

12/8/2015

## **Proposal to Preserve the Collier Avenue Wood**

Imke and Inge Durre  
100 Coxe Avenue, #308 and #410  
Asheville, NC 28801

### **Location of the wood:**

This undisturbed natural urban forest is located at 11 Collier Avenue, just east of Coxe Avenue and south of Hilliard Avenue off Ravenscroft Drive, and is listed with the Buncombe County Register of Deeds under PIN # 9648-38-5770, Deed/Book 5166/0063.

### **Vision:**

Our vision is for this wood to continue to exist in its natural state as a conservation area and passive park. A small wood-chip trail with a bench or two could be added to augment the opportunity for a peaceful experience under the trees in the middle of an otherwise concrete city area. Signage could inform visitors about the trees and the historical significance of the area. Maintenance, such as initial cleanup and ongoing reforestation, could be taken on by a group of neighbors, if not by the City, the County, or a conservation group.

### **Reasons for preserving this wood:**

#### **a. Opportunity:**

The wood is of historic, ecologic, and scenic significance, as attested by a local arborist in a Tree Evaluation Report. The ca. 0.5 acre property is currently owned by a developer team, Matt and Mark Maynard. In the interest of preserving the wood on their property, the Maynards have been supportive of the idea to sell their property, but with a clear preference to swap the parcel with one owned by the City of Asheville. The entire wood would be removed if the Maynards' proposed Collier Avenue Apartments Project were to be built on that site.

#### **b. Ecosystem functions:**

According to the Tree Evaluation Report, the wood contains 23 tall mature native oaks as well as many younger trees and shrubs. The Tree Report declares that "The subject stand is the only grouping of mature oak trees within the 94-acre study area" bounded by Patton Avenue in the north, Southside in the south, Asheland Avenue in the west, and Biltmore Avenue in the east. ... The stand also serves several ecosystem functions such as cleaning air, sequestering carbon, moderating noise, mitigating heat island effect and capturing storm water runoff. The evaluated oaks are all "equal to or greater than 18 inches in diameter at breast height", and range in height "from 58 to 109 feet". ... "Although this property contains .05% of the land mass, it accounts for almost 12% of the tree canopy in the study area." ... The arborist declares: "As such these trees serve the citizens of the immediate neighborhood and of the entire city."

#### **c. Historical significance:**

The Tree Report states, "[T]hough no direct measurement of age was taken, a comparison of tree heights to site index data for the given soil type indicates that the subject trees are between 80 and 100 years of age." This estimate is consistent with historical photos and maps of the area dating back to the late 19th and early 20th century. Based on these photos and maps, local historical preservationists have recently determined that this wood was a part of the former Ravenscroft School Campus. The one remaining building of that School, which is located just

north of the wood on Ravenscroft Drive, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978 and is located in the Downtown Asheville Historic District.

d. Ambience

The trees form an expansive canopy visible from many vantage points around the area. On the web site of our Petition to the City, many of the signers left emphatic comments expressing the view that this canopy is an integral part of the South Slope's scenery, contributes substantially to the identity of the area and of the entire City, and therefore should be preserved.

e. Public support

As of 12/05, 1165 persons have signed our petition, posted at

<https://www.change.org/p/city-of-ashevi-preserve-the-wooded-area-on-the-site-of-the-proposed-collier-avenue-apartments>.

Written support has been received from the Asheville Tree Commission, the Preservation Society of Asheville and Buncombe County, the Sierra Club of WNC, Asheville area's chapter of the Audubon Society, several South Slope businesses, the Coalition of Asheville Neighborhoods (CAN), N.C. Forest Service's Urban Forestry Program, among others.

As of 12/8, we have received pledges for contributions totaling \$43,000 as well as offers from several organizations and individuals to actively help with fundraising.

**Our organization:**

We have formed a loosely organized group and chosen Ravenscroft Reserve Initiative as group name. Currently, a small inner core of 7 persons has been actively participating in outreach activities and is committed to seeing the effort through.

Recently, we have entered into a fiscal sponsorship agreement with MountainTrue which provides us the ability to operate as a non-profit. This means that Ravenscroft Reserve Initiative is eligible to apply for grants and can accept tax-deductible contributions.

**Preservation plan:**

In a meeting on 11/24/15, a plan towards achieving preservation of the 11 Collier Avenue Wood was agreed upon by the following parties:

City Representatives: Mayor Esther Manheimer, Councilwoman Gwen Wisler, Councilman Chris Pelly, City Manager Gary Jackson; 11 Collier Avenue Property Owners/Developers Matt and Mark Maynard; Imke Durre, Inge Durre, and Devorah Thomas.

1. The City will explore the land swap option including appraisal of the potential property in which the Maynards are interested.
2. The Durrees will attend the PED Committee Meeting scheduled for December 15, 3:30 PM, to present this plan and ask for the PED members' support.
3. The Durrees will raise funds in the amount of 2/3 of the appraised value of the property to be swapped for the 11 Collier Avenue parcel.

4. The first third will come from community fundraising through the Durres; a yet to be determined portion of that amount will be placed into a trust and used for expenses incurred for the upkeep of the property.
5. The second third will be solicited from the County by the Durres. Any amount not covered by the County will have to be raised by the Durres. The Durres will contact County officials asking for their support of this agreement. City Council offered to talk with County officials once County officials have indicated their willingness to enter into conversation with City/City Council regarding this project.
6. The City agrees to contribute the third third of the appraised value of the property to be swapped.
7. The Maynards will explore the property in question for its suitability for their development intentions.
8. The Maynards agree to absorb any potential difference between the values of the properties to be swapped.
9. The Maynards agree to build a percentage of affordable housing units, e.g. 20%, on the property they receive, should the rest of this agreement be upheld.
10. This agreement is scheduled to be discussed and put up for vote at the January 12 City Council meeting.
11. The Maynards will allow 90 days after the City Council meeting, in which this topic will be considered by full Council, for the completion of fundraising activities.
12. The Durres will provide a plan for how they will secure their contribution to the funding of this project by the same City Council meeting.
13. At the time of the property transfer, the current natural state of the 11 Collier Avenue property will be perpetually preserved by means of a deed restriction, a conservation easement, and or a historical landmark designation.
14. All components of this plan need to fall into place for the Wood to be preserved.

As of today, we have received an appointment with Buncombe County Commission Chairman Gantt to discuss this plan.

**Our commitment:**

Should the intended property swap turn out not to be feasible, or any other piece of this plan fail to work out as documented above, we are committed to working with the other parties to find an alternative solution for preserving this property in its natural state.