Good evening; my name is Richard Houghton. I am a resident of the District of Columbia.

In regard to the emergency rulemaking which preceded this hearing, a memorandum dated January 7, 2001, from the Office of Planning to the Zoning Commission states that "Allowing the public recreational uses by a matter of right provision would. . . avoid a costly delay that would be caused by requesting variance relief."

But requesting variance relief does not mean the inefficient use of public funds when the request is made in a timely fashion, reflects due diligence on the part of the requesting agency and has community support. Some of the 21 proposed recreation centers have been in the planning stages for years. An ANC Commissioner publicly stated that one project has been 12 years in the planning—surely enough time to apply for a zoning variance. But 12 years was evidently not enough time to complete a comprehensive planning study or building program, both of which have been requested on numerous occasions by the community, but not received.

The zoning variance is a tested municipal mechanism for granting zoning relief on a site-by site basis. The ability to consider proposed development appropriate to a community and its needs and account for existing and proposed development is being sacrificed in the name of expediency.

The proposed Turkey Thicket Recreation Center in Ward 5 is an example of some of the possible consequences of the proposed text amendment. I would like to enter into the record, two vicinity plans showing Turkey Thicket and its immediate neighborhood. One plan shows the footprint of the existing recreation center, a building approximately

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 00-15
EXHIBIT NO. 25

40 x 50 feet. The second plan shows the current proposed recreation center, a building of approximately 39,000 square feet--nearly 20 times the size of the existing structure. Together with the loss of open space given over for parking and hard surfaces, this development intrudes on precious open space in a densely settled urban neighborhood. The Office of Planning requested the text amendments specifically for renovation, additions and re-construction of existing structures. The proposed recreation center at Turkey Thicket is not a renovation; it is not an addition. And to call it a "re-construction" is generous, if not downright misleading.

Moreover, there is a significant change in the use and character of the building, which raises a host of issues germane to zoning regulations and permitted uses. This site is one of the few dedicated parks in the greater Brookland area designed for outdoor recreation. The proposed facility—containing an indoor basketball court, bleachers and natatorium with diving board, in addition to community and craft rooms, administrative space and core functions—will change the character of the of the open space and the physical and visual relationships in the neighborhood. This is the recreational equivalent of a "big box" development. And "big box" development, given the green light in an existing neighborhood without adequate planning, may generate unintended and irreparable consequences.

In conclusion, as a District of Columbia resident with two children, ages 4 and 8, I am acutely aware—particularly at this time of year—of the need for recreation facilities, both indoor and outdoor. But in a time of reduced budgets, development pressures and a limited number of park sites, it is crucial that the right center be built at the right site.

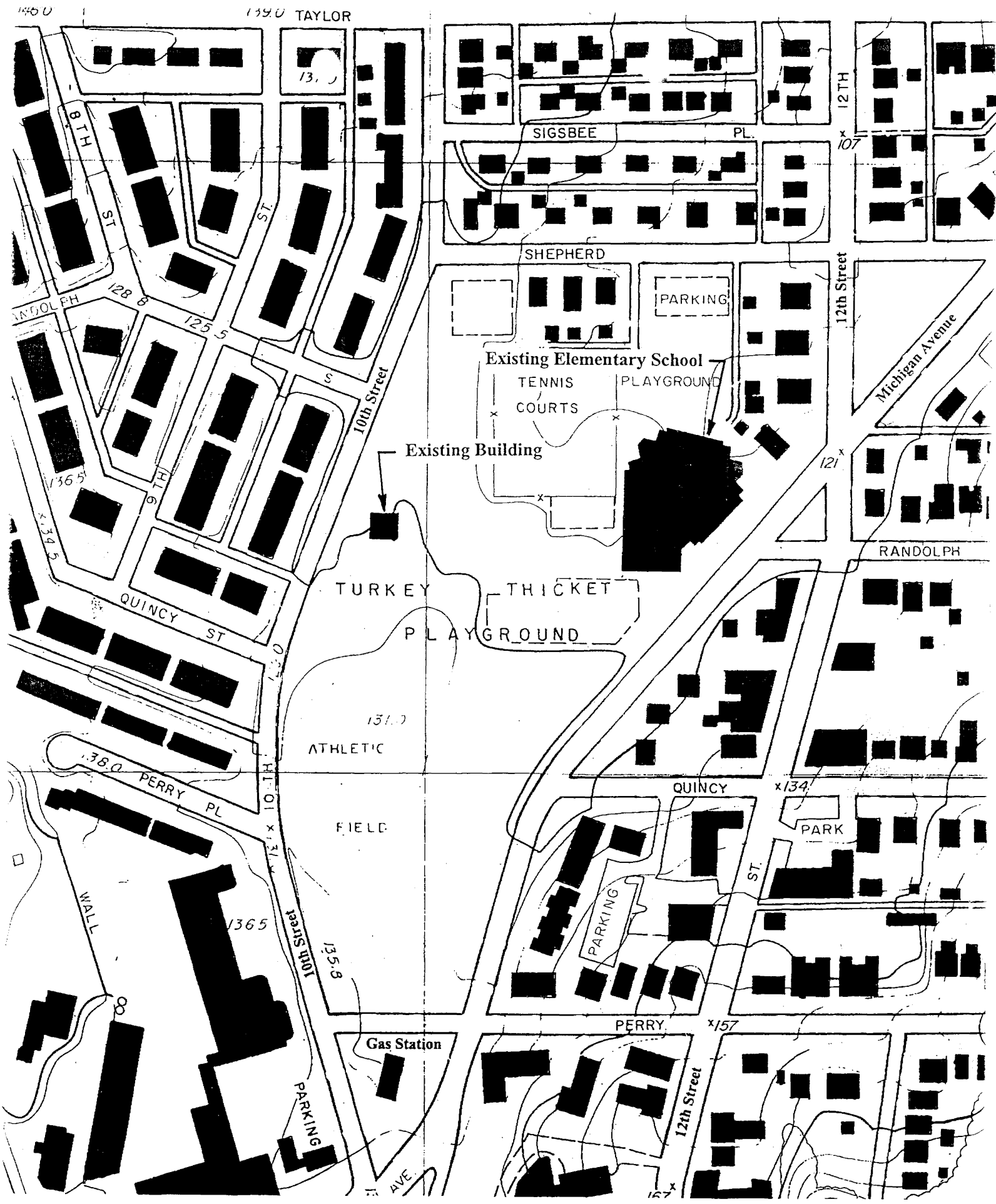
This can happen if the Zoning Commission does not adopt changes to permit public recreation and public community centers as a matter-of-right in residential zones.

Thank you.

Richard Houghton

930 Kearney Street, NE

Washington, DC 20017



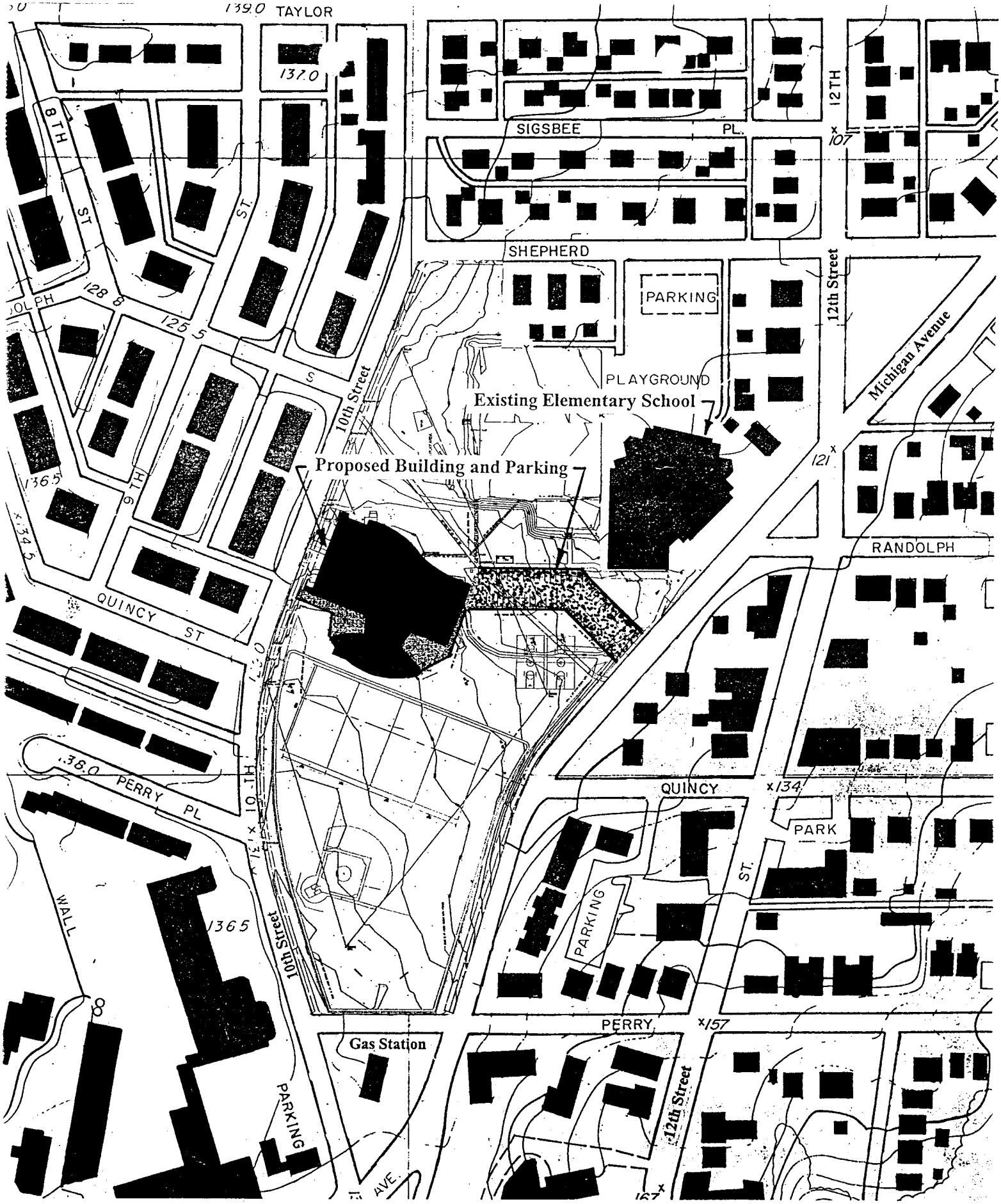
N

1" = 200'

Existing Conditions

Proposed Turkey Thicket Recreation Center

May 6, 2002



N

1" = 200'

Current Proposed Design

Proposed Turkey Thicket Recreation Center

July 1, 2002