

# Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

## 1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic: Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) Water Plant (Chestnut/Meem)

and/or common WSSC Pump Houses & Water Tower Tank

## 2. Location

street & number 112 West Diamond Avenue  not for publication

city, town Gaithersburg  vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ congressional district \_\_\_\_\_

state Maryland county Montgomery

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: <i>local history</i>

## 4. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name City of Gaithersburg

street & number 31 South Summit Avenue telephone no.: (301) 258-6310

city, town Gaithersburg state and zip code MD 20877

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Montgomery County Courthouse liber 08154

street & number 50 Courthouse Square folio 0259

city, town Rockville state Maryland

## 6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title \_\_\_\_\_

date \_\_\_\_\_  federal  state  county  local

repository for survey records

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_

# 7. Description

Survey No. M-21-177

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved    date of move _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

Three small brick buildings and a water tank remain of the City's first water plant built in 1926-1928. The site originally consisted of one large brick pumping house, three smaller brick buildings (also referred to as pumping houses which covered the wells), a small metal-clad building, and two water tanks. 1/ Water was pumped and stored here for several decades. The larger brick pumping house was removed in 1988 for the widening of West Diamond Avenue; one of the water tanks was demolished in 1988 to permit the construction of the day care center. The metal-clad date of its removal is not recorded. Located along West Diamond Avenue, the existing structures are tucked in among mature trees and dot the grassy area which surrounds a modern, brick building (used as a day care center) and a concrete parking lot.

Forming the southern boundary of the site is four-lane West Diamond Avenue which directs traffic to the interchanges at Route 355 to the south and I-270 to the north. West Diamond also connects with Muddy Branch Road, another four-lane highway. A gravel alley extends from West Diamond behind the water tower and two of the brick buildings to Meem Avenue. This is used to provide access to the historic structures which are currently used for storage. On the other side of West Diamond Avenue, to the south and directly opposite the original WSSC structures is the modern facility of the Washington Suburban Sanitation Commission. It is a one-story garage-like building housing a maintenance depot and has areas for storage of vehicles and materials (asphalt, salt, and gravel). The building was first occupied in 1976 and the parcel was annexed into the City in 1990.

To the east lies the residential neighborhood of the Chestnut/Meem area; to the west is a mix of apartments and business uses; to the north is a row of industrial uses, some of which are contained in buildings previously used as residences.

The cream-colored metal water tank is approximately thirty feet in diameter, about one story high, and has an entrance door visible from the current parking lot. It is a squatty, round structure, with a slightly sloping top, and can hold about 50,000 gallons of water. 2/

Three small brick buildings are scattered about on the property, and cover the location of the wells. Each structure is identical, being about 10 feet square and one story high with slate hip roofs. The sides of the buildings are one bay each; one facade has an entrance door; the rear is solid brick; and the other two sides each have one window (currently boarded up, but probably originally six-over-six). These smaller buildings mimic the design of the larger pumping station (now demolished), both in the brick pattern of the walls and the slate hip roof style. One of the buildings has a small raised area on the roof for ventilation.

WSSC Pumping Stations and Water Tank, Montgomery County  
-----

The following description of the main pumping station is included here for reference purposes. It was removed in 1988 to accommodate the widening of West Diamond Avenue.

The largest brick building was the main pumping station and was located quite close to West Diamond Avenue. It had a hip roof of slate, a large central chimney, and was set on a concrete block foundation. The three-bay front facade facing West Diamond had a standard size entrance door in the middle bay and a window (six-over-six) in each of the other bays. The eastern facade had two bays, one with a double door, and the other with a six-over-six window. The rear facade, also three-by-three, as the front, had a six-over-six window in two adjacent bays, and a double door in the third. The remaining facade was two bays wide with a six-over-six window in each. 3/

The original front door had a small two-over-two window in it, which complemented the larger windows, and coordinated closely in design with the double doors. Over time these doors were replaced. The front was changed into a solid, very plain white door. The double doors on the side facade were replaced with a single, standard-size entrance door and the remaining area filled in with white siding. The rear double doors were removed and the space filled in with white siding. 4/

The brick pattern of the exterior walls provided interest to this very utilitarian building, and as noted above, was repeated in the smaller structures. An American bond brick pattern formed the main part of each wall from the foundation to about two to three feet from the top. The decorative brick frieze had two courses of slightly projecting American bond as a border at the top, then four courses of stack bond, and was separated from the main portion of the brick wall by a single course of bricks in a slightly projecting American bond arrangement.

Footnotes:

1. 1949 Sanborn Insurance Map
2. As above
3. 1929 Photograph by WSSC
4. 1988 Photographs

# 8. Significance

Survey No. M-21-177

<b>Period</b>	<b>Areas of Significance—Check and justify below</b>					
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/humanitarian		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify)		
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		(Local History)		

**Specific dates** 1926-1928      **Builder/Architect** Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission

check: Applicable Criteria:  A  B  C  D  
and/or  
Applicable Exception:  A  B  C  D  E  F  G  
Level of Significance:  national  state  local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Three small brick buildings and a metal water tank, situated along West Diamond Avenue near the intersection of Muddy Branch Road and Chestnut Street, are what remain of the City of Gaithersburg's first water plant. The facility was built by the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission between 1926-1928 and marks the extent of the City's limits as it existed in the Chestnut/Meem area in 1896.

### HISTORY AND SUPPORT

#### PART ONE

(Reprinted from a history submitted by Arthur P. Brigham 1/)

In 1924, at the request of the towns of Gaithersburg and Washington Grove, the Maryland General Assembly ruled that both communities should be included as a part of the Washington Suburban Sanitary District for the purpose of providing public water and sewerage service. WSSC records indicate that many of the Gaithersburg homes to be served by the proposed new system had been using individual wells and privies. These wells and privies had been sufficient for Gaithersburg resident use in early days, but as the town progressed and its population grew, a more efficient water and waste system was needed. With the 1924 ruling of the General Assembly, Gaithersburg became one of a number of towns already served by the WSSC. Places such as Chevy Chase, Silver Spring, and Takoma Park, were located on the perimeter of the Washington, DC system and could use the same water source. Because of Gaithersburg's island-like location though, the small town surrounded by farmland needed a separate water source along with its own pipeline systems and storage and treatment facilities. Existing WSSC facilities in the lower part of Montgomery County did not lend themselves to feasible extension into Gaithersburg, so the Commission had to establish new facilities for the town.

WSSC Pumping Stations and Water Tank, Montgomery County

---

Before the WSSC could build its new layout of systems and facilities in Gaithersburg, it had to deal with the problem of a lack of accurate mapping of the town. The Commission's headquarters Department Engineer, Vinton D. Cockey, noted in September 1924, that some difficulty was being encountered because the latest map of Gaithersburg that the WSSC had been able to find was dated August 1894. To further complicate matters, the description of the town boundaries used in the 1924 legislation was based on information which had been recorded in 1914. To alleviate the problem, the WSSC hired Olinus Smith for \$350 to prepare a topographical map of the area.

While this preliminary work was being done, the Gaithersburg Town Council and Mayor Walter M. Magruder grew impatient. By letter, the Mayor informed the Commission that the council had passed a resolution to "hereby authorize the WSSC to proceed with the least possible delay (with) the installation of the water and sewage system within the town of Gaithersburg." The Mayor and Council also pledged "cooperation in installing and maintaining the system in the most efficient manner."

An advertisement in the Montgomery County Sentinel on July 31, 1925, announced the Commission's intention to "construct water and sewer systems in the towns of Gaithersburg and Washington Grove" and invited interested citizens to an August 3 hearing at the WSSC's main office, then located in the Evans Building in Washington, DC.

There were some citizens who voiced disagreement with the Gaithersburg town leaders' decision to initiate a new water and sewerage system. As might be expected, costs were the main reason for their opposition. The WSSC expected the Gaithersburg portion of the system's development to run about \$222,000 (the actual cost turned out to be \$216,000).

One example of community opposition to the new water and sewerage facilities was embodied in a community flyer dated March 2, 1926. The flyer was authored by Otho C. Trundle and pointed out that:

A charge of \$25 (actually it was \$35) is made by the Commission for connecting you up with its system, and from estimates given me by reliable plumbers, the cost of installing complete bathroom equipment will range from \$350.00 on up.

The entire burden of assuming this tremendous burden is now up to the Mayor and Council of Gaithersburg. They have requested from the Sanitary commission to begin the work of installation. Bids from different engineers are expected in by the commission some time this week.

What are you as a citizen and taxpayer going to do? Gaithersburg is assessed at approximately \$600,000. Are you satisfied to see it bonded over one-third of its tax assessment value for the privilege of having

WSSC Pumping Stations and Water Tank, Montgomery County

---

water and sewerage: Would you, as an individual, mortgage your home for one-third of its value for this privilege?

A course of action is open to you. Actual work has not yet begun. No contracts have been awarded. Demand of your Mayor and Council that they stop all action in this matter, until you as a taxpayer, most vitally and directly concerned, be given a vote on the question. Now is the time to act. Tomorrow will be too late.

As it turned out, though, the proponents of the new water and sewerage system under the WSSC won the town fathers' ears and approval. The Montgomery Press, a weekly newspaper distributed throughout the community, voiced its opinion on April 2, 1926. Editor Cornelius W. Clum wrote: "Water and sewerage systems in Gaithersburg and Washington Grove will make those towns more desirable as places of residences and enhance property values."

This is the type of opinion the leaders of Gaithersburg took to heart. Work on the design and installation of the systems proceeded with the town's blessing and frequent proddings by phone and letter in support of "expeditious installation" of the WSSC facilities. The work took place during 1926-1928, and a Council/Mayor memorandum on August 4, 1928, described the system as "near completion."

The new WSSC-installed network included water mains and sewers in what was then downtown Gaithersburg on Frederick Pike (now Route 355), Diamond Avenue, and pieces of Summit Avenue, James Street, George Street, Brookes Avenue, Walker Avenue, Russell Avenue, and Park Avenue, as well as Water Street. The "water plant" consisting of wells and storage facilities was located on West Diamond Avenue.

The sewerage system outfall (the pipe to the new Gaithersburg Treatment Plant) went south from Water Street in a direction marked on the plans as Water Street (Fitzgerald Road) extended. The plant site was near Muddy Branch, south of Gaithersburg, and was visible until the early 1960s on the left side of Muddy Branch Road, going from Gaithersburg toward Route 28.

Both the well system for water supply and the old Muddy Branch Treatment Plant for sewage disposal operated into the early '60s. As the Commission's major supply lines from the new Potomac River Water Filtration Plant, opened in 1961, reached the Gaithersburg area, the well system was taken out of service. Today, the WSSC's new, fully modern Gaithersburg Field Service Center, opened in 1977, is located across the street from the old water well and storage site on West Diamond Avenue.

The Muddy Branch Road Sewerage Treatment Plant, a simple but effective pollution control facility, went out of service when the Commission connected a sewage pumping station, built just south of the plant site, to the Gaithersburg pipeline system and started moving the growing community's sewage through a force main to the Rock Creek Trunk Sewer, which over the years had been gradually extended upstream from the D.C. boundary to a point well north of Rockville.

WSSC Pumping Stations and Water Tank, Montgomery County

---

Later in the decade, the Dulles (Potomac River) Regional Interceptor Sewer was built and the WSSC constructed a trunk sewer from the Interceptor up the Muddy Branch Valley. The system now had the potential to carry Gaithersburg sewage either way, by pumping to Rock Creek or by gravity to the Muddy Branch Trunk Sewer. However, all of these lines are designed to carry the waste from the Gaithersburg area through pipelines in lower Montgomery County and Washington, DC to the regional Blue Plains Pollution Control Plant at the Potomac River in the southeastern section of the nation's Capital. Under this arrangement, Gaithersburg sewage probably travels 30 or more miles before it reaches its destination.

Although Commission records show no figures for the initial number of households and businesses served by the agency when the WSSC first started operating the Gaithersburg water and sewerage facilities, it has been estimated that more customers were added to the system (153 customer units) in the month of January 1978 than were "on board" when residents began receiving WSSC water in the 1920s.

From the beginning, the number of customer units served by the WSSC increased to about 1,100 units (houses and buildings) in the Gaithersburg area by 1960. Since then there has been much additional change in the community, which now includes a large new residential and business area within the umbrella known as "greater Gaithersburg." The number of customer units connected to WSSC services by the end of January 1978 had reached 7,874, a more than seven-fold increase in 18 years.

PART TWO

(from History of the WSSC -75th Anniversary 1918-1993 2/)

The above noted History was originally written by Art Brigham to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the WSSC in 1988 and covered the first seventy years. In 1993, the narrative was brought up-to-date and more photographs added. The following excerpt recounts a bit of the humorous side of the history of this site.

Early in the 1960s, positive things were happening in the development sewage collection and disposal systems. The "sewer-cide" (that's what some WSSC engineers used to call it!) of the Commission's business celebrated the extension of the Rock Creek Trunk Sewer in upper Montgomery County to a point where a new \$1.1 million pumping station and pressure sewer at Muddy Branch could be activated. The new system replaced the old, pollution-prone Gaithersburg sewage treatment plant. Built as a stopgap measure shortly after the WSSC began operations, the Gaithersburg Plant had long been overwhelmed by the growth of Gaithersburg but was so remote from the regional system that it took more than three decades for the Rock Creek Sewer to work its way up the valley to within range of the Muddy Branch pump-over project.

John M. Jester, WSSC Maintenance and Operations Engineer when the old plant was taken out of service, recalled that in the early days of the Commission new employees would be sent out on a mid-summer's day during the tomato-canning season to inspect the Gaithersburg plant. Invariably,

WSSC Pumping Stations and Water Tank, Montgomery County  
-----

a phone call would come from the concerned inspector to report that the sewage in the plant was running blood red.

"It would scare a fella damn near to death," Mr. Jester remembered, "and the supervisor would tell him he'd better get the red sewage cleaned up. One new man actually went to the police station to report what he thought might be a massacre that was causing the sewage to run red. Actually, the red sewage came from a nearby commercail cannery (Thomas & Company Cannery) that processed tomatoes from truck farms around Gaithersburg every summer; and for quite a few years, the 'red tide' at this plant served as one of the better opportunities for a practical joke at WSSC."

PART THREE

In 1987, the City purchased the site and leased it to Montgomery County for the construction and operation of a day care center. One of the two original water tanks was demolished for the parking lot turn around. Not long after, the largest brick building, the pumping station, was removed to permit the widening of West Diamond Avenue.

Footnotes:

1. Gaithersburg : The Heart of Montgomery County, pp. 270-273, 1978, City of Gaithersburg. Arthur P. Brigham was the Public Affairs Officer for the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. He prepared this history in February 1978. His history of the WSSC was also printed in the Gaithersburg Gazette, March 30, 1978.
2. History of the WSSC 75th Anniversary 1918-1993, p. 63.





The original pumping station. This faced West Diamond Avenue. Photo taken for HPAC meeting of 6-5-86. This was demolished for the widening of West Diamond Avenue.

The brick pattern of the pumping station. This was repeated in all of the smaller buildings on the site. Photo taken for HPAC meeting of 6-5-86.



WSSC Pumping Stations and Water Tank  
Montgomery County

Survey No. M-21-177

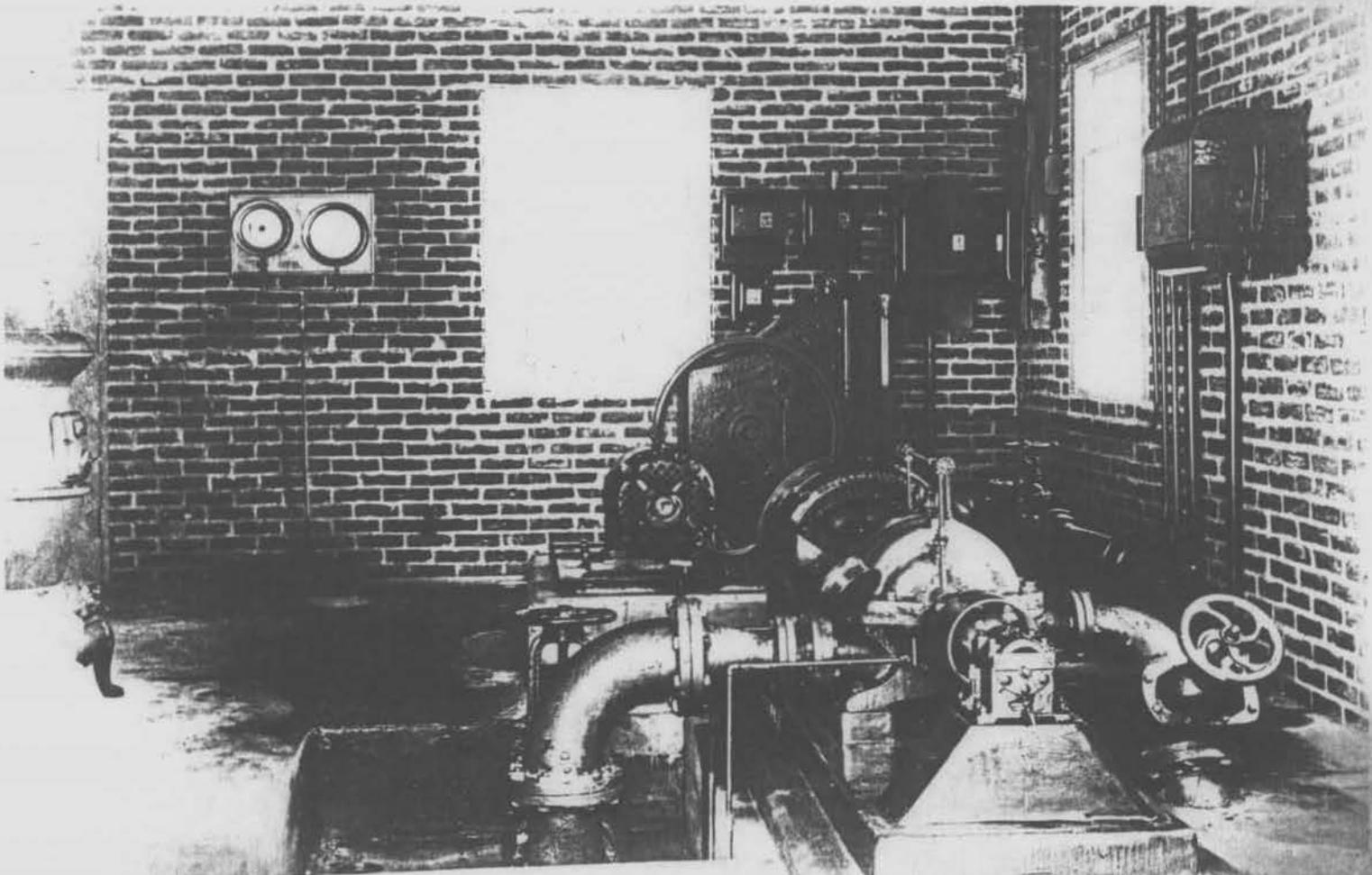


Pumping station along  
West Diamond Avenue.  
Photo taken for HPAC  
meeting of 6-5-86.  
Note changes to side -  
compare to 1929 photo.

Western side of  
pumping station.  
Photo taken for  
HPAC meeting of  
6-5-86.



8-10,000 to now



123

123  
File No. 11  
Order No. 2

6/2/52/9

Gaithersburg Water Pumping Station

Pumping Unit

WSSC Pumping Stations and Water Tank, Montgomery County

SURVEY NO. M-21-177



WSSC Pumping Station 1929 approximately.  
Demolished for the widening of West Diamond Avenue 1988.

Survey No.  
M-21-177

#110

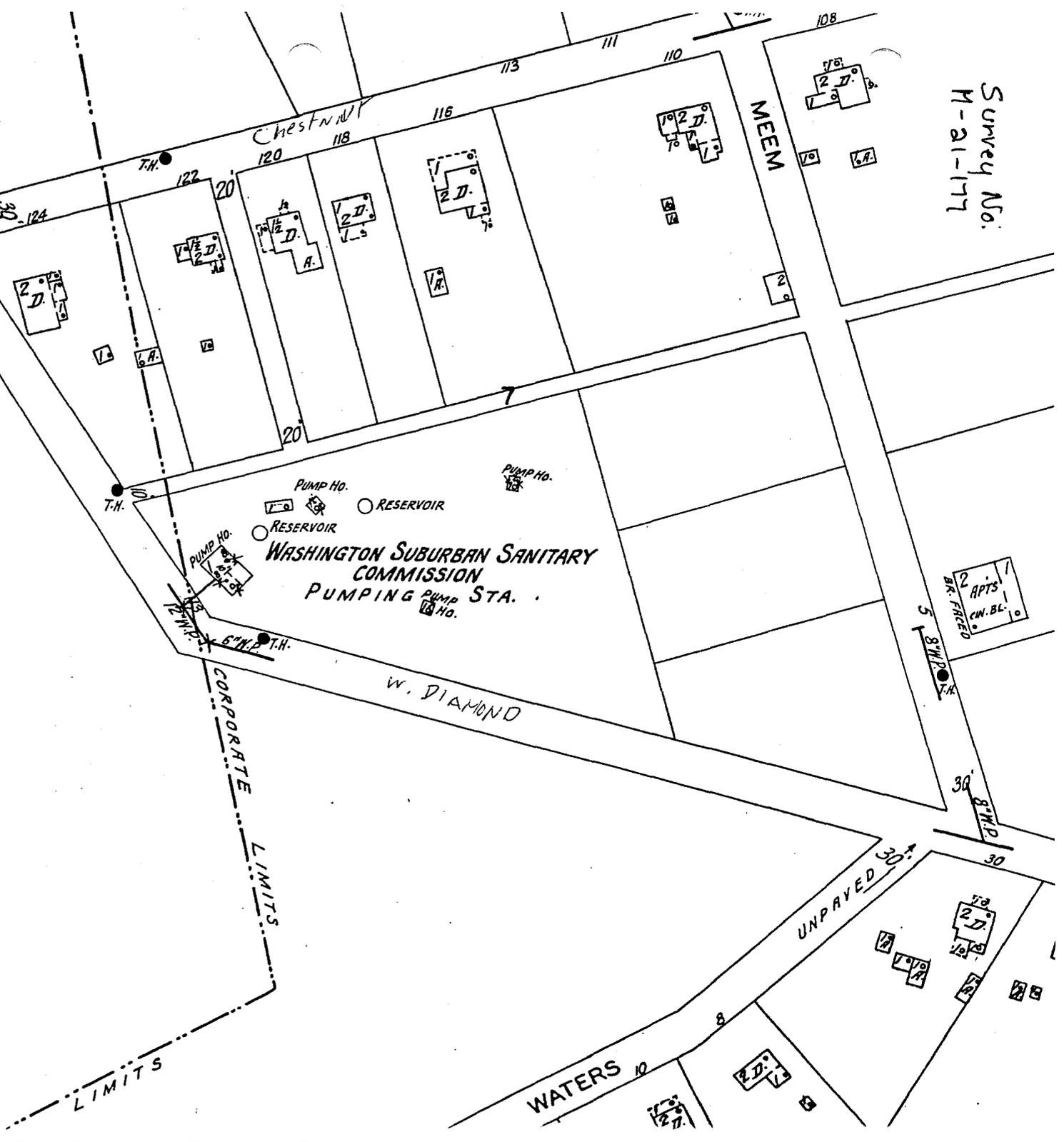
Survey No:  
H-21-177

JUNE 1949, SANNBORN

40'

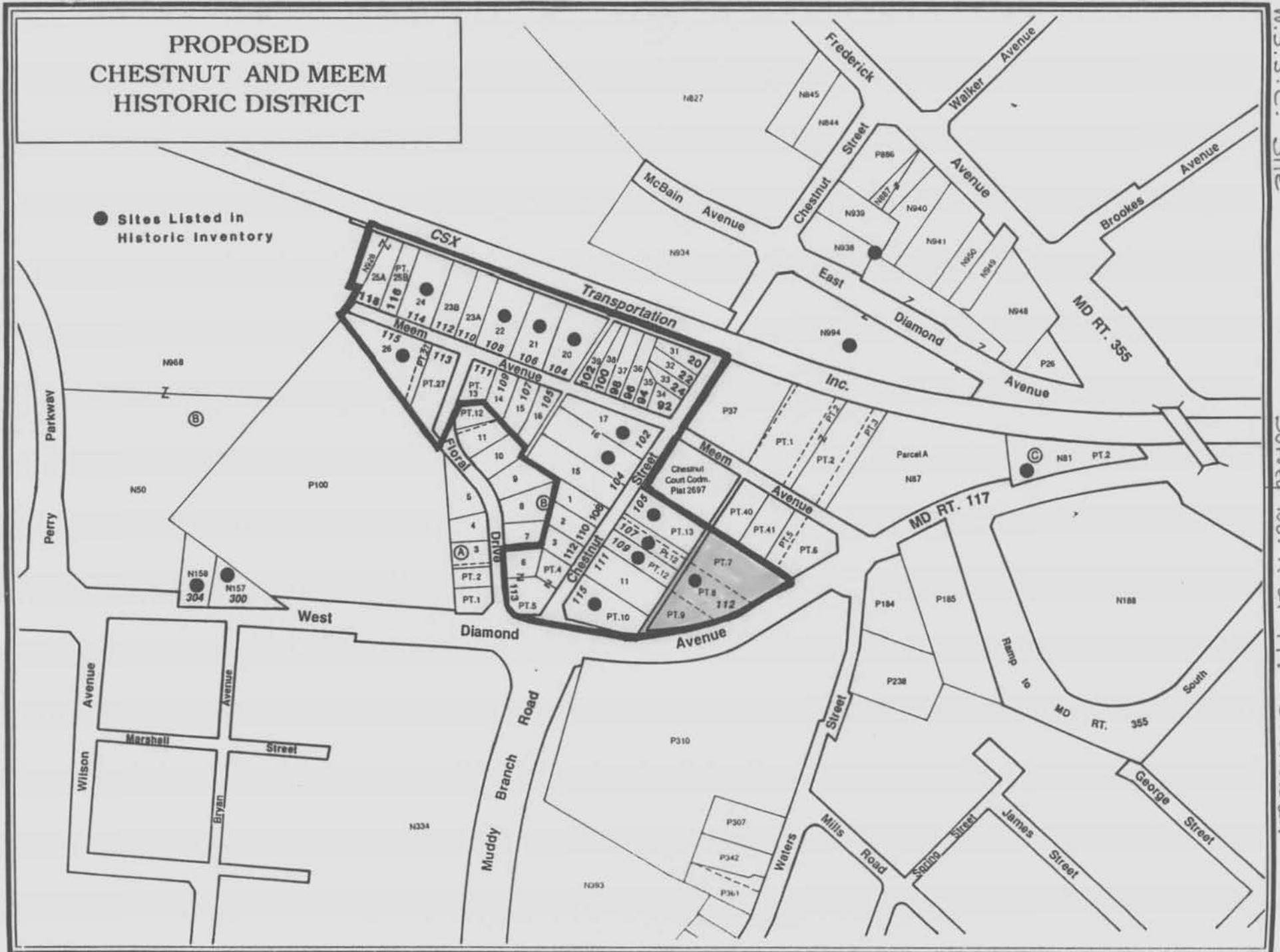
12" W.P.

2

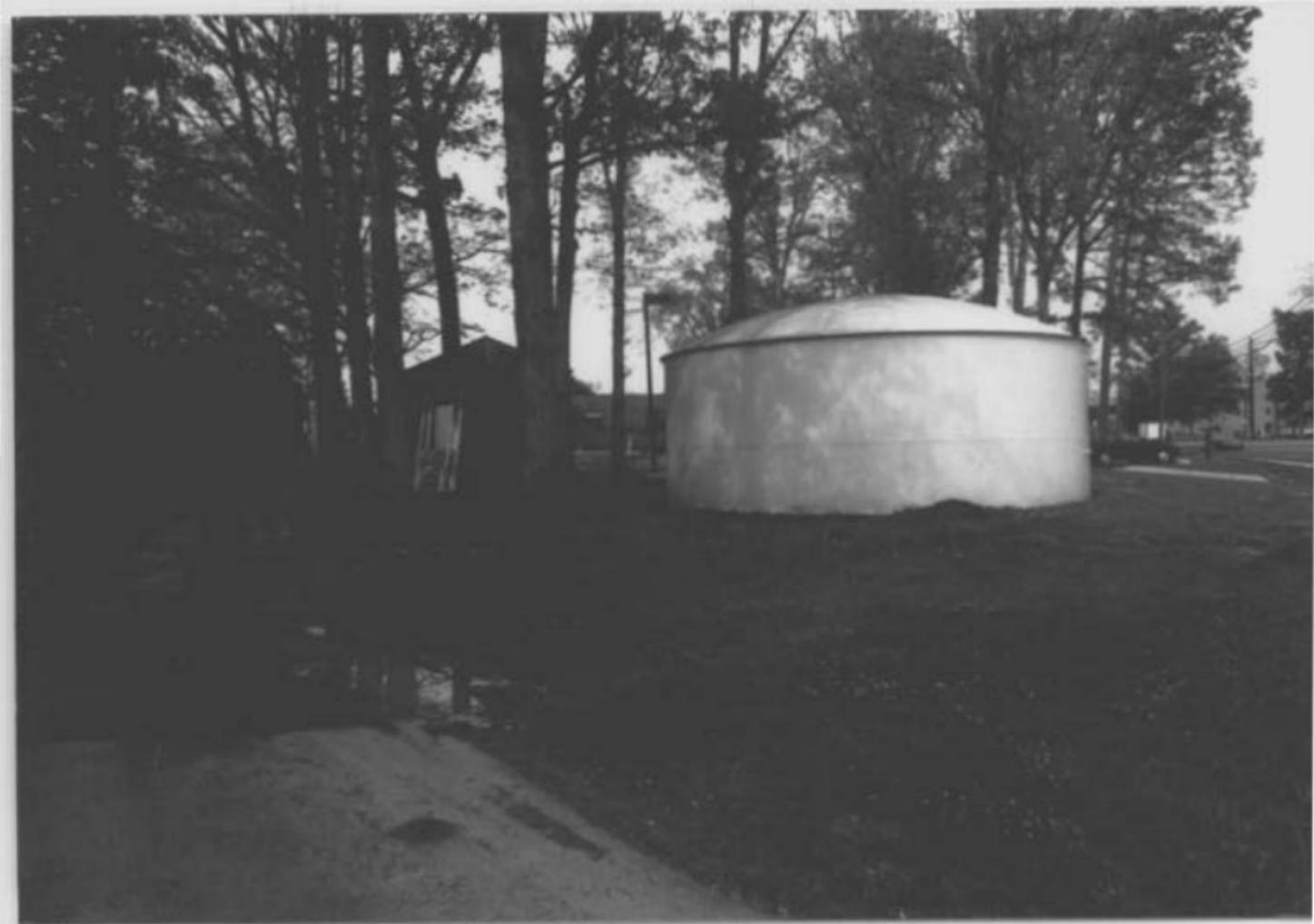


# PROPOSED CHESTNUT AND MEEM HISTORIC DISTRICT

● Sites Listed in  
Historic Inventory



W.S.S.C. Site Survey No. H-21-197 Section 2.1



M-21-177

WSSC Pump Stations & Water Tank  
(Chestnut/Meem)

112 West Diamond Avenue

Geithersburg, MD 20877

Montgomery County

Photographer: City Employee

Date: Spring 1995

Negative:

Elevation

Photo No.



M-21-177

WSSC Pump Stations & Water Tank  
(Chestnut/Meem)

112 West Diamond Ave

Gaithersburg MD

Montgomery County

Photographer: City Employee

Date: Spring, 1995

Negative: City of Gaithersburg, Planning  
& Code Administration

Elevations from W. Diamond Ave

Photo No. —/—

1995



M-21-177

WSSC Pump Stations & Water Tank  
(Chestnut/Meem

112 West Diamond Ave  
Gaithersburg, MD  
Montgomery County

Photographer: City Employee

Date: Spring 1995

Negative:

Elevations from  
Photo No: /

1995