

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Town Council

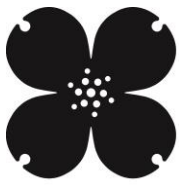
FROM: Renuka Soll, Chair  
Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Commission

SUBJECT: Stillhouse Bottom Nature Preserve – Pledge

DATE: May 20, 2021

On May 18, 2021, the Commission voted unanimously to recommend that the Council authorize a \$100,000 match towards a North Carolina Land and Water Conservation Trust Fund grant application. If received, the funding would allow the NC Botanical Garden Foundation to acquire 7-acres of undeveloped property, which would add to its Stillhouse Bottom Nature preserve area and effectively grow the Morgan Creek Bluffs National Heritage Area. This area is located in the southern part of Chapel Hill, within the Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ). See the attached letter from the NC Botanical Garden Foundation addressed to Phil Fleischmann, Parks and Recreation Director, dated January 27, 2021, which contains more details about the property and request.

**Members Present:** Renuka Soll (Chair), Wesley McMahon (Vice Chair), Alice Armstrong (Orange County Representative), Jeanette Bench, Leah Boucher, William Kaiser, Lydia Kivihya-Ndugga, Guthrie Richardson (Youth Council Representative), Jochen Schwarz, and Tyler Steelman



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Mr. Phillip Fleischmann, Director  
 Town of Chapel Hill Department of Parks and Recreation

Dear Mr. Fleishmann:

January 27, 2021

I am writing to request that the Town of Chapel Hill help support our NC Land and Water Fund application for the purchase and addition of the Raney property to the Stillhouse Bottom Nature Preserve (Stillhouse Bottom). Stillhouse Bottom is owned, fee-simple, by the NC Botanical Garden Foundation, Inc. (NCBGF), and is a State Dedicated Nature Preserve. NCBGF also holds conservation easements on 12 acres of contiguous private land with landowner commitments for additional conservation easements and land donations toward a 100-acre preserve.

Stillhouse Bottom is part of the larger Morgan Creek Bluffs Significant Natural Heritage Area, and according to the **Inventory of Natural Areas and Wildlife Habitats for Orange County, NC** (2004): "Stillhouse Bottom has the only undisturbed, steep, north-facing ravine left in Orange County. Over 100 plant species have been identified, and the high quality of the site is demonstrated by the presence of red-tailed and red-shouldered hawks, yellow-billed cuckoo, white-breasted nuthatch, ovenbird, and scarlet tanager. Stream quality is likewise demonstrated by the healthy amphibian community, made up of dusky salamanders, two-lined salamanders, and green frogs."

The 6.9-acre Raney property occupies the easternmost portion of Stillhouse Bottom and is an ecologically exceptional mature mixed hardwood forest, which to best of our evaluation has never been logged. Conservation protection of this parcel is essential for maintaining the ecological integrity of Stillhouse Bottom.

In 2010, the Town provided \$29,000 toward the purchase of the adjacent Ivey property, which we added to the Stillhouse Bottom Nature Preserve. Likewise, in 2018, the Town contributed \$50,000 toward Cochrane property purchase, which we added to the nearby Laurel Hill Nature Preserve. We request the Town pledge a \$100,000 match toward our NCLWF application. We are also requesting \$100,000 from Orange County, and are actively pursuing private donations.

Thank you very much for considering your continued support for our land conservation efforts that add to Town of Chapel Hill open space.

Sincerely,

Anne Harris, President  
 NC Botanical Garden Foundation, Inc.

Damon Waitt, PhD, Director  
 North Carolina Botanical Garden