



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

June 7, 2002

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Montgomery County Planning Board  
**VIA:** John A. Carter, Chief, Community-Based Planning Division *JAC*  
**FROM:** Kristin O'Connor, Senior Planner *KO*  
Bethesda-Chevy Chase/North Bethesda Team (301-495-2172)

**REVIEW TYPE:** Mandatory Referral  
**PROJECT NAME:** Athletic Field for Westland Middle School and Little Flower Church School  
**APPLICANT:** Montgomery County Public Schools

**CASE NUMBER:** 02202-MCPS-1  
**REVIEW BASIS:** Article 28, Chapter 7-112 of the Regional District Act

**ZONE:** R-60  
**LOCATION:** 5511 Massachusetts Avenue, Bethesda  
**MASTER PLAN:** Bethesda-Chevy Chase Master Plan (1990)

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** APPROVAL to transmit comments to Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS).

1. Preserve as many mature trees in the existing forest stand as possible.
  - a. Reduce the size of the field to save additional trees and to increase the setback from homes along Jordan Road.
  - b. Add retaining walls to reduce encroachment into the critical root zones of significant and specimen trees.
2. Provide additional landscaping and screening of the field and parking lot.
3. Submit and obtain approval of a Final Forest Conservation Plan prior to permitting.
4. Provide pedestrian connections to the field.
5. Establish a cooperative parking and field use agreement between the two schools.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) has submitted a plan to create a 165-foot by 300-foot multi-purpose field. This multi-purpose field will serve as outdoor space for Westland Middle School and Little Flower Church School. The field will be utilized for various sports such as soccer, lacrosse, and football. After school hours, the field will be available to the public including teams from Westland Middle School, parish sports teams from Little Flower Church School, and the adjacent community. The field will not be lighted and does not require any additional utilities.

The Little Flower Church School has been utilizing a portion of its paved parking lot for student outdoor activities. The proposed application will use a portion of the Westland Middle School site for these activities. The proposed field will be located in a wooded, undeveloped area along the common property line of both schools. The area for the proposed field consists of approximately two acres.

The field area will be accessible from Westland Middle School and the Little Flower Church School parking lot. There is no need for additional roads or driveways to access the field. Since the field is being established principally for existing MCPS and Little Flower Physical Education programs, there will not be a traffic impact.

### **Cooperation Between the Church of the Little Flower and Westland Middle School**

The Church of the Little Flower and the Westland Middle School have existed cooperatively as neighbors for many decades. The church and the school have maintained a good neighbor status with each other as well as the neighboring residential community.

In 1959, the church and the school exchanged parcels of land. The new boundary configuration provided more efficient use of their sites. The church parking area, which is immediately adjacent to the school, has provided overflow parking for many school functions. There is an existing pedestrian walkway between the two sites that connects their parking.

The Little Flower Church School, as the primary user of the field during the school day, is funding the cost for the design and construction of the field. Little Flower will establish the necessary agreements to address the terms covering the construction, operation, maintenance, and liability for use of the field.

### **Site Description**

Westland Middle School property consists of 25.1 acres in the R-60 zone. The school building is situated on the eastern portion of the property on a bluff adjacent to Westbard Avenue. The only vehicular entrance to the public school is from Massachusetts Avenue via a shared driveway (with the library). The school's current athletic field is located on the northern boundary also adjacent to Westbard Avenue. There are two parking areas located on school property. One parking area is adjacent to the south side of the building, and the larger parking area extends westerly across the

mid-portion of the site, almost to the Little Flower property. The current school population is 1,029 students. There are currently 124 parking spaces, two delivery-loading spaces and a bus-loading area. A wooded area containing some steep slopes and a drainage path runs along the western boundary adjacent to Little Flower.

The Little Flower Church School is located on 11.35 acres in the R-60 zone on the north side of Massachusetts Avenue adjacent to the western boundary of Westland Middle School. The school is a Catholic elementary school sponsored by the Church of the Little Flower Parish. It is operated in accordance with the mandates of the State of Maryland under the supervision of the Catholic Schools Office of the Archdiocese of Washington. Little Flower has an enrollment of 270 students (pre-kindergarten through eighth grade).

The Little Flower Church property is improved with the school buildings, gymnasium, Rectory, and Sanctuary. The site currently provides 305 parking spaces. The primary outdoor activity area available for the school recreation is an asphalt area located in the courtyard formed by building wings on the north side of the school.

The proposed field is bounded on the north by Jordan Road, on the west by the Little Flower Church and parking lot, on the south by Massachusetts Avenue, and to the east by Westland Middle School. The proposed site topography is severe and the grade change is 30 feet across the property from west to east.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Master Plan Findings**

Both schools are in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Master Plan area. The 1990 Master Plan includes the following guidance:

*When new uses are programmed for school sites, compatibility with the neighborhood must be maintained. The degree to which a new use is incorporated into the existing community fabric is crucial. The mandatory referral process should be used to ensure that proposals for school modernization, additions and reuses are compatible with the surrounding area. Issues to address include:*

- 1. Traffic and parking controls*
- 2. Sensitive siting of additions*
- 3. Landscaping and parking lot screening*

*Traffic and Parking:* The field is not expected to generate any additional traffic or parking challenges. The proposed field will not be used for increased activities or will it add more students to either school. The field is being proposed for existing MCPS programs, the Little Flower School physical education program and the community.

*Sensitive Siting:* The proposed field is situated in a high priority forest containing specimen trees. A reduced and relocated field provides for greater sensitivity to the

specimen trees and provides compatibility with the adjacent neighborhoods. The reduction and relocation of the field will save additional forest that includes mature poplars and oaks. Since the intention of the proposed field is to allow for programmed school classes and for activities during recess periods, a reduced field would protect much of the tree stand while providing the necessary recreation space required for school activities. According to the approved and adopted M-NCPPC *Recreation Guidelines*, a junior field-size field at 150' by 240' will provide ample activity space for K-8 school children at Little Flower Church School.

Staff supports reducing the size of the field to retain additional mature trees that will supply sufficient screening to buffer the field from the neighbors. In addition, a smaller field will require less grading on MCPS property. A retaining wall is requested by staff to reduce the encroachment in the critical root zone of significant specimen trees.

*Landscaping and Screening:* The applicant proposes screening along the field from the neighbors along Jordan Road. Staff recommends extending the new plantings along the north side of the fence by planting the American Holly 12-15' on center rather than the 9' as suggested in the Landscape Plan. This will provide ample screening of the parking and field. Staff suggests considering Leyland Cypress at 6" in diameter and spaced at 6-8" on center in lieu of Colorado Spruce. The size of the Chinese Elm, European Beech, and the Sawtooth Oak should be increased to 2 ½ - 3" caliper (slightly larger than the 2.0" proposed in the Landscape Plan) to provide a denser buffer around the field.

The Master Plan also recommends that:

*Existing public facilities already provide a range of programs and activities that enhance life in the Planning Area. But where there is space available on the site for expansion, community-enhancing functions should be planned. Such facilities should be linked to the neighborhood by pedestrian and bicycle paths. (Page 149)*

MCPS and Little Flower propose to make the field available for other community-serving uses. An access path currently exists on the MCPS property. Staff supports the construction of an upgraded pedestrian link that meets ADA standards. An ADA-compliant connection between Little Flower and Westland Middle School will provide full-community access to the field. Due to an already existing parking agreement and a current field operational agreement between Westland Middle School and the Little Flower Church School, a connection from each parking lot to the field is necessary.

Since the Westland Middle School already has a baseball field and other large fields, a smaller youth-size field will add to the compliment of recreational space at both schools and the community.

## Development Standards

The proposed field meets all the setback requirements from adjacent properties established in the Recreation Guidelines.

## Transportation Findings

Staff recommends approval because the additional field has no significant impact on the area's transportation system. The proposal will not add any new students or increase activities on site; therefore, no additional trips are expected to be generated to the site. Since the field is being established for existing MCPS programs, Little Flower School physical education program and the community, staff believes the athletic field has no traffic impact.

**Access and Circulation:** Access to the field will be gained from the existing Westland Middle School's north parking lot and from the Little Flower Church School parking lot. Based on the location of the proposed field, there is no need for additional roads or driveways to access the field.

**Policy Area Review/Staging Ceiling Analysis:** The site is located within the Bethesda-Chevy Chase policy area, which has a remaining capacity of 484 jobs and 5,881 housing units as of April 30, 2002.

## Environmental Findings

Staff has reviewed the proposed field and recommends **approval** with the following conditions:

1. That the proposed field be reduced in size from 160' x 300' to 150' x 240.' This reduced size will provide additional setback from homes along Jordan Road, and preserve additional trees along the eastern boundary of the field.
2. That on any appropriate side of the field a retaining wall be built that would reduce encroachment of 30% or more into the critical root zones of significant and specimen trees.
3. That a Final Forest Conservation Plan be submitted to and approved by M-NCPPC, County Wide Planning, and Environmental Planning prior to issuance by the Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services (MCDPS) of the sedimentation and erosion control permit. This plan must include MCPS acknowledgment that all forest retention areas shown on Westland Middle School will be preserved.

**Forest Conservation:** The athletic field proposed by the applicant is located within a 3.5-acre stand of highest priority<sup>1</sup> forest as classified by the Forest Conservation Law.

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<sup>1</sup> Highest priority forest stands are those that exhibit all of the following characteristics: high structural and species diversity; few alien or invasive species present; very good overall stand health; and high potential to provide a significant amount of habitat for forest interior dwelling plant, animal and bird species. Additionally individual trees which are specimens of a species.

The Forest Conservation Law requires that *“any available planning and zoning options that would result in the greatest possible forest retention”* be employed for highest priority forest stands. Staff believes that the plan can be modified to reduce forest loss.

Staff recommends that the field size be reduced to the dimensions recommended by M-NCPPC guidelines (150' x 240'); that retaining walls be used wherever possible to avoid encroachment on critical root zones of all significant and specimen trees. Staff also recommends that forest loss be mitigated, acre for acre, on a reforested property, or two acres for every one-acre forest lost on a forested property.

Stormwater Management: Full water quality and quantity control shall be expected to protect the integrity of the Cabin John Creek watershed.

## **COMMUNITY CONCERNS**

There are seven residential homes located along the northerly boundary adjacent to the proposed field. Representatives from the adjacent community were involved throughout the development of this project. Community concerns raised in correspondence include tree preservation and compatibility. A few residents have expressed the view that this proposal seeks to eliminate well-established, wooded areas in the down-County area.

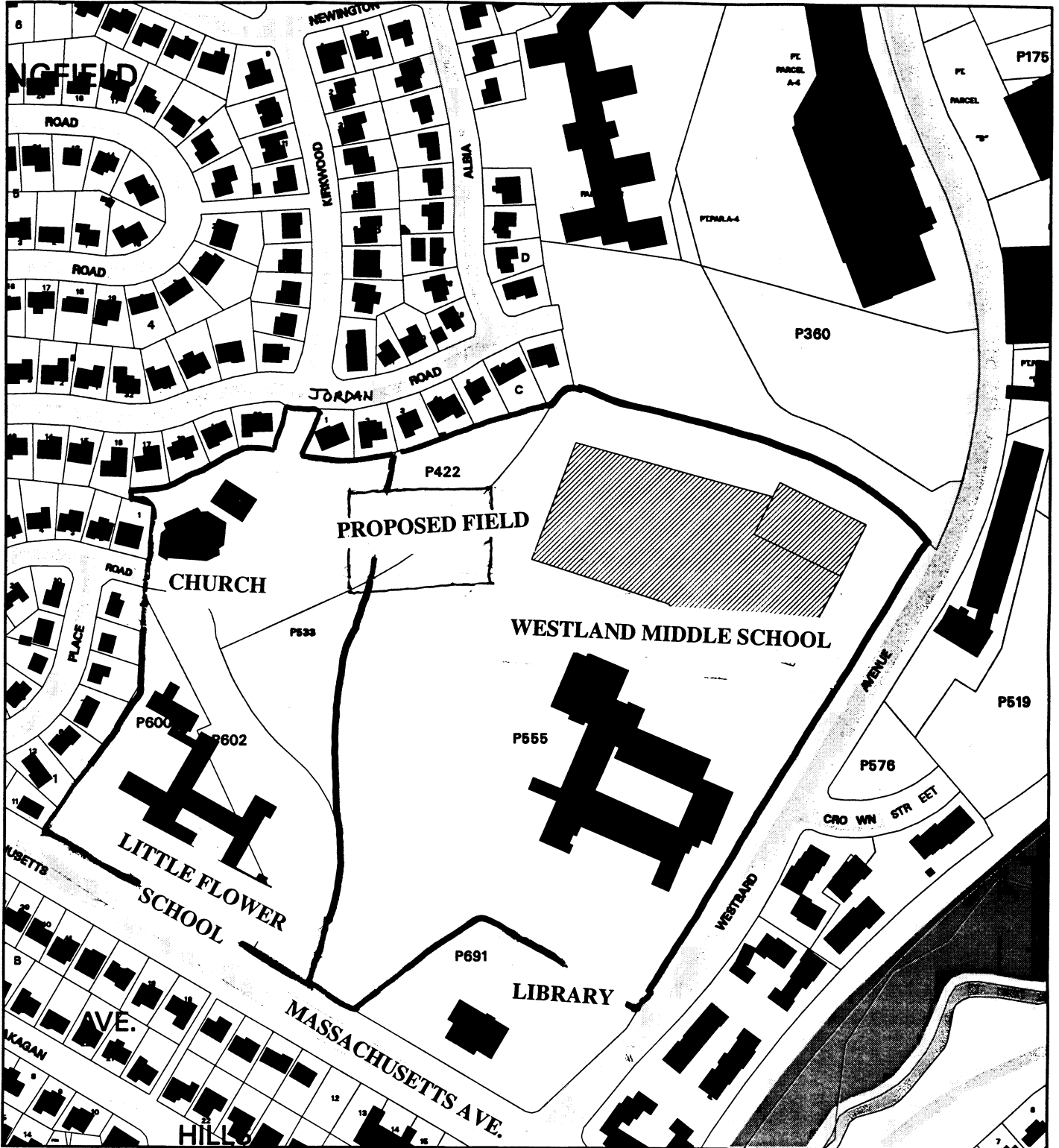
## **CONCLUSION**

M-NCPPC recommends approval of the mandatory referral with comments listed at the beginning of this report.

KO:ha: a:\o'connor1\little flower packet.doc  
Attachments

VICINITY MAP FOR  
**MR-02202-MCPS-1**

ATTACHMENT A  
 VICINITY MAP



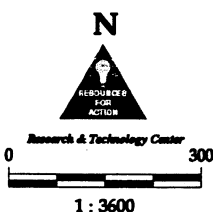
Map compiled on June 07, 2002 at 7:34 AM | Site located on base sheet no - 207NW06

**NOTICE**

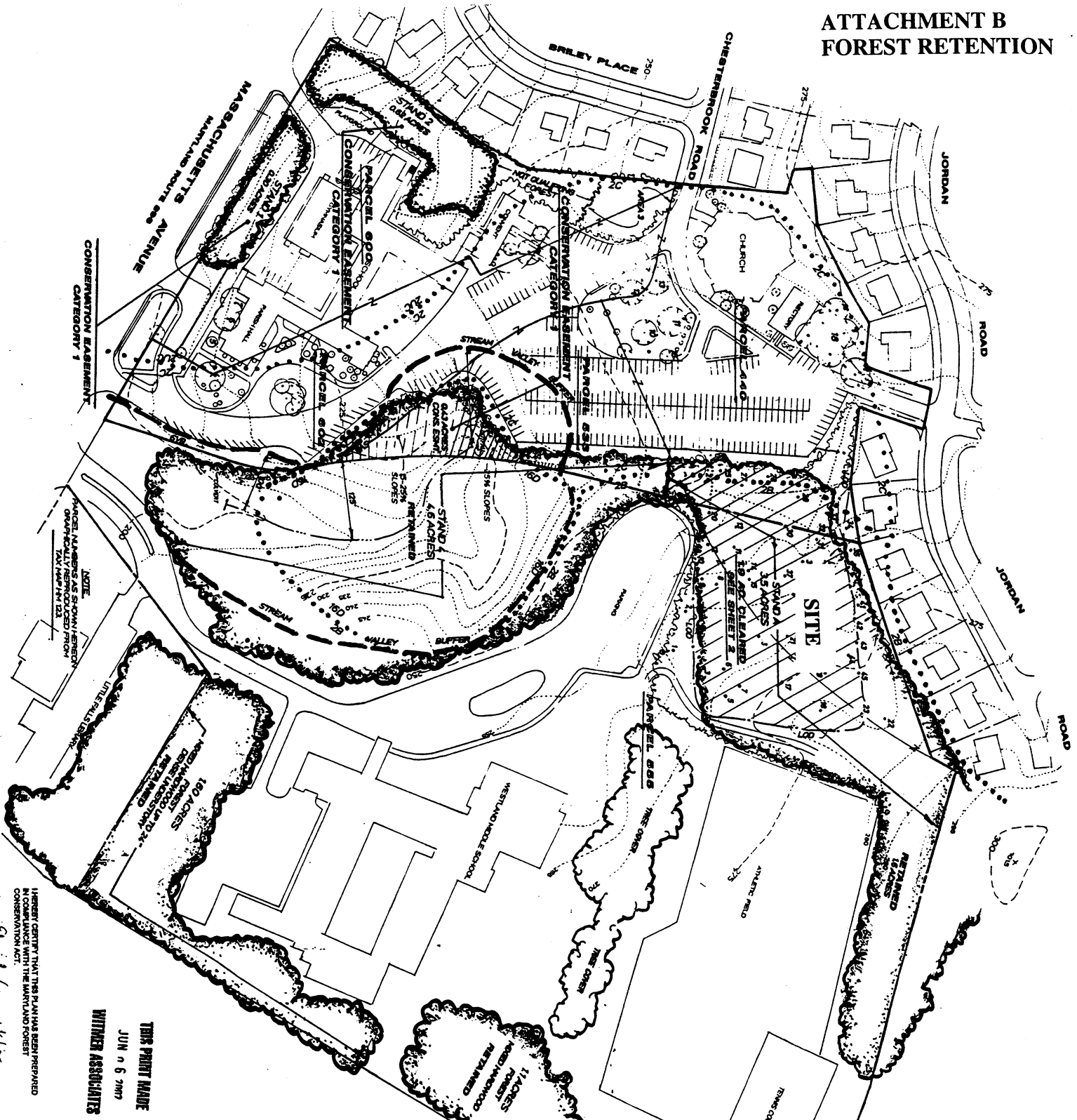
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Property lines are compiled by adjusting the property lines to topography created from aerial photography and should not be interpreted as actual field surveys. Planimetric features were compiled from 1:14400 scale aerial photography using stereo photogrammetric methods.

This map is created from a variety of data sources, and may not reflect the most current conditions in any one location and may not be completely accurate or up to date. All map features are approximately within five feet of their true location. This map may not be the same as a map of the same area plotted at an earlier time as the data is continuously updated. Use of this map, other than for general planning purposes is not recommended. - Copyright 1998



# ATTACHMENT B FOREST RETENTION



**FOREST RETAINED**

School Board	=	8.47 Acres
Little Flower	=	1.35 Acres
(conservation easement)		
		<b>9.82 Acres</b>

**THIS PRINT MADE**  
JUN 16 2007  
**WITMER ASSOCIATES**

HIGHEST CERTIFY THAT THIS PLAN HAS BEEN PREPARED IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE MARYLAND FOREST CONSERVATION ACT.

*David C. Galt*  
6/16/07  
REGISTERED PROFESSIONAL  
CONSULTING PROFESSIONAL

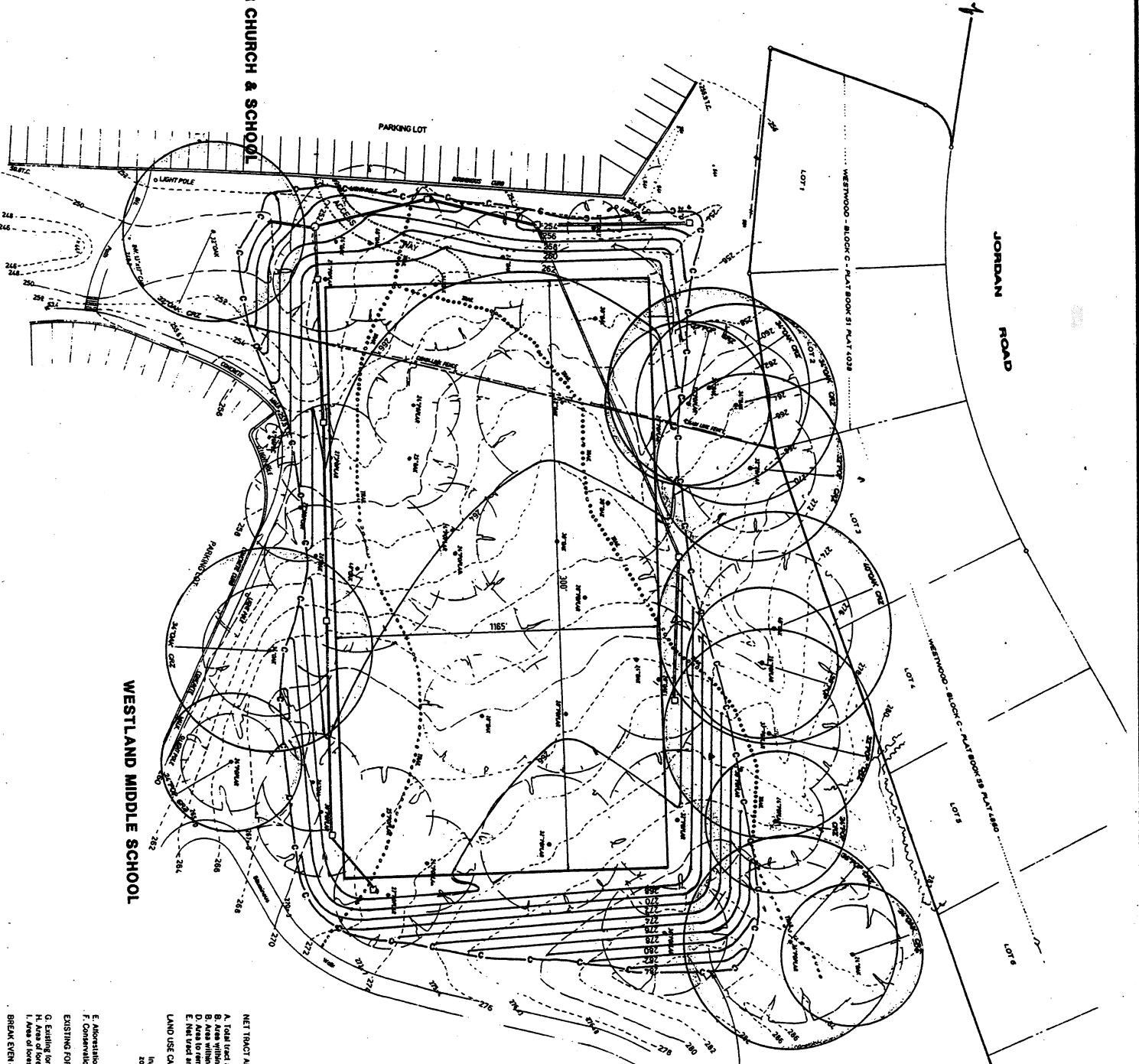
DATE: JUN 12 2007	PROJECT: CHURCH OF THE LITTLE FLOWER SCHOOL	SCALE: 1" = 100'	WORK: PAGE 10 OF 10
REVISIONS:	5-B-07 REVISION TO INCLUDE WESTLAND WOODS SCHOOL PROPERTY AND TOTAL 9.82 ACRES	WEIGHT: MAP	SCALE: 1" = 100'
PREPARED FOR:	LITTLE FLOWER SCHOOL 5801 MASSACHUSETTS AVE BETHESDA MD 20814 301-200-5333		
<p><b>PRELIMINARY FOREST CONSERVATION PLAN</b></p> <p><b>CHURCH OF THE LITTLE FLOWER SCHOOL</b></p> <p>BETHESDA (TOWN) ELECTION DISTRICT MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND</p> <p><b>WITMER ASSOCIATES, LLC</b> Land Surveying, Land Planning &amp; Design 154 A Hagerford Drive, Rockville, MD 20850 Tel: (301) 398-6800 Fax: (301) 398-6801</p>			
SCALE: 1" = 100'	DATE: JUN 12 2007	PROJECT: CHURCH OF THE LITTLE FLOWER SCHOOL	SHEET NO: 10



# ATTACHMENT C PRELIMINARY FOREST CONSERVATION PLAN

LITTLE FLOWER CHURCH & SCHOOL

WESTLAND MIDDLE SCHOOL



TOTAL DISTURBED AREA = 19 AC.

## FOREST CONSERVATION WORKSHEET Church of the Little Flower

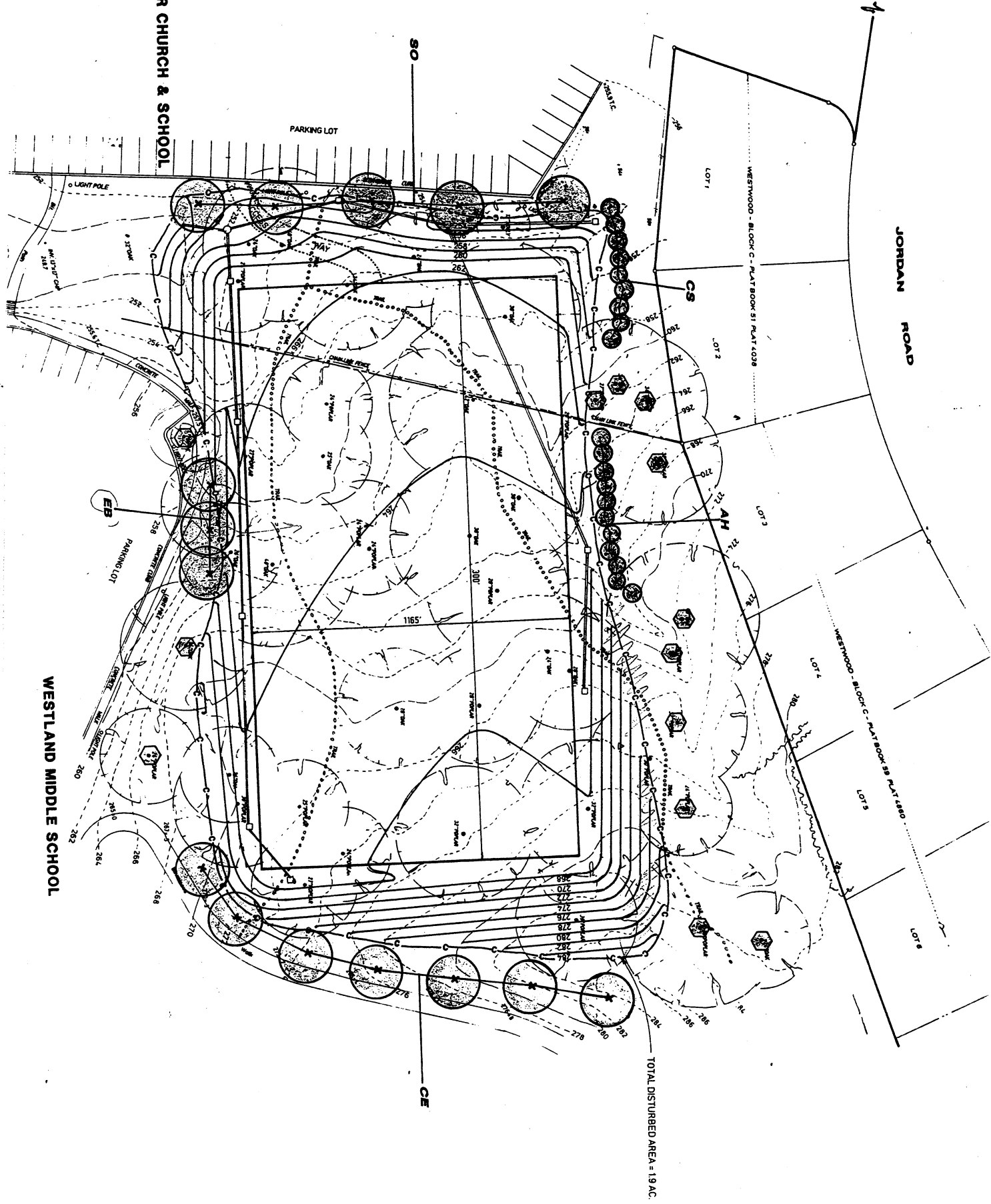
- NET TRACT AREA:**
- A. Total tract area.....
  - B. Area within utility fence's not being improved.....
  - C. Area within utility fence's not being improved.....
  - D. Area to remain in agricultural production.....
  - E. Net tract area.....
- LAND USE CATEGORIES:** (from table 3.2.1, page 40, Manual)
- Input the number "1" under the appropriate land use zoning, and limit to only one entry.
- |     |     |     |     |     |    |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|
| AAA | MDR | IDA | HDR | M/P | CA |
| 0   | 0   | 0   | 1   | 0   | 0  |
- EXISTING FOREST COVER:**
- G. Existing forest cover.....
  - H. Area of forest above abandonment threshold.....
  - I. Area of forest above conservation threshold.....
- BREAK EVEN POINT:**
- J. Forest retention above threshold with no mitigation.....
  - K. Clearing permitted without mitigation.....
- 155  
206  
1.0 =  
x 0 =

# ATTACHMENT D LANDSCAPING PLAN

LITTLE FLOWER CHURCH & SCHOOL

WESTLAND MIDDLE SCHOOL

JORDAN ROAD



TOTAL DISTURBED AREA = 19 AC.