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# Matthews-Mint Hill WEEKLY

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY, FOR THE COMMUNITY

VOLUME 7, NUMBER 18 • APRIL 30 TO MAY 6, 2014

## Completing the 'history puzzle'

by Morgan Smith

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MATTHEWS – Matthews is home to a surviving example of a 20th century pottery workshop and kiln, and thanks to work of local historians who want to see the historic site come back to life, the town now has the opportunity to invest in preserving another piece of its history.

"I think it's the last piece in the Matthews history puzzle," Paula Lester, president of the Matthews Historical

Foundation, said at the Monday, April 28, meeting of the Matthews Board of Commissioners. "It's the last piece that really is an important piece to Matthews. It's something I really hope we can bring to fruition."

Matthews partnered with the Arts & Science Council and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission in June 2013 to develop a feasibility study that focused on the options for R.F. Outen Pottery, 430 Jefferson St., and what it would take to make the

property "a lively, thriving and iconic asset to Matthews, its residents and visitors," according to a town memo. R.F. Outen Pottery was opened around 1950 by Rufus Franklin Outen, according to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission website, and the workshop and vaulted brick kiln is still located on the property today.

Results of the feasibility study revealed the purchasing and restoration of the site could be a valuable contribution to the area's education and artistic needs.

"It's the only remaining vintage kiln in Mecklenburg County," Lester said, adding the facility, if in working condition, could bring an added attraction to the town. "The Outen Pottery facility would become a distinct vision in arts and culture."

But restoring the property could take some work and could cost the town a hefty dollar to purchase and restore the property and add programming that could benefit the community. Estimates to acquire and stabilize the property are currently at more than \$270,000. Further funding would be

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necessary to renovate the space and make road improvements in and out of the property.

But it's something the Matthews Board of Commissioners wants to look into, voting Monday, April 28, to move into an agreement with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, showing support for the commission to seek historic designation for the entire site and purchase the property. Matthews would then buy the property from the commission, likely over a five-year period at 0

percent interest.

"I'm really in favor with working together to move forward on this property," Matthews Mayor Jim Taylor said. "Securing a property is the most important part right now. It's a big step moving forward with the town, but we only have limited resources – we need to use those wisely and get the private sector involved."

Taylor, in agreement with other board members, said after acquiring the property, the best route will be to create a steering committee to further research what exactly should be done with the property.