

MANDATORY REFERRAL-REPORT NO. 15-50

Proposed Sale of a Portion of the Former Eastland Mall Site to CMS for Construction of a School

PROJECT PROPOSAL AND LOCATION:

The City of Charlotte proposes to sell approximately 11 acres of the former Eastland Mall property in East Charlotte to Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) for the construction of a 54-classroom K-8 magnet school. The property is a portion of a larger vacant 80.4 -acre parcel (103-041-99) located between Wilora Lake Road, Central Avenue, and N. Sharon Amity Road. The property is located in an area bounded by single family residential uses to the north, and a mixture of retail uses to the east, south, and west.

The property proposed for sale to CMS is currently zoned B-1(SCD) according to the Charlotte Zoning Ordinance. The property would likely need to be re-zoned to remove the conditional zoning prior to school construction. The City will coordinate with CMS for any rezoning required for the use.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION:

Eastland Mall opened for business in 1975 as the largest mall in North Carolina. At its peak, Eastland was a thriving center of commerce and activity that anchored Charlotte's East Side. Over time, in the face of great competition from other retail centers, the Mall declined and eventually closed. Rather than let the property languish, the City intervened in August 2012 and bought the 80.4 acre site. The purchase was intended to aid in accomplishing the broad policy objectives for neighborhood stabilization and economic development through a master planned, mixed-use redevelopment.

The *Eastland Area Plan*, adopted by Charlotte City Council in 2003, recommends creating a range and balance of shopping choices, housing types, and places for entertainment and recreation that will attract new residents, workers, and visitors to the area. In 2006, the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) constructed one of its most popular and heavily utilized transit centers on land leased from Eastland Mall and in 2011, CATS purchased 1.378 acres of the leased land and retained the transit center improvements to ensure continuity of service at this important transit facility.

In addition to including the proposed school on the Eastland Mall property, the Eastland Area Strategies Team (EAST) has highlighted the need for natural features such as park space and a stormwater detention pond, as well as pedestrian connectivity. EAST is a volunteer based citizen group established to work toward the recommended goals of the *Eastland Area Plan*, composed of business people, non-profits and neighborhood representatives working to improve the future and quality of life for the people of East Charlotte through economic development. A Concept Plan for the entire 80-acre Mall site, which encompasses the principles articulated by EAST has been developed and is serving as a blueprint for re-use of the larger site, and forms a basis for the proposed school placement on the site.

CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED PUBLIC POLICIES:

Construction of a school in this area was approved as part of the November 2013 school bond referendum. Specifically, this project funds construction of a new K-8 partial magnet school, expanding capacity for the Spanish language immersion magnet program (currently housed at Collinswood elementary school) while providing crowding relief for Albemarle Road elementary and middle schools and other nearby elementary schools. The kindergarten through Grade 8 configuration can provide consistency and stability for students as they move from kindergarten to a new elementary school and then to a new middle school while providing new classroom seats for less than the cost of building separate elementary and middle schools.

In addition, in seeking to maximize the City's return from its current and future asset portfolio, the City will aggressively manage these assets. Maximizing the City's return will include pursuing alternative ownership / management strategies which will optimize the benefits of private ownership (tax revenue streams and eliminating public costs associated with ownership) while meeting the City's public policy objectives.

CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED LAND USE PLANS:

The *Eastland Area Plan* (2003) identifies the Eastland Mall site as part of a future town center for east Charlotte. The vision is for an identifiable, compact, pedestrian oriented environment including a variety of uses, such as retail, entertainment, offices, urban housing, a town square, civic uses, and a community transit center. The plan recognizes that the mall site is in the midst of a transition and that in order for the site and surrounding properties to serve as the "center" of the east side of Charlotte, change will be necessary. The proposed use of a K-8 school is consistent with the adopted land use policies for the former Eastland Mall site.

PROJECT IMPACT:

The project can serve as an anchor for the redevelopment of an unutilized City asset and as a catalyst for redevelopment of the remainder of the former Eastland Mall property. However, good site design and integration with the larger site will be critical in achieving an integrated town center environment between the school site and the remaining area.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PUBLIC OR PRIVATE PROJECTS:

Development of a school at this site will represent one component of overall redevelopment of the 80+ acre former Eastland Mall site that will eventually contain a mixture of uses, including open space, residential, and mixed use development.

ESTIMATED PROJECT COMPLETION DATE:

The City would propose to complete the sale by early 2016. CMS has established a goal of constructing and opening the school in August 2018.

JOINT USE TASK FORCE REVIEW COMMENTS:

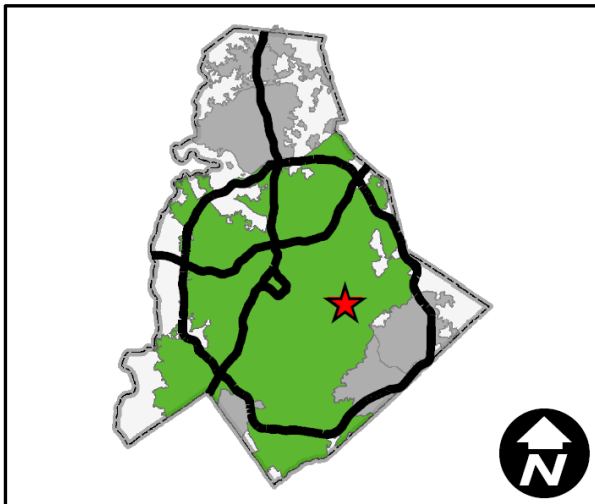
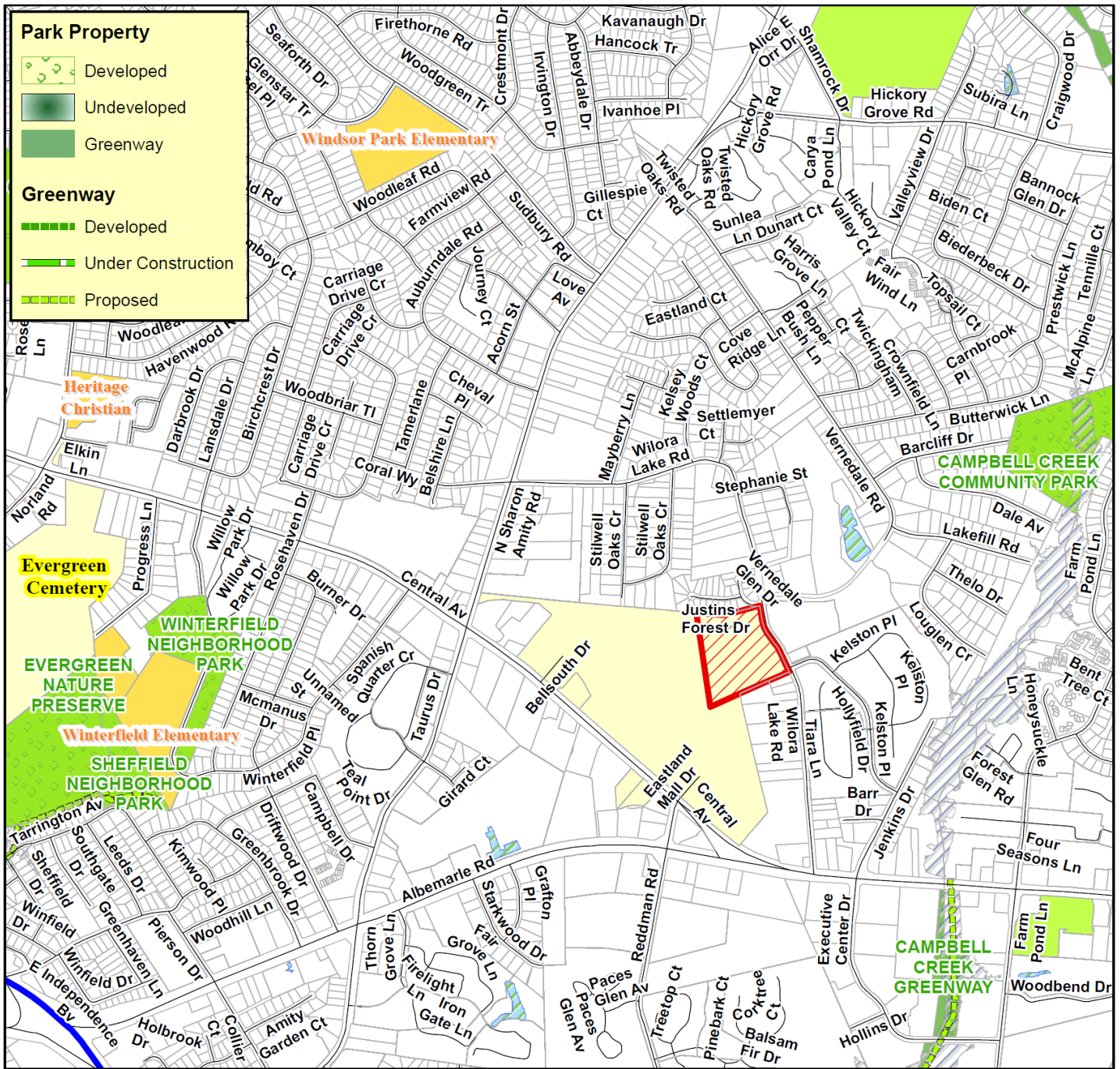
The Joint Use Task Force reviewed this matter at their October 7, 2015 meeting and there were no joint use comments. It was acknowledged at the meeting that County Park & Recreation staff have been involved in the concept plan discussions and are satisfied with the preliminary recommendations pertaining to parkland on the former Eastland site.

PLANNING STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the sale of land for future use as a school.

CMPC PLANNING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

At their October 20, 2015 meeting the Planning Committee recommended denial of this proposed transaction by a 5-1 vote. Concern was expressed among dissenters with the site design parameters utilized by CMS at other (mostly suburban) new school locations, their inapplicability to this particular site, and the lack of detail regarding how more stringent site design approaches might be taken at this particular location.



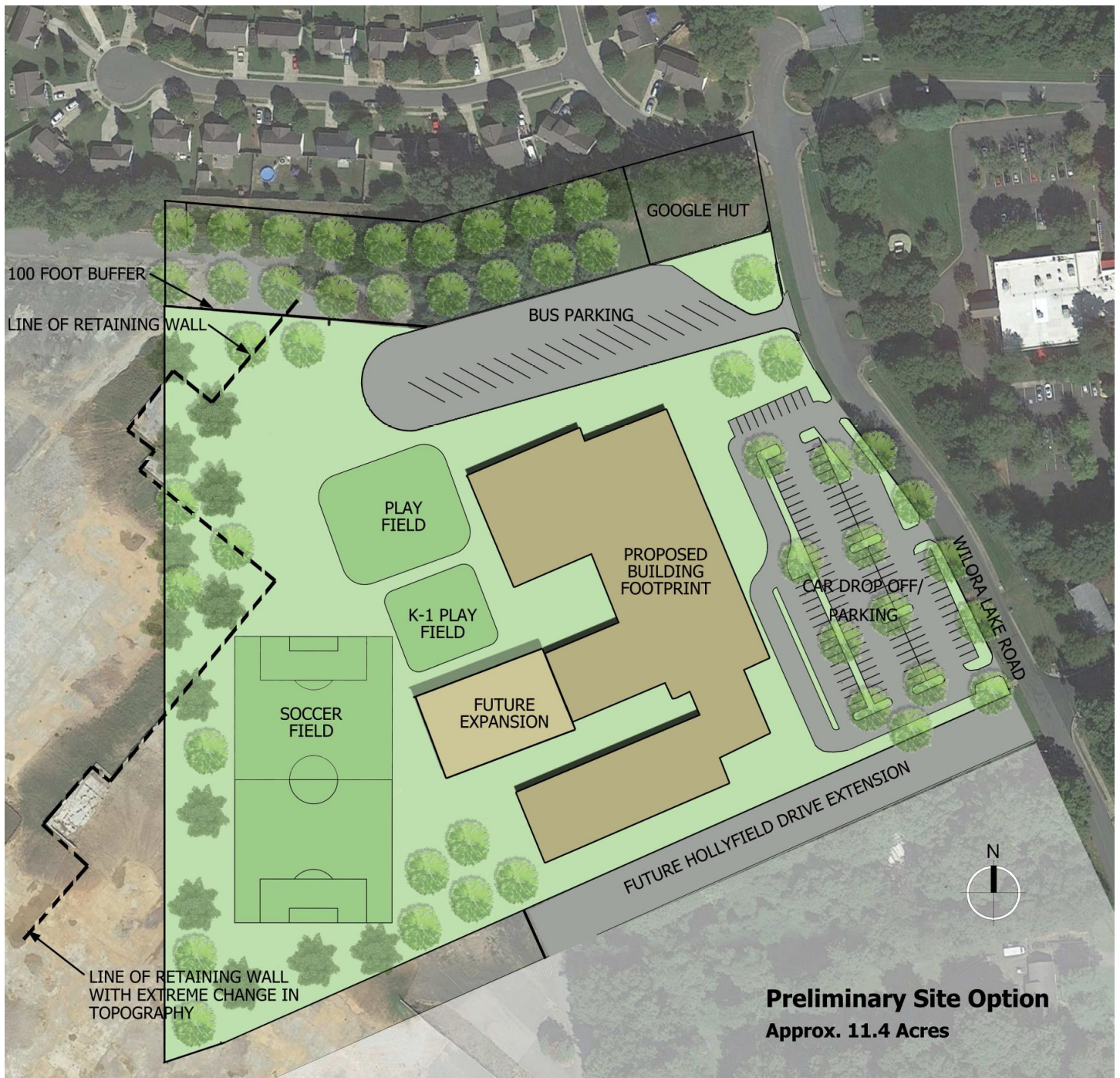
Mandatory Referral 15-50

Initiated by: N&BS, Economic Development

Submitted by: E&PM, City Real Estate

- Mandatory Referral
- Schools
- Wetland
- City Property
- County Property
- FEMA 100 Year Floodplain





Preliminary school site plan; Subject to change

Concept Plan



Gold Line Future Phase

Open Space: **22 acres (27.5%)**

School: **12 acres (15%)**

Development: **26 acres (32.5%)**

Right of Way: **20 acres (25%)**

80 acres