

**From:** [Daniel Jones](#)  
**To:** [Act250 - Board](#)  
**Cc:** [Daniel Jones](#); [jmacgovern@me.com](mailto:jmacgovern@me.com); [Robert Slocum](#); [Rhoda Moore](#); [Deborah Falls](#)  
**Subject:** Comments on Mt. Ascutney Tier 1B Memorandum  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 18, 2026 3:33:05 PM  
**Attachments:** [Comments - MARC Appendix B - Tier 1B Memorandum - Final - 18 March 2026.docx](#)  
[MARC - Redevelopment of Windsor Prison Site - Sept2024 -.pdf](#)  
[DFW Land Transfer Report - March2025.pdf](#)

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**EXTERNAL SENDER: Do not open attachments or click on links unless you recognize and trust the sender.**

Dear Mr. Weinhagen and Members of the Land Use Review Board,

On behalf of the individuals Cc'd on this email, all of whom live in Windsor, Vermont, I am submitting comments on the pre-application submitted by the Mt. Ascutney Regional Commission for Tier 1B status, specifically for the part of the Windsor prison site lying outside of the razor wire fence. Our comments specifically focus on "Document 006 - Appendix B: Tier 1B Memorandum."

Our comments are copied below and are attached as a Word document. I am also attaching two documents discussed in our comments. One is by the Mt. Ascutney Regional Commission. The other is by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife.

I notice that you are scheduled to visit the Windsor prison site this Friday, March 20. I hope you will view the site from the hill to the west of the prison buildings and the fence. From there, it is easy to see almost the whole 118.6 acres of the property. The view provides a perspective that may be elusive if you stay at the lower area of the site where the prison buildings and the razor wire fence are located.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,  
Daniel B. Jones  
7 Timson Ave.  
Windsor, VT 05089  
503-292-2338

## **COMMENTS ON MARC'S REGIONAL PLAN**

Date: March 18, 2026

To: Alex Weinhagen, Board Member  
Vermont Land Use Review Board

From: Daniel B. Jones  
John MacGovern  
Deborah Falls  
Robert Slocum  
Rhoda Moore

Subject: Document 006-Appendix B: Tier 1B Memorandum  
Project RPC06-0001 – Mount Ascutney Regional Commission Draft Regional Plan

### **Summary**

The area outside of the razor wire fence at the Windsor prison site should not be granted Tier 1B status because residential housing on it would present a direct threat to the purposes of the adjacent Windsor Grasslands Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Mount Ascutney Regional Commission (MARC) has found that most of the area is not suitable for development because of steep slopes, riparian areas, and an existing solar project with lease options extending to beyond 2034. The area includes woodland, grasslands, a deer wintering area, recreational value, and scenic views. In these respects, it serves as an extension of the WMA.

### **Background**

On March 3, 2026, the Mt . Ascutney Regional Commission (MARC) filed a pre-application with the Vermont Land Use Review Board proposing an area of 118.6 acres on the former Windsor prison site for Tier 1B status. The land is adjacent to the Windsor Grasslands Wildlife Management Area (WMA), which is notable for the varied and thriving bird populations it hosts.

In 2017, the prison site of more than 900 acres was divided, with more than 800 acres forming the WMA. The 118.6 acres left to the prison includes less than twenty acres enclosed by a razor wire fence, which encloses the prison buildings. About 100 acres of land surrounding the razor wire fence was retained by the prison, in part, to provide a buffer that would be needed if another correctional facility were ever to be established at the site.

Our comments in this memo refer only to the area outside of the razor wire fence unless specifically noted. Our comments relate specifically to “Appendix B: Tier 1B Memorandum” of MARC’s draft regional plan. Later, we might submit comments on other parts of the regional

plan and/or on the question of Tier 1B status for area within the razor wire fence.

### **MARC's New Village "Master Plan"**

Appendix B refers conspicuously to a report from MARC to the Vermont Legislature of September 22, 2024, entitled "Development of a Master Plan for the Redevelopment of the Former Southeast State Correctional Facility Property in the Town of Windsor, VT" prepared by Tom Kennedy (of MARC) and Emily Bell (of Bell Design Studios, LLC). (See attachment.) Appendix B proposes "a "new village" area to implement recent master plan for the former Windsor prison site..." and includes a figure showing a "Redevelopment Concept" from the September 22, 2024, report. However, the Redevelopment Concept was found by Kennedy and Bell to be impractical and was rejected due to constraints they identified in Section C, titled "Findings and Recommendations," of their report.

Section B2 of the Kennedy-Bell report to the legislature is entitled "Proposed Redevelopment Concept". The proposed redevelopment concept includes three distinct areas: (1) about 34 acres of housing on which about 100 units of housing would be built; (2) 57 acres designated as "State/Institutional Acreage;" and (3) 27 acres designated as "Recreational/Hospitality Acreage".

The three Redevelopment areas were presented at meetings of the public, municipal agencies, and State legislative committees during December of 2023 and January of 2024. After those meetings, a "Development Constraints Site Plan" was prepared by Kennedy and Bell. The constraints are described in the "Findings and Recommendations" of their report to the legislature of September 22, 2024. The constraints are itemized as 89.1 acres being "environmentally constrained" and 8 acres having solar panels already installed. The environmental constraints are illustrated in a site plan on page 19 of the report. They include riparian areas, wetlands (within the razor wire fence), and steep slopes.

The 2024 report by Kennedy and Bell states "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 does not seem likely to succeed. If future development is to be pursued, existing buildings should be demolished to maximize available developable acreage."

Therefore, Kennedy and Bell apparently decided that the so-called "Proposed Redevelopment Concept" that is illustrated and discussed in Appendix B (Tier 1B Memorandum) of the regional plan is not recommended. In Section C4, their Conclusions, they state that reasonable developable acreage is only about 21.5 acres and that the multiple use concept highlighted in their report is not likely on that small of an area.

Most of the 21.5 acres of land that Kennedy and Bell found to be potentially developable is within the razor wire fence and is not a matter we object to in these comments. Much of the “developable” land outside of the fence is immediately adjacent to deer wintering area, as shown in the figure in the Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (DFW) report to the Senate and House committees on institutions of March 21, 2025, “Report on the Potential Land Transfer at the Former Southeast State Correctional Facility.” (See attachment.) The DFW report is not mentioned in the MARC report discussed above. In fact, the MARC report does not show any evidence of having consulted with DFW.

The DFW report notes the significant damage likely to be caused by domestic animals to the birds and other wildlife on the WMA if the housing plan presented in the MARC report were to be implemented. On page 3, it states “Depending on the nature of the future uses of the current BGS property, there is potential for increased disturbance of wildlife from domestic pets. This is especially concerning with respect to house cats taking grassland birds, a widely documented occurrence and threat to the populations of many songbird species (Blancher, 2013; Loss et al., 2013; van Heezik et al., 2010). Grassland bird habitat is a focus of the WMA management objectives, and many species currently nest in the habitat that surrounds the Southeast State Correctional Facility”.

### **Conclusion**

Taken together, the DFW report and the MARC report by Kennedy and Bell provide compelling reasons to reject Tier 1B status for the land outside of the razor wire fence. The land is not developable and/or is essential to the preservation of the WMA and the environmental and recreational values it was established to protect. In fact, the land has several characteristics the State of Vermont seeks to protect through Tier 3 status.

### **Attachments:**

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“Report on the Potential Land Transfer at the Former Southeast State Correctional Facility”, March 21, 2025, Submitted by Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife to Senate Committee on Institutions and House Committee on Corrections and Institutions.



## 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

Prepared by: Emily Bell | Founder & Principal Designer, Bell Design Studios LLC  
Tom Kennedy | Director of Community Development, Mount Ascutney Regional Commission

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Report Date: September 22, 2024

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## **SECTION A: OVERVIEW**

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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**

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### **B1 EXISTING CONDITIONS**

Site Summary: Southeast State Correctional Facility

Owner of Record: State of Vermont

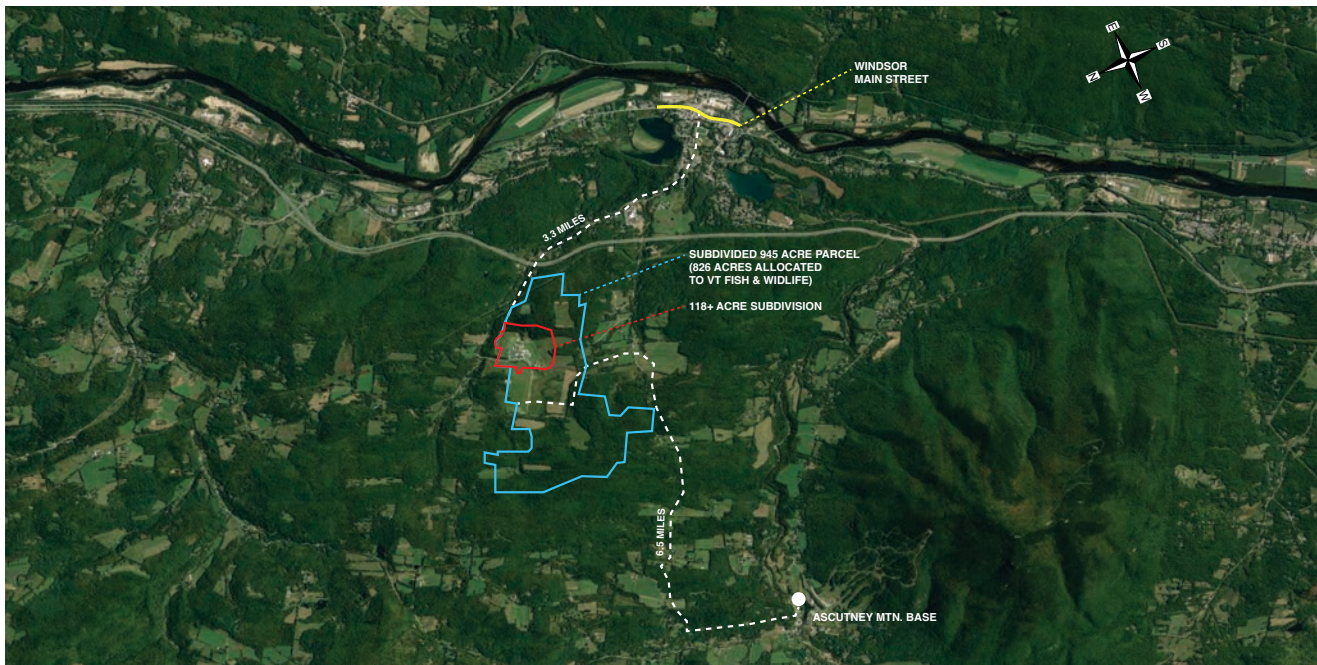
Last Date of Transfer: Purchased between 1894 and 1935

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.

## BELL DESIGN STUDIOS LLC

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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**BELL DESIGN STUDIOS LLC**

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
	<b>Total All Structures</b>	<b>86,248</b>			

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.



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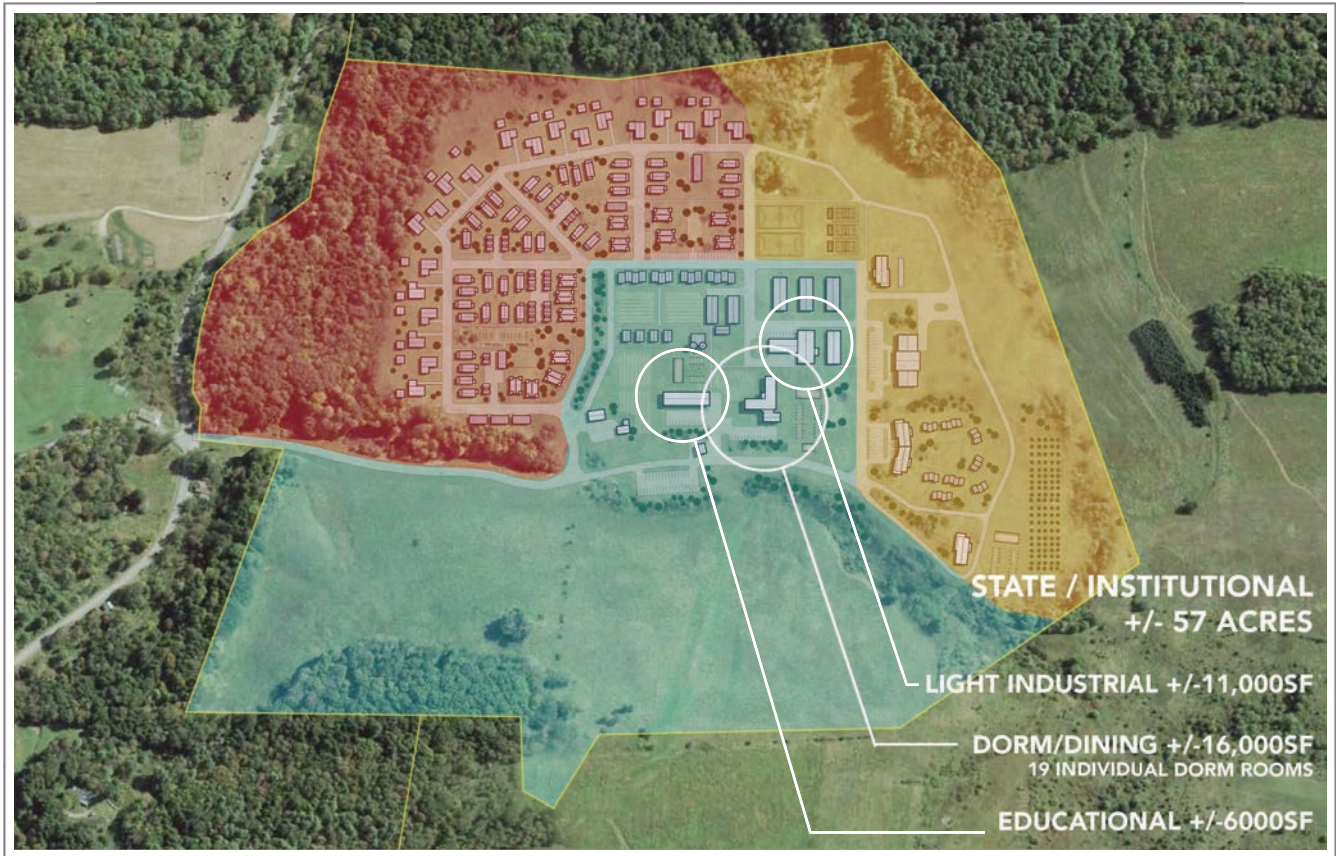
**STATE / INSTITUTIONAL**

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.

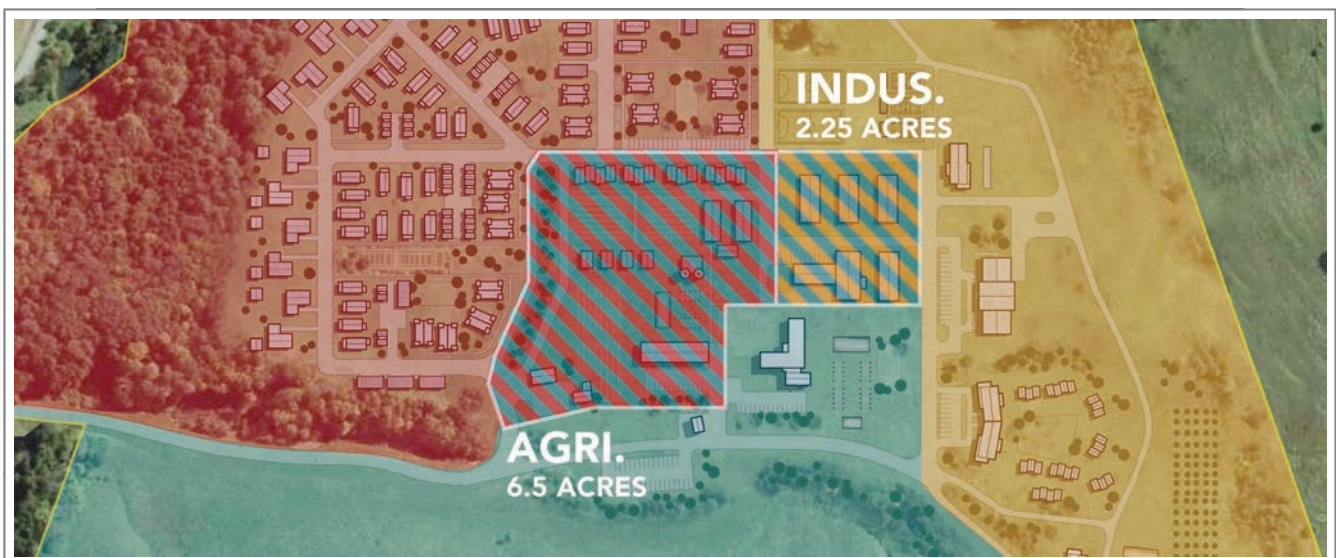
State / Institutional Acreage +/- 57 Acres Total

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

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

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

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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.

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## SECTION C: FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

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### 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>
<b><u>Developable Acreage:</u></b>	<b><u>21.5 Acres</u></b>

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](#)

**Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife**

**Report on the Potential Land Transfer at the  
Former Southeast State Correctional Facility**

Submitted to:  
Senate Institutions  
House Corrections & Institutions

Submitted by:  
Andrea Shortsleeve, Interim Commissioner  
Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife

In consultation with:  
Wanda Minoli, Commissioner  
Vermont Department of Buildings & General Services

March 21, 2025



In June 2024, the Vermont legislature enacted Act 162 – *An act relating to capital construction and State bonding budget adjustment*. Section 22 of Act 162 specifically directed that a report be submitted to the House Committee on Corrections and Institutions and the Senate Committee on Institutions by January 15, 2025, with the following:

- (a) The Department of Fish and Wildlife, in consultation with the Department of Buildings and General Services, shall evaluate the potential transfer of a portion of the former Southeast State Correctional Facility property to the Department of Fish and Wildlife for inclusion in the adjacent wildlife management area. The evaluation shall:
  - 1. delineate the portions of the former Southeast State Correctional Facility property that could be used for future redevelopment of the site, taking into account any necessary setbacks from wetlands, streams, or wildlife habitat;
  - 2. identify any portions of the property that could be transferred into the adjacent wildlife management area and potential impacts on the redevelopment or sale of the property from the transfer of the identified portions; and
  - 3. identify any rights of way or easements that will be necessary for the potential future redevelopment of any retained portion of the property.

An extension was granted to postpone the report deadline to March 10, 2025 based on leadership transitions that were occurring in both the Departments of Buildings and General Services and Fish and Wildlife.

BGS is largely in agreement with the report but would require specific provisions to address any potential rights-of-way, easements, and setbacks from the existing fence line. These provisions are necessary to ensure that there are no restrictions or obstacles that could affect the future utilization of the remaining property still owned by BGS. It is essential to ensure that any development or changes do not interfere with BGS's long-term plans for the property, allowing for its full and unrestricted use in the future.

## Introduction

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), in consultation with the Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS), has evaluated the potential transfer of a portion of the former Southeast State Correctional Facility property to the Department of Fish and Wildlife for inclusion in the adjacent Windsor Grasslands Wildlife Management Area.

Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) help conserve fish, wildlife and their habitat, while providing people with opportunities for wildlife-based recreation. DFW carefully manages WMAs to benefit wildlife as well as to provide opportunities for the public to access and enjoy these areas. WMAs are different than other state land designations in that the primary management objective for these properties is the conservation and maintenance of wildlife habitats. This purpose is reinforced and required by federal funding sources through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that are used for the acquisition and management of WMAs.

The Windsor Grasslands WMA is an 826.5-acre property featuring a mix of forests, agriculture, and wildlife meadows. There is a wide variety of wildlife habitat types and conditions on the WMA and

public uses on the property are diverse. There are many unique features on the property including an abundance of open fields, wild apple trees, and a beaver-occupied wetland. The WMA is uniquely popular for hunting, walking, snowmobiling on a VAST-groomed trail, cross-country skiing, and is renowned for birdwatching with over 100 species observed on the property. The grassland and shrubland habitats support a unique assemblage of songbirds, some of which are rare and declining due to loss of habitat, among other pressures.

Management of these unique habitats requires attention to important challenges including minimizing the spread and effects from invasive plants. Managing to control invasive plants requires considerable time and resources to achieve the desired habitat conditions. In this case, DFW works with nearby farmers and a variety of natural resource management contractors to assist with invasive plant control efforts on this property.

## Area of Potential Transfer

The map below shows a sketch of the land that would be transferred to DFW from BGS. The land transfer would be roughly half (i.e., approximately 60 acres) of the current BGS property (i.e., 118 acres, and would include the majority of the property that is located outside of the former prison fence). Excluded from this transfer, but outside of the fenced area, is a field containing solar panels to the north of the former prison compound, and two small disjunct parcels to the west-northwest that harbor the water supply infrastructure for the prison facility. These exclusions would remain as property of BGS.

There is a small house just inside the loop road in the southwest corner of the prison facility (highlighted on the map below). This house is currently being used by the Department of Public Safety (DPS), but if this situation changed and the building was no longer utilized by DPS, DFW would be interested in acquiring this building for use as office space, housing for seasonal staff, housing for a manager of the WMA, or for storage.

## Easements and Right-of-ways

There is currently infrastructure related to water sources for the prison facility that will need to be considered with any potential land transfer layout. As identified on the map below, this infrastructure includes several drilled wells and a pumphouse located on a small BGS inholding a short distance south of the WMA's parking lot on Marton Road, a large concrete hilltop cistern located on the west side of the current prison facility property, and underground water lines (not shown on the map) which connect all of this infrastructure to the prison facility. Should the potential land transfer occur, a deeded right-of-way or easement will be needed over the transferred property to accommodate the water lines. A similar scenario already exists with an easement across the WMA for a waterline that connects the pumphouse to the cistern, so an additional easement or right-of-way would most likely not be an obstacle to the transfer.

Depending on the final layout of the potential land transfer, DFW will need some sort of deeded right-of-way or easement across the BGS retained parcel that provides DFW access to both the transferred land as well as to the existing WMA. For example, if the land transfer does not include the loop road that surrounds the security fence, then DFW will not have legal access to parts of the newly acquired land. Because BGS currently owns the property, DFW has been able to use the loop road without any issues, however, if the property is transferred to another entity or developed for

some other use, DFW may be excluded without a legal right-of-way. In 2017, BGS granted DFW a right-of-way on a portion of the loop road to access the WMA on the east side of the prison property. It is hoped that the same could be done for the remaining road loop if needed.

## Setbacks and Buffers Required

Act 250 guidelines dictate that, at a minimum, a 300' buffer to the deer wintering area from all development is needed. Given the presence of functioning deer wintering area adjacent to the former prison facility as depicted on the map below, future development of this facility would likely impact this habitat and require significant offsite mitigation.

There is a 5.6-acre Class 2 wetland within the Windsor Grasslands WMA, and any future development that may occur on the land that is currently owned by BGS would be required to avoid impacting the wetland and associated 50-foot buffer, as required by the Vermont Wetland Rules.

## Wildlife Impacts

This potential land transfer would help minimize impacts to wildlife from future development of the Southeast State Correctional Facility which lies within the heart of the current Windsor Grasslands WMA. There is significant concern that poorly planned or incompatible development of the former prison facility could lead to a variety of impacts on the natural resources present on the property. In the worst-case scenario, such as a high-density residential development, it is anticipated that there would be a general displacement of wildlife from those areas of the WMA in closest proximity to the development and adjacent to the most heavily used places within the property, such as along trails.

Depending on the nature of the future uses of the current BGS property, there is potential for increased disturbance of wildlife from domestic pets. This is especially concerning with respect to house cats taking grassland birds, a widely-documented occurrence and threat to the populations of many songbird species (Blancher, 2013; Loss et al., 2013; van Heezik et al., 2010). Grassland bird habitat is a focus of the WMA management objectives, and many species currently nest in the habitat that surrounds the Southeast State Correctional Facility. Similarly, unleashed dogs roaming at large though the property pose additional disturbance, and direct mortality impacts to nesting birds and other wildlife using the grasslands to raise their young.

Industrial noise associated with development of the current BGS property is an anticipated potential disturbance to the deer wintering area which is immediately adjacent to the north and east of the development as shown on the map below.

There is an increased likelihood that beaver, which have just recently returned to the property after many decades of absence, will present challenges to the future development and maintenance of the former prison facility and thereby complicate our efforts to let the species flourish at this site in accordance with WMA management objectives.

The addition of this much human presence in the center of the WMA also has the potential to significantly complicate our management efforts such as by increasing the likelihood of rogue trails and illegal uses of the property. This is especially concerning with respect to mountain bikes, the use of which is burgeoning across the greater region and is already an issue for DFW staff managing this property.

The land identified for potential transfer to the DFW serves a critical role in DFW's effort to control invasive plants on the WMA and, thus, protect and enhance a variety of critical wildlife habitats including grassland bird breeding habitat, deer wintering area, and mast (i.e., fruits and nuts) producing forest stands. The potential transfer area is currently infested with invasive plants and acts as a formidable seed source that, if left unchecked, impacts the success of the overall management area.

Depending on the density of residential development on the BGS property, it is likely to impact the ability of people to hunt on the WMA. Residential intolerance for hunting on the WMA, which is one of the primary public uses for this property, could result in conflicts with the hunting public. These are also issues that are considered during the Act 250 permit process under criterion 9(k) associated with public investments.

Should the land transfer not happen, DFW strongly advocates for a no-build buffer for the WMA on the land outside of the former prison fence. Without a formally recognized buffer, we anticipate having to defend future proposed uses of this area for years to come. As stated above, development in this area identified for potential land transfer would significantly reduce the quality and effectiveness of the current WMA for wildlife habitat and remove areas that are currently used by the public for hunting and birdwatching.

## Citations

Blancher, P. (2013). Estimated Number of Birds Killed by House Cats (*Felis catus*) in Canada. *Avian Conservation and Ecology*, 8(2), np-np. <https://doi.org/10.5751/ACE-00557-080203>

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van Heezik, Y., Smyth, A., Adams, A., & Gordon, J. (2010). Do domestic cats impose an unsustainable harvest on urban bird populations? *Biological Conservation*, 143(1), 121-130. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2009.09.013>

# Southeast Vermont Correctional Facility Windsor, Vermont

