



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

July 19, 2002

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Montgomery County Planning Board  
**VIA:** John A. Carter, Chief, Community-Based Planning Division *JAC*  
Glenn Kreger, Silver Spring Takoma Park Team Leader  
**FROM:** Margaret Rifkin, Planner Coordinator (301/495-4583) *MR*

**REVIEW TYPE:** Mandatory Referral  
**PROJECT NAME:** Takoma Park Community Center  
**APPLICANT:** City of Takoma Park  
**CASE NUMBER:** 02101-TP-1  
**REVIEW BASIS:** Article 28, Chapter 7-112 of the Regional District Act  
**ZONE:** R-60  
**MASTER PLAN:** Takoma Park Master Plan  
**FILING DATE:** June 5, 2002

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Approval with comments.

1. Address the following pedestrian access issues:
  - a. Reduce the radius of the curb at the corner of Maple and Philadelphia Avenues and narrow the pavement to the minimum allowed to shorten the crossing distance for pedestrians. Coordinate with State Highway Administration.
  - b. On Maple Avenue, incorporate additional streetscape features such as seating areas, enhanced crosswalks, and decorative lights.
  - c. Revise the parking lot design to reflect better pedestrian and bikeway access and additional landscaping. Consideration should be given to reducing the number of spaces shown to accommodate the improvements (up to approximately 10%).
  - d. Strengthen and enhance the pedestrian circulation, particularly to improve the connections between the open space and to enhance access to the building, as described in the body of this staff report.
2. Provide improvements in the vicinity of the Community Center to implement the Master Plan recommendations for an on-road bikeway (Class 2 or 3) on Maple Avenue and for a bike path (Class 1) to Piney Branch Road via Takoma/Piney Branch Local Park to include connections to the building for each.

3. Address the following parking issues:
  - a. Four surface parking spaces near the Philadelphia Avenue entrance should be either relocated or removed to provide a 25-foot setback consistent with the development standards in the zone.
  - b. Screening for the parking facility as described in the Zoning Ordinance should be provided along Philadelphia Avenue, Maple Avenue, and Grant Avenue.
4. Address compatibility issues with neighbors on Grant Avenue by providing for tree preservation and supplemental planting as appropriate along the slope. Select and locate lights to minimize intrusion into homes.
5. Work with SHA to address safety improvements along Philadelphia Avenue at the Main Entry Plaza.
6. Design and build the west side of Grant Avenue so that a sidewalk can be added in the future by the City.
7. Ensure a sufficient radius for emergency vehicles for the proposed redesigned cul-de-sac on Grant Avenue.

**CONDITIONS** (Related to use of Parkland)

1. Prior to conveyance of parkland, the City of Takoma Park and the M-NCPPC shall enter into an agreement providing for the City to make certain improvements to the existing park entrance and slope on Grant Avenue. Construction for the entrance is to be determined based on a fair exchange for the value of the parkland. Construction shall occur as part of Phase 2 of the Community Center construction. As part of this agreement the City shall provide: A concept design for an attractive new entrance to the park from Grant Avenue with access for pedestrians, bicyclists and emergency and maintenance vehicles; and design and construction drawings.
2. The City of Takoma Park shall submit site, landscape, lighting, and stormwater management plans for these improvements to the M-NCPPC for review and approval prior to applying for a building permit. The City shall obtain a park permit prior to construction.
3. The City of Takoma Park shall remove invasive species, provide a tree preservation plan, and stabilize slopes in the area to prevent erosion.
4. The City of Takoma Park shall officially abandon adjacent road right-of-way and record new plats to reflect the road abandonment and park conveyance.

5. In the event the conveyed property is no longer needed by the City for a public purpose, the land will be conveyed back to the M-NCPPC at no cost.

## **EXISTING CONDITIONS: NEIGHBORHOOD AND SITE**

The site is located at 7500 Maple Avenue within the northeast quadrant of the intersection of Maple Avenue and Philadelphia Avenue (MD 410). It is bounded on the east by Grant Avenue with Piney Branch Elementary School on the opposite side of the street. To the north is property owned by the Board of Education and used for a special learning facility and for the Takoma Park Elementary School. The boundary with the Board of Education property consists of a steep slope that is wooded. Steps lead up the slope at that edge, to the elementary school's ballfields and entrance. The northern boundary is also shared with one single-family home that is part of a residential neighborhood on Grant Avenue. To the northeast and adjacent to the site is Takoma/Piney Branch Local Park which is owned by the M-NCPPC. To the west and facing the site across Philadelphia Avenue is Memorial Park which is owned by the City. To the south on the opposite side of Maple Avenue is a C&P Telephone substation and parking lot.

The site currently contains the Takoma Park Library and Municipal Center and Tool Library with surface parking supporting both these uses. The site and surrounding property are in the R-60 Zone. Diagonally across the intersection of Maple Avenue and Grant Avenue is land zoned R-10 in the Commercial Revitalization Overlay Zone.

The site is adjacent to the Takoma Park Historic District which includes all the properties facing the site across Philadelphia Avenue.

## **SUMMARY OF PROJECT AND PROCESS**

Project Description: This project is an expansion of the existing Municipal Center into an updated government/community center. This proposal requires the use of property that is currently right-of-way owned by the City as well as approximately 1/4 acre of parkland owned by the M-NCPPC.

The proposal creates a new building wrapped around the existing municipal center building. Parking and vehicular circulation surround the building on the lowest level which is partly below street level. A green roof then covers some of that parking and becomes a street level plaza.

The project includes space for the existing uses and adds an outdoor community plaza with a gazebo, a pocket park at the end of Grant Avenue, a sculpture garden, a main entry plaza, underground parking, a gymnasium, a recreation center, a computer learning center, a teen center, a child care center, a dance studio and craft rooms, facilities for seniors, and a multilevel atrium for community events and art display.

The community center will be open from 8:30 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. seven days a week. Specific uses will have more limited hours as reflected in the analysis of parking later in this staff report.

Previous Planning Board Actions: There have been no previous Planning Board actions. The mandatory referral for site selection was approved administratively.

Community Outreach and Community Concerns: The City of Takoma Park has conducted extensive community outreach beginning in 1998, when they started looking at possible sites. In 1999, the City held a town meeting attended by more than 300 Takoma Park residents. A Steering Committee and five committees were formed as a result of that meeting. Major decisions involved public hearings in front of the City Council. The City Council approved this plan in January 2002. During the process, the neighborhood associations representing residents who live closest to the site were briefed on a regular basis and neighborhood leaders participated in many of the committee meetings.

Community concerns have focused on the relocation of the Grant Avenue cul-de-sac which will bring maneuvering vehicles closer to existing homes.

## **PROJECT ANALYSIS – FINDINGS**

**Finding: This project will be consistent with the Takoma Park Master Plan when comments are addressed concerning additional enhancements to the streetscape and provision of bikeway facilities along Maple Avenue.**

The proposal is consistent with the vision of the Master Plan and specific recommendations concerning improvements. The Plan states "*support provision of new or redesigned Municipal Center buildings and public spaces, including a library, school, and possibly a community center.*"

The proposal is consistent with the Master Plan's recommendations for Maple Avenue. The Master Plan states: "*Improve Maple Avenue between MD410/Philadelphia Avenue and Sligo Creek Parkway. Provide attractive features such as flowerbeds, benches, decorative lights, seasonal banners, seating areas, and enhanced crosswalks. Traffic calming features should also be considered.*" (page 95). This proposal will improve Maple Avenue through the enhanced landscaping and provision of a plaza in front of the building that reaches from the main entrance to the crosswalks at the intersection of Maple Avenue and Philadelphia Avenue. The proposal should incorporate additional design features as well, such as seating areas, enhanced crosswalks, and decorative street lights.

The Master Plan also identifies Maple Avenue as a bikeway route (Class 2 or 3) connecting Sligo Creek Park Trail and the Takoma Metro Station. A bike path (Class 1) is also recommended from the Municipal Center to Piney Branch Road via Takoma/Piney Branch local park. This proposal should show how these routes lead to the entrances to the community center.

**Finding: This project is consistent with the Development Standards for the Zone except as explained below and as shown in the Summary Table which follows:**

- The proposal will meet the development standards in the R-60 Zone along Grant Avenue through the acquisition of parkland.
- The surface parking lot does not meet the 25-foot development standard for the setback along Philadelphia Avenue. Four surface parking spaces should be either relocated or removed to provide the setback.
- Screening for the parking facility as described in the Zoning Ordinance should be provided along Philadelphia Avenue, Maple Avenue, and Grant Avenue: “a solid wall or fence, of adequate height for screening or a compact evergreen hedge with a minimum height of 3 feet at the time of original planting” (Section 59-E2.91.a-f). The screening should be shown on a landscape and lighting plan.
- The amount of interior green space for the surface parking lot does not meet the development standards in the zone and the design should be revised accordingly.

Summary Table  
Development Standards in the R-60 Zone  
**Bold type indicates where the Development Standards are not met**

Feature	Required for Private Development	Proposed
<b><u>BUILDING</u></b>		
Front yard setbacks		
Maple Avenue	25 feet	90 feet
Philadelphia Avenue	25 feet	40 feet
Side yard setbacks – Grant Avenue	8 feet sum = 18 feet	More than 10 feet
Rear yard setback	20 feet	90 & 127 feet
Height	2.5 stories/35 feet	34 feet
Max. building coverage - % net lot area	35%	25%
Distance from parking: farthest space to an entrance	500 feet	314 feet
<b><u>PARKING</u></b>		
Front yard setback		
- Maple Avenue	25 feet	29 feet
- Philadelphia Avenue	25 feet	<b>12 feet</b>
Side yard setback - Grant Avenue	8 feet sum of sides =18 feet	More than 10 feet
Rear yard setback	20 feet	35 feet
Loading Space	1 space	3 parking spaces
Total Auto Spaces	218	<b>207</b>
-Standard	211	199
-Spaces for the Handicapped	7	8

Feature	Required for Private Development	Proposed
Bicycle spaces	14	21
Motorcycle spaces	6	6
Landscape adjacent to street right-of-way: Maple Avenue & Philadelphia Avenue 10 foot min. width + 1 tree/40 feet+ 3-foot hedge or wall	10 foot width	To be provided
Landscape - perimeter 4 foot min. width + 1 tree/40 feet	4 foot width To be determined	To be provided
Internal green area	5%	To be provided

- The total number of spaces required is 218. The number currently shown is 207. Because of the need for improved pedestrian and bikeway access within the parking lots to connecting paths and sidewalks and for additional internal green area, a further reduction up to a total of approximately 10% below the number shown should be considered. The revisions to accommodate better pedestrian and bikeway circulation should be reflected in a site plan, landscape plan, and lighting plan. A reduction of the amount of parking is acceptable for the following reasons:
  - Many people will be walking instead of driving. There is a high concentration of people living within ¼ mile walking distance in nearby high-rise apartments. There are also bus stops in front of the library and in front of Piney Branch Elementary School that provide service. Students from the two nearby elementary schools and the Takoma Park Intermediate School are all within walking distance.
  - The City will be able to manage the use of the building so that some uses can be closed when there are special events that increase the demand for parking.
  - Major events are not frequent, occurring less often than once a month. The largest events occur 1-3 times a year. The City has made provisions for overflow parking off-site for such events.

**Finding: With the recommended modifications, this project will be compatible with existing and proposed adjacent uses and structures.**

Compatibility with nearby neighborhoods is the primary concern since the site is otherwise surrounded by public schools and parkland.

The neighborhood closest to the project is along Grant Avenue to the north. The nearest home in that neighborhood is approximately 100 feet away from the surface parking lot and is at an elevation more than 10 feet higher and separated by a slope

with existing trees. Residents have requested that a planted buffer be maintained along this slope. In addition, lights should be selected and located to minimize intrusion into nearby homes.

The shortening of Grant Avenue brings vehicles maneuvering within the cul- de-sac closer to several homes. The vehicles are driven by people coming to the park for recreation or maintenance or to drop children off for school. The impact of this activity has been raised as a concern by neighbors. For this reason, the cul-de-sac has been designed to sit slightly off-center so it is further from the homes and instead extends into the entry area of the park.

Compatibility with homes in the Historic District across Philadelphia Avenue is achieved. The most significant contribution to this is the character, orientation, and massing of the building. The building includes architectural references to historic styles found within the community in particular, the inspiration for the new building is the North Takoma Hotel of 1907.

**Finding: When the following comments are addressed, the location of the buildings, open space, and circulation will be adequate, safe, and efficient.**

Buildings: The placement works well on the site provided the parkland conveyance is approved. One safety consideration is that the route to the park along Grant Avenue is opposite the blank wall of the gymnasium where there are no windows looking out on that area. Consideration should be given to organizing the building spaces to ensure that there is an active interior space with windows looking out on this route to and from the park.

Open space & pedestrian circulation: There are three main areas of open space: The Entry Plaza, the Gazebo Space, and the Pocket Park. Collectively, the amount of open space is adequate and is distributed well throughout the site. Pedestrian connections between the spaces and to the public realm of the streets should be strengthened. Maple Avenue, as the civic main street, Grant Avenue as the route to the park and “seam” to connect to Piney Branch Elementary School next door, and Philadelphia Avenue as a main thoroughfare and major transit route should all have strong and welcoming connections to the public gathering spaces associated with this town hall/community center.

- The Entry Plaza which is at the intersection of Maple and Philadelphia Avenues provides pedestrian access to the main entrance of the building on Maple Avenue. The Entry Plaza is the most prominent of the three spaces.

The Entry Plaza is not currently designed as the town square because there have been several accidents where vehicles have run off Philadelphia Avenue and directly into that area of the site. Therefore, the City should consider design features such as reflective, crash resistant bollards and highly visible flags or banners along the edge. In addition, the City should work with the State Highway Administration (SHA) to address these safety

concerns. This plaza space and road should be designed so that the plaza can be used safely for major gatherings.

In addition, the intersections with Maple Avenue should be improved by reducing the crossing distance for pedestrians. The radius of the curb could be reduced to 30 feet. Differentiated pavement and enhancements to Maple Avenue should be considered at both the Philadelphia Avenue and Grant Avenue intersections. The proposal shows a depressed curb with bollards at the intersection with Philadelphia Avenue for better bicycle and pedestrian access and to create a stronger plaza presence within the community. A similar treatment should be considered at Grant Avenue and Maple Avenue.

In addition, pedestrian routes from the crosswalks to the two building entrances should be clear and more direct. For example, consideration should be given to creating a pedestrian axis from the corner, on a straight line through the plaza, through the building entrance near the library, and then to an attractive pedestrian entrance for the surface parking lot beyond. The route to the main entrance from the crosswalks should be direct and take into consideration the view lines that are created for pedestrians moving through the plaza to and from that entrance.

A stronger connection between the surface parking lot and the open space is also desirable. The above revisions will provide for a better visual and pedestrian link between the two.

- The Gazebo Space which faces Grant Avenue is associated with the building entrance that leads to the gymnasium from the school and park. The Gazebo Space is currently identified as the primary outdoor gathering space or town square. It sits on top of underground parking and is therefore separated by a low planter wall from Maple Avenue and Grant Avenue on two sides. There is only one entry point directly from a street and it is from Grant Avenue. Consideration should be given to revising this design to provide a more direct pedestrian route from the intersection of Grant Avenue and Maple Avenue. The space could be opened up more to this civic main street and the community. In addition, the connection between the Entry Plaza and this space should be strengthened by widening and enhancing the passage between the two. Consideration should also be given to creating focal points to draw people around the curve of the building from one space to the other.
- The third open space is the Pocket Park that sits at the end of Grant Avenue and provides an attractive passage space between Takoma/Piney Branch Local Park and the community center. The pedestrian connection to the back door of the community center should be clearly marked in the pavement and with signs. A more generous landscaped connection should be provided.



- The west side of Grant Avenue should be designed to accommodate a sidewalk. The City would like to direct people to cross Grant Avenue at a specific location to avoid conflicts with vehicles. For that reason, the City does not wish to provide a sidewalk on the west side of Grant at this time. In the future there may be a need for such a sidewalk. It should not be precluded by the design.
- On the north side of the building, continue paths from Takoma Park Elementary School and Grant Avenue, across the surface parking lot to connect to the community center entrances. Enhance the site design associated with the entrances so they are highly visible.
- On the South side provide direct pedestrian access from Maple Avenue and Grant Avenue to the building entrances on ground level with clearly marked crossings, pavement, and signs.
- On the west side investigate creating an enhanced crosswalk on Philadelphia Avenue for transit users.

Vehicular Circulation: The vehicular access to the parking areas works well. The use of three parking spaces for loading as proposed is acceptable. The design should ensure that a sufficient radius is provided for emergency vehicles to maneuver within the proposed new cul- de-sac at the end of Grant Avenue.

Bicycle Circulation: Maple Avenue is a framework bike route (Class 2 or 3) as recommended in the Master Plan. Another framework bike route connects Maple Avenue with Piney Branch Road and Takoma Intermediate School through this site (Class 1). This site design should include improvements to implement these routes such as striping and signs. Provide clear signs along Maple Avenue between Sligo Creek Park and the entrance to the community center.

### **Finding: Transportation**

The Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance requirements are satisfied. The City's traffic study confirms that Local Area Transportation Review Criteria are also satisfied.

### **Finding: Consistency with Environmental Guidelines and Regulations**

Forest Conservation Law: An exemption has been granted from the requirement to submit a Forest Conservation Plan for both parcels. This project has an approved NRI/FSD for both the City property and the Takoma/Piney Branch Park as required. The project also has an approved Tree Preservation Plan.

Stormwater Management: This project is in a Watershed Restoration Area as identified in the County Stream Protection Strategy. For this reason, all efforts should be made to address degraded conditions by improving runoff conditions, stream restoration, and

stormwater retrofit. These environmental concerns are also addressed in the conditions related to the use of parkland as discussed in this staff report.

**Comment: Use of Park Property**

The City is requesting the conveyance of approximately 0.5 acre of parkland at the edge of Takoma Piney Branch Local Park. This will allow the City to build within what is currently the Grant Avenue right-of-way and to grade and terrace a slope that is currently parkland. This will allow the access drive for the parking facility and a corner of the gymnasium to be built outside of what is today the City's parcel.

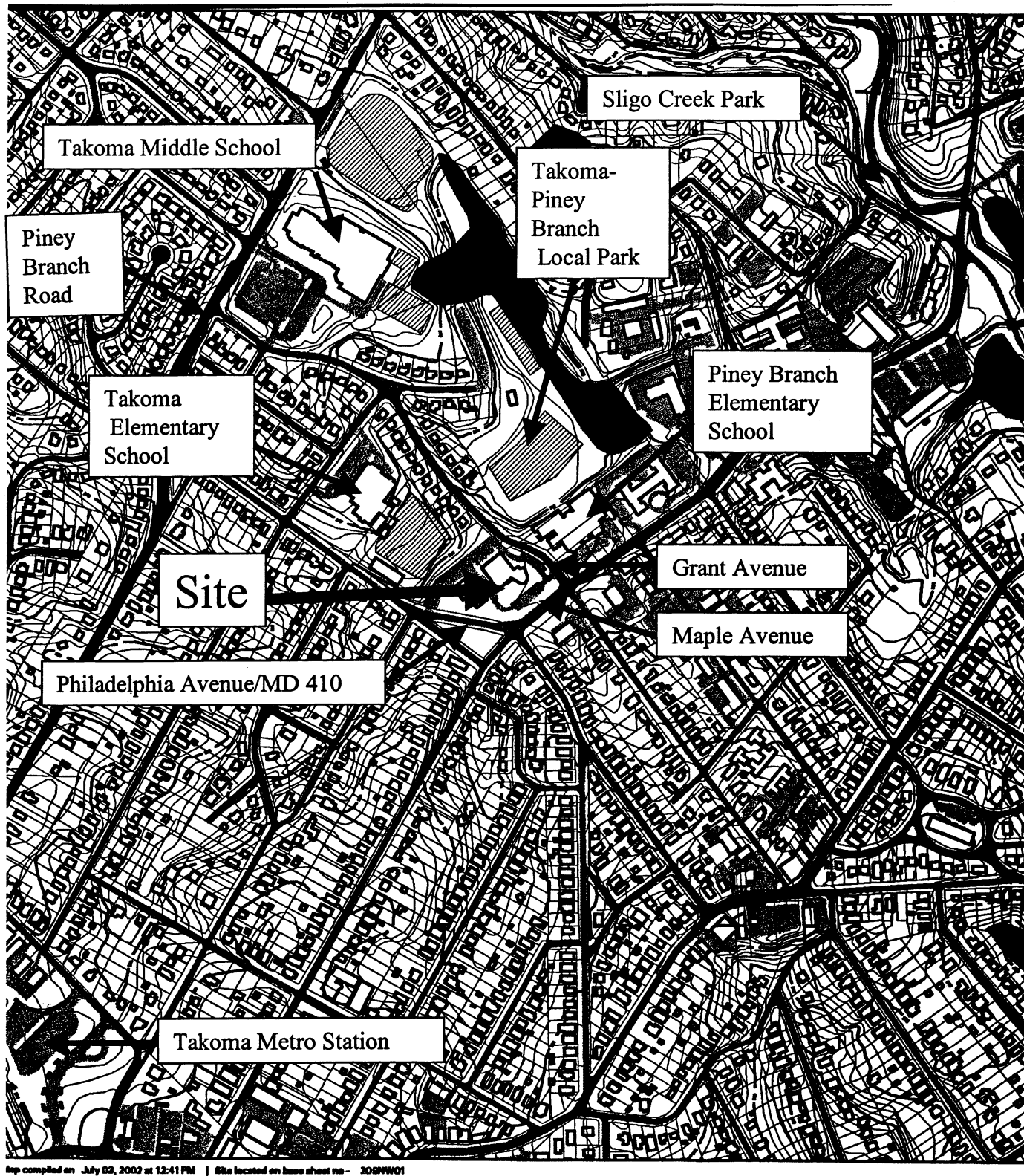
The City is also proposing changes to the park slope to facilitate construction of the access drive. The slope will be quite visible to users of the new Community Center and the park, and will be terraced, landscaped, and maintained by the City as part of the site. The following comments are recommended:

1. Prior to conveyance of parkland, the City of Takoma Park and the M-NCPPC shall enter into an agreement providing for the City to make certain improvements to the existing park entrance and slope on Grant Avenue. Construction for the entrance is to be determined based on a fair exchange for the value of the parkland. Construction shall occur as part of Phase 2 of the Community Center Construction. As part of this agreement the City shall provide a concept design for an attractive new entrance to the park from Grant Avenue with access for pedestrians, bicyclists, and emergency and maintenance vehicles, and design and construction drawings.
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3. The City of Takoma Park shall remove invasive species, provide a tree preservation plan, and stabilize slopes in the area to prevent erosion.
4. The City of Takoma Park shall officially abandon adjacent road right-of-way and record new plats to reflect the road abandonment and park conveyance.
5. In the event the conveyed property is no longer needed by the City for a public purpose, the land will be conveyed back to the M-NCPPC at no cost.

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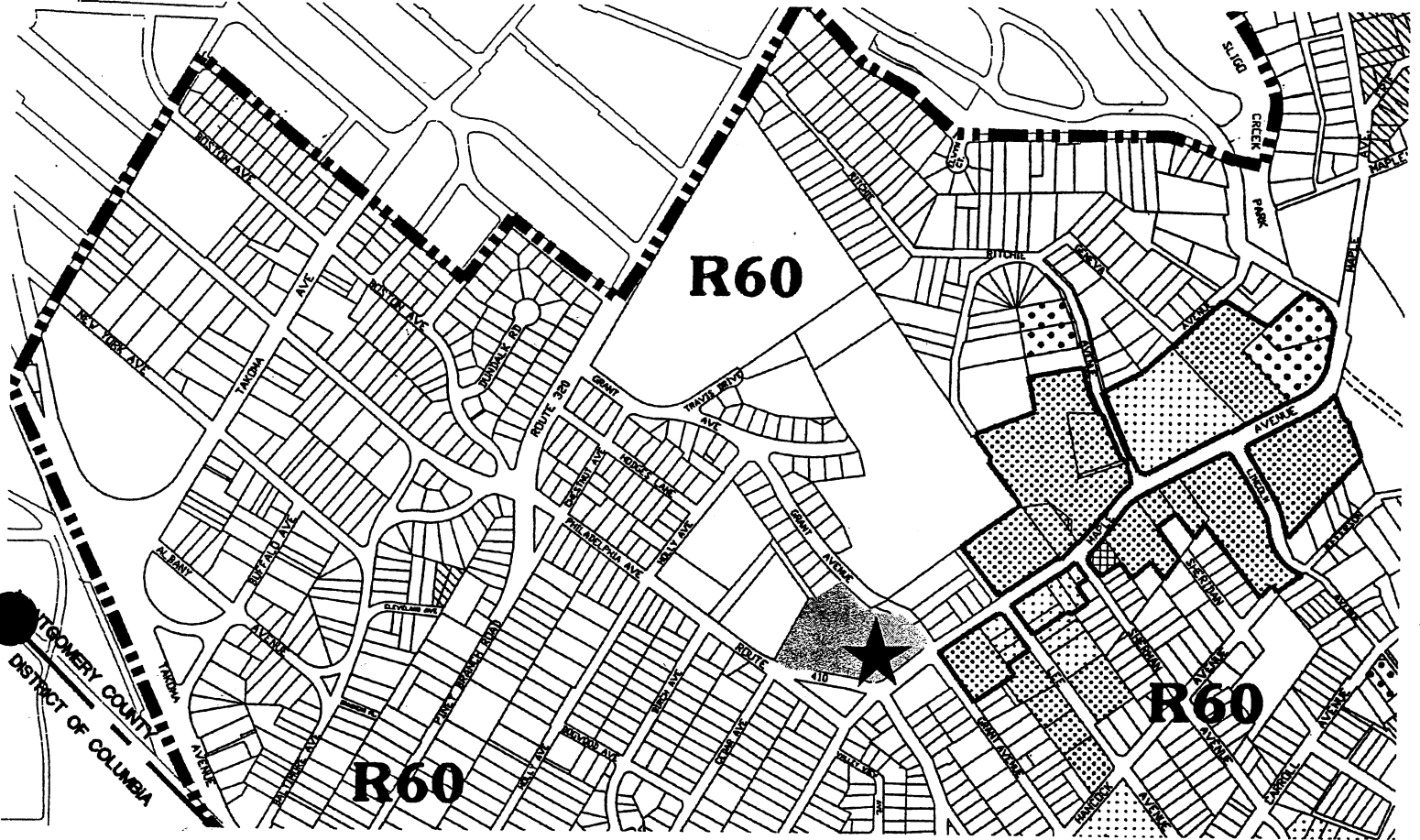
**Attachments:**

- Vicinity Map
- Zoning Map
- Existing Conditions
- View from Maple Avenue
- Site Plan with Comments
- Site Plan with Comments Regarding Pedestrian Circulation



Map compiled on July 02, 2002 at 12:41 PM | Site located on base sheet no. 208NW01

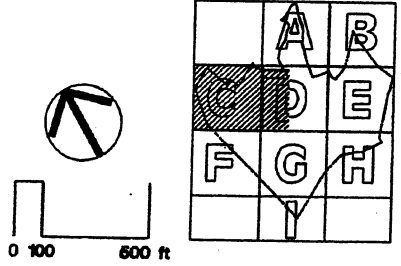
Vicinity Map –  
Takoma Park Community Center



Proposed Zoning – Area C  
Area D

LEGEND

- County Line
- Master Plan Boundary
- ▤ C-1 - Local Commercial
- ▧ R-10 - Multi-Family High Density Residential
- ▨ R-20 - Multi-Family Medium Density Residential
- ▩ R-30 - Multi-Family Low Density Residential
- R-40 - One Family Semi-Detached
- RE-2, R-60 - Single Family Residential
- NROZ - Neighborhood Retail Overlay Zone
- CROZ - Commercial Revitalization Overlay Zone
- R-60 - Single Family Residential



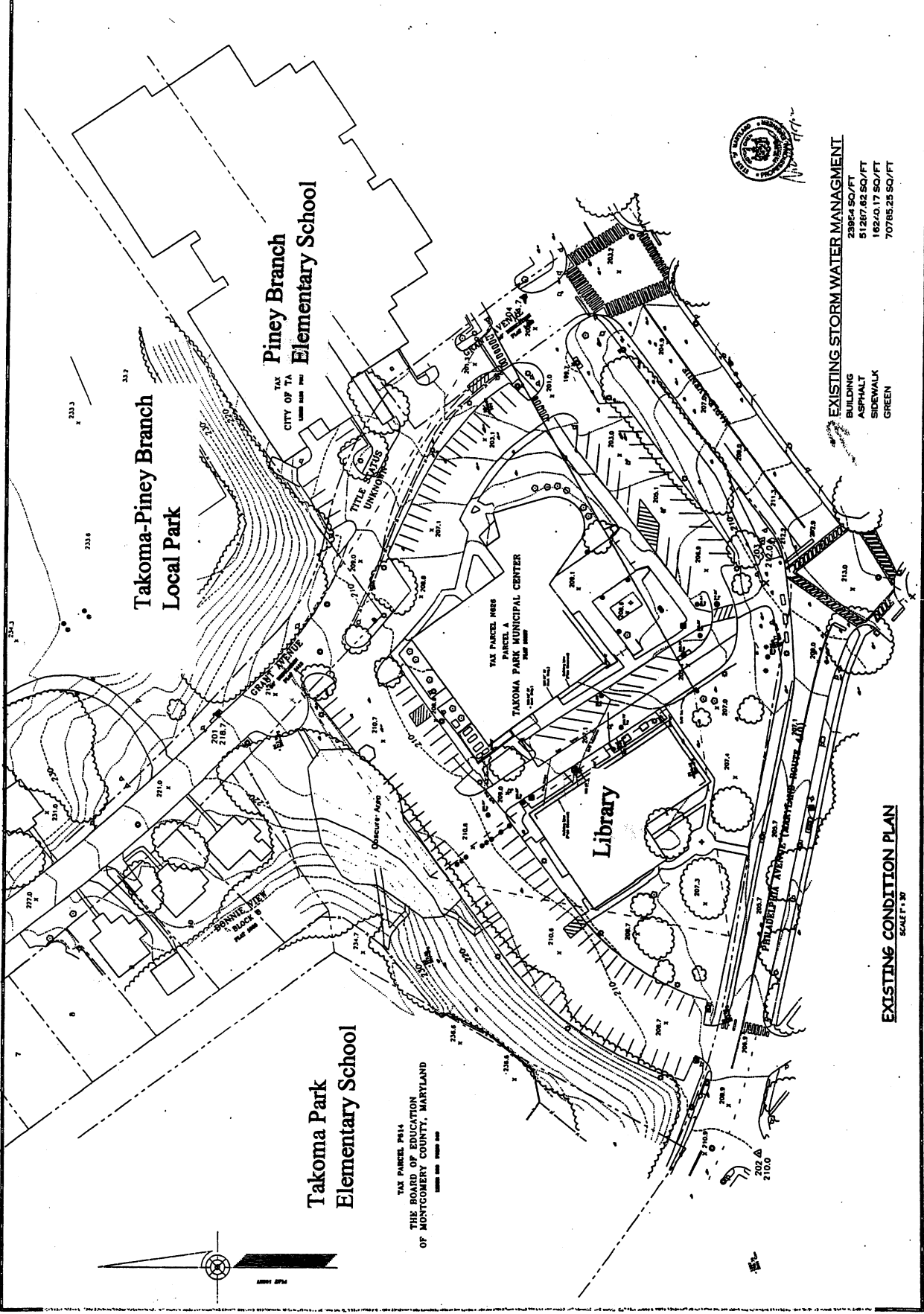
DATE	2014.09.24
PROJECT	SWM CONCEPT SITE PLAN
CLIENT	THE CITY OF TAKOMA PARK
LOCATION	TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND
SCALE	AS SHOWN

SCHEMATIC DESIGN PLANS  
TAKOMA PARK MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND

LAWRENCE ABELL & ASSOCIATES LTD.  
ARCHITECTS - PLANNERS  
314 EAST CHARLES STREET, LA PLATA, MARYLAND  
TEL: 410.326.1234 FAX: 410.326.1235

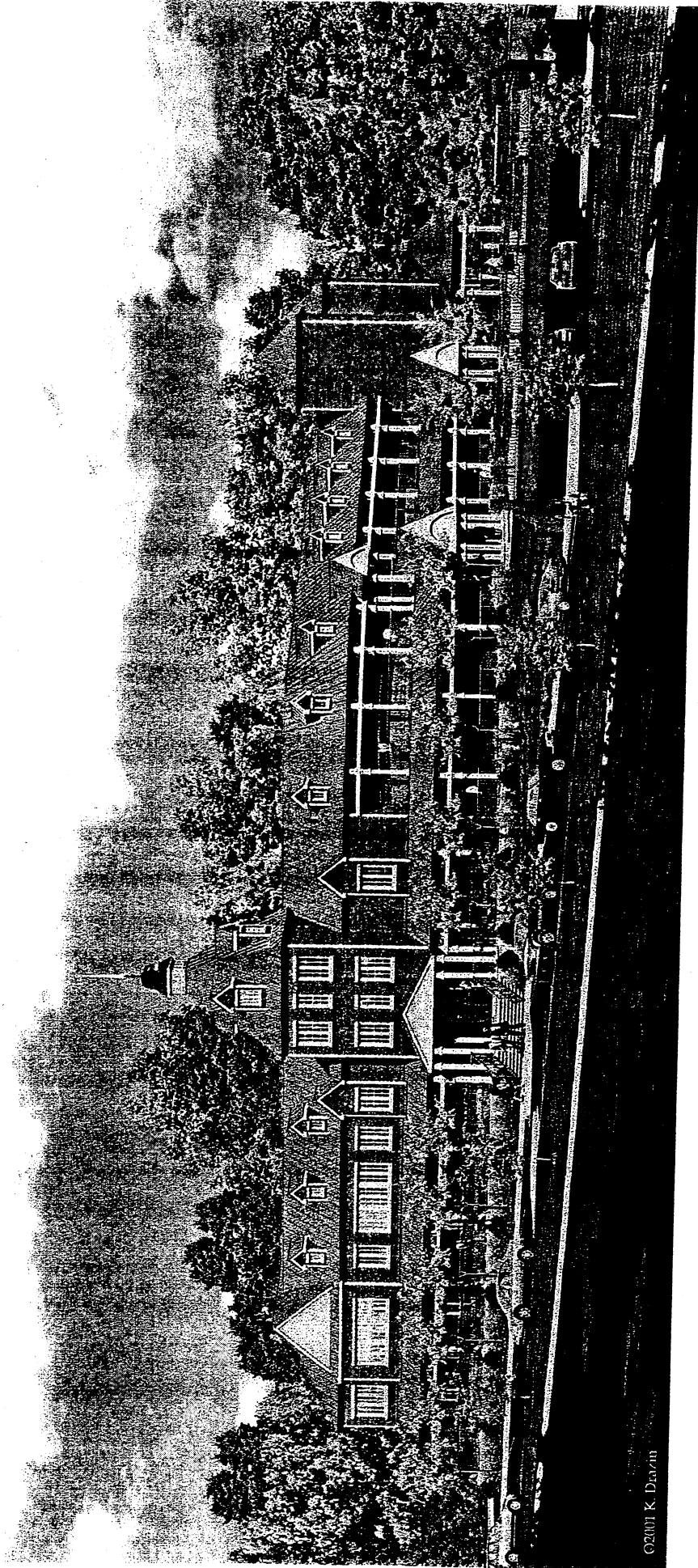
EXISTING STORM WATER MANAGEMENT  
 BUILDING 23824 SQ/FT  
 ASPHALT 51267.62 SQ/FT  
 SIDEWALK 16240.17 SQ/FT  
 GREEN 70785.25 SQ/FT

C1  
SHEET OF



Existing Conditions

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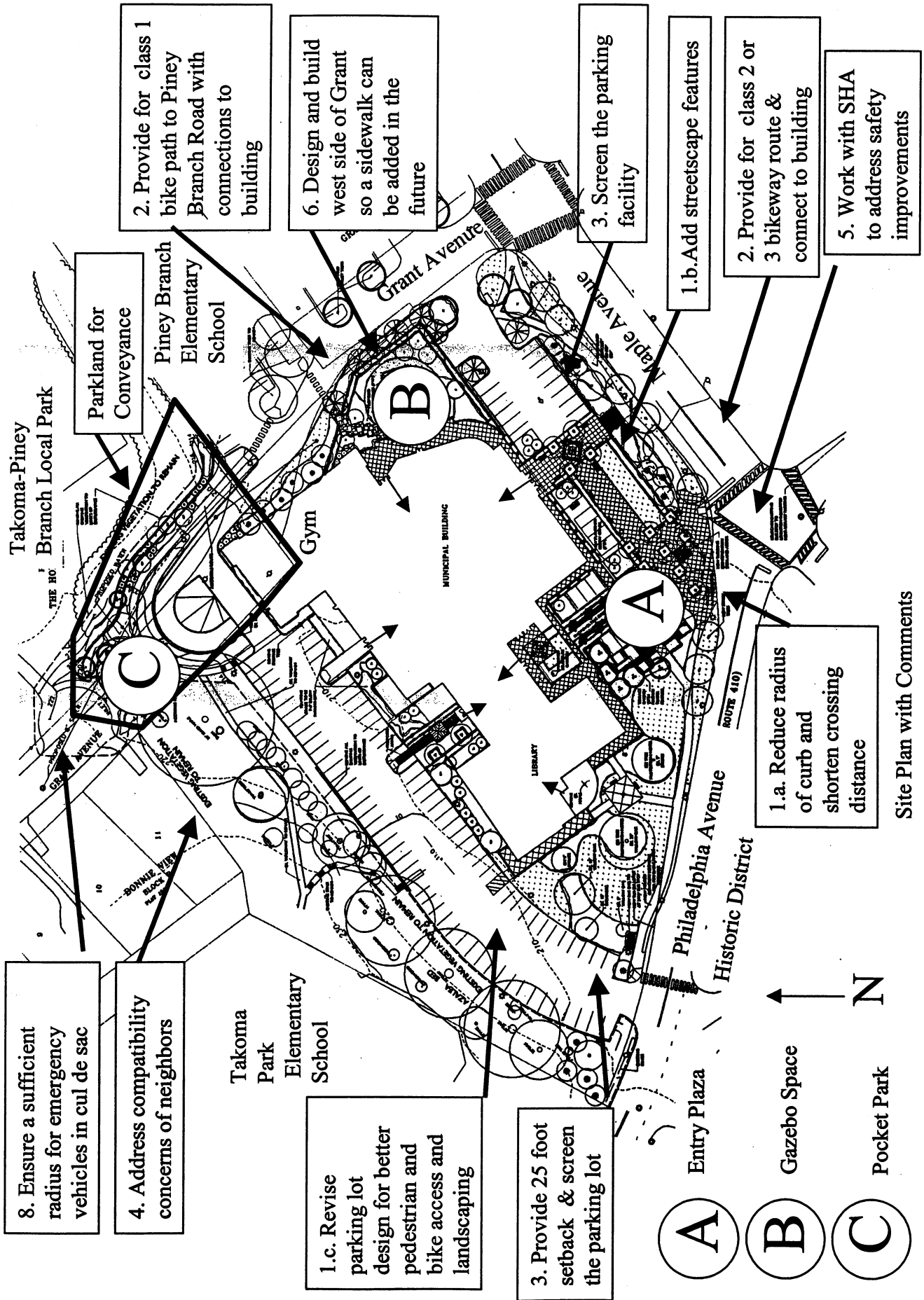
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# TAKOMA PARK MUNICIPAL CENTER

DESIGNED BY LAWRENCE ABTLI & ASSOCIATES



View from Maple Avenue



8. Ensure a sufficient radius for emergency vehicles in cul de sac

4. Address compatibility concerns of neighbors

1.c. Revise parking lot design for better pedestrian and bike access and landscaping

3. Provide 25 foot setback & screen the parking lot

2. Provide for class 1 bike path to Piney Branch Road with connections to building

6. Design and build west side of Grant so a sidewalk can be added in the future

3. Screen the parking facility

1.b. Add streetscape features

2. Provide for class 2 or 3 bikeway route & connect to building

5. Work with SHA to address safety improvements

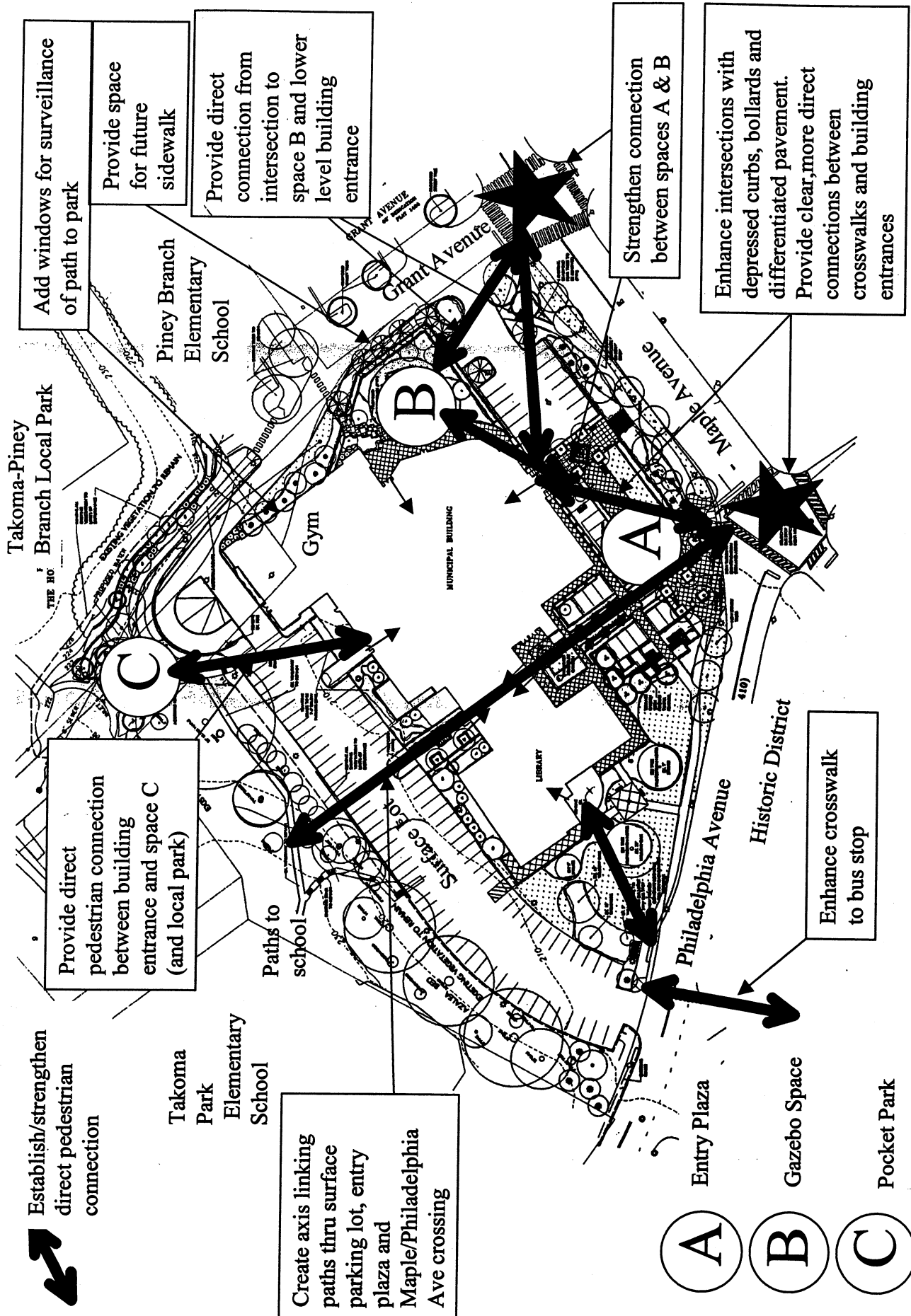
1.a. Reduce radius of curb and shorten crossing distance

A

B

C

Site Plan with Comments



Establish/strengthen direct pedestrian connection



Provide direct pedestrian connection between building entrance and space C (and local park)

Add windows for surveillance of path to park

Provide space for future sidewalk

Provide direct connection from intersection to space B and lower level building entrance

Strengthen connection between spaces A & B

Enhance intersections with depressed curbs, bollards and differentiated pavement. Provide clear, more direct connections between crosswalks and building entrances

Enhance crosswalk to bus stop

Create axis linking paths thru surface parking lot, entry plaza and Maple/Philadelphia Ave crossing

A

B

C

Site Plan with Comments regarding Pedestrian Circulation