

Report to the Vermont Legislature

DEVELOPMENT OF A MASTER PLAN FOR THE REDEVELOPMENT OF THE FORMER SOUTHEAST STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY PROPERTY IN THE TOWN OF WINDSOR, VT

Submitted By: Mount Ascutney Regional Commission

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SECTION A: OVERVIEW

This study is built upon past committees' efforts in collecting community and expert feedback regarding potential re-use/re-development of the Southeast State Correctional Facility property.

Main Objectives:

- 1) Existing Information: Collect Site Information and Reports previously commissioned/performed.
- 2) Mixed Use Redevelopment Plan: Consider uses on site that would allow multiple users on the site.
- 3) Community Feedback: Facilitate community discussion through a series of public meetings.
- 4) Legislative Feedback: Present Site Information and Community Feedback to State Legislature.
- 5) Analysis: Procure expert feedback on redevelopment options for the site, garnering input on cost and economic development opportunities.

Community interests and the legislature's responses were vetted against of constraints of the site. This report concludes with recommendations for further pre-development work.

SECTION B: PROJECT OUTLINE

B1 EXISTING CONDITIONS

Site Summary: Southeast State Correctional Facility

Owner of Record: State of Vermont

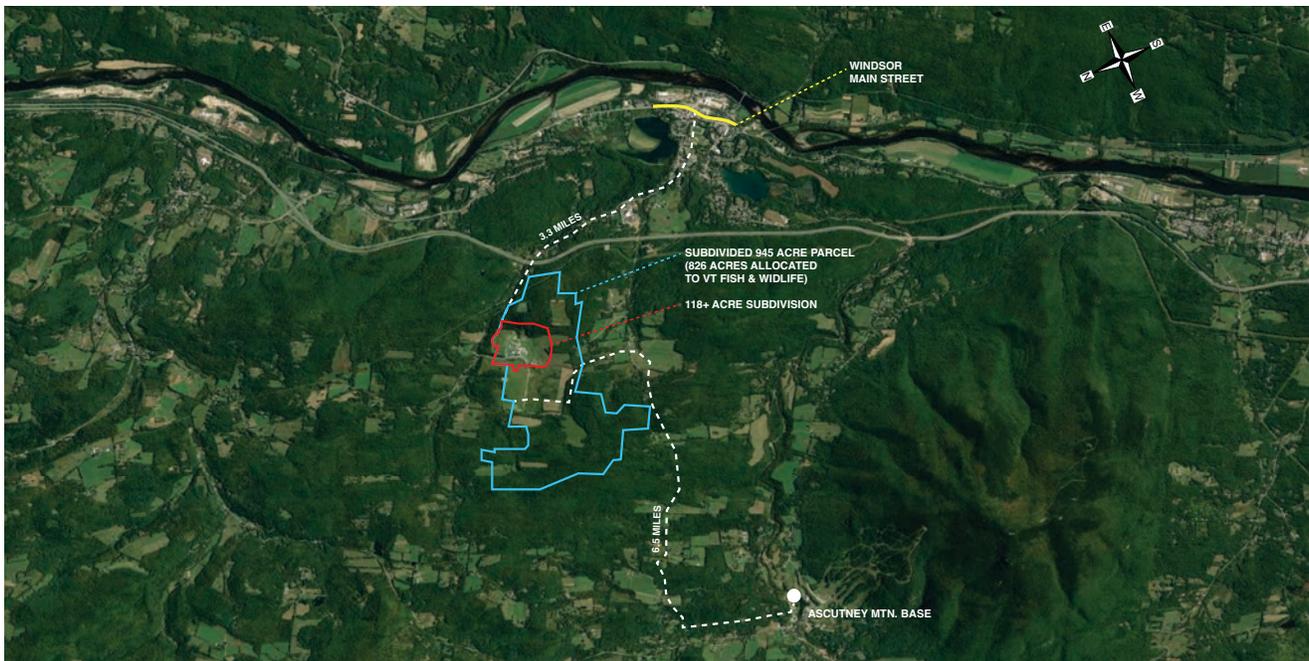
Last Date of Transfer: Purchased between 1894 and 1935

The property was purchased by the State over 100 years ago, and developed into a correctional facility in the 1930's. In early iterations, inmates took an active role in various forms of agricultural production on site, as evidenced by the remaining barn structures and silos. In more recent history, industrial structures were erected for tool shops and license plate production. The site remained in use correctional facility until 2017.

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The State owns 945 acres in Windsor based on the tax assessment records. In March 2017, the Governor transferred approximately 826 acres from the Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS) to The Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW.), creating the Windsor Grasslands Wildlife Management Area.

This project considers only the property controlled by BGS, which is 118.6 acres and all buildings that had been used as the correctional facility. From the BGS property entrance on State Farm Road, Windsor Main Street is approximately 3.3 miles, and base access to Ascutney Mountain is approximately 6.5 miles (by car).



Above: Parcel boundaries and key adjacencies in Windsor, VT.

Utilities: There is municipal sewer service and public electric to the site. Water is provided by a private well and water system for the facility.

The water system consists of a well and pump house along Marton Road, which is not on the subject property and it is assumed that there is an easement for these critical components to the complex. The pumps push the water to a 200,000 gallon concrete storage tank on the westerly boundary of the

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subject property. This at the highest elevation of the subject property and there are underground pipes that supply all of the water for the prison complex.

The property owned by the State of Vermont is mostly open fields surrounding the correctional facility. The facility is surrounded by a fence with rolled razor wire along the top for security which encloses nearly all of the building structures. The area contained within the fence is approximately 14 acres, with approximately 100 acres of cleared fields surrounding the area contained by the security wire.

Zoning: The property falls within the "Res-10" zoning district. Permitted uses in this zone are agriculture, forestry and one and two family dwellings. The minimum lot size in this zone is 10 acres, with minimum lot frontage of 400 feet. Conditional uses include accessory dwellings, correctional facility, day care facility, garden center, home business, outdoor recreation, public facility and telecommunications facility. The previous use of the property as a correctional facility was a conditional use in this zone.

Current uses of the site include minimal storage by Fish and Wildlife and BGS, and the site hosts occasional law enforcement training.

Maintenance costs for the complex in its current state are estimated to be \$250,000 annually according to the House Institutions and Corrections Committee.

There are three underground fuel oil tanks. These are listed with the State and there is a 5,000 gallon tank that was installed in 1991, a 12,000 gallon tank installed in 2005 and a 1,000 gallon tank installed in 2005. Underground tanks could present the potential for future issues and may be a concern to a potential purchaser.

Available site data was collected and reviewed, including but not limited to:

- Property and Building Assessments
- Building Plans
- Land Surveys
- Appraisals

There are 27 structures containing a total of 86,248 SF, but not all are considered to add value. Prior to this report, a property assessment was furnished by the State of Vermont (completed by Martin Appraisal Services, Inc in June 2018). A square footage calculation and general condition of each structure is archived in the appraisal report and included below:

| Overview of Buildings | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|-------|---------|-----------------------------|
| # | Name | Size | Qual. | Cond. | Highest & Best Use |
| 1 & 2 | BGS Office & Garage | 3,270 | Avg. | Avg. | Office with Shop Area |
| 3 | Gate House | 600 | Avg. | B. Avg. | No Value - Possile Demo |
| 4 | Education | 5,600 | Avg. | Avg. | Office/Commerical |
| 5 & 6 | Dorm & Dining and Service | 12,768 | Avg. | Fair | Renovate - Multi-family |
| 7 | North Country | 3,013 | Avg. | Avg. | Renovate - Multi-family |
| 8 | Administration | 3,521 | Avg. | Avg. | Office |
| 9 | Plate Shop | 5,000 | Avg. | Avg. | Light Industrial |
| 10 | Sign Shop | 4,000 | Avg. | Avg. | Light Industrial |
| 11 | Maintenance Shop | 1,800 | Avg. | Avg. | Contractors' Shop |
| 12 | Maint. Storage | 963 | Low | Fair | Accessory Storage Or Garage |
| 13 | Maint. Garage | 1,120 | Low | Fair | Accessory Storage Or Garage |
| 14 | Boiler House | 768 | Avg. | Avg. | Support - No Value |
| 15 | Saw Mill | 5,248 | Low | Avg. | Storage or Light Industrial |
| 16 | Slaughter House | 720 | Low | Fair | Accessory Storage Or Garage |
| 17 | Lumber Storage | 4,200 | Low | Avg. | Cov. Storage - No Value |
| 18 | Creosote | 2,732 | Avg. | Fair | Light Industrial |
| 19 | Heifer Barn | 6,864 | Avg. | Fair | Storage or Renovations |
| 20 & 21 | Cow Barn & Milk House | 14,343 | Low | Poor | Demolition |
| 22 | Greenhouse | 3,216 | Avg. | Good | Greenhouse |
| 23 | Hay Barn | 2,850 | Low | Poor | Cold Storage - No Value |
| 24 | Oil Shed | 96 | Avg. | Avg. | Support - No Value |
| 25 | BGS Sheds | 3,456 | Low | Avg. | Cold Storage - No Value |
| 26 | Pump House | 100 | Avg. | Avg. | Support - No Value |
| 27 | Water Storage | N/A | Avg. | Avg. | Support - No Value |
| | | | | | |
| | Total All Structures | 86,248 | | | |

Above: Square Footage, highest & Best Use assessment findings, sourced from June 2018 Appraisal Report by Martin Appraisal Services, Inc.

Determination of each building's code compliance is beyond the scope of this report. Code compliance depends on the intended use of each building and the number of occupants; as such, building use would need to be understood before individually assessing required upgrades. It is reasonable to

assume that a majority of the buildings in good condition will still require significant capital investment to bring them up to current performance standards and code compliance.

Information gathered during the “Existing Information” phase was layered into a Site Plan, and each building was graded based on its “Likelihood of Re-use” based on two factors:

- 1) Building Condition as interpreted from Appraisal Reports
- 2) Building Typology and subsequent demand in the marketplace



Above: Site Plan depicting existing buildings and assigned likelihood of re-use.

B2 PROPOSED REDEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

Historically, it has been difficult to interest the private sector in redeveloping the property without significant investment by the State of Vermont for the following reasons:

- Lack of clarity on the State’s desired presence on the site
- Pre-development costs

- Potential need for re-zoning and other permitting challenges
- Building conditions
- Lack of community consensus on the reuse of the property

In 2021, the Vermont Legislature passed Act. No. 50, creating a study committee to explore the highest and best future State use for the former Southeast State Correctional Facility (SESCF) in Windsor, Vermont. The Study Committee Final Report suggested that creating a campus style redevelopment using public/private investment could be a possible redevelopment scenario for the site. In 2023, the Legislature provided funding to the Mount Ascutney Regional Commission to hire a consultant to look at the feasibility of development a multi-use project with State and private investment. The suggested uses from the report included developing housing, recreation, private enterprise and State and institutional uses. The feasibility study also included a public participation process that included local, regional, state and legislative stakeholders to receive feedback on the multi-use concept.

To design a redevelopment concept, information gathered in the Existing Conditions phase was carefully considered, and an effort was made to preserve existing buildings with reasonable remaining useable life that could theoretically be renovated and re-used.

| Planning Southeast State Correctional Facility |

EXISTING SITE PLAN



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Above: Existing Rendered Site Plan. 118.6 Acre Parcel outline indicated by yellow line.

REIMAGINED SITE PLAN



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Above: Rendered Re-Development Concept. 118.6 Acre Parcel outline indicated by yellow line. Buildings shown in white indicate existing structures to remain, buildings shown in grey indicate proposed new construction.

The proposed redevelopment concept depicted (3) distinct areas and uses on the site:

- **HOUSING**
- **STATE / INSTITUTIONAL**
- **RECREATIONAL / HOSPITALITY**

HOUSING

No existing buildings were re-purposed for private housing. A variation of housing types were proposed in order to illustrate different densities and their resulting scale:

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| Housing Acreage | +/- 34 Acres Total |
| Multi-Family (52 Units): | 3.5 Acres |
| Single Family w/ Shared Open Parking (38 Units): | 7.0 Acres |
| Single Family w/ Private Detached Garage (20 Units): | 6.5 Acres |
| Remaining Wooded Acreage: | +/-17 Acres |

| | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Square Footage | 122,400 Square Feet (SF) Total |
| Multi-family: (13) 2-Story Quadplexes, 900SF/Unit | 46,800SF |
| Single Family: (38) 1-Story Single Family, 1200SF/Unit | 45,600SF |
| Single Family: (20) 1-Story Single Family w/ Detached Garage 1500SF/Unit | 30,000SF |



Above: Redevelopment Concept divided into 3 distinct areas. Housing acreage indicated in red. Proposed areas of new development are called out with corresponding square footages.



Above: Redevelopment Concept divided into 3 distinct areas. Housing acreage indicated in red. Proposed areas of new development are called out with corresponding square footages.

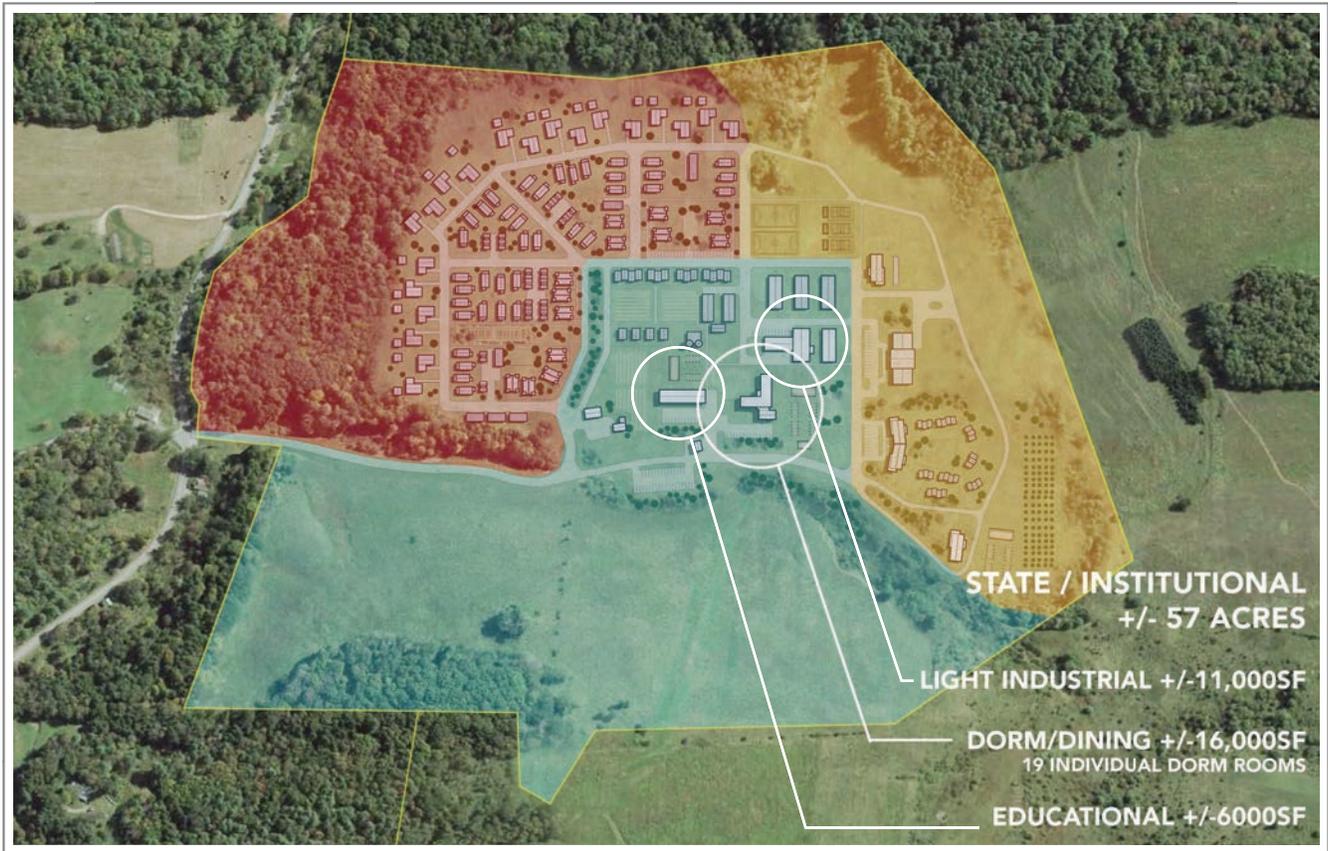
STATE / INSTITUTIONAL

Four existing buildings (plus existing silos) were shown as re-purposed for State/Institutional use. From researching available appraisals, condition reports and site visits, these 4 buildings were understood to be in average condition for their age.

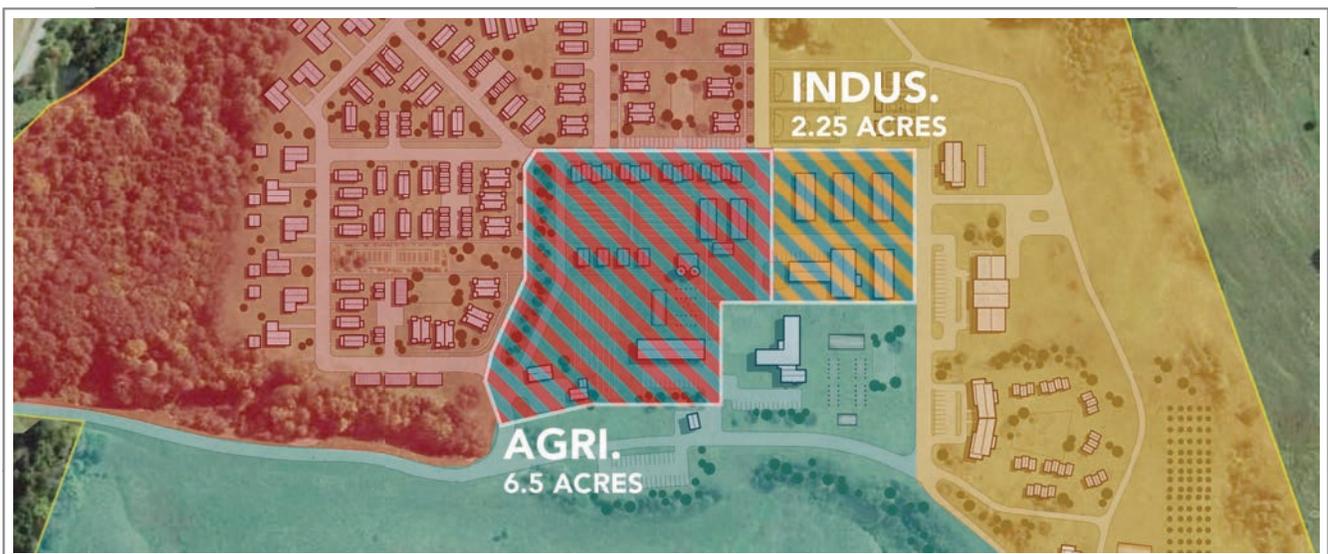
State / Institutional Acreage +/- 57 Acres Total

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Re-Purposed Square Footage | 33,000 Square Feet (SF) Total |
| Alpha Dorm / Dining | +/-16,000 SF |
| Educational / Office Building | +/-6,000 SF |
| Light Industrial Buildings | +/-11,000 SF |

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Added Square Footage | 17,000 Square Feet (SF) Total |
| Agricultural Support Structures | +/-7,000 SF |
| Light Industrial Buildings | +/-10,000 SF |



Above: Redevelopment Concept divided into 3 distinct areas with State / Institutional acreage indicated in blue. Re-purposed buildings are indicated with corresponding square footages.



Above: Expanded development (new construction) within the State / Institutional acreage includes agricultural support structures surrounding existing silos. A light industrial presence on the site could be encouraged with added clear span structures to compliment existing shop buildings.

RECREATIONAL / HOSPITALITY

One existing building was shown as re-purposed for Recreational / Hospitality use. It was understood by the facilitators that the Windsor Grasslands Wildlife Management Area is greatly appreciated and used frequently by the community. Including a recreational hub on the site was an effort to encourage use by the local community and compliment the activities already undertaken by many on the surrounding Grasslands. The presence of hospitality on the site was in response the recent and growing popularity of outdoor-focused hospitality concepts.

Recreational / Hospitality Acreage +/- 27 Acres Total

Re-Purposed Square Footage 3,100 Square Feet (SF) Total
 North Country Dorm +/-3,100 SF

Added Square Footage 34,000 Square Feet (SF) Total
 Hospitality +/-20,000 SF
 Recreational +/-14,000 SF



Redevelopment Concept divided into 3 distinct areas with Recreational/Hospitality acreage indicated in yellow. Re-purposed buildings are indicated with corresponding square footages.

B3 COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS

The mixed-use redevelopment concept was presented in a series of public meetings, where Mount Ascutney Regional Commissions and Bell Design Studios served as facilitators to collect community feedback.

Qualities emphasized in the presentation of this site plan in Community Meetings:

- Preservation of the site's rural character
- Preservation of usable structures
- Mixed-use: Housing, State/Institutional and Recreational/Hospitality
- Agricultural or Industrial Components
- Maintaining open space

Town of Windsor Select Board - Comments

December 12, 2023

From the Windsor Select Board meeting, there was appreciation for preserving the rural character and usable structures of a site. Discussion centered around mixed-use development with housing and potential agricultural or commercial/industrial components, while maintaining open space. The presentation was met with a generally positive response to the proposal for housing, as it addresses a concerning shortage being felt throughout the state. Emphasis was placed on connecting with local partners in the town of Windsor and beyond. Concern was raised regarding the pressure a housing development may put on the local school system, pointing to a concern echoed in the room over the density of the housing depicted in the presentation. Compliance with environmental standards of redevelopment was questioned, and facilitators pointed to the former creosote plant on site as potentially requiring remediation.

Windsor Planning Commission - Comments

December 14, 2023

The potential need for rezoning the property was discussed along with the implications of the recently passed changes to Act 250. Primary concerns from the Planning Commission were whether a housing development would conform to the Windsor Town Plan and Zoning Bylaws. We heard from a small but vocal group who wants no development on the site, preferring to see structures demolished and the parcel merged with the Windsor Grasslands Wildlife Management Area.

The Planning Commission raised concerns that a certain number of units must be allowed when municipal services are present. At the time of the presentation, it was believed that 5 units/acre must be allowed when municipal sewer is present. At the close of the meeting, the summarized response of the planning commission was that their preference was to see the property merged into the Grassland Conservation area, but if housing was continued to be pursued in accordance with the allowable units then they would prefer a plan with less density (the concept plan depicted 96 units of mixed single and multi-family homes).

Community Meeting - Comments

December 20, 2023

Generally, comments were supportive of housing units that are smaller than typical single-family housing found in the area. References were made to micro-housing concepts, which received positive feedback when considered with the needs of the elderly and veteran communities in the area. Housing was mentioned as being needed by several community members, stating it to be very difficult to purchase a home at current market prices, due to the strong demand and short supply. The cost of construction was also mentioned as a factor affecting the local housing market, and that density is one means of cutting down the per-unit cost of construction, making a housing development more feasible than building the same number of units one at a time. One community member pointed to the need for a youth facility, though it is unclear if they were referring to a private or institutional group/use.

B4 TESTIMONY TO STATE LEGISLATURE

A presentation of the redevelopment concept and community feedback was given to members of the House Committee on Corrections and Institutions, followed by the same presentation given to members of the Senate Committee on Institutions.

Vermont House Committee on Corrections and Institutions - Comments

January 17, 2024

Facilitators noted the interest by the Windsor Select Board in the mixed use concept. In talks with local hospitals and schools, a need is repeatedly expressed for “Missing Middle Housing” for those who are low to moderate income.

There is potentially a brownfield site due to creosote activity on the site. Because there is a known responsible party (State of Vermont) the DEC should get involved and perform a Phase II analysis.

The existing photovoltaic array on site was brought up as a development hindrance, as the land is leased out on a 20 year contract. The contract originated in 2014 and it was stated there is no “out-clause.”

Support was expressed in the room for housing as part of the plan, citing the need for middle-income housing in the area.

Transportation was addressed; there is an existing transit service in Windsor which could be tapped into if necessary.

A comment on agricultural use: it was noted that professionals of the University of Vermont’s College of Agriculture have visited the site and were “singularly unimpressed with the agricultural potential of the site.” Also, the Vermont Department of Agriculture has expressed no interest in the property.

It was acknowledged by committee members that anyone looking to purchase this property would look to the State to demolish some of the existing buildings.

Improvements on roadways connected or leading to the site were noted as a possible ancillary cost.

Unanswered questions regarding the redevelopment of the property that need to be addressed:

- How much land would the State of Vermont want to hold onto, if any?
- Will the State contribute to the cost to demolish existing structures?

Generally, at the time of this report, it is unclear the direction the state wants to take regarding the disposition of the property given two conflicting issues; the ongoing annual maintenance cost of holding onto the property, and Vermont's needs for state sponsored facilities.

Vermont Senate Committee on Institutions - Comments

January 26, 2024

The need for workforce housing was mentioned, with the specific example of Mount Ascutney Hospital down the street having difficulty attracting and retaining staff due to the housing shortage and the cost of housing in the Upper Valley. Implications of Act 250 related to housing development was discussed, as the site is not within the designated downtown. However, it is a unique property given the water supply on site and municipal sewer.

Committee members stated that it is clear that the Town of Windsor does not want another correctional facility.

A committee member, who also serves on the Economic Development Committee, pointed out that the new Home Bill requires a minimum residential density of 4 units per acre if there is water and sewer present. Excitement was expressed for this as a "real-life" example of increased housing density for a traditionally rural area, and a much better use of resources.

Connection to public transit would be possible through the area transit provider. Currently, public transport is available to Mount Ascutney Hospital.

Financial feasibility was touched upon; it was emphasized by facilitators that incentives would be provided to attract for private developers to the site. While many private parties have found the site compelling, it will continue to be difficult to attract serious interest without concrete knowledge of how much land is being offered, the condition of the land and terms of sale or lease.

Echoing the challenge the facilitators made to the House, it was suggested that the most helpful next step would be to identify how much land (and where on the site) that the State would like to hold, if any, and how much is the State of Vermont willing to spend to make the site more developable.

SECTION C: FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

C1 CONSTRAINTS

Following meetings with the community and Legislature, a development constraints map was created to provide more detail to the site's overall conduciveness for future development.

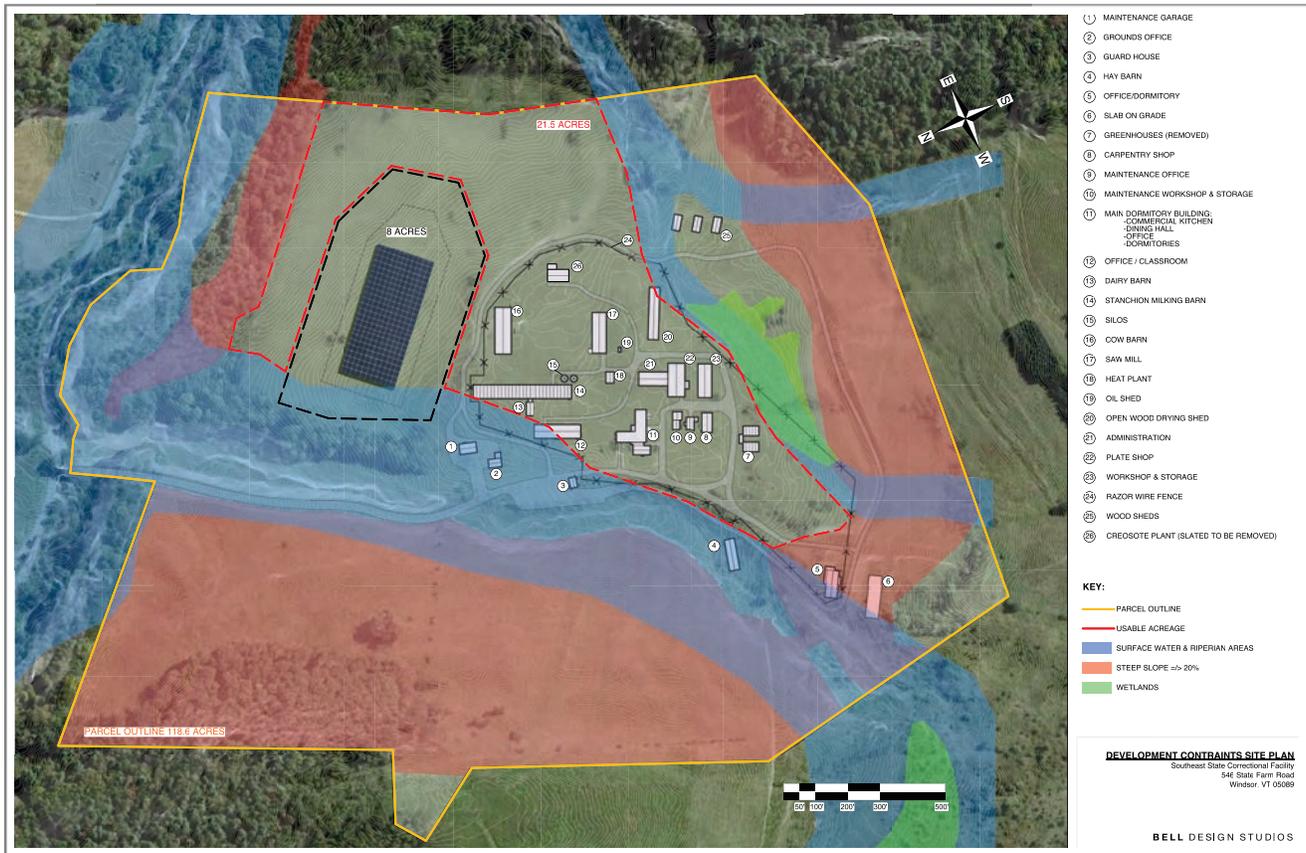
Details of the existing solar field lease were clarified; the base lease of 25 years will be up in year 2034 with a possible 5-year extension. The cost to remove the existing solar system has anecdotally been estimated to cost 1 to 2 million dollars.

Environmental constraints were mapped and overlaid on parcel boundaries, including topography, wetlands and waters information. Approximate acreage of developmental constraints as follows:

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| <u>Parcel (Total):</u> | <u>118.6 Acres</u> |
| <u>Environmentally Constrained Acreage:</u> | <u>89.1 Acres</u> |
| <u>Solar Field Acreage w/ Buffer:</u> | <u>8 Acres</u> |
| <u>Developable Acreage:</u> | <u>21.5 Acres</u> |

While the overall parcel is large at 118.6 acres, developmental constraints limit the site's attractiveness to development. From our examination of site constraints, as well as feedback from the community and the legislature, a multi-use development plan does not seem likely to succeed. If future development is to be pursued, existing buildings should be demolished to maximize available developable acreage.

See Constraints Site Plan on following page for a visual depiction of developable acreage.



Above: Development Constraints Site Plan

C2 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Conversations were facilitated with local and other economic development experts to explore the possibility of offering incentives to private sector entities to redevelop the site.

At the moment—and historically—there’s been a deficit of leadership on steering a redevelopment plan to community and Legislative consensus. There needs to be an increasing level of buy-in across the public/private/social sectors to see this underutilized asset maximized.

Advisors experienced with facilitating public/private partnerships were consulted; a suggested way to move towards the aim of redevelopment consensus would be to establish a Redevelopment Board; this group of individuals will have interest in playing leadership roles in refining the vision for the redevelopment, and who are committed to helping steward its creation.

The Redevelopment Board should be comprised of local, regional and state officials who would create the vision, build consensus, and facilitate funding and incentive discussions. The representation from multiple groups would help bring the project along in a deliberate and meaningful way, with each member getting the buy-in of their represented parties and not have detrimental pushback as things move forward. With a Redevelopment Board in place, private developers would have a resource to work with in their pursuit of the site to help build assurance, and board members would in turn be able to vet and ensure that private developer's interests satisfied the desires of their represented regional groups.

Springfield Regional Development Corporation (SRDC)

January 26, 2024

SRDC suggested this could be a good candidate for "Mini TIF" Tax increment financing. The community can designate an area to Spot TIF, citing the Industrial Park in Springfield as an example.

Other potential funding resources were identified, depending on the intended use of the site, including:

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) - Federal
- Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) - Federal-State Partnership
- Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) - State
- Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA) - Loan programs funded through tax-exempt bonds
- Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) - State

Development would be much more likely with the buy-in of local partners in the form of an advanced agreement. Dartmouth Hitchcock was given as an example of an institution that is in need of workforce housing. If housing is pursued, it should be discussed with area hospitals and other constituencies who could benefit, and potentially allocate resources to the development.

The possibility of consulting a regional bank like Mascoma as a partner. TD Bank's recent commitment of 1/4 billion dollars towards housing in downtown Windsor was provided as an example of bank participation in housing projects.

Lack of permitting clarity was discussed as a development hindrance. If the State of Vermont were to sell this property, development incentives would be needed. Potential incentives may include conditional

permitting assistance from the Town and State, and legislative approval of the sale. The length of time to receive an approved/permitted site plan is a concern for a private developer; the concept of seeking a Master Plan Permit was discussed to speed the review process.

The general conclusion of discussions with Economic Development professionals was that any new use/development pursued on the site would require creative financial incentive packages and strong local leadership.

C3 COST ANALYSIS

The analysis of existing conditions, previous reports and site information showed a majority of the buildings require significant capital investment to bring them up to current performance standards and code compliance; as such, these buildings represent a barrier to redevelopment.

If it is the decision of the Legislature to sell or lease the site, expense must be incurred to undertake demolition of various buildings in order to make the site marketable to private developers.

It is difficult to determine demolition costs at this time, Buildings and General Services testified that they received a recent cost of \$400,000.00 to remove the existing razor wire.

With environmental and demolition costs, cost to prepare the site would likely be upwards of \$1,000,000.00.

Land Value:

In conversation with local Real Estate Developers, land acquisition cost is about 40,000 to 60,000 per acre. If the developable land were delivered in its raw form (presuming all existing buildings demolished and environmental remediation performed), the developable 29.5 acres of land identified in the constraints map would yield \$1.25 to \$2.0 million.

C4 CONCLUSIONS

While the overall parcel under consideration is large at 118.6 acres, constraints on the site reduce reasonably developable acreage to around 18%, +/-21.5 acres. Therefore, the likelihood of attracting multiple users to the site is low. The parcel is more conducive to a single use, be it public or private.

Currently, a lack of clarity on the State's intended use and control of the property remains too high a barrier to attracting private development. The Legislature should decide on sale, lease or hold of the property.

If it is the desire of the Legislature to hold the property, funds should be allocated to the demolition of decrepit buildings and decommission all of the heated buildings that are not in use to cut down on annual maintenance costs. Demolition of the buildings would make the site more attractive for future development by either the State or private entity.

If the State were to become interested in selling or leasing the property, Legislation would need to pass authorizing the governing entity to sell or lease. Now, there is still a lack of clarity on which entity has the ultimate ability to permit the sale of the property. This must be clarified.

If re-development is to be pursued with a private entity, a Redevelopment Board should be formed to facilitate forward progress. Additionally, it is the conclusion of discussions with economic development specialists that any new use/development pursued on the site would require creative financial incentive packages.

C5 SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Previously commissioned reports prepared by others were collected as part of this report, including building plans, inspection reports, condition assessments, site appraisal and surveys. These supporting documents can be digitally accessed *at this link* [Windsor SESCOF](#)