribute to downgrading the quality of the area's drinking water.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED PUBLIC POLICIES:**

This acquisition is consistent with several Mecklenburg County adopted policies and plans such as the *2008 Park and Recreation Master Plan*, the *Mountain Island Lake Memorandum*, the *Charlotte-Mecklenburg Water Quality Buffer Implementation Guidelines* as well as several other water improvement ordinance and floodplain development ordinances.

The Town of Huntersville *2030 Community Plan* contains the following applicable policy: "Support the preservation and enhancement of the natural environment, along with its scenic and cultural assets" (Policy E-1).

### **CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED LAND USE PLANS:**

The proposed land to be acquired is located within the boundaries of the *Beatties Ford Road Corridor Small Area Plan* (adopted in 2007) that highlights the value of and need for open space preservation to balance the increase in growth and development within the Study Area. Specifically, the plan identifies the subject property as "Vulnerable Land" and encourages that the Town of Huntersville "pursue options for obtaining conservation easements" to protect this land.

Therefore, acquisition of the subject property for the intended purpose is consistent with the adopted Plan.

### **PROJECT IMPACT:**

Acquisition of this property takes this tract out of play for future development and expands the area protected by Auten Nature Preserve.

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

This property is to be utilized as nature preserve land. It does not affect any other known public projects in this area.

### **ESTIMATED PROJECT COMPLETION DATE:**

This project for is land acquisition only and is expected to be completed by summer 2014.

### **JOINT USE TASK FORCE REVIEW COMMENTS:**

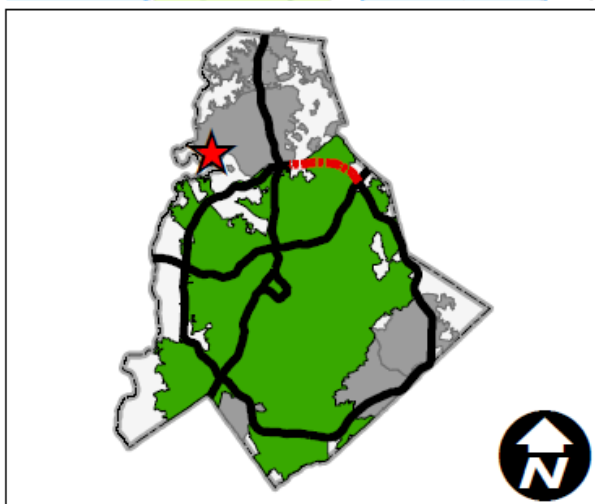
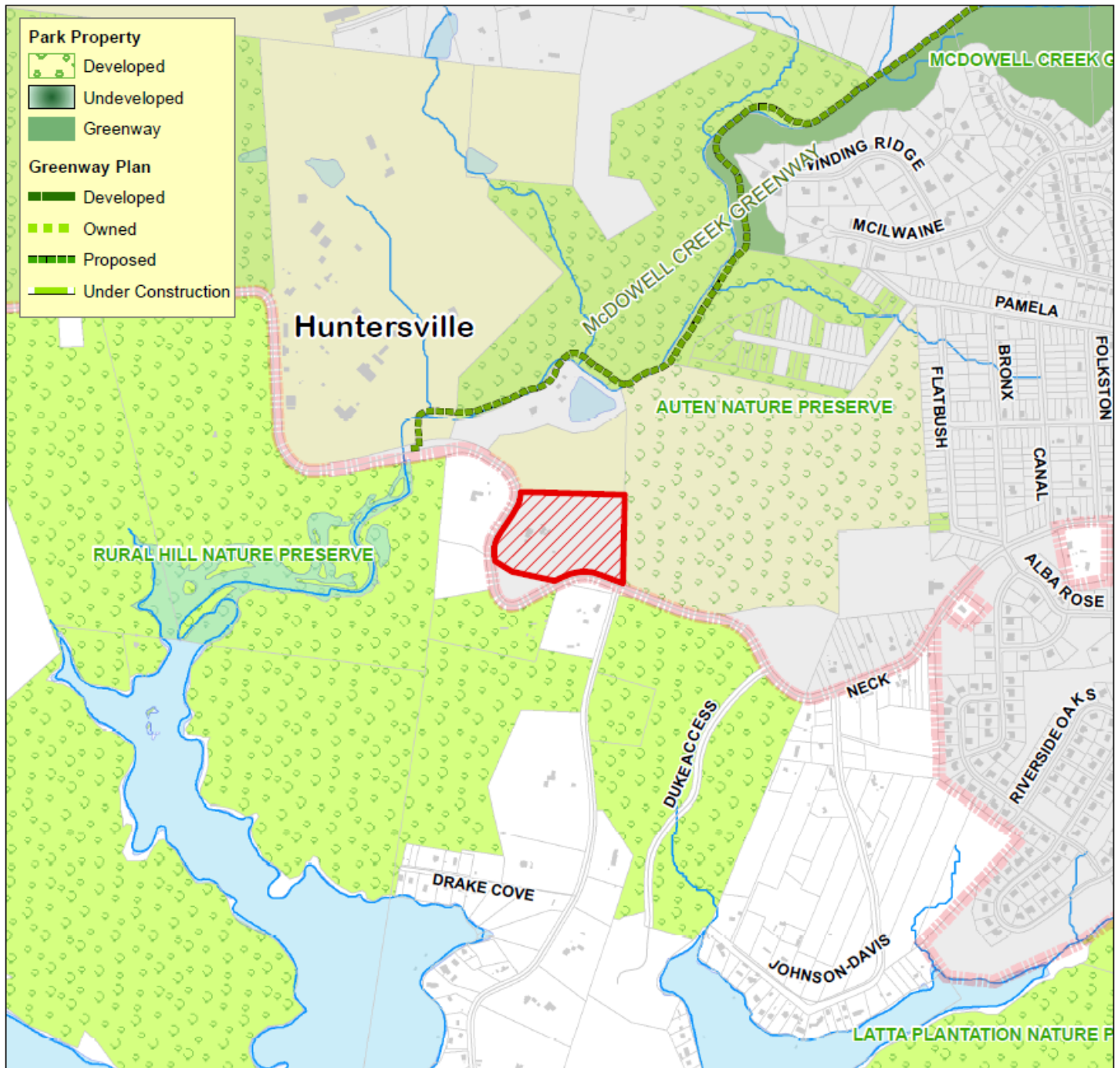
The Joint Use Task Force reviewed this matter at their April 2, 2014 meeting and no joint use comments were offered.

### **PLANNING STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Town of Huntersville is fully supportive of the proposed acquisition of this property, given its strategic location between the current Auten Nature Preserve and Latta Plantation Nature Preserve and the identification of this property by the Area Plan as a candidate for preservation. Therefore Planning staff recommends approval.

### **CMPC PLANNING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:**

At their April 15, 2014 meeting the Planning Committee recommended approval by a 6-0 vote.



## Mandatory Referral 14-15

Initiated by: Park & Recreation  
Submitted by: County Real Estate

- Mandatory Referral
- City Property
- County Property

