

**BEFORE THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT**

**APPLICATION OF  
D.C. DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL SERVICES**

**ANC 5B**

**STATEMENT OF THE APPLICANT**

**I. NATURE OF RELIEF SOUGHT**

This statement is submitted on behalf of the Applicant, D.C. Department of General Services (the “Applicant”), as the implementing agency for D.C. Public Schools (“DCPS”) and owner of the property located at 3rd St. NW (Square 3269, Lot 65) (the “Property”), in support of its application for variance relief for multiple primary structures on one record lot (Subtitle C § 302.2) to construct a modular trailer “swing space” in the R-1B zone.

**II. JURISDICTION OF THE BOARD**

The Board of Zoning Adjustment (the “Board”) has jurisdiction to grant the variance relief requested herein pursuant to Subtitle X § 1000.1 of the Zoning Regulations.

**III. BACKGROUND**

**A. The Property and the Surrounding Neighborhood**

The Property is located in the R-1B Zone District and is an upside down L-shaped lot of approximately 283,200 sq. ft. A copy of the Zoning Map is attached at **Tab A**. The Property abuts Square 3269 Lot 66 which is improved with the Ida B. Wells Middle School building (the “School Building”), a D.C. public school, constructed in 2019. The School Building is located to the west of the Property. Abutting the Property to the north is the Takoma Community center (Square 3283 Lot 0801 and Square 3272 Lot 0805). The Property occupies the eastern portion Square 3269 and is bounded by public rights-of-way along 3rd St. NW to the east and Sheridan St. NW to the south.

The Property is located in the Takoma neighborhood. The surrounding area is primarily improved with single-family residential homes. There is also a small swath of commercial uses to the southeast of the Property on 3rd St NW. The Property is not in an historic district, and the School Building is not a designated landmark.

### **B. Traffic Conditions and Mass Transit**

The Property is well-served by Metrobus, with stops for Lines 62 and 63 two blocks away in front of the School Building on 5th St. NW. Additionally, the Takoma Metrorail Station is approximately 0.45 miles to the north of the Property. There is a Capital Bikeshare station within a block of the Property as well.

### **C. The Project**

The Applicant is conducting a renovation and modernization of the Whittier Elementary school located at 424 Sheridan St. NW (Square 3268 Lot 0811) across Sheridan Street from the School Building and one block away from the Property. Whittier Elementary School was constructed in 1926. In order to provide space for students during the renovation, the Applicant proposes to construct a modular trailer “swing space” campus (the “Swing Space”) on the Property. A copy of the architectural plan set is attached at **Tab B**. As described below, zoning relief is required in order to have multiple primary structures on one record lot in the R-1B zone.

The Swing Space consists of five modular trailers, one tensile structure (bubble) (multi-purpose space) and a concrete masonry structure for the electrical switchgear building that will have approximately 44,577 sq. ft. of gross floor area. Four of the five trailers will be dedicated to classrooms and support space and one trailer will be a kitchen. There will also be a canopy and walkway that is constructed to provide a path between each modular trailer. There is a baseball

field on the north end of the Property that will remain untouched.

The Swing Space will comply with all zoning standards in the R-1B zone. The buildings will have a total floor-area-ratio of 0.16 with up to 1.8 permitted for a school building. *See Subtitle D § 4902.1.* The Swing Space will have a maximum building height of 16 feet, with up to 60 ft. permitted for a school building.<sup>1</sup> *See Subtitle D § 4904.1.* The total lot occupancy at the Property will be 16%, with up to 60% permitted. *See Subtitle D § 4910.1.* The Swing Space has a parking requirement of six spaces,<sup>2</sup> which will be satisfied by the installation of a temporary parking lot at the Property. There is one loading berth in the parking lot, which will serve the Swing Space. The Swing Space will also provide 30 bicycle parking spaces, which meets the total requirement.<sup>3</sup>

#### **IV. NATURE OF VARIANCE RELIEF SOUGHT AND STANDARD OF REVIEW**

The Applicant is seeking area variance relief for multiple primary structures on a single record lot. Pursuant to Subtitle C § 302.2, each new primary building or structure must be erected on a separate record lot when located in an R, RF or RA zone. As a result of the Swing Space, there will be several primary buildings on the Property; therefore, area variance relief is needed.

Under D.C. Code § 6-641.07(g)(3) and 11 DCMR Subtitle X § 1000.1, the Board is authorized to grant variance relief where it finds that three conditions exist:

- (1) The Property is affected by exceptional size, shape or topography or other extraordinary or exceptional situation or condition;
- (2) The owner would encounter practical difficulties or undue hardship if the zoning regulations were strictly applied; and

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<sup>1</sup> Modular Building E for the multi-purpose space is 28 feet. The trailers for classroom space and the kitchen are shorter.

<sup>2</sup> A public school use requires 0.25 spaces per 1,000 sq. ft. The swing space will have a GFA of 44,577 sq ft. which would require 12 spaces. However, the minimum parking requirement is reduced by 50% due to the Property's location within .5 miles of the Takoma Park Metro Station. This proximity reduction applies to public schools located within any zone. *See Subtitle C § 702.2.* As such the parking requirement is 6 SPACES.

<sup>3</sup> The requirement for the Swing Space is 28 short-term bicycle parking spaces and 7 long-term bicycle parking spaces. All bicycle parking spaces will be located outside the Swing Space. Under Subtitle C § 805.11, a public school is permitted to locate required long-term bicycle parking outside the building provided it meets all conditions.

(3) The variance would not cause substantial detriment to the public good and would not substantially impair the intent, purpose and integrity of the zone plan as embodied in the Zoning Regulations and Map. 11 DCMR Subtitle X § 1001.1; *see also French v. Board of Zoning Adjustment*, 658 A.2d 1023, 1035 (1995); *see also Capitol Hill Restoration Society, Inc. v. Board of Zoning Adjustment*, 534 A.2d 939 (1987).

In assessing the variance test, the Board may apply a more flexible standard of review for a public service organization, “especially where the organization is seeking the zoning relief in order to meet a public need or serve the public interest.” *See Neighbors for Responsive Government v. D.C. Bd. of Zoning Adjustment*, 195 A.3d 35, 56 (D.C. 2018); *see also Monaco v. D.C. Bd. of Zoning Adjustment*, 407 A.2d 1091, 1097 (1979). The flexible standard of review can be applied regardless of whether the applicant seeks to expand an existing use or add a new use to the property in question. *See id.* at 59. As part of this reduced standard of review, the Board may more fully weigh the equities of an individual case, including the organization’s needs, in finding an exceptional situation or condition. *See id.* at 56; *see also Monaco* at 1098; *see also National Black Child Development Institute, Inc. v. D.C. Bd. of Zoning Adjustment*, 483 A.2d 687, 690 (1984).

## **V. THE APPLICANT MEETS THE STANDARD FOR VARIANCE RELIEF**

### **A. The Property is Affected by an Exceptional Situation or Condition**

The phrase “exceptional situation or condition” applies not only to the land, but also to the existence and configuration of a building on the land. *See Clerics of St. Viator, Inc. v. District of Columbia Bd. of Zoning Adjustment*, 320 A.2d 291, 294 (D.C. 1974). The unique or exceptional situation may arise from a confluence of factors which affect a single property. *Gilmartin v. D.C. Bd. Of Zoning Adjustment*, 579 A.2d 1164, 1168 (D.C. 1990).

Here, the Property faces the following exception situation and conditions:

### *1. Nature of Modular Construction*

The Swing Space will consist of prefabricated modular trailers that function as interim swing space for students. Creating the Swing Space with multiple, separate trailers - as opposed to one larger structure - is necessary for several reasons:

- Allowing sufficient light and air into each classroom space;
- Meeting DOEE stormwater requirements by providing green space between trailers;
- Wood-frame construction type that limits maximum size of each trailer;
- Separating each trailer by a minimum of 20 feet to avoid increased cost for fire and life safety compliance; and
- Transporting the prefabricated units on narrow public roads.

### *2. Large Property*

The Property is one of few large lots in the neighborhood where most lots are small residential lots. The Property's large size makes it appropriate for multiple primary structures.

## **B. The Applicant Will Face Practical Difficulty with Strict Zoning Compliance**

An applicant experiences practical difficulties when compliance with the Zoning Regulations would be "unnecessarily burdensome." *See Gilmartin v. District of Columbia Bd. of Zoning Adjustment*, 579 A.2d 1164, 1170 (D.C. 1990). Here, the Applicant faces practical difficulty with strict compliance of Subtitle C § 302.2 limiting each record lot to a single principal structure. These practical difficulties are present whether the Property remains a single lot or if the Property were to be subdivided to provide a separate lot for the Swing Space.

It is inefficient and unreasonable to construct the Swing Space as a single structure. One large structure would create more internal space with no access to natural light, which is not conducive to the learning environment. Likewise, one large structure would create challenges with meeting stormwater requirements and fire/life safety requirements. The smaller modular trailers

are also significantly easier to transport to the Property on the surrounding neighborhood roads. Therefore, even if the Applicant were to subdivide the Property and construct the Swing Space on its own record lot, multiple structures on the lot would still be needed.

Additionally, The proposed swing campus is a temporary solution. The modular buildings proposed for the swing campus are specifically designed for quick installation and removal. Requiring these temporary structures to be consolidated into a single primary building would impose unnecessary design and construction challenges, particularly for a short-term use. Creating a meaningful connection between the trailers would pose practical challenges, particularly from a cost and budget perspective, given the expenses associated with enclosing, heating, and lighting the connection. Compliance with the zoning requirements would undermine the efficiency and flexibility that modular campuses are intended to provide, making it significantly more difficult to meet the District's educational and logistical needs during the renovation period.

**C. The Variance Relief Will Not Cause Substantial Detriment to the Public Good or the Zoning Regulations and Maps**

The variance relief will not cause substantial detriment to the public good or Zoning Regulations. The Property will remain compliant with the zoning standards in the R-1B zone. In particular, the School Building and Swing Space are well below the maximum permitted lot occupancy, building height and FAR. There will be approximately 10,000 sq. ft. of open field space and multiple play spaces at the Property.

The Swing Space is a public school use that is permitted by-right in the R-1B zone. Further, the Swing Space meets a public need in that it will minimize disruption for public school students during renovations. Ultimately, the Swing Space will help the Applicant and DCPS to achieve its goals of providing modernized facilities to improve educational outcomes for students and families.

## **VI. COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

The Applicant and DCPS have discussed the Swing Space and the School Building renovation extensively with the community and Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B (the “ANC”). The Applicant and DCPS have held or attended four community meetings since April 1, 2025. Three of these meetings were held by DGS’ School Improvement Team (“SIT”), which is an advisory group that includes school staff, families and community members. The Applicant and DCPS will also request to present at the ANC’s public meeting in June 2025. The Applicant and DCPS will continue to engage the community and ANC in connection with the subject BZA application.

## **VII. SUMMARY OF WITNESS TESTIMONY**

A representative of the Applicant, Alex Casey, will testify regarding the project and community outreach. Ronald McGhee, the project architect from R. McGhee & Associates, will testify regarding architecture and project design. The Applicant reserves the right to add witnesses or expert witnesses as necessary

## **VIII. CONCLUSION**

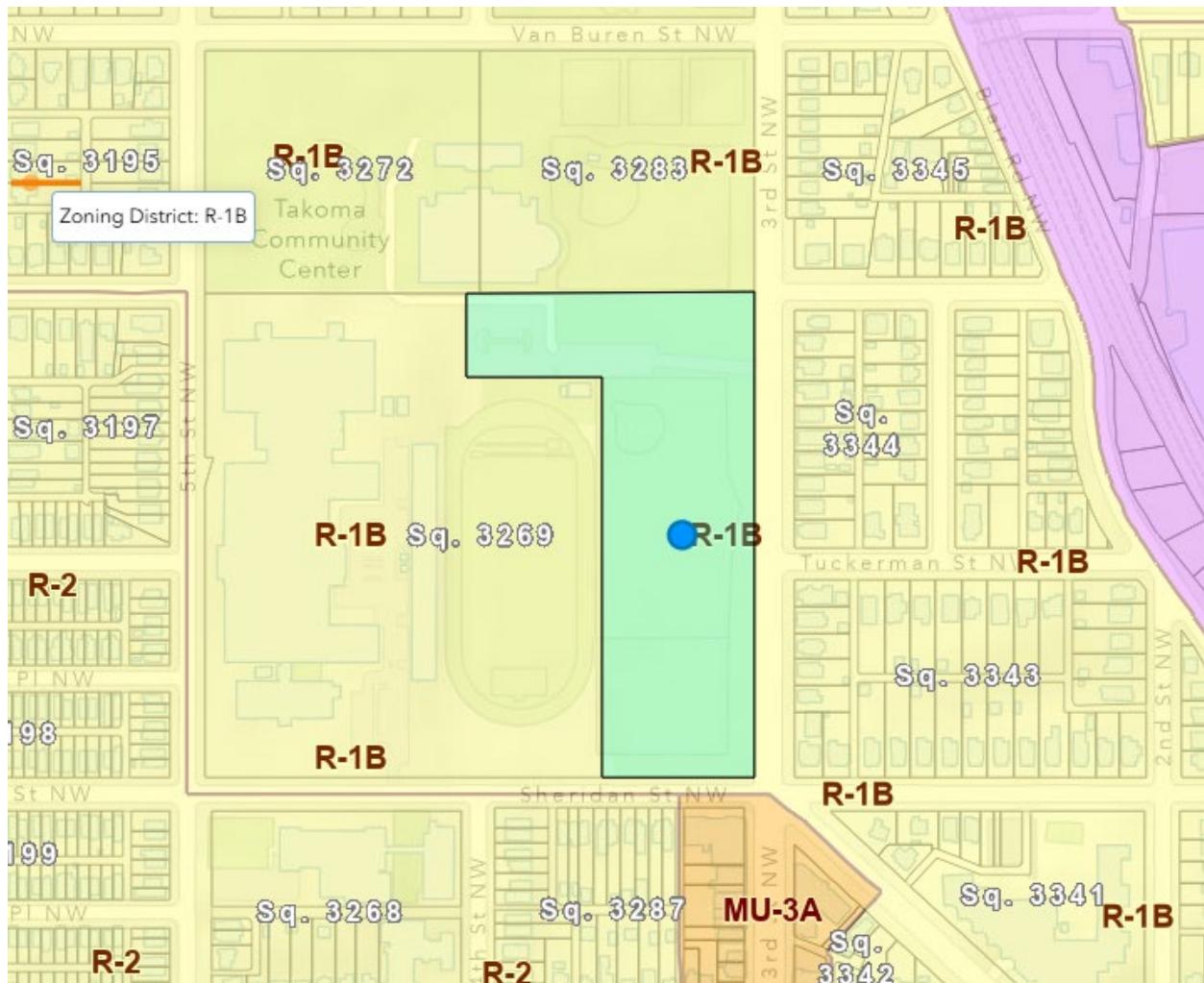
For the reasons stated above, the Project meets the applicable standards for variance relief under the Zoning Regulations. Accordingly, the Applicant respectfully requests the Board grant the application.

Respectfully Submitted,  
COZEN O'CONNOR



Meridith H. Moldenhauer

# Tab A



# Tab B



# WHITTIER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEMPORARY MODULAR CAMPUS

BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT  
6/4/2025



hord | coplan | macht

RM<sup>c</sup> R. McGhee  
& Associates

MCN<sup>1</sup> B U I L D  
BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY

# WHITTIER ES TEMPORARY MODULAR CAMPUS

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION



THE MODULAR CAMPUS DESIGN FOR WHITTIER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AIMS TO PROVIDE A STRATEGIC AND FLEXIBLE SOLUTION TO SUPPORT THE ONGOING MODERNIZATION OF THE SCHOOL WHILE MAINTAINING UNINTERRUPTED EDUCATIONAL OPERATIONS.

THIS TEMPORARY CAMPUS IS IN LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD AT THE INTERSECTION OF SHERIDAN ST. NW AND 3RD ST. NW, WASHINGTON DC 20011. THE MODULAR CAMPUS IS TEMPORARY YET HIGHLY FUNCTIONAL TO SERVE AS A TRANSITIONAL SPACE, ENSURING THAT STUDENTS AND FACULTY HAVE ACCESS TO SAFE, EFFICIENT, AND CONDUCIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS THROUGHOUT THE CONSTRUCTION PERIOD.

THE OVERALL SITE AREA IS APPROXIMATELY 282,810 SQUARE FEET, WITH A GROSS FLOOR AREA OF 44,500 SQUARE FEET FOR THE MODULAR CAMPUS TRAILERS. THE PROJECT CONSISTS OF FOUR PRE- ENGINEERED MODULAR TRAILERS, A MODULAR KITCHEN UNIT, A TENT MEMBRANE STRUCTURE (MULTI-PURPOSE SPACE (GYMNASIUM/DINING) AND AN ADA BATHROOM. TWO PLAYGROUNDS ARE PROVIDED FOR AGES PRE-K, K AND ANOTHER FOR 1ST GRADE AND 5-12 YEARS. ALL TRAILERS ARE CONNECTED BY EXTERIOR COVERED WALKWAYS. PARKING IS PROVIDED FOR 6 CARS. LONG-TERM 6 BICYCLE RACKS AND SHORT-TERM 24 BICYCLES ARE PROVIDED ON THE SITE. TWO SHOWERS AND LOCKERS ARE PROVIDED IN THE TRAILERS. A NEW CURB CUT IS REQUIRED FOR THE PARKING AND LOADING AREA. BERTH WILL HAVE TEMPORARY CHAIN LINK FENCE WITH PRIVACY SLATS FOR SCREENING. THE AREA BETWEEN TRAILERS WILL BE UNDISTURBED. THE SITE WILL BE RESTORED TO ITS ORIGINAL CONDITION AFTER THE REMOVAL OF THE CAMPUS.

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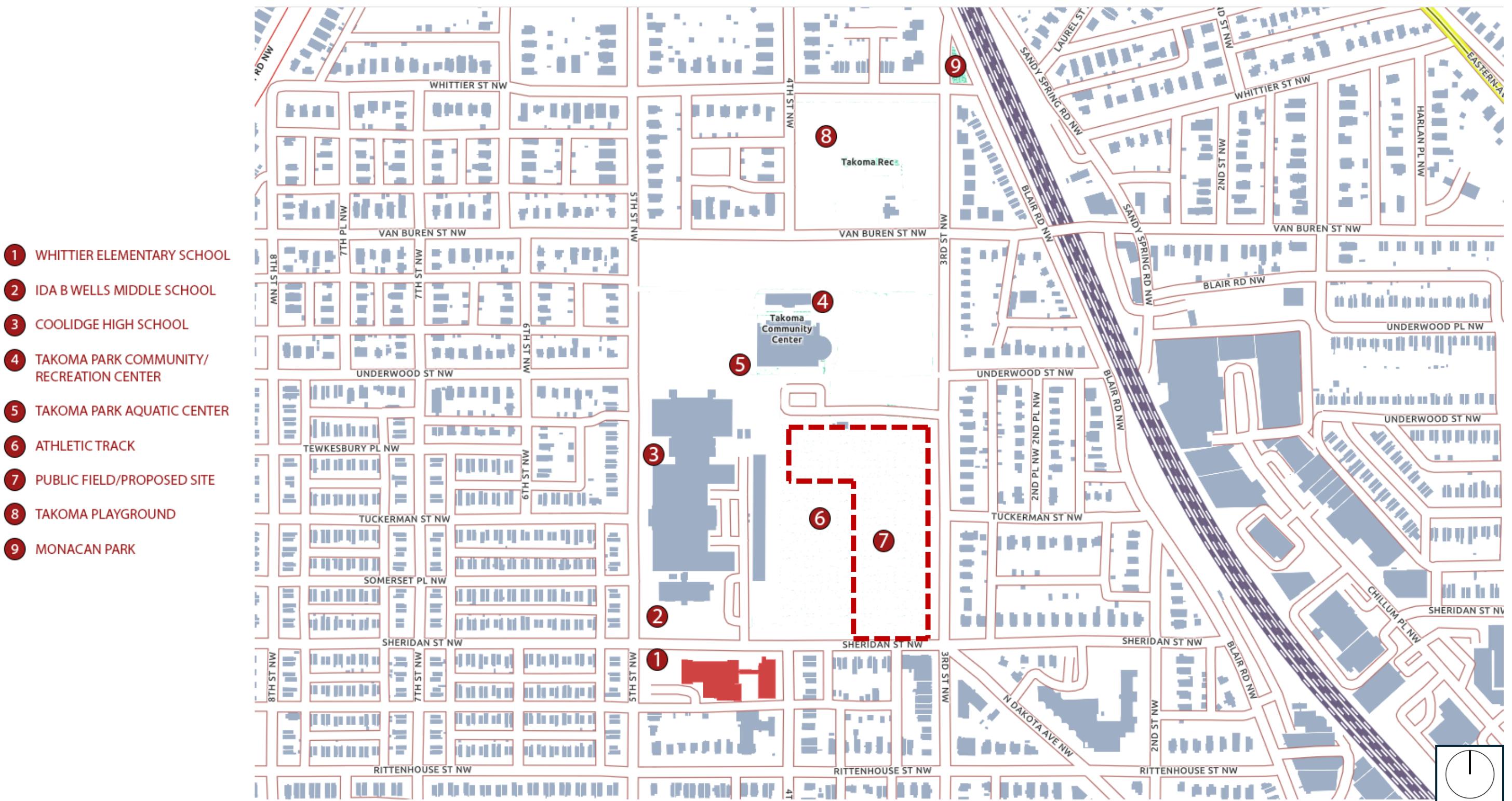
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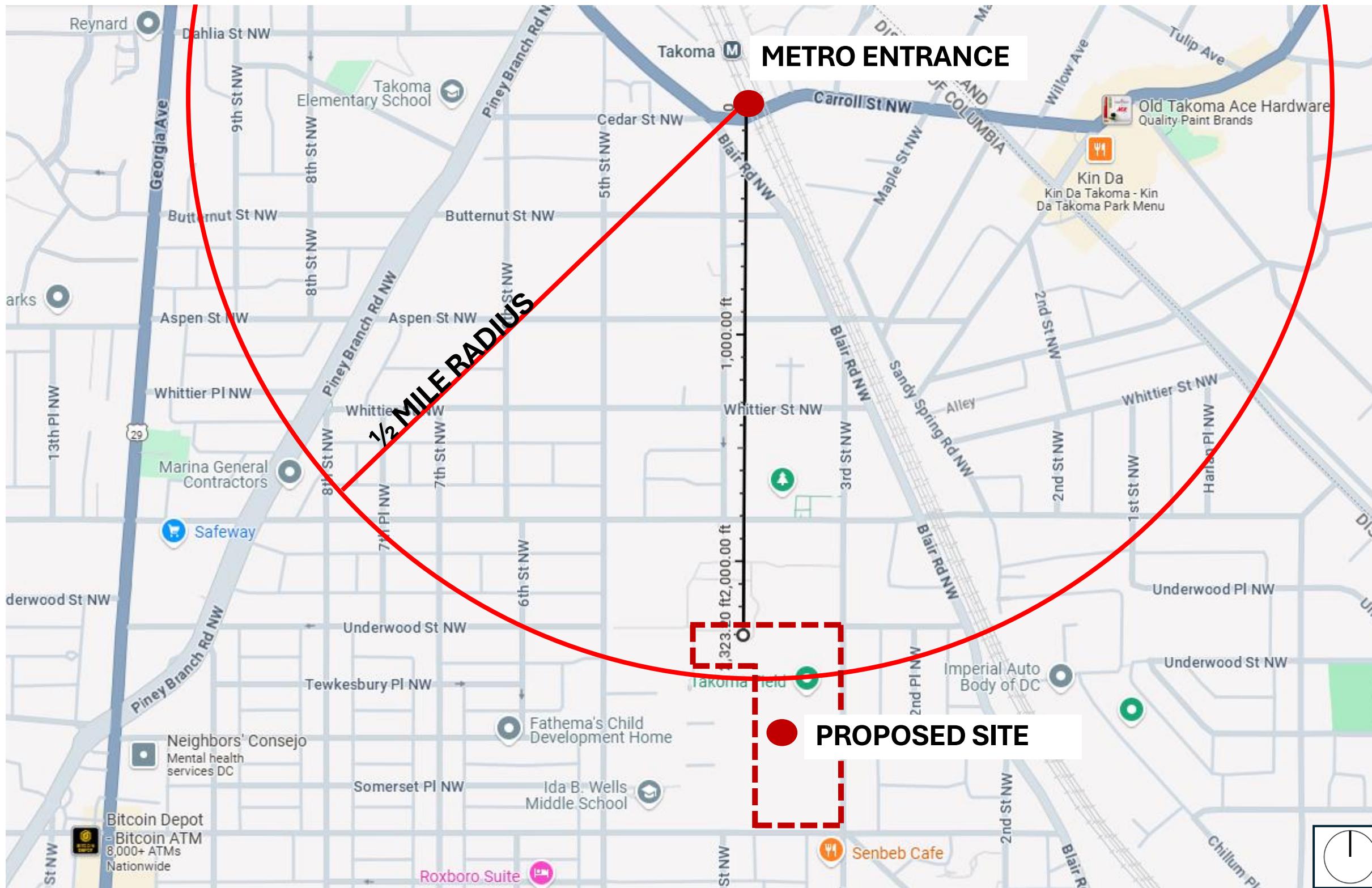
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# EXISTING CONDITIONS VICINITY MAP



## EXISTING CONDITIONS RADIUS MAP



# ZONING ANALYSIS

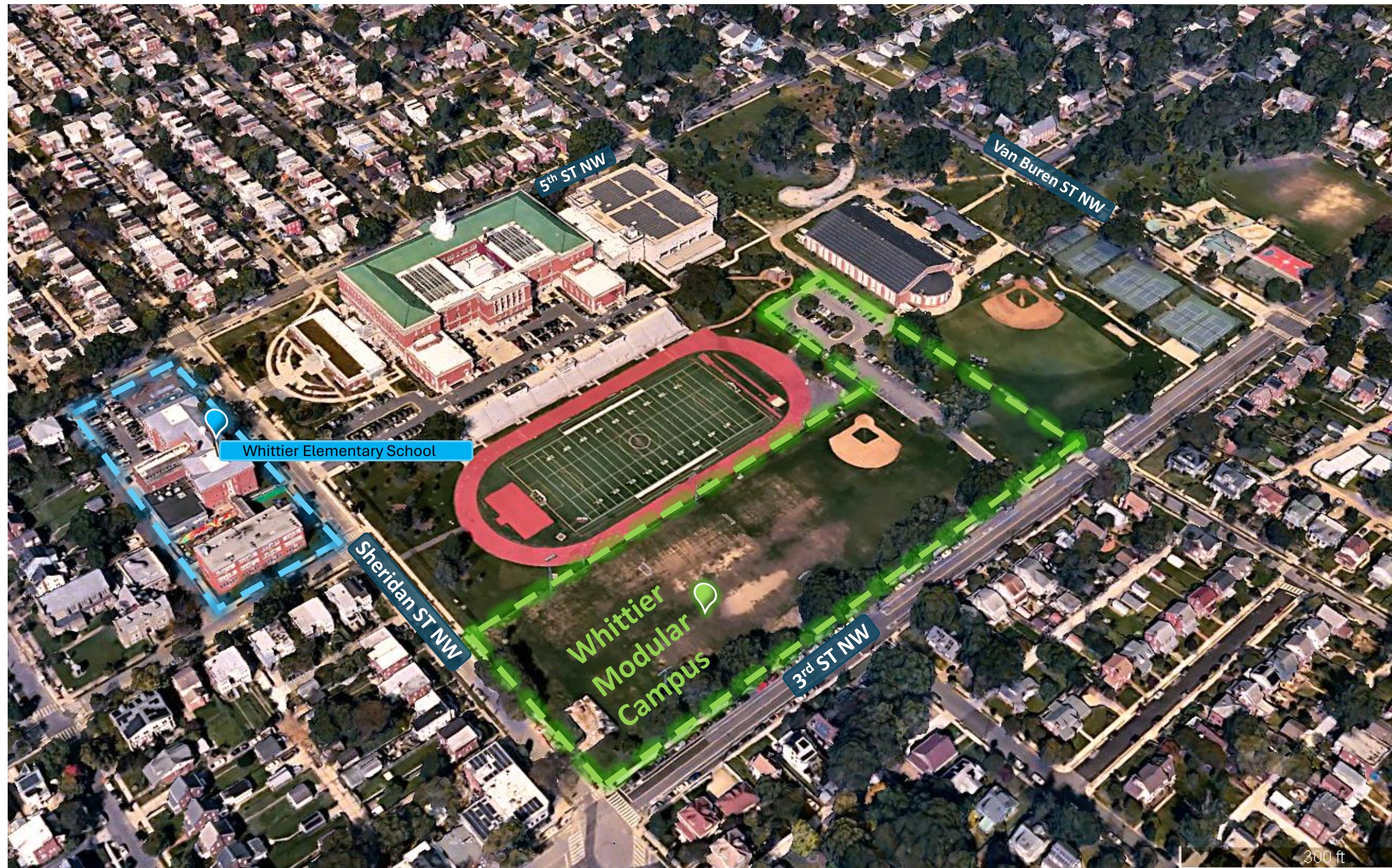
## ZONING REGULATIONS



ZONING INFORMATION		
ZONING DISTRICT	R-1	
SQUARE	3269	
LOT	65	
WARD	4	
SITE AREA	283,200 SF	
GROSS AREA	44,577 GSF	
ZONING REGULATIONS		
	REQUIRED	PROPOSED
HEIGHT (FT)	60 FT	15 FT
HEIGHT (STORIES)	NOT LIMITED	1
FLOOR AREA RATIO (FAR)	1.8	0.16
PERCENTAGE OF LOT OCCUPANCY	60%	16%
REAR YARD SET BACK (FT)	NOT REQUIRED RECREATION AREA ABUTS THE LOT LINE (4907.2)	-
SIDE YARD SET BACK (FT)	8 FT NORTH SIDE	6'-3" FT (ABUTS NORTH SIDE RECREATION AREA) 4908.4
CAR PARKING GROSS AREA = 45,577 SF	0.25 PER 1,000 SF 12 CARS	6 (702.2 - 50% REDUCTION FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS, IN THE 0.5 MIL RADIUS FROM METROPOLITAN STATION)
LONG TERM BICYCLE PARKING (802.1)	1 PER 7,500 SF 6 SPACES	6
SHORT TERM BICYCLE PARKING (802.1)	1 PER 2,000 SF 23 SPACES	24
SHOWERS AND LOCKERS (806.3)	2 / 2 (STAFF ONLY)	2 / 2 (STAFF ONLY)
LOADING BERTH 30,000 TO 10,000 SQFT GFA (901.1)	1	1 20'-0" x 30'-0"
SCREEN (908.3) FOR LOADING BERTH	72" HIGH SOLID MASONARY SCREEN	TEMPORARY 8'-0" CHAIN LINK FENCE WITH SLATS

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

EXISTING AERIAL VIEW LOOKING SOUTHEAST



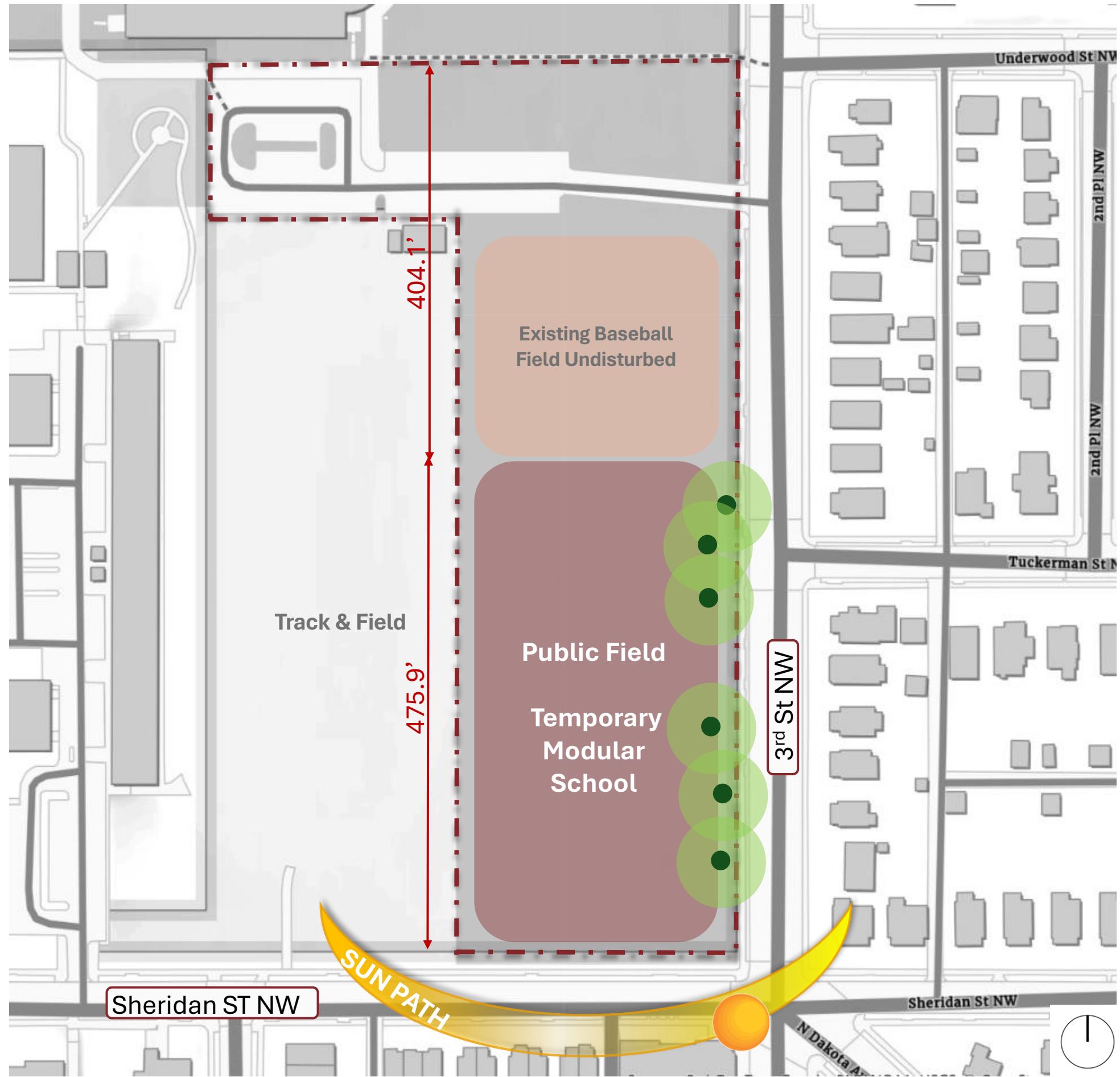
DGS WHITTIER ELEMENTARY MODULAR CAMPUS

RMc | HCM | MCN

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

## EXISTING SITE PLAN

- **EXISTING PUBLIC FIELD** IS CURRENTLY BEING USED AS A BASEBALL FIELD TO THE NORTH AND A SOCCER FIELD TO THE SOUTH
- **TRACK AND FIELD** TO THE WEST IS BEING USED BY COOLIDGE HIGH AND IDA B WELLS MIDDLE SCHOOL TO THE WEST
- **SHERIDAN STREET** IS A TWO LANE STREET WITH STREET PARKING
- **3<sup>RD</sup> STREET** IS A FOUR LANE STREET WITH STREET PARKING
- **HERITAGE TREES** LINE UP THE MAJORITY OF 3<sup>RD</sup> STREET



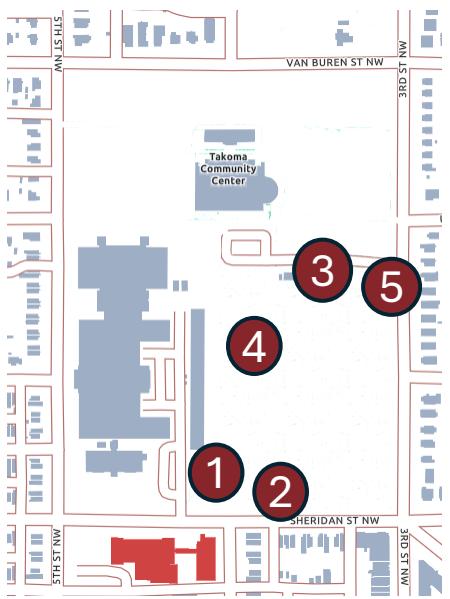
DGS WHITTIER ELEMENTARY MODULAR CAMPUS

RMc | HCM | MCN

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### SITE PHOTOS

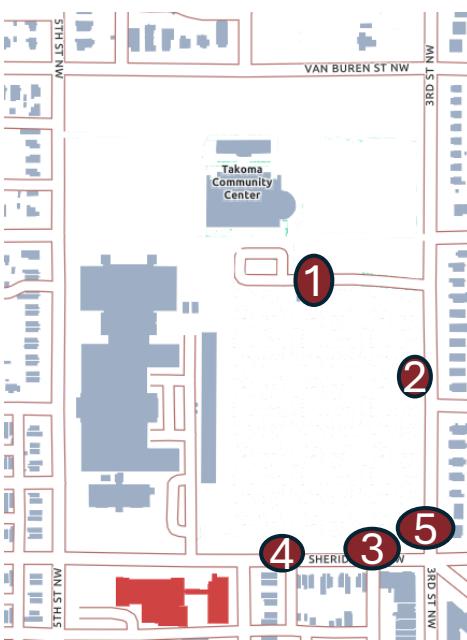
IMMEDIATELY TO THE NORTH THE SITE HAS A BASEBALL FIELD AND THE TAKOMA PARK AQUATIC CENTER. TO THE SOUTH IS A SOCCER FIELD. TO THE WEST IS THE TRACK AND FIELD BELIEVED TO BE USED BY COOLIDGE HIGH SCHOOL AND IDA B. WELLS, BUT IS ALSO ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC. TO THE EAST IS 3<sup>RD</sup> STREET, THAT IS LINED WITH SEVERAL HERITAGE TREES.



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### SURROUNDING CONTEXT PHOTOS

THE SITE IS SITUATED IN A MOSTLY RESIDENTIAL AREA. IT ALSO HAS SOME BUSINESSES INCLUDING A DAY CARE ADJACENT TO THE SITE. COOLIDGE HIGH SCHOOL AND IDA B WELLS ARE SITUATED TO THE WEST AND WHITTIER ELEMENTARY IS SITUATED TO THE SOUTHWEST, SOUTH OF COOLIDGE AND IDA B. WELLS.



# PROPOSED CONCEPT DESIGN OVERALL SITE PLAN

- 1 COVERED WALKWAYS
- 2 LOADING BERTH
- 3 8' FENCE
- 4 4' FENCE
- 5 LONG TERM BIKE SPACES 6
- 6 SHORT TERM BIKE SPACES: 24
- 7 PRE-K – 1<sup>ST</sup> PLAYGROUND
- 8 2<sup>ND</sup>-5<sup>TH</sup> PLAYGROUND
- 9 MODULAR BUILDINGS
- 10 PARKING
- 11 OPEN LANDSCAPE
- 12 SWITCHGEAR ROOM
- 13 MULTIPURPOSE
- 14 EMERGANCY EGRESS PATH
- 15 TEMPORARY DROP OFF AREA
- 16 PROTECTED AREA FOR HERITAGE TREES
- 17 MAIN (PUBLIC) ENTRANCE
- 18 TEMPORARY BUS PARKING AS NEEDED
- 19 NEW CURB CUT FOR VEHICLE ACCESS
- 20 SCREEN AT PARKING
- 21 STORM WATER DETENTION
- 22 CRZ
- 23 TEMPORARY CHAIN LINK FENCE



# PROPOSED CONCEPT DESIGN DEPARTMENTS

- ACADEMIC SPACES
- ADMINISTRATION
- BUILDING SUPPORT
- VISUAL ARTS
- CIRULATION
- HEALTH SUITE
- LIBRARY
- PERFORMANCE ARTS
- MULTIPURPOSE
- KITCHEN
- ADA BATHROOM
- SWITCHGEAR ROOM

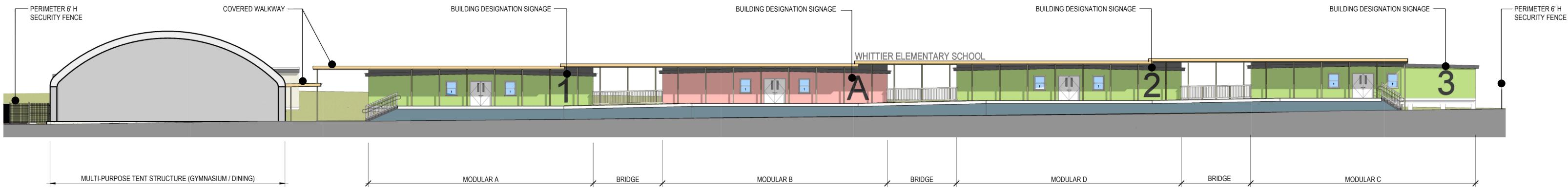


DGS WHITTIER ELEMENTARY MODULAR CAMPUS

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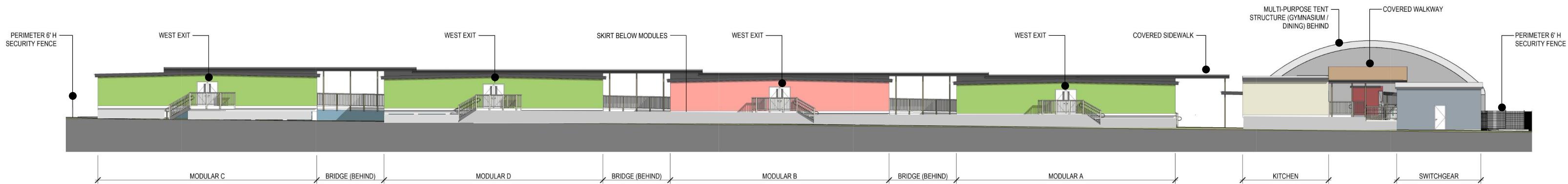
# PROPOSED CONCEPT DESIGN

## EXTERIOR ELEVATIONS



## EAST ELEVATION

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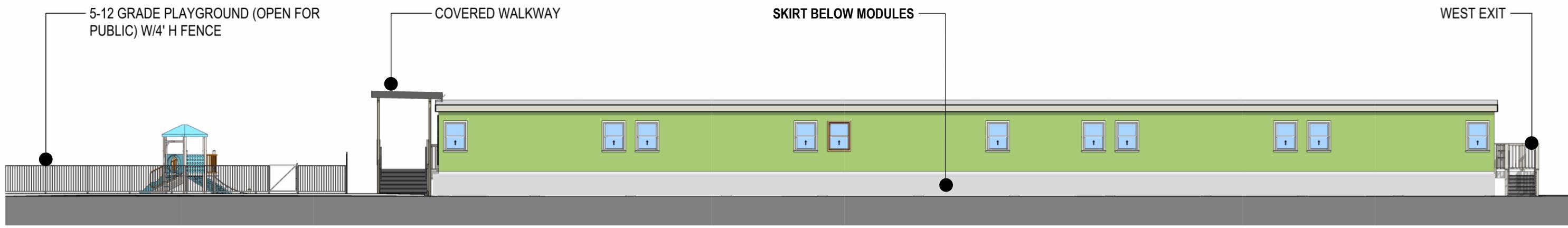


## WEST ELEVATION

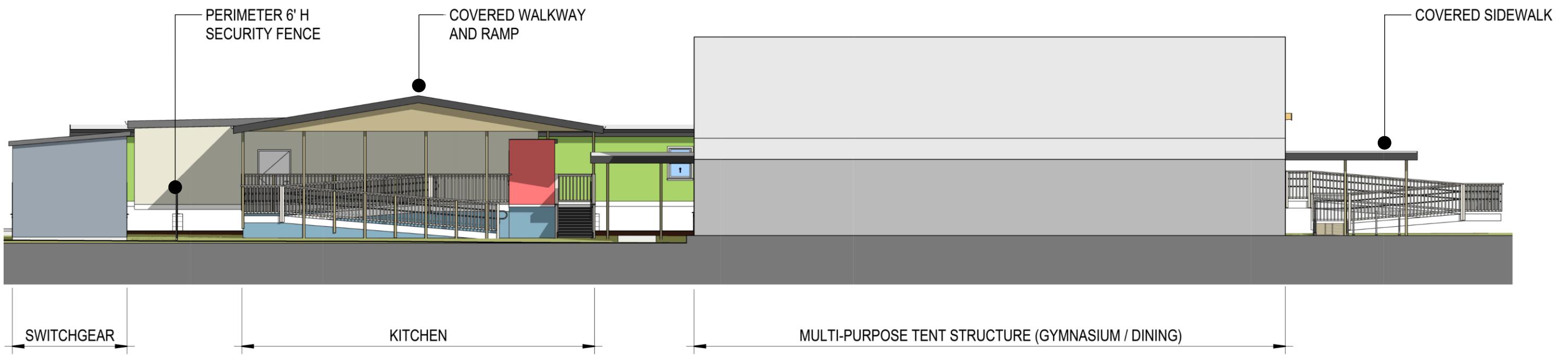
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# PROPOSED CONCEPT DESIGN

## EXTERIOR ELEVATIONS



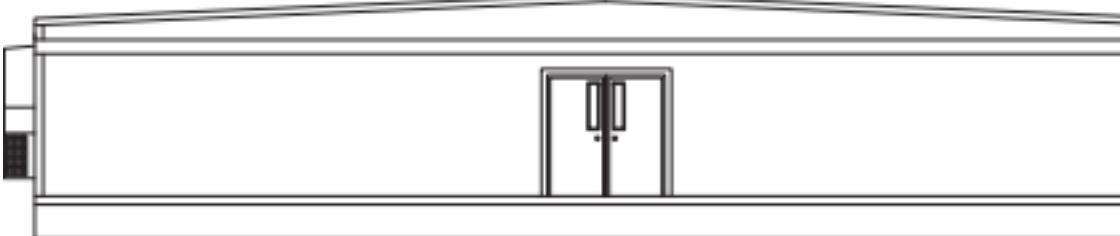
**NORTH ELEVATION**



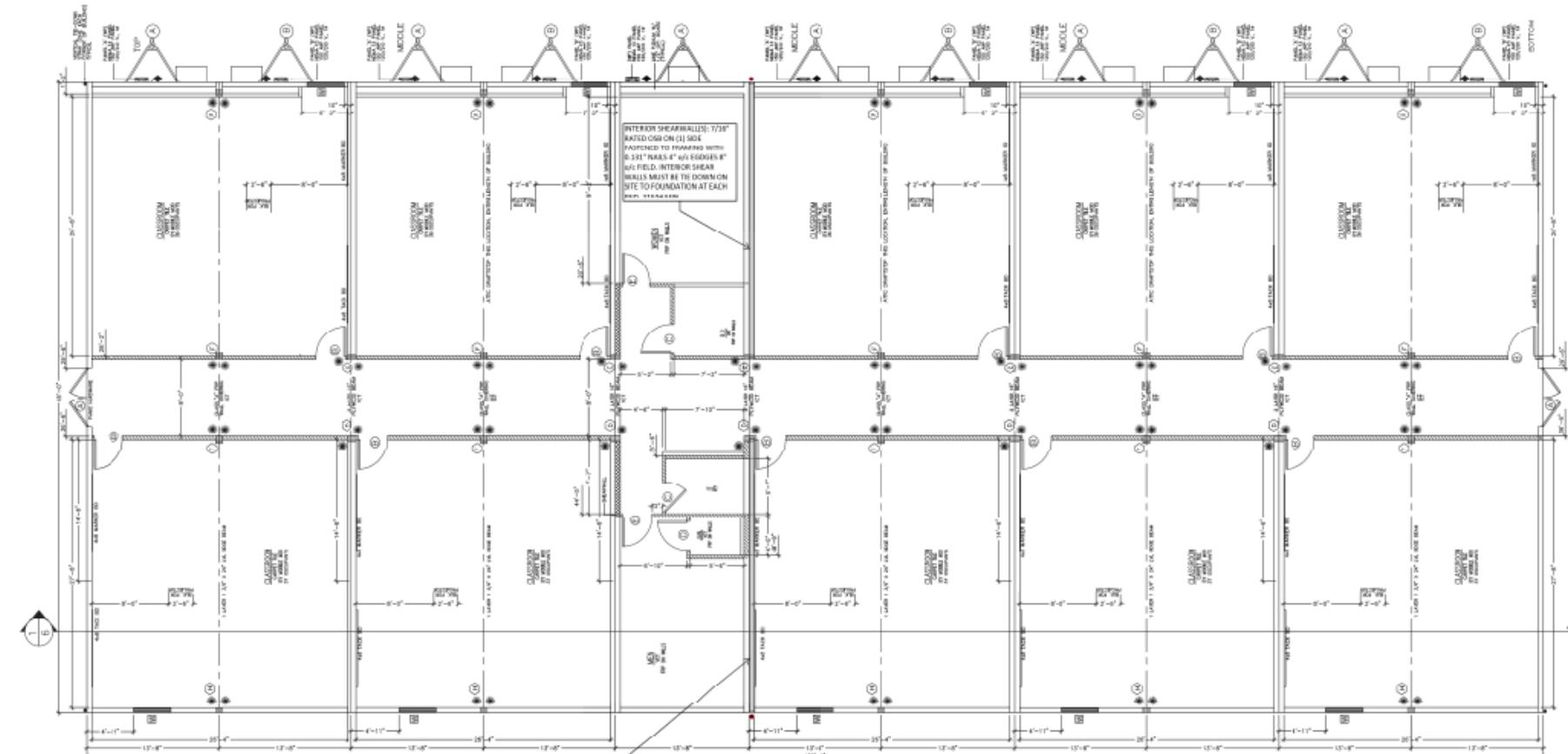
**SOUTH ELEVATION**

# PROPOSED CONCEPT DESIGN

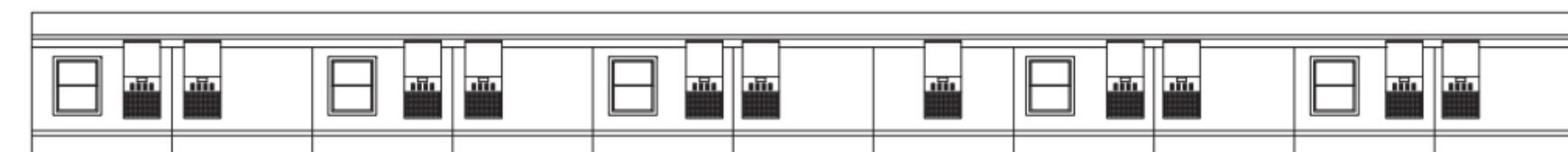
## MATERIAL AND EXPRESSION



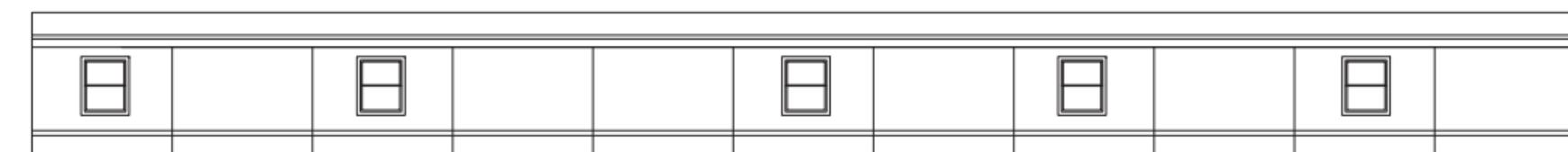
TYPICAL MODULAR TRAILER ELEVATION



TYPICAL MODULAR TRAILER FLOOR PLAN



RIGHT ELEVATION



TYPICAL MODULAR TRAILER ELEVATION