

ANALYSIS: Conformance to Zoning Regulations and Schematic Development Plan

Prior Approvals

The Whetstone Run property was the subject of a Local Map Amendment request that commenced in January 2004. The applicant's request sought reclassification zoning from R-200 (residential, one-family) to RT-10 (residential, townhouse). The MNCPPC staff report recommended approval of the rezoning, with the additional recommendation to revise the application to request RT-8, the density level reflected in the proposal itself. The Planning Board recommended approval at its hearing on January 29, 2004.

The application, G-812 [Tax Account No. 09-00767043], for the Zoning Map Amendment was introduced and adopted per Resolution 15-735, July 27, 2004. The binding elements are noted in the data table below:

PROJECT DATA TABLE				
Whetstone Run	Site Plan 8-05010	Devel. Plan	RT-8 (Cluster)	RT-8 (Cluster)
Development Standard	Total Areas	Binding Elem. ¹	Permitted/Reqd	Proposed
Gross Site Area				
Total Gross Tract Area	4.02 ac. [175,180 sf]			
Area of Public Dedication	0.20 ac. [10,109 sf]			
Total Net Tract	3.80 ac. [165,071 sf]			
Development Standards RT-8				
Proposed use: Attached SFH		Attached SFH	Det., att, semi-att.	Attached SFH
Tract Area (minimum)			20,000 sf minimum	175,180 sf
Density (standard)		32 du's	8 du/acre (32 du's)	7.9 du/acre (32 du's)
Density (MPDU standard)			9.76 du/acre (39 du's)	N/A
Building Setbacks				
From 1-family detached dwelling zone			30 feet minimum	30 feet minimum
From public street			25 feet minimum	25 feet minimum
From adjoining lot - side [must equal front setback]			10 feet minimum	10 feet minimum
From adjoining lot - rear			20 feet minimum	20 feet minimum
Building Height				
			35 feet maximum	35 feet maximum
Building Coverage				
Footprint Coverage		14% [24,000 sf]	35% maximum	14%
Green Area		65% [113,800 sf]	50% minimum	65%
Forest Conservation			0.80 acres	0.93 acres
Forestation - Afforestation			38 acres	0.38 acres
Parking				
Standard: 2 spaces/unit			64 spaces	75 spaces
¹ Additional binding elements include the following: Submission of Preliminary Plan of Subdivision restricted to July 1, 2004 or thereafter; areas specifically designated on site plan limited to landscaping and/or fencing, as reviewed at Site Plan.				

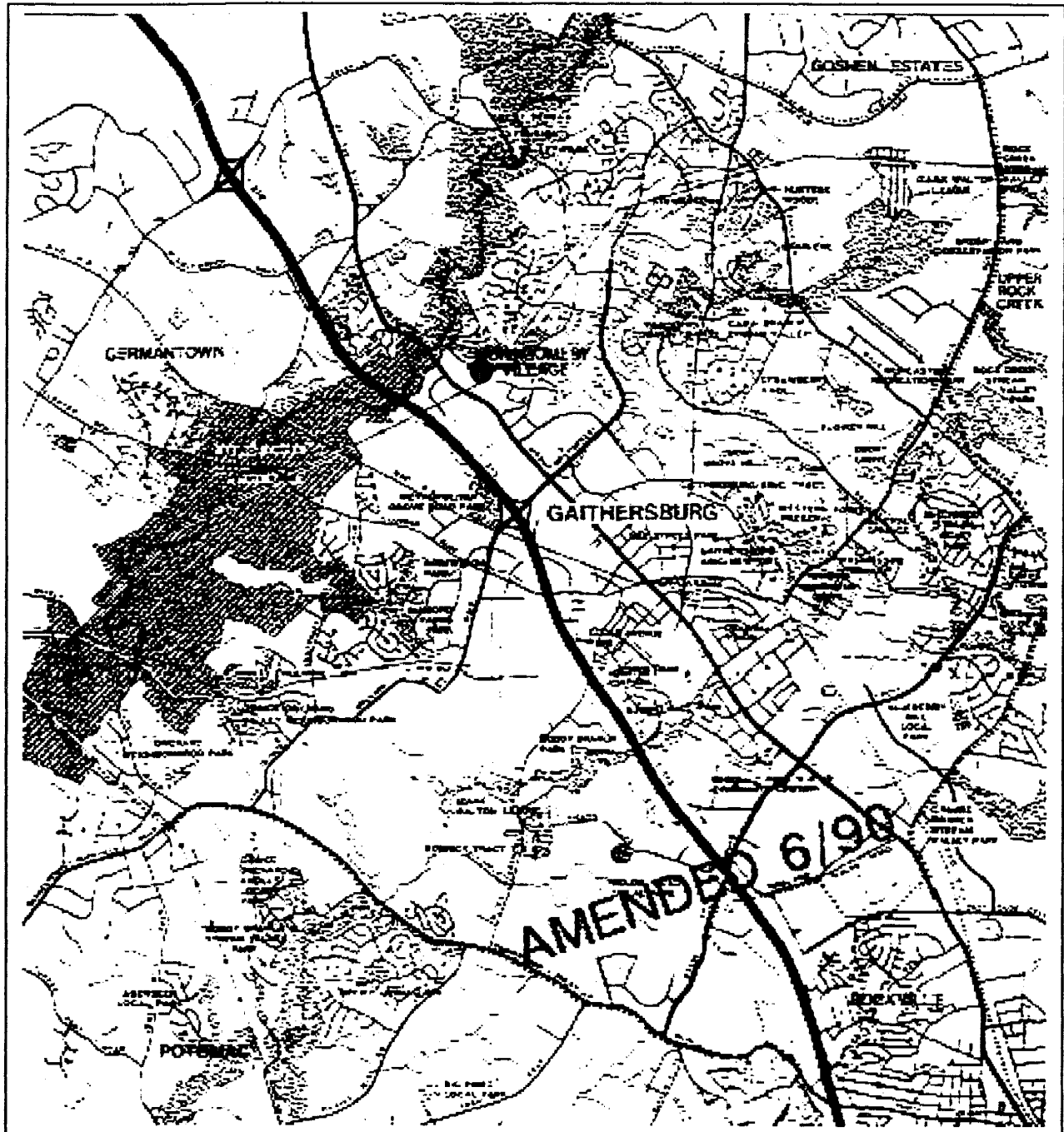
ANALYSIS: Recreation

WHETSTONE RUN RECREATION						
DEMAND POINTS	Tots	Children	Teens	Adults	Seniors	TOTALS
<i>per 100 units</i>	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	
Townhouses	17.00	22.00	18.00	129.00	7.00	193.00
TH # units = 32	<u>5.44</u>	<u>7.04</u>	<u>5.76</u>	<u>41.28</u>	<u>2.24</u>	<u>61.76</u>
PROJECT DEMAND	5.44	7.04	5.76	41.28	2.24	61.76
SUPPLY POINTS						
On Site						
Picnic/Sitting (1)	2.00	2.00	30.00	10.00	4.00	1.00
Tot Lot	9.00	2.00	0.00	4.00	1.00	16.00
Natural Areas	0.00	0.35	0.58	4.13	2.06	7.12
Pedestrian System	0.54	1.41	1.15	18.58	1.01	22.69
On Site Total	11.544	5.76	31.728	36.704	8.072	93.808
Off Site						
Watkins Mill Elem School:						
Soft Ball Field - Junior	2.00	15.00	15.00	30.00	2.00	
Open Play Area	9.00	2.00	0.00	4.00	1.00	
Great Seneca Creek Trail	0.27	0.70	0.86	6.19	0.34	8.37
Off Site Total	11.27	17.70	15.86	40.19	3.34	88.368
SUPPLY/DEMAND RATIOS						
On Site Ratio	2.12	0.82	5.51	0.89	3.60	
Off Site Ratio *	2.07	2.51	2.75	0.97	1.49	
* Staff condition addresses portion of pedestrian system requested for the adjoining Pepco road frontage connection to Travis Avenue.						

ANALYSIS:

Conformance to Master Plan

The Whetstone Run property is located within the boundaries of the 1985 Gaithersburg Vicinity Master Plan. The Master Plan does not include any specific recommendation for the subject property, however, the land use map indicates low-density residential (2-4 units per acre). The adjacent properties to the west are also zoned R-200 and are developed with both one-family detached homes and townhouses. Townhouses are permitted in the R-200 Zone under the optional method of development to accommodate moderately priced dwelling units.



The Great Seneca Stream Valley Park adjoins Whetstone Run on the north. The park contains more than 800 contiguous acres of parkland.

Local Area Transportation Review

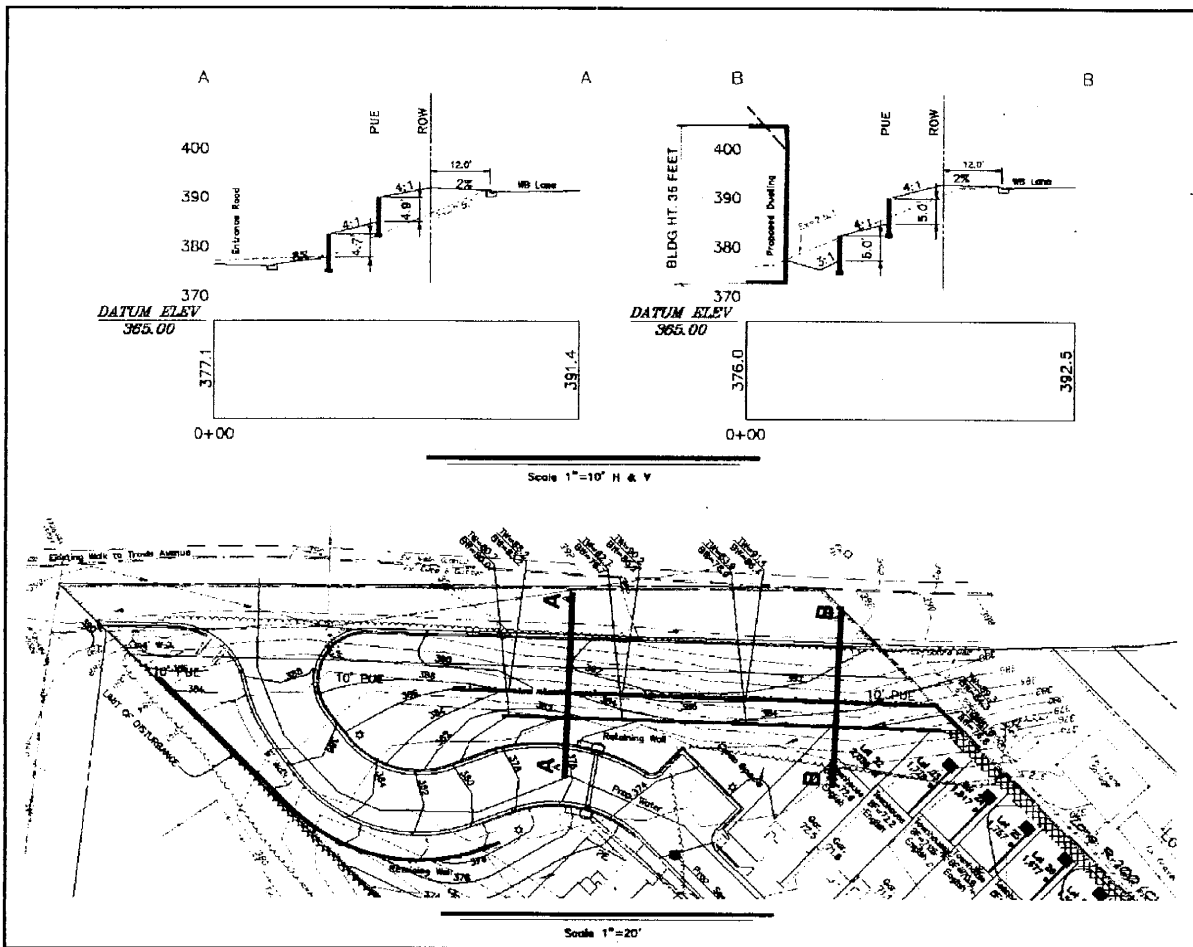
The plan, as conditioned, satisfies the Local Area Transportation Review and will result in no adverse effect on local area roadway conditions or existing pedestrian and vehicular access; the proposed plan, as conditioned, will improve roadway conditions and pedestrian and vehicular access.

Forest Conservation

The Preliminary Forest Conservation Plan has been reviewed by Environmental Planning Staff. The site currently provides 2.97 acres of forest. The applicant proposes to clear 2.04 acres of forest while retaining 0.93 acres. The forest to be retained includes highly erodible soils with steep slopes between 15% and 25%. EPD staff recommends that the applicant meet forestation requirements (0.38 acres of forest) by using an offsite forest conservation bank or through the fee-in-lieu option.

Housing Impact Statement

There will be no net gain or loss of affordable units, should this plan be approved. The project does not involve demolition of units, because none currently exist on the 4-acre tract, and, because it proposes 32 units, the project does not require MPDUs, assuming the plan is approved by April 1, 2005. Housing staff has no further comments on this project.



Section drawing showing proportions of retaining walls along the Old Game Preserve Road frontage. The walls have been minimized as much as possible.

FINDINGS: For Site Plan Review

1. *The Site Plan is consistent with an approved development plan or a project plan for the optional method of development if required.*

See data table above for conformance to the approved schematic development plan.

2. *The Site Plan meets all of the requirements of the zone in which it is located.*

See data table above.

3. *The location of the building and structures, the open spaces, the landscaping, recreation facilities, and the pedestrian and vehicular circulation systems are adequate, safe and efficient.*

a. Location of Buildings

The overall site development of Whetstone Run is determined by several factors: namely, the exaggerated topography of steep slopes, the proximity of the stream valley buffer, the prevailing patterns of attached housing, and the feasibility of road access into the site. The townhouses that “hug” the Pepco right-of-way, as well as adjacent Seneca Whetstone, set the immediate context with respect to density level and building type—a finely articulated scale that supports more than 450 housing units. The resulting residential development pattern, extending to Watkins Mill Road, almost ½ mile to the east within the City of Gaithersburg, wraps the mix of retail and service uses confronting Frederick Avenue, interrupted only by the “slice” of Pepco property that supports overhead transmission lines.

The proposal for Whetstone Run, clearly an “infill” development, completes the area’s recognizable residential development pattern, reconciling the grid established by Montgomery Meadows on the east with Seneca Whetstone on the west. This rationalist plan places its buildings in logical relationship to the adjoining properties, corresponding to the existing massing and scale, while respecting prevailing geometries and preserving the stream buffer. The compatibility of this form, however, is challenged by its role as a comprehensive, manmade overlay imposed on inherently steep terrain. The consistency of the pattern is achieved only by extensive site engineering that encompasses more than 700 linear feet of retaining walls—the structural “wedges” that allow the proposed density, and, ironically, preserve the sensitive, steep slopes within the floodplain. While the scale and height proposed for the walls have been minimized to the greatest extent possible, these retaining walls necessarily wrap 2-1/2 sides of the building envelope. Such structures exert significant effect on the site itself and adjoining properties with respect to views, shade, landscaping, and even maintenance costs. Staff has concerns about the responsibility for long-term maintenance associated with the retaining walls by a subdivision of 32 homes. Staff recommends additional review of the retaining walls, including dimensions, elevations, and building materials, prior to signature set. Staff also recommends additional plantings and ground cover at the retaining walls to mitigate visual effects.

b. Open Spaces

The site’s open spaces are, by nature of the parcel’s shape and topography assigned to the 0.97 acres of forest conservation at the north end of the site. This forest, sited on steep, erodible slopes, forms part of the Great Seneca Stream Valley Park. The protection of this area will enhance the recreation amenities for residents, providing direct access to the stream valley and its trail system. It will further ensure the adjoining residents of natural surroundings and attractive views in perpetuity.

The Tot Lot, located mid-site along the west property boundary, is aligned with Badger Court, the street serving the adjacent community. The space is designed to function as a gathering place, featuring seating and group mailboxes framed by attractive, varied landscaping.

c. Landscaping and Lighting

The landscaping and lighting is adequate, safe, and efficient. The disposition of the site boundaries within the stream buffer, the surrounding sensitive environment, and optimal design that accommodates the desired density create significant challenges in topography and grading, particularly along the east site boundary and the Old Game Preserve road frontage. The compulsory use of retaining walls, paradoxically, allows the preservation of the stream buffer in addition to adequate and safe site access. In a sense, the creation of a usable buildable envelope within the site, vis-à-vis the retaining walls on the east and south, allows the continuity of the stream buffer extension into the site, and, offers “democratic” visual and physical access to the MNCPPC stream valley park for residents and neighbors.

d. Recreation

The proposed development offers adequate, safe and efficient recreational amenities. On site recreation includes a tot lot, natural area of 0.97 acres within the forest conservation easement, and the pedestrian system. The site’s proximity to the Great Seneca Stream Valley Park and to the MNCPPC trails system offers attractive recreational amenities.

e. Vehicular and Pedestrian Circulation

Vehicular and pedestrian circulation is adequate, safe, and efficient. The vehicular circulation system consists of a single entry point from Old Game Preserve Road into the site, as a central “spine” that culminates in a landscape island round-about. Pedestrian circulation within the site is provided by curbside sidewalks along both sides of the private street, with shade trees and ornamental trees framing the view of the street. A single pedestrian interconnection is provided at the Tot Lot, connecting to Arrowsmith Court.

The head-in parking is provided, primarily on the east side of the public street, toward the rear, attractively landscaped with shade trees. Ironically, although the plan goes to great lengths to incorporate the surrounding residential lot pattern, hence the outward site form, the streets are insular and offer no interconnections to the adjoining sites. This visually connected site offers no vehicular connections other than the public street frontage.

See page 6, *Road Improvements and Neighborhood Pedestrian Connections Issues of Review* for staff discussion of external circulation.

4. *Each structure and use is compatible with other uses and other Site Plans and with existing and proposed adjacent development.*

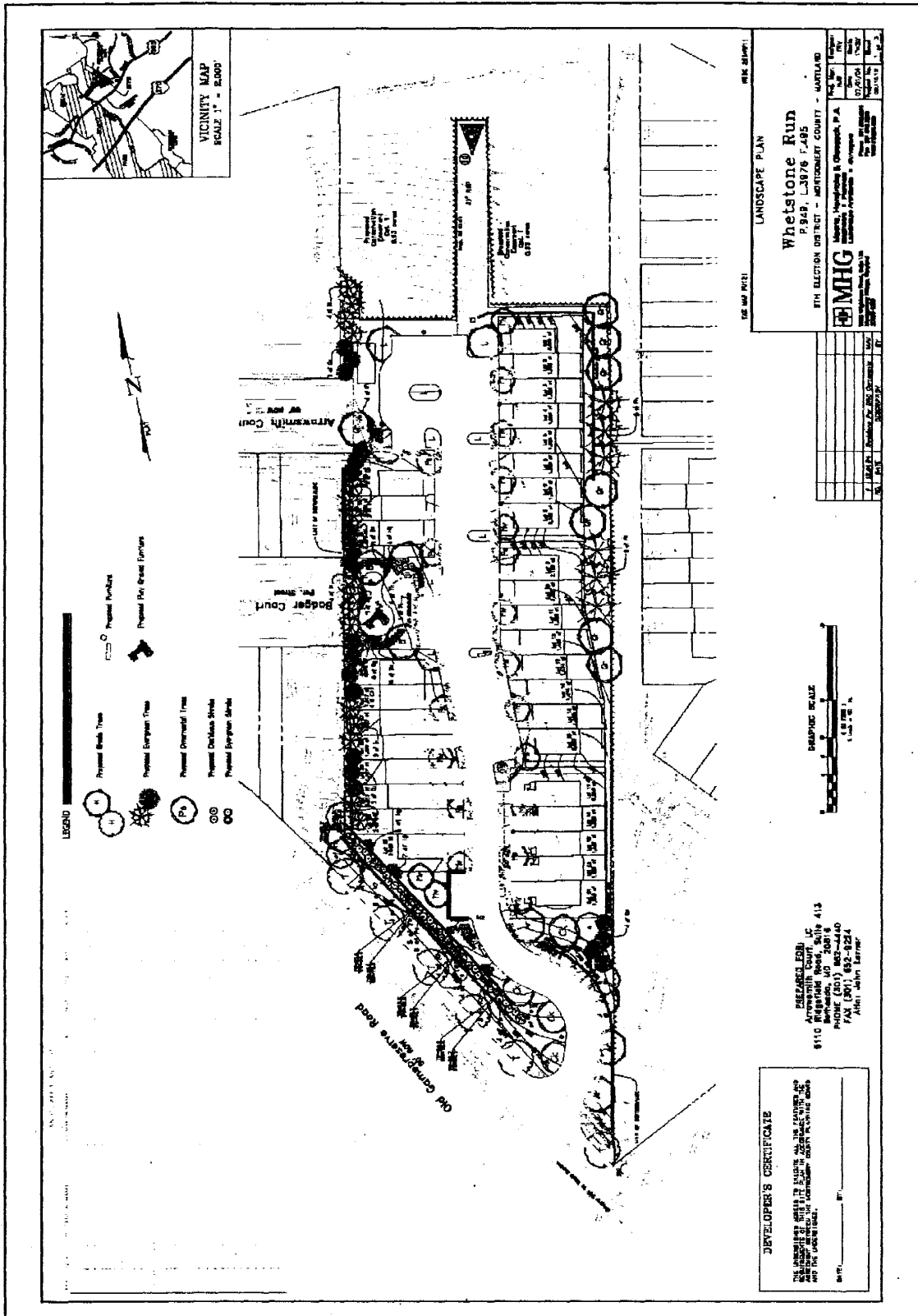
The proposed housing is compatible with the established patterns of the adjacent development, extending the lot pattern with compatible reference to building type, massing and scale. The site plan achieves an intentional, insular orientation, despite its reference to the geometry of surrounding development, physically limiting vehicular and pedestrian interconnections, and visually limiting viewsheds through landscaping and fencing.

In general, the site design achieves internally an attractive, humane scale via its optimal building locations that offer a balance of public and private places within the development. Externally, this is a subdivision that, with this site plan, will function as a logical solution to an infill site, referencing the area’s existing development. This plan will impart a new reading of the adjoining small development, Seneca Whetstone, as the tapered end of the area’s residential community east of Seneca Creek Park.

The most challenging aspect to achieving compatibility for this site rests with the ability to minimize the size and scale of the retaining walls, and to successfully mitigate the visual effects for residents and neighbors. The achievement of satisfactory residential density along with the preservation of significant areas of parkland requires, in return, thoughtful, aesthetic treatment of the necessary engineering.

5. *The Site Plan meets all applicable requirements of Chapter 22A regarding forest conservation and Chapter 17 regarding Water Resource Protection.*

The plan conforms to the requirements of Chapter 22A for forest conservation by the applicant's provision of off site planting of 0.38 acres or a fee-in-lieu payment.



Revised Landscape Plan submitted January 31, 2004. The unit types for Lots 30-32 have been changed to provide an English-type row house, with street parking.