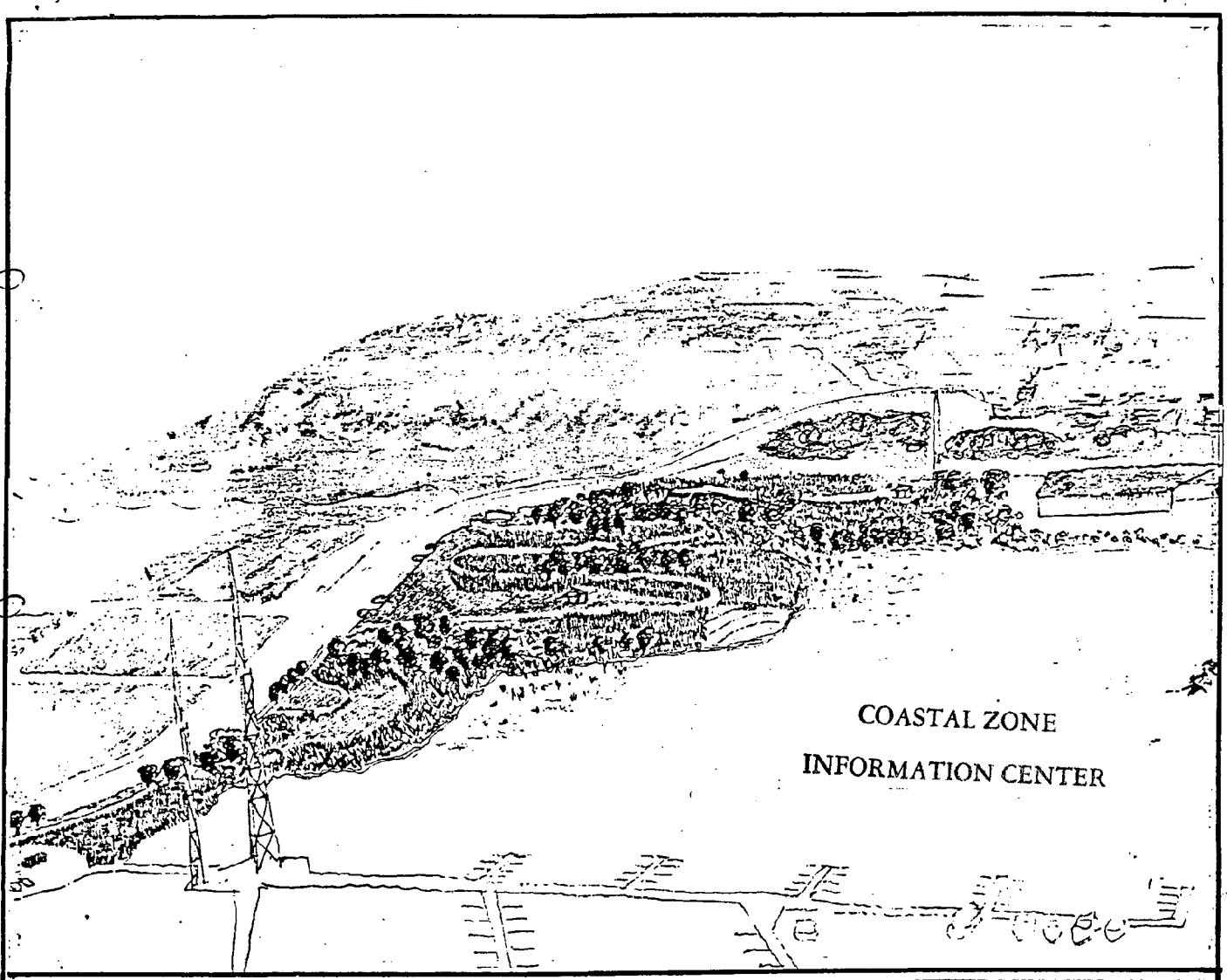


# DRAFT
# Concept Plan for Future Park Development

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# MIDDLE BRANCH PARK

**September 1990**

**City of Baltimore**
**Kurt L. Schmoke, Mayor**

**Department of Planning**
**Ernest Freeman, AICP, Director**

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This study was partially funded by the Coastal Resources Division of the Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources through a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office of Coastal Resources Management

## PURPOSE OF STUDY

The following study was initiated for primarily two purposes. First, to establish the most appropriate form of park development for the study area and ascertain the costs involved. Second, to examine the potential acquisition and re-use of the site occupied by the Merit Concrete (formerly Somer Concrete) operation.

The report which follows describes the study area as two separate sections, City owned property (Waterview West) and private property (Merit Concrete), establishing the physical conditions and appropriate park use for each. This information can be used to help determine the appropriate source of funding for development of Waterview West, as well as whether it is cost effective to acquire and utilize the Merit Concrete site.

## I. STUDY AREA LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The Study Area is located at the corner of Waterview Avenue and Kloman Street, at the western end of the Middle Branch Park, east of the Westport neighborhood. The area is roughly one and a quarter miles west of the

Hanover Street bridge, and directly across the Middle Branch from the I-95/I-395 Interchange. (See Figure 1)

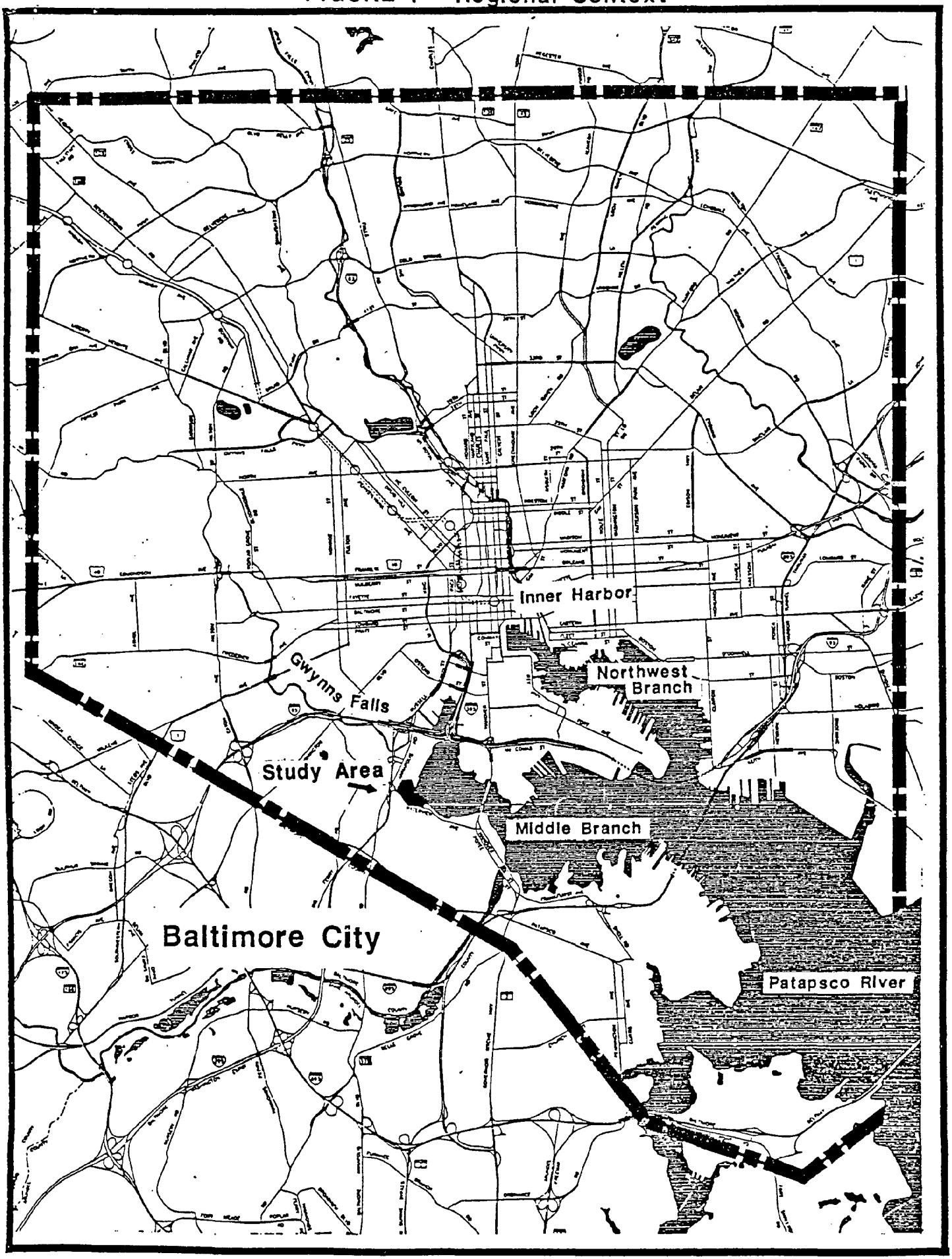
The Study Area is divided into two parcels. The eastern portion is 11 acres in size and is known as Waterview West on Middle Branch Park Plan maps. This is because it is located at the far western edge of Middle Branch Park on Waterview Avenue. The site previously contained an auto junk yard operation, which was purchased by the City in the 1983. The City removed the debris, put in clean topsoil and re-seeded the site with grasses. The western portion of the Study Area is roughly 5 acres in size and contains a concrete batching operation. The site is owned by Baltimore Gas and Electric Company and is leased to the Merit Concrete Company.

The two sections of the Study Area are very different in terms of land use, ownership and site conditions. They will therefore be described independently as Waterview West and Merit Concrete in the following report.

## II. HISTORY OF STUDY AREA

Through the 1700's and 1800's the study area contained no development and consisted largely of wetlands and mudflats. The original shoreline of the area was much closer to Waterview Avenue and Kloman Street than at present. The shoreline of the Middle Branch was used primarily for public recreation at that time. Land directly south of the site contained rich deposits of clay, and the Westport Paving and Brick Company is shown just south of the study area on the 1922 City topographic map. The Carr-Lowrey glass plant was also in operation at that time (founded in 1889), and its

# FIGURE 1 – Regional Context



buildings extended to within 800 feet of the study area's northern property line. The land between Carr-Lowrey and the study area was occupied by the Maryland Veneer Basket Company. This land is now occupied by Carr-Lowrey.

The study area remained undeveloped through the 1920's. At some point in the 1940's an auto storage/junk yard facility began operation on both the Waterview West and Merit properties. It was at this time that filling of the shoreline on the property began in earnest. In the 1960's the western portion of the auto junk yard was sold and converted to a concrete batching plant. The junk yard/storage facility continued operation on the Waterview West site. Both of these operations were generally unregulated and the properties were maintained in very poor condition.

By 1982, the shoreline of the Waterview West and Merit concrete sites had been extended waterward by 310 and 220 feet respectively and to heights of 20 to 50 feet.

In the late 1970's the City of Baltimore began negotiating to purchase the Waterview West site as part of the Middle Branch Park Plan. The purchase of the property and removal of junked cars and trash was completed in August of 1983. The concrete batching plant continues to operate at the western study edge, but it has changed ownership.

## III. SURROUNDING LAND USES

Land adjacent to the study area contains largely industrial uses. The Carr-Lowrey glass factory is located adjacent to the northwest property edge. This operation is large and imposing, with the structures reaching

within 100 feet of the water's edge. Just this year, a vegetated berm was planted as a part of the City's Critical Area Program with additional funding from Carr-Lowrey.

Kloman Street acts as the study area's western boundary. This is a narrow, poorly maintained, privately-owned street which provides access to Carr-Lowrey and other businesses. The B & O railroad tracks run parallel to Kloman Street along its western edge. Beyond this is a parking lot for BG&E employees. This parking area will be re-developed as part of the Central Light Rail line by 1993. Two Light Rail stops will be located within 1800 feet of the site. Additional industrial and storage uses are located west of the light rail line, and beyond this is the Westport neighborhood.

The land south of the Study Area, across Waterview Avenue, contains a light industrial storage operation and trucking company.

The eastern property edge abuts the Middle Branch Moorings Marina. This marina contains 340 slips.

The Middle Branch of the Patapsco River acts as the Study Area's northern boundary. The site has excellent views north across the Middle Branch to the I-95/I-395 interchange and the downtown skyline, and east toward the Hanover Street bridge. See Figure 2 for a map of surrounding land uses.

## IV. RELATIONSHIP TO EXISTING PARK AND SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS

The area under study is currently one of the missing pieces needed to complete the Middle Branch Master Plan. Development of this entire parcel

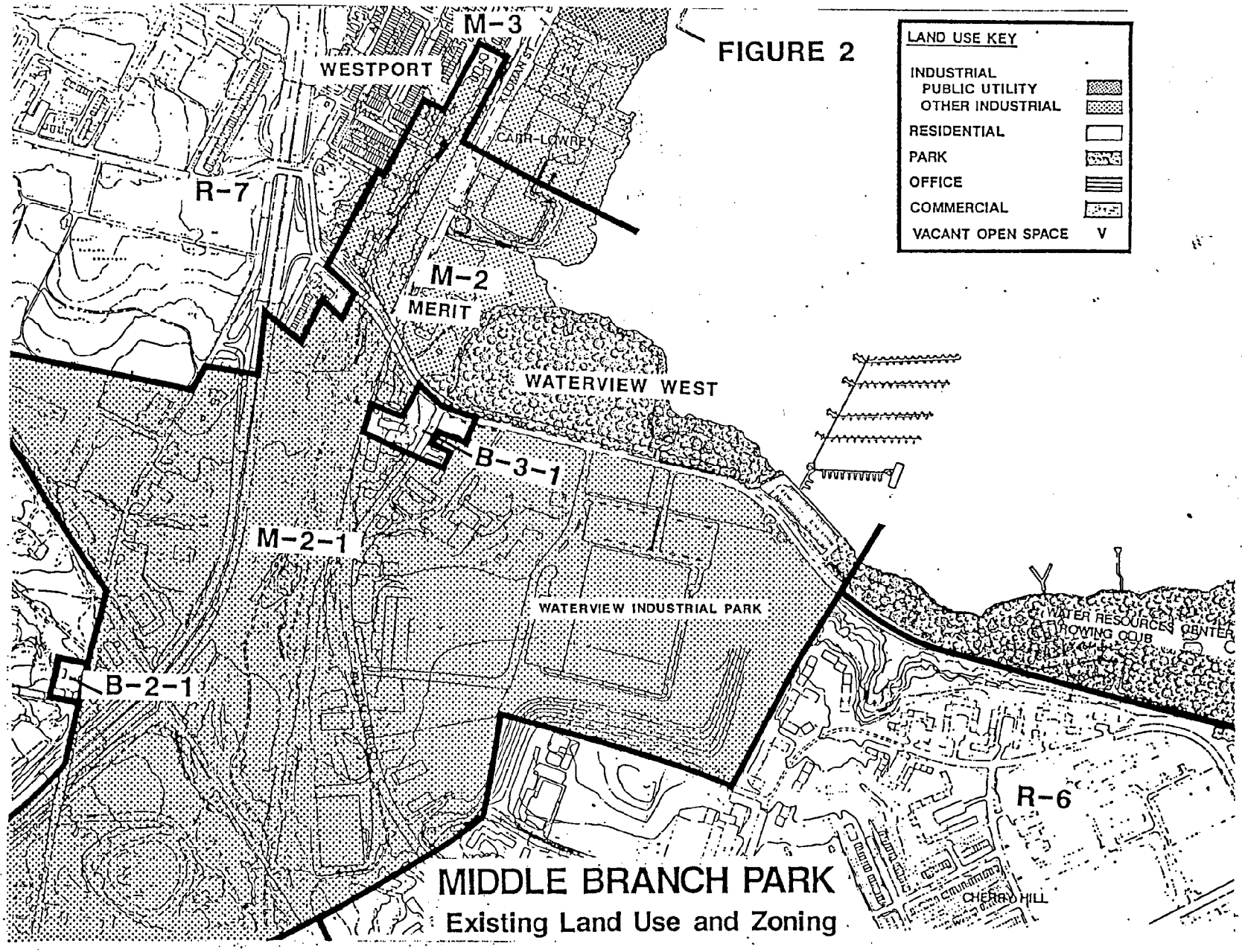


FIGURE 2
LAND USE KEY
INDUSTRIAL
PUBLIC UTILITY
OTHER INDUSTRIAL
RESIDENTIAL
PARK
OFFICE
COMMERCIAL
VACANT OPEN SPACE V
M-3
WESTPORT
CARR-LOWREY
R-7
M-2
MERIT
WATERVIEW WEST
B-3-1
M-2-1
WATERVIEW INDUSTRIAL PARK
WATER RESOURCES CENTER
ROWING CLUB
B-2-1
R-6
CHERRY HILL
MIDDLE BRANCH PARK
Existing Land Use and Zoning

(both Waterview West and Merrit Concrete) for park use would complete the southern edge of the Middle Branch Park, extending the existing programs at the Rowing Center and providing a link to the Westport neighborhood. Development of the Waterview West portion of the study area has been included in both the 1977 document Middle Branch Park Reclaiming a Shoreline for Recreation, and the updated park plan, completed in 1985.

The 1977 document proposed that the site be developed as ballfields and a marina facility. Since that time, the mudflats and wetlands have re-established themselves and the site has been established as excellent wildlife habitat. At the time of the 1977 Plan, the study area was in poor environmental condition, and contained a junk and scrap metal operation. The 1985 Plan update has altered the original proposal to reflect the physical changes in the Study Area, and has proposed that the site be developed for passive recreation to enhance its wildlife potential.

Completion of a park in the Study Area would also serve the surrounding neighborhoods. Cherry Hill residents presently use the rowing center docks for crabbing, fishing and picnicking. Neighborhood children attend educational programs at the rowing center after school and on weekends. Development of a nature trail with educational signage will complement this use and extend the park area for these residents. Development of a park in the Study Area will also act to extend the park to the Westport neighborhood for their use. Presently the limit of park development does not extend westward enough for the Westport community to gain easy access, therefore they do not frequent the park. Development of a path system from Kloman Street, (through the Merit site) would help to

connect this neighborhood with the existing park system. This will also complement the Light Rail station at Kent Street.

## V. SITE ANALYSIS

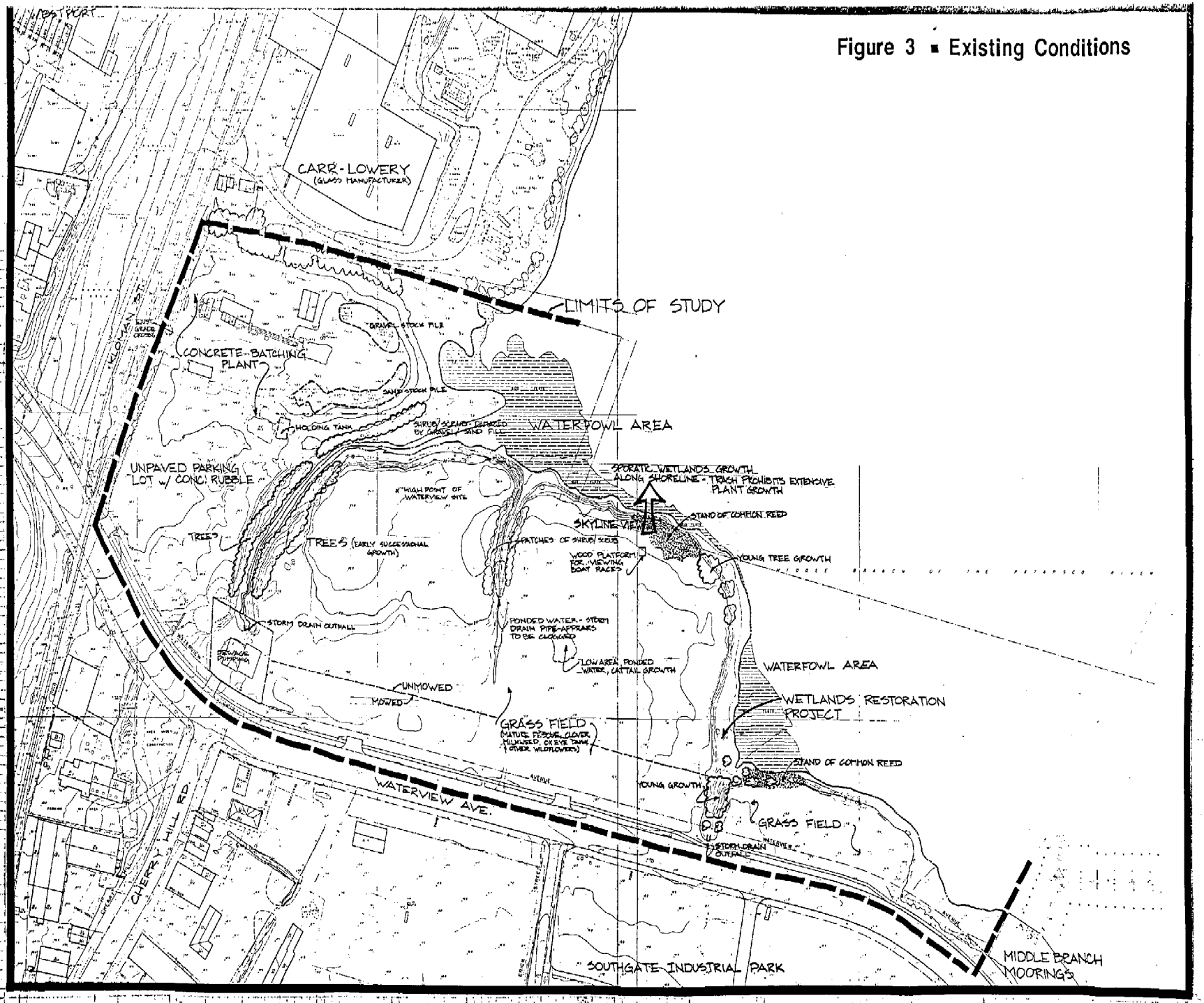
**o vegetation** - The eastern portion of the study area, known as Waterview West, was cleared of junkyard debris, covered with topsoil, graded and seeded in 1983. The City maintained the property by mowing the grass until 1990, when budget constraints caused the City to stop cutting the lawn, except along the street edge. Figure 3 provides a map highlighting environmental conditions in the study area.

The majority of this area is now in the old field successional ecological stage, with high mature grasses, clover and some scattered patches of wildflowers, including ox-eye daisy, black eyed susan and milkweed. Small areas of young trees exist along the water's edge and in the swale running through the middle of the site. These trees are species that typically move into disturbed areas, including Ailanthis Atissma (Tree of Heaven). Slightly more dense tree growth occurs along the stream corridor which divides the concrete plant from Waterview West.

There is virtually no vegetation on the Merit Concrete site. Some trees are located along the stream corridor edge and the base of the fill line at the water's edge. The movement of the fill toward the water has covered the base of many of the trees, which are unhealthy and suffering from environmental stress.

**o Topography** - The Waterview West portion of the study area consists of two gently sloping fields bisected by a drainage swale. The western

## Figure 3 ▪ Existing Conditions



field area is at a slightly higher elevation than the eastern field, overall about 10 feet higher. A low berm was constructed along the water's edge of the western parcel. This berm limits view of the water from the rear of the site, but acts as an excellent high point for viewing the shorebirds below. The edges of the property along the water line are very steep. Current topographic maps indicate that slopes vary from 40 to 60%. At the bottom of the slopes there is a small area of wetlands and mudflats.

The western portion of the study area contains the Merit concrete batching operation. The topography of this area is generally flat, draining towards the east. The far northeastern property edge contains a mountainous heap of gravel and sand, roughly 150 feet in diameter and rising approximately 50 feet above sea level. This mound is accessible by heavy machinery from the landward side of the property, but drops off steeply into the water. Current topographic maps show that this area contains 40% slopes, however visual analysis indicates that it is much steeper, probably closer to 60%. Heavy equipment is operated atop this mound, moving fresh piles of material around. Little vegetation exists to stabilize the steep slope.

**o Soils** - Soils at the Waterview West site consist primarily of fill material made up of soil, sand, gravel, construction debris and junk such as scrap metal and car parts. The stability of this material is questionable without extensive engineering data. In 1961, a use permit was issued for the property owner of the eastern edge of the site for "storage and reclaiming of perchloroethylene (PCE)" on a 50' x 50' section of the lot. City personnel interviewed individuals associated with the

property and its operation during the 1960's, and investigated Department of Health and Hygiene files. Based on information received from these investigations, City personnel decided that the site was not actively used for storage of perchloroethylene. Current planning department staff have reviewed the same historic data, and feel that the potential does exist for some PCE contamination. Testing of groundwater should be performed before development of the site is initiated.

In addition to this, the property owner of the western section of Waterview West was cited for operation of an illegal landfill in 1981. The State of Maryland prosecuted the property owner, and the landfill was cleaned up prior to the City's purchase of the property. All debris and junk were removed from the Waterview West parcel as part of the purchase agreement between the City and the property owner. After removal of the debris, the City Department of Public Works covered the site with a layer of clean sludge and seeded it with grasses in August of 1983.

The substrate and soil of the Merit Concrete parcel have not been tested by the City. Ms. Becki Kurdle, Vice President of Constellation Properties, Inc., has indicated that an environmental assessment was performed prior to their purchase of the site.

o **Wildlife** - The site's location along the water's edge, with old field successional growth and wetlands with mudflats create excellent conditions for wildlife habitat. A wide variety of shorebirds have been documented at the site, including Great Blue Heron, Common Tern, Little Blue Heron and Snowy Egret. For a more complete listing see Table 1.

**TABLE 1**
BIRD SPECIES OBSERVED IN STUDY AREA

| SHORE BIRDS | UPLAND SPECIES |
|---|---|
| - Little Green Heron | - Barn Swallow |
| - Yellow Crowned Night Heron | - Red Winged Blackbird |
| - Belted Kingfisher | - Red-Tailed Hawk |
| - Kill Deer | - Red Shouldered Hawk |
| - Snowy Egret | - American Kestrel |
| - Little Blue Heron | - Blue Jay |
| - Great Blue Heron | - Northern Mockingbird |
| - Forster's Tern | - Gray Catbird |
| - Common Tern | - American Robbin |
| - Ring Billed Gull | |
| - Laughing Gull | |

Numerous upland bird species have moved into the Waterview West section of the study area since the City stopped mowing the grass. Species utilizing this area include Barn Swallows, Red Winged Black Bird, American Kestrel, Blue Jay, and Gray Catbird.

It is anticipated that the Waterview West area is home to a variety of small mammals, including mice, rats and muskrats, although none were observed on field visits.

The Merit Concrete property contains habitat only along the edge of the stream corridor and at the base of the gravel heap where mudflats exist. Herons and other birds listed above have been observed roosting in this area.

o **Access** - The study area is bounded on the south by Waterview Avenue and the West by Kloman Street. The Waterview West site can be easily reached by Waterview Avenue. Access to the Merit Concrete site is best provided from Kloman Street. The Western area where Merit concrete is currently located does not have good direct access from Waterview West

because of the stream corridor which bisects the property. Indirect access is provided along the sidewalk on Waterview Avenue.

One of the primary goals of the proposed park in this area is to serve the Westport neighborhood with more direct access to the Middle Branch Park system. Waterview Avenue is not preferred for access to this neighborhood because it has heavy vehicle traffic and few traffic lights. It would serve the Westport community better to provide direct access through the Merit site from Kloman Street. The Kloman Street to Waterview link for pedestrian and bicycle use has been previously proposed in the 1977 Middle Branch Park document Reclaiming a Shoreline for Recreation which was adopted as part of the Recreation and Parks Master Plan in 1978. The proposed park is also part of the Gwynns Falls Greenway, adding a critical link to the park system being established along the Gwynns Falls.

**o Utilities** -A storm drain pipe is located in the swale crossing from south to north in the middle of the property, with the storm outlet located at the high tide level.

The Westport sewer pumping station is located on Waterview Avenue, at a point exactly between the two parcels of the study area. The pumping station is at the top of the stream which separates the two parcels, at the point where the stream leaves the culvert under Cherry Hill Road. This station contains a small building with fencing surrounding it. Sewer lines connected to the station enter from Waterview Avenue, and do not cross the park property.

The pumping station and the stream act to physically separate the two parcels. Access between each parcel must be made by walking along the sidewalk on Waterview Avenue.

## VI. PROPOSED PARK DEVELOPMENT

### Waterview West parcel

The excellent habitat value of the Waterview West parcel makes it more suitable for development for passive recreation than for active uses such as ball fields. Active, noisy recreation on the Waterview West site would most likely disturb the wildlife, limiting the value of the wetlands and mudflats as a feeding area for shorebirds. It may be possible to locate some active recreation on the far western edge of the Merit concrete property, but this may not be cost effective given the physical site conditions. The proposed park development of the Waterview West parcel is as follows:

o Enhance the site's natural habitat quality by planting trees along the drainage swale and stream corridor. Plant portions of the site with wildflower meadows. Limit mowing of grass to only small areas of the site which are used for picnicking.

o Allow for passive recreation on the site by constructing a bike/hiking trail and picnic pavilion.

o Improve the wooden viewing stand used by the Baltimore Rowing Club for judging sculling races. This stand can be enlarged to hold 12 people. The Rowing Club can pay for these improvements.

o Create a high point near the viewing stand on the eastern parcel for additional space to view sculling races and the shorebirds.

o Utilize the site for environmental education programs, providing signage at key points which identify plant, animal and insect species.

o Utilize the Chesapeake Clean-up Campaign volunteers to plant additional trees at the site. (Conceptual plans for development of both parcels are shown in Figures 4 and 5.)

o Perform environmental site work which may be necessary. The extent of this work will be determined based on an analysis of ground water on the property.

Merit Concrete Parcel -

This site is somewhat more complicated than the Waterview West parcel. The soil is very poor and compacted, and the consistency of the underlying substrate is unknown. The highly compacted nature of the surface area would require that this layer be removed for any ballfield construction, which would be expensive. These factors may make construction of a ballfield difficult. At this time we propose two possibilities for this site:

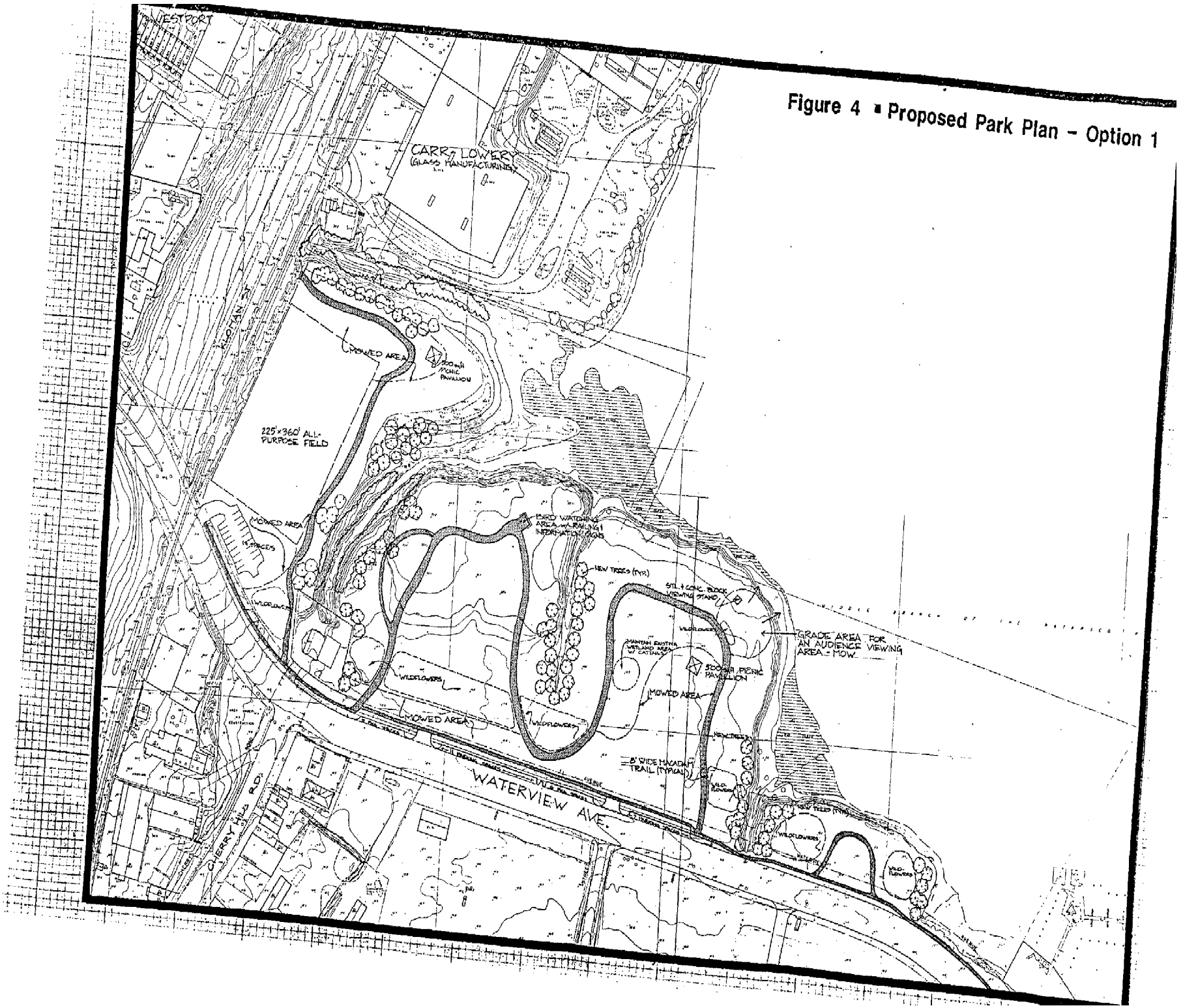



**Figure 4 ▪ Proposed Park Plan – Option 1**

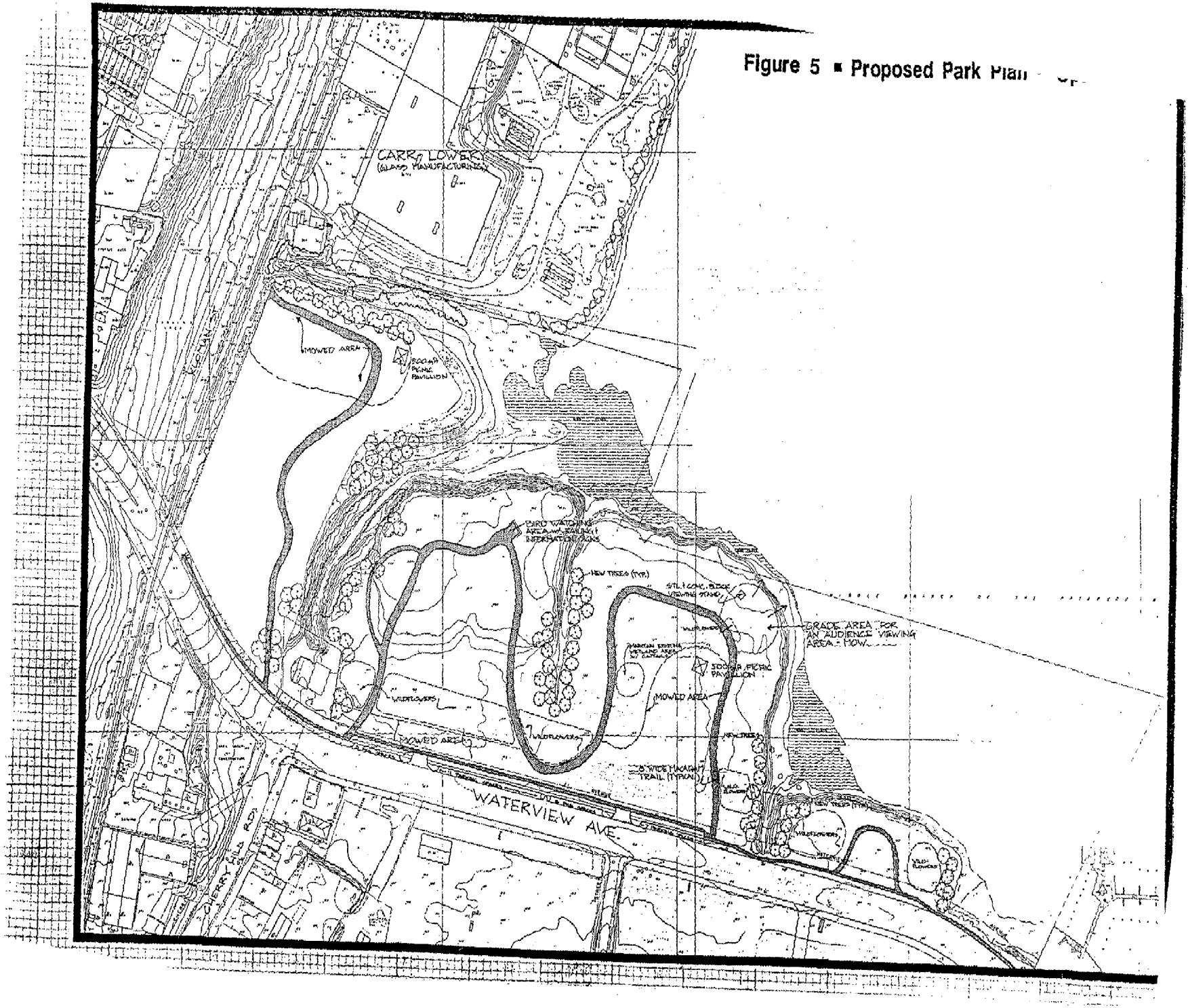



Figure 5 ■ Proposed Park Plan

Proposal One:

o Construct an all purpose ballfield on the southwestern edge of the site.

o Construct a picnic pavilion near the site's northeastern edge to take advantage of the excellent views.

o Include a trail system which connects the Merit and Waterview West parcels for biking and hiking uses.

o Stabilize the steep slope located at the northeastern property edge with dune grasses and other hardy plant materials.

Proposal Two:

o Utilize the site for passive recreation only. Construct a biking/hiking trail which is linked to the trail system at Waterview West.

o Construct a picnic pavilion near the northeastern edge of the site, taking advantage of the high plateau and excellent views.

o Leave the majority of the site as unmowed, old field succession for better use by wildlife.

o Plant trees for additional wildlife habitat.

o Stabilize the steep slope located at the northeastern property edge with dune grasses and other hardy plant materials.

VII. COSTS

**(Estimates do not include costs of environmental restoration of the properties involved.)**

The costs of developing the study area are as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Waterview West - | |
| Path (2000 Linear Feet) | $20,000.00 |
| Wildflower Patches (33,600 Sq. feet) | $3,360.00 |
| Pavilion | $20,000.00 |
| Trees (34) | $10,200.00 |
| TOTAL | $38,560.00 |
| Merit Concrete- | |
| Option 1 (Baseball Field) | |
| Acquisition | $1,000,000.00* |
| Ball Field Construction (Includes site preparation and grading.) | $300,000.00 |
| Pavilion | $20,000.00 |
| Path(1000 linear feet) | $10,000.00 |
| Trees (15) | $4,500.00 |
| TOTAL | $1,334,500.00 |
| Option 2 (Passive Recreation) | |
| Acquisition | $1,000,000.00* |
| Pavilion | $20,000.00 |
| Site Preparation and Grading | $160,500.00 |
| Path (1000 linear feet) | $10,000.00 |
| Trees (15) | $4,500.00 |
| TOTAL | $1,195,000.00 |

* Informal conversations with Constellation properties indicate that $1,000,000 is likely to be the asking price. The purchase price in 1988 was just above $700,000. Property appreciation and improvements have increased the land value.

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