

Iron Rail Property Highest and Best Use Study

Public Outreach Design Charrette
October 2, 2023



DODSON & FLINKER
Landscape Architecture and Planning



Iron Rail Property / 91 Grapevine Road

MassDOT Pictometry

THE PROJECT TEAM



Peter



Helena



Eli



Jack



Dillon

Project Goal: *Evaluate the characteristics of the site and examine potential best use concepts to achieve the community's vision and goals.*

Dodson & Flinker

Core Role

- Community Engagement
- Site Analysis and Assessment
- Mapping and Graphics
- Scenario Visioning

Key Staff

- Peter Flinker, Helena Farrell, Eli Bloch

Town of Wenham

Core Role

- Municipal Coordination
- Public Outreach and Participation
- Stakeholder Input and Visioning

Key Staff

- Joseph Pessimato, Assistant Town Administrator
- Kate Mallory, Conservation & Open Space Coordinator
- Margaret Hoffman, Planning Coordinator
- Michelle McGovern, Executive Assistant Town Administrator
- Steve Poulos, Town Administrator

IRON RAIL BEST USE STUDY SCHEDULE

July

- Project Kick-off
- Advisory Group Meeting
- Site analysis & assessment
- Review of Town Plans, regulations, and market conditions

September

- Stakeholder Outreach
- Community Survey
- Case study analysis
- Synthesis of analysis & assessment

To the end of the year

- Finalize Best Use Scenario
- Prepare final annotated plan

- Site analysis & assessment
- Public Meeting 1
- Review of Town Plans, and market conditions

August

- Public Meeting 2 – Design Charrette
- Conclude community survey and outreach
- Development of Best Use Scenarios

October

Iron Rail Community Survey is LIVE!

150 respondents and counting

Open until October 9



Iron Rail Best Use Study *Public Outreach Workshop*

The Town is conducting a study to ensure that the **potential long-term use** of the Iron Rail property aligns with the **best interests** of the community.

This **interactive and visioning** workshop will be an opportunity to share feedback in a **participatory process** to explore possible uses of the Iron Rail property.

Please plan on attending to participate!

You may also let your voice be heard by taking the **Iron Rail Community Survey**

Follow the link or scan the QR code with your smart phone:
www.surveymonkey.com/r/ironrail



Sponsored by: The Town of Wenham
Facilitated by: Dodson & Flinker, Inc.

DODSON & FLINKER
Landscape Architecture and Planning



Monday, October 2, 6:00 PM
Buker Elementary School
1 School Street, Wenham, MA

THE PROCESS

Public Engagement

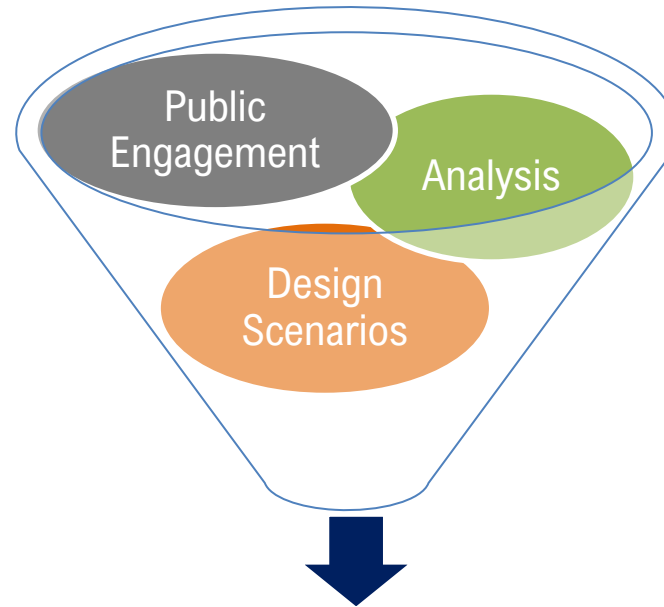
Public Meetings and Collaboration with
Community Stakeholders

Facilitate shared fact-finding and
discussion of community goals and values

Design Scenarios

Three (3) Concept Plans

Present and evaluate scenarios to identify
the highest and best reuse of the site,
based on input from the community and
project team



Existing Conditions and Market Analysis

Site Analysis

Assess physical conditions, historic uses,
regulatory constraints, market conditions,
design considerations, and mobility needs

Opportunities, Challenges, & Best Use

Alternatives

Based on public input and analysis, identify and
assess development opportunities and key
alternatives

**Iron Rail Property
Highest & Best Use**

Final Plan

A final illustrated and annotated plan that
describes the selected design scenario

MEETING AGENDA

Time	Discussion Topic
6:00PM	Welcome and Introductions.
	Overview of the project goals, project team, and scope of work.
6:10PM	Presentation of current community and market trends, and goals identified in current town plans that are relevant to the Iron Rail property.
	Presentation of site analysis and assessment, and potential areas for development.
7:00PM	Break into groups to discuss strengths, challenges, and potential design scenarios at three (3) key areas on the site.
7:45PM	Discuss future uses and programming to be explored.
	Identify essential information still needed to inform potential design scenarios.
8:00PM	End

POPULATION TRENDS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Wenham's Population is the lowest among 6 neighboring communities

Steady growth in recent decades has slowed since 2010

As people are moving to Wenham, homes have been increasing in price and decreasing in availability

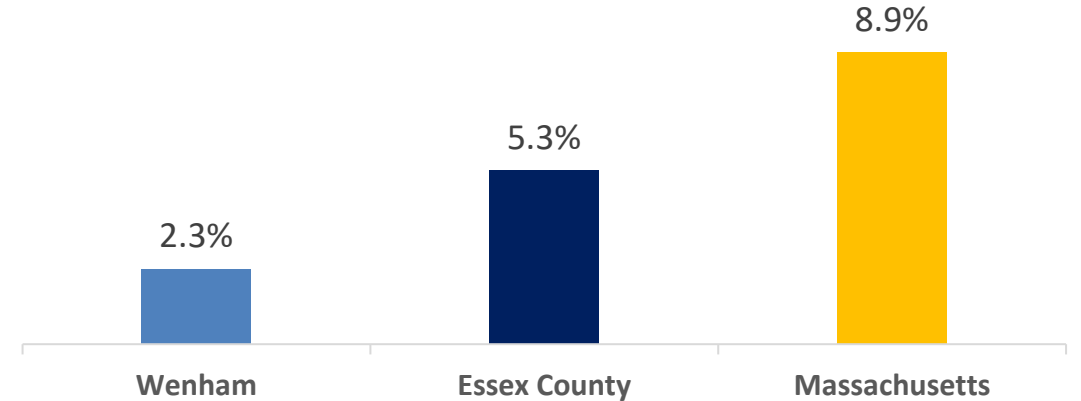
- Homes for less than \$400,000 are becoming scarce. Homes are not available for under \$300,000.
- While Wenham meets state quota of 10% affordable housing, **access remains difficult for lower income residents, especially families.**

Wenham has many households with families, is highly educated, has a low poverty rate, is young, is affluent compared with the county and state, however;

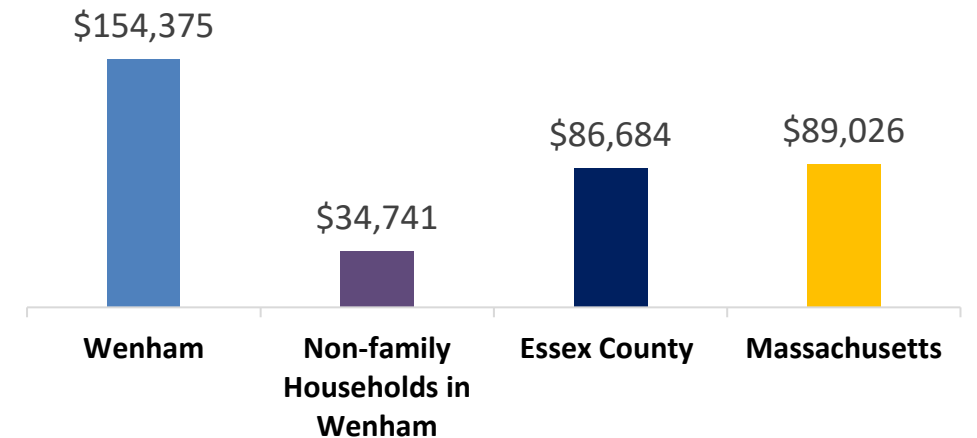
- Median age of 23.6 may be influenced by student residents of Gordon College.
- income is considerably lower for non-family households.

(ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2021)

Housing Vacancy (% of total housing units)

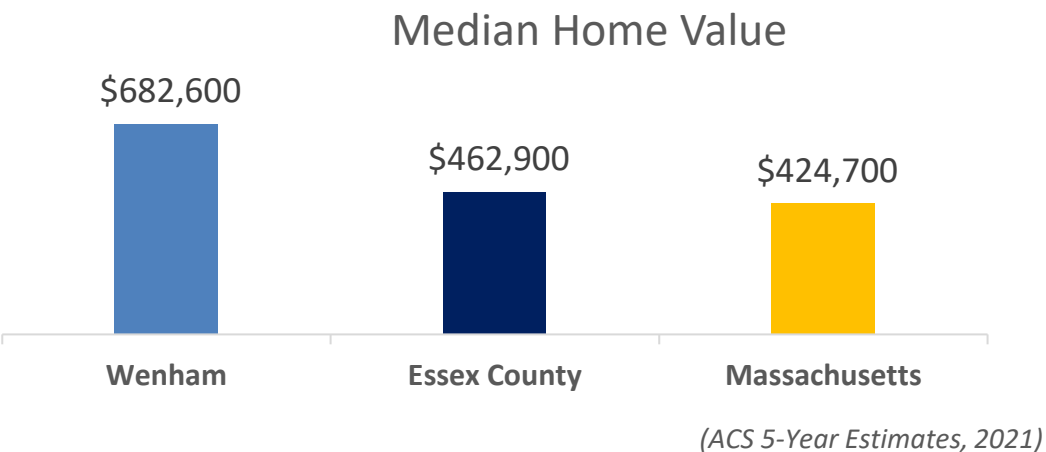
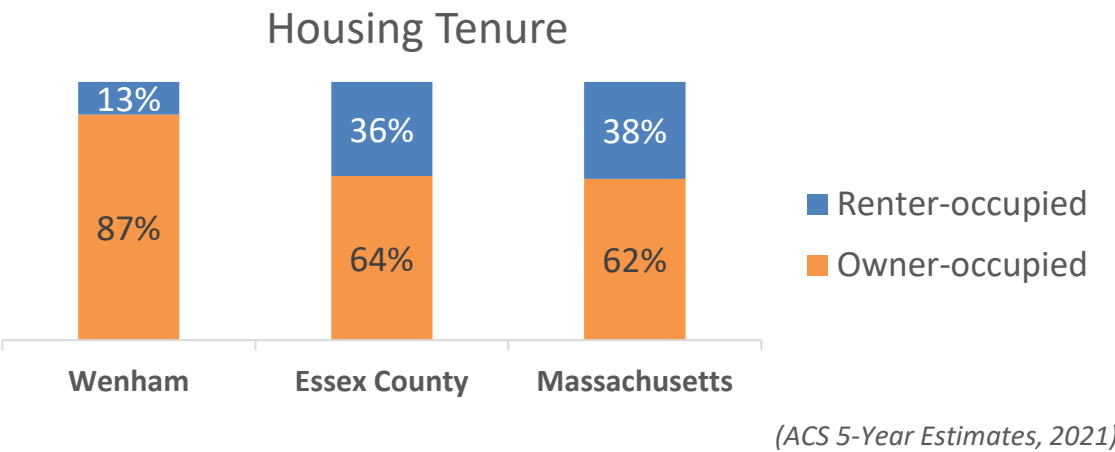


Median Household Income

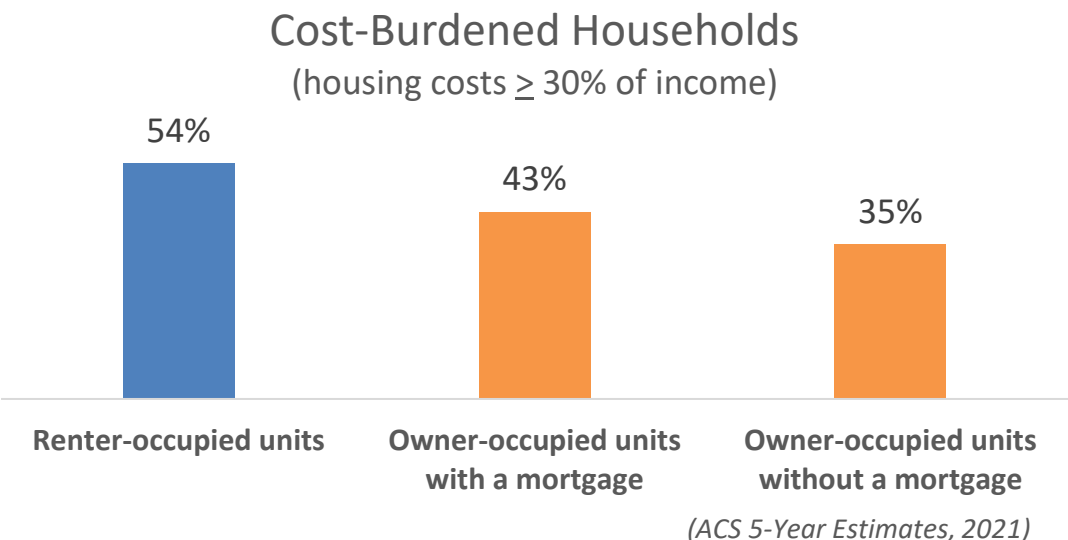
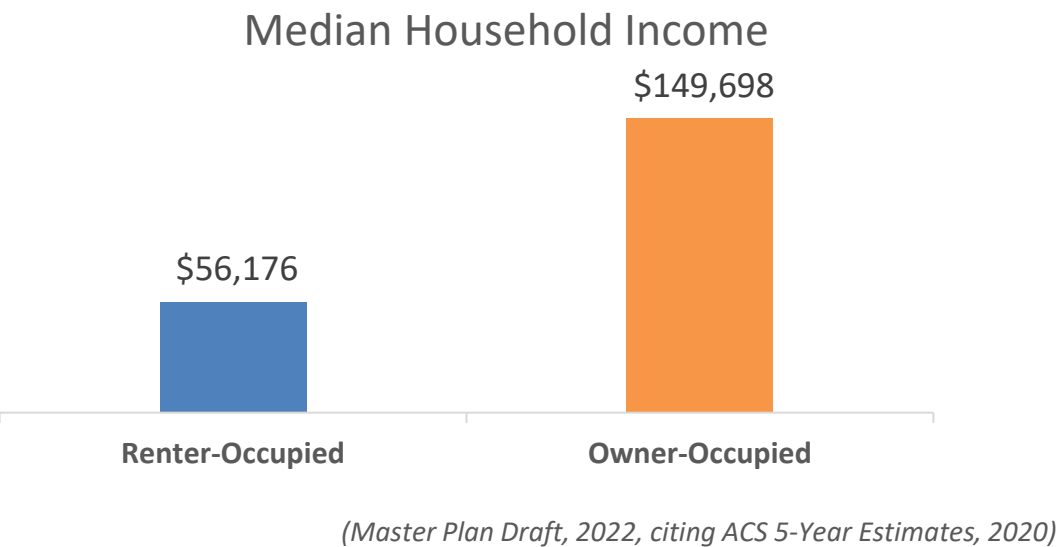


HOUSING TRENDS

Wenham has a high rate of homeowners and a high median home value.



Homeowners earn nearly 3x as much as renters, and renters are cost-burdened at higher rates.



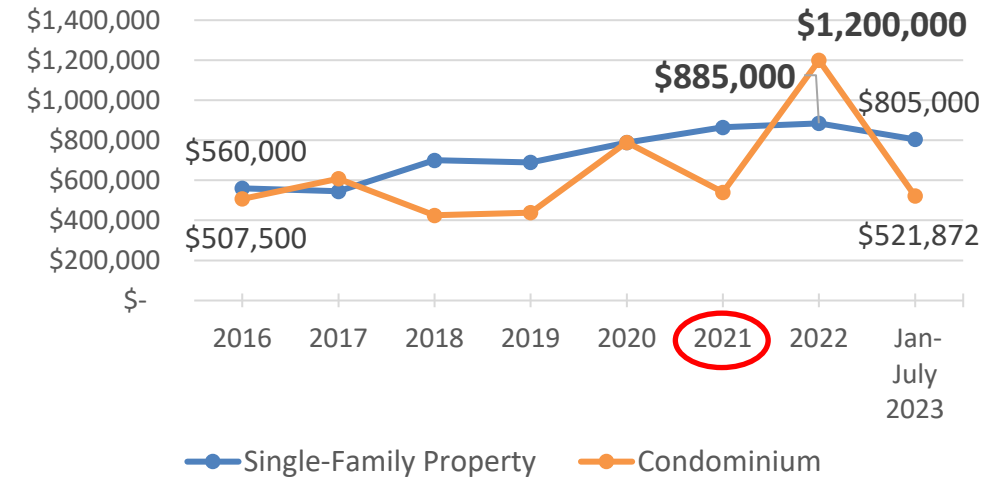
IRON RAIL MARKET PROSPECTS in HOUSING REAL ESTATE

Current conditions:

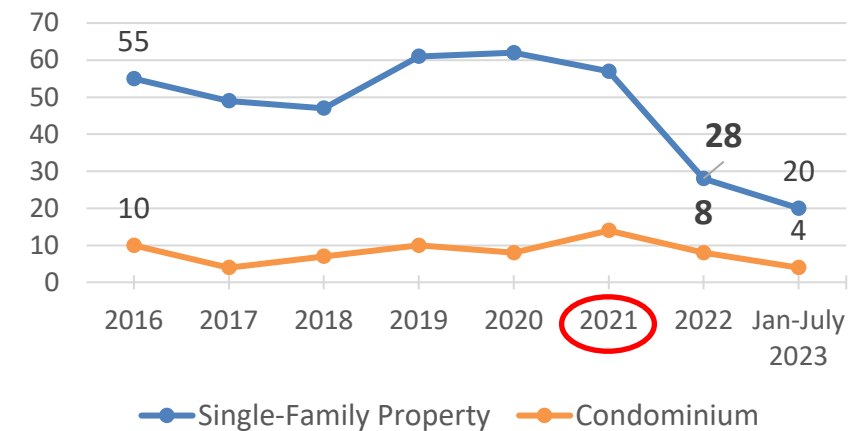
- Homes are increasing in price and decreasing in availability.
- Housing Vacancy is at 2.3% of total housing units.
- Median sales prices have increased steadily since 2016, peaking in 2022, when 28 single-family properties and 8 condominiums sold.
- Prices appear to be stabilizing in 2023.
- Homeowners earn nearly 3x as much as renters, and renters are cost-burdened at higher rates.
- Access remains difficult for lower income residents, especially families.
- Diverse housing types are needed that are suitable and affordable for families, seniors, and individuals with special needs, empty-nesters, and low-income residents.

(ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2021; Master Plan Draft, 2022)

Median Sales Price in Wenham



Closed Sales in Wenham

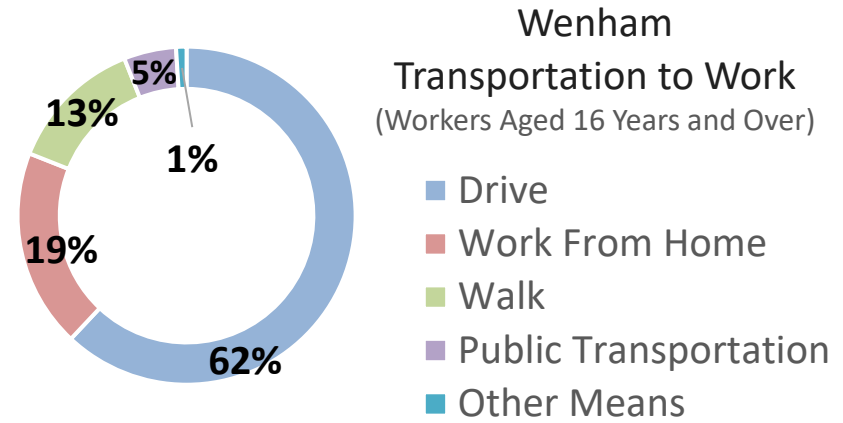


(Massachusetts Association of Realtors)

TRANSPORTATION AND JOBS (ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2021)

Wenham relies on cars for transportation.

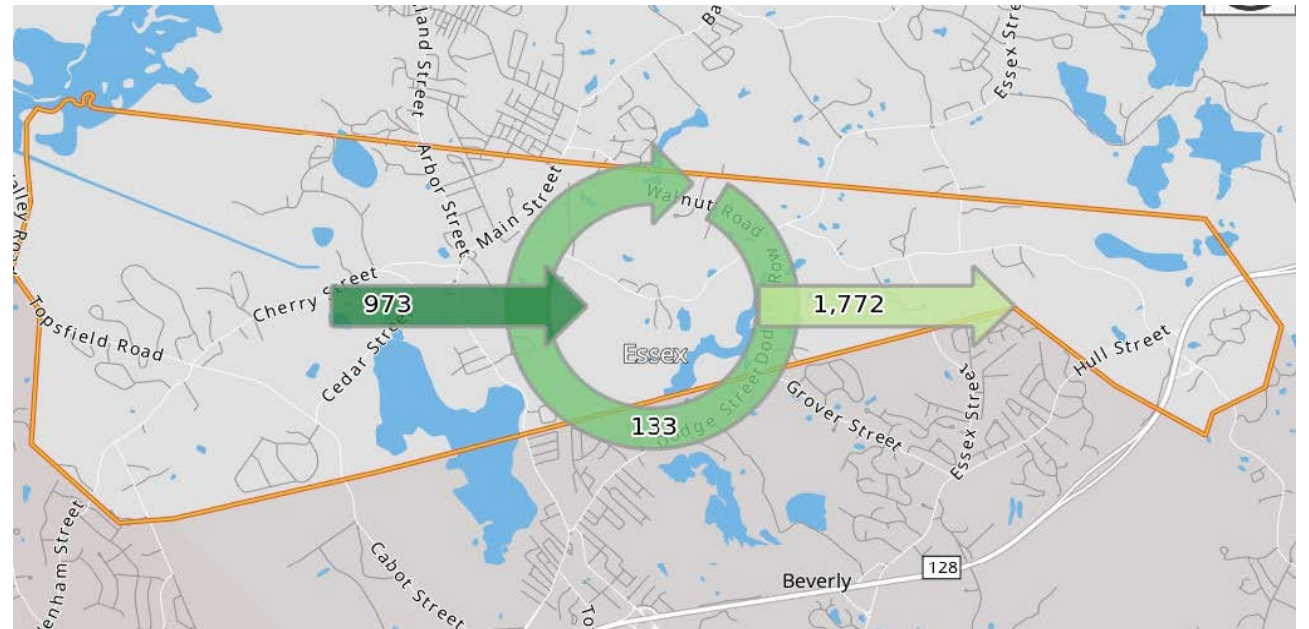
- The Hamilton/Wenham MBTA stop provides commuter access to Boston, but few other options for shopping and other needs.
- Few bike lanes exist apart from the Rail Trail.
- 15% of streets have a MassDOT compliant sidewalk along one side.



Wenham's job market has one job for every four residents of working age.

- 93% of residents work outside of town; 133 residents work in town.
- 23% of residents work in Boston, 10% work in Beverly, and 19% work remotely from home.
- Most jobs in Wenham are filled by workers commuting from other towns, including 12% from Beverly.

(Master Plan Draft, 2022)



Job inflow and outflow in Wenham *(Census On The Map, 2020)*

FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS

.03% zoned commercial

- very little commercial development within town limits
- 1 job for every 4 residents
- little commercial tax revenue
- longer commutes to obtain goods and services

Wenham’s 5 largest employers are tax-exempt educational institutions.

Wenham maintains a balanced budget, but expenses have outpaced revenue in the recent past.

- Wenham’s tax revenue exceeded expenditures by about \$1M in 2021.
- However, expenditures exceeded revenue in 2017 and 2019.
- Public expenses are driven by education (50%) and public safety (20%).

Wenham’s tax base is almost entirely sourced from residential property.

- However, at \$19.58 per \$1,000, Wenham’s residential property tax rate is the highest in the region.
- Tax revenue from commercial and industrial property taxes account for 1% of the total tax levy.

(Master Plan Draft, 2022, citing Wenham Annual Audits)

Municipality	Commercial & Industrial Taxes as Percent of Total Levy (2022)
Wenham	1%
Boxford	1%
Hamilton	3%
Topsfield	6%
Essex	7%

(Master Plan Draft, 2022, citing Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, Labor Market Information and Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services, Community Comparison Report)

RELEVANT GOALS FROM THE MASTER PLAN DRAFT

Bolster resilience by increasing job diversity and tax base diversity.

- Diversify the town's job portfolio into other industries
- Increase tax base diversity by developing commercial properties
- Increase retail spending in Wenham and limit "leakage"

Prioritize, prepare for, and realize the potential for commercial development.

- Rezone town-owned property for commercial or industrial use to attract new businesses and take advantage of the right economic development opportunity when it arises.

Consider ways to diversify housing stock in Wenham.

- Increase options for affordable housing for seniors, families, and individuals with special needs.



IRON RAIL MARKET PROSPECTS in COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

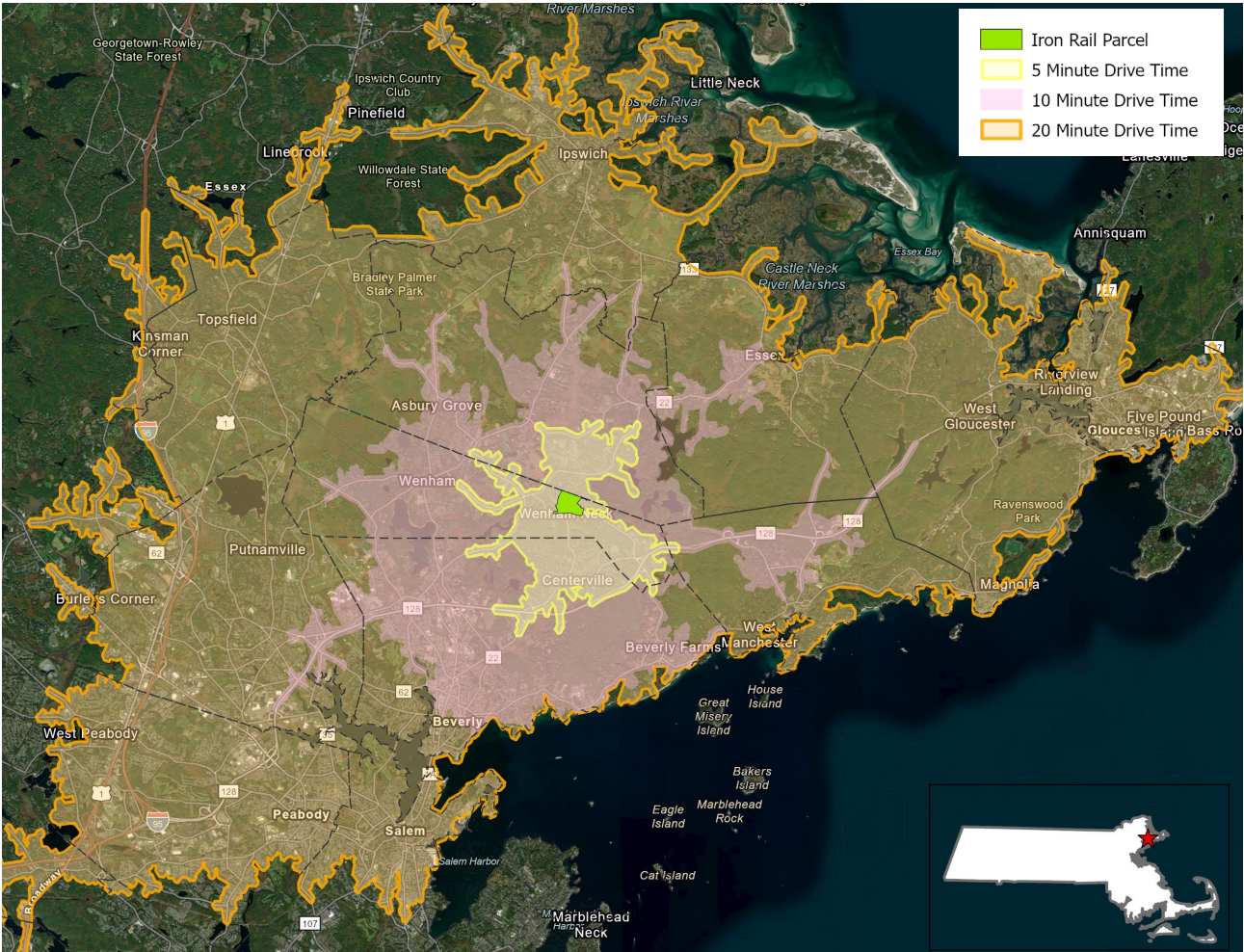
Demographics and ESRI Business market analysis confirm that the area tends to be wealthier, and residents have more disposable income.

Distance to Iron Rail	Households	People	Median Income
Within 5-min drive	1,838	5,552	\$158,318
Within 10-min drive	15,317	42,339	\$112,401

People living nearest to the Iron Rail tend to be particularly wealthy even in comparison to their neighbors.

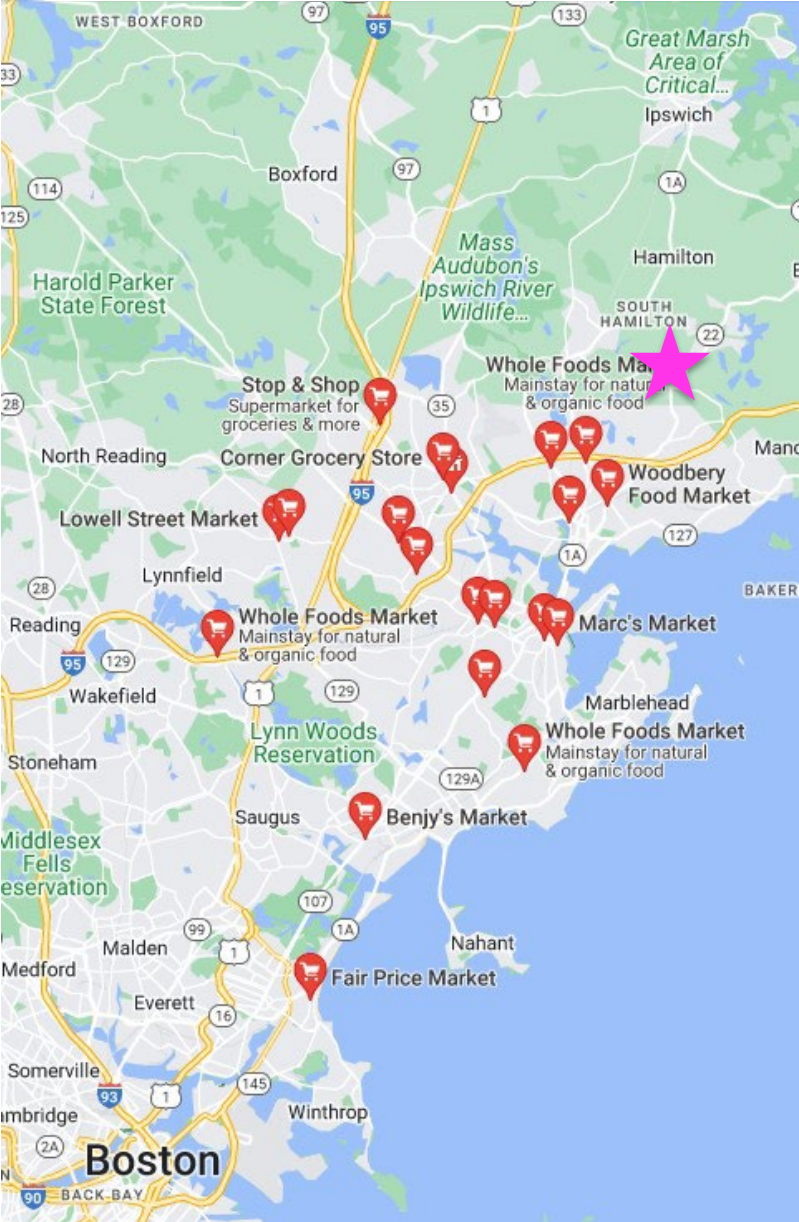
Residents within a ten-minute drive of the Iron Rail property are disproportionately likely to spend money on:

- high-end goods and technology
- entertainment of all kinds (except for video games and theme parks)
- foreign travel, and gym memberships

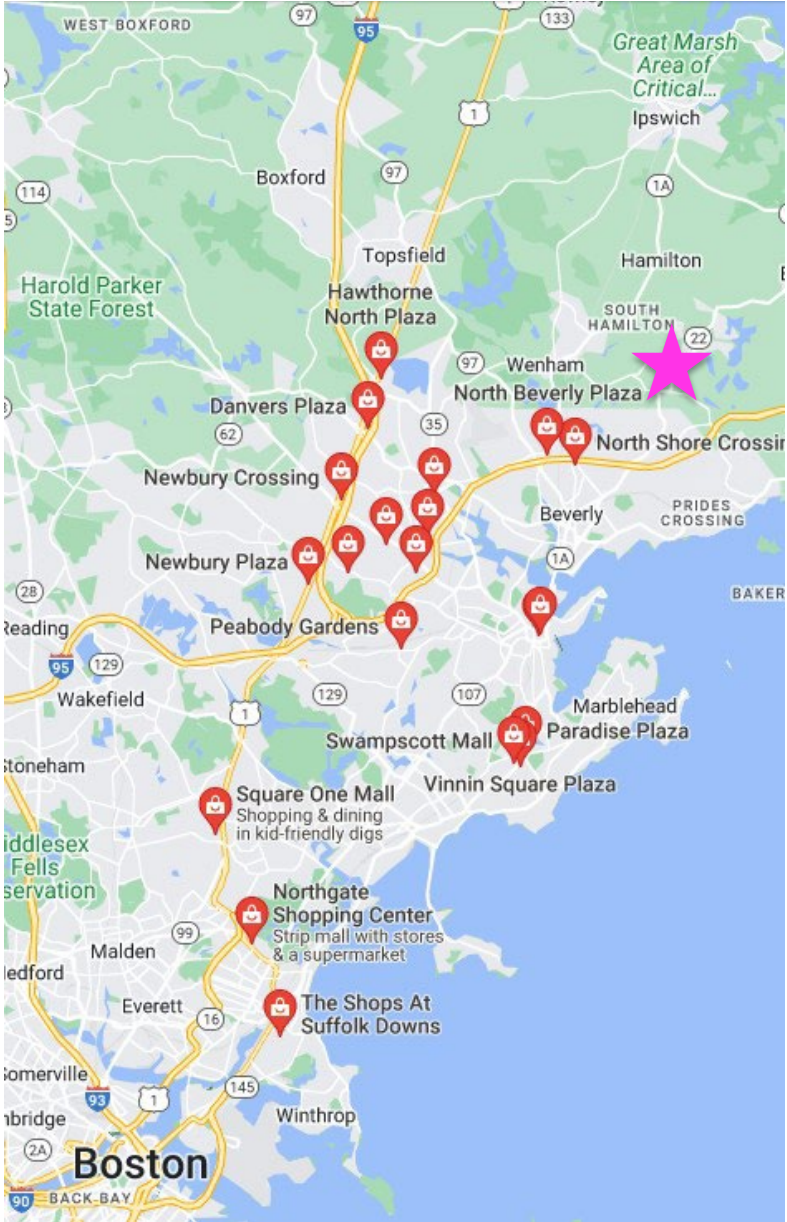


(ESRI Business Analyst, Sourced August, 2023)

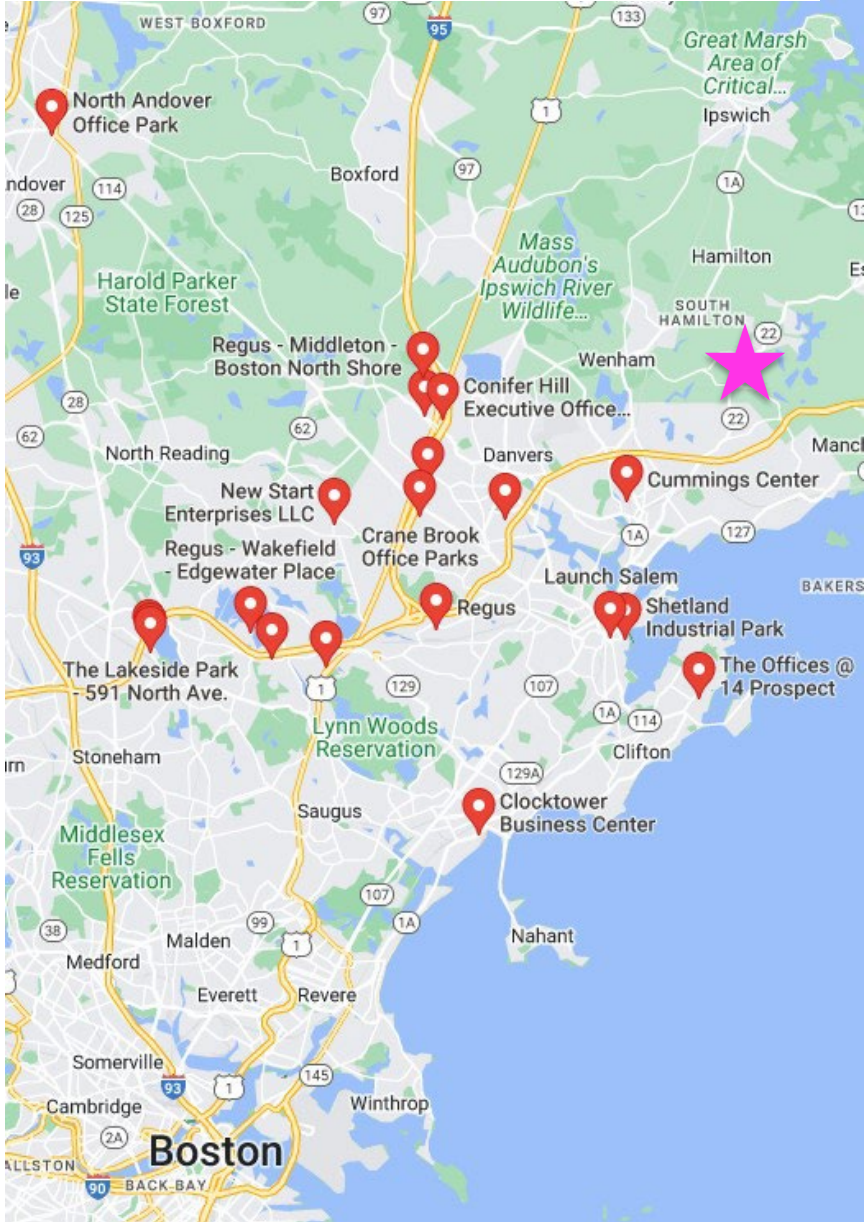
IRON RAIL MARKET PROSPECTS in COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE



Grocery Stores



Malls



Office Parks

IRON RAIL MARKET PROSPECTS in LOCAL SMALL BUSINESS

Interviews with local Real Estate and Chamber of Commerce leaders painted an uncertain picture for the prospect of future commercial development at the Iron Rail Property.

- Universal agreement that demand for office space has declined greatly
- None anticipated that it would return to pre-pandemic levels
- Traditional retail has also declined as online shopping has increased

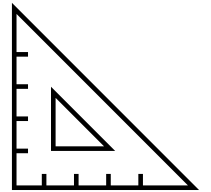
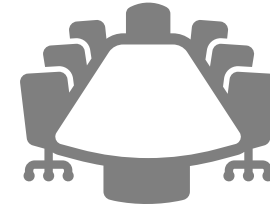
At the same time, several sectors of small businesses are expanding in the area and demand for Real Estate in those sectors is high,

- indoor recreation
- holistic health and wellness
- light manufacturing

These types of businesses could provide:

- local amenities
- new gathering and community spaces
- employment opportunities

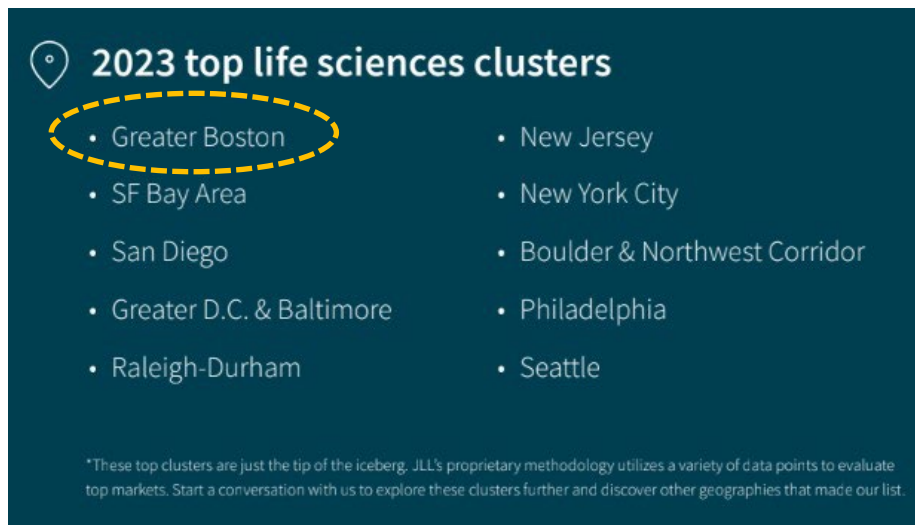
(Direct Outreach to local Real Estate and Chamber of Commerce, August 2023)



IRON RAIL MARKET PROSPECTS in BIOTECH, LIFE SCIENCES

2023 Life Sciences Industry and Real Estate Perspective:

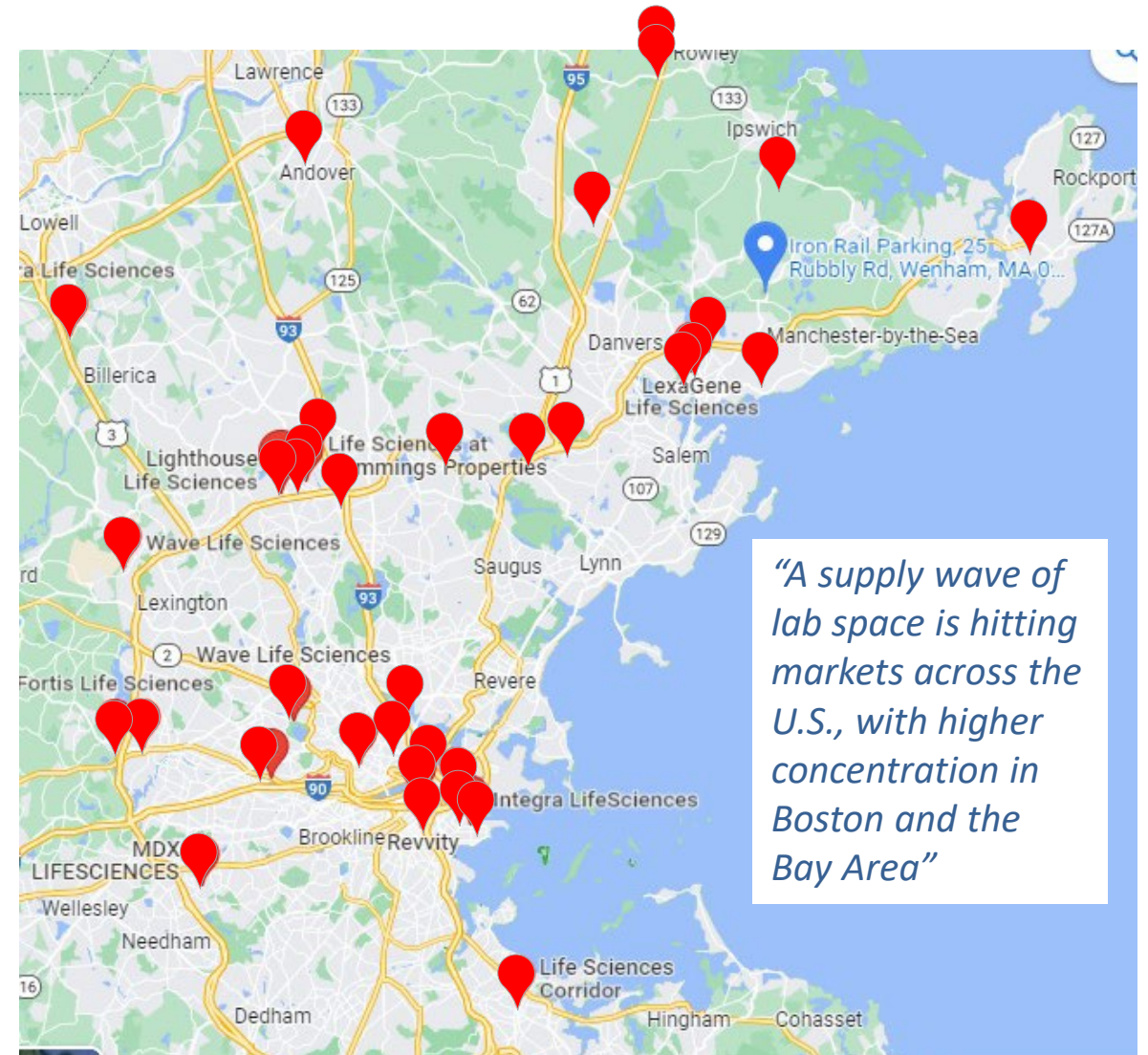
Assessing the future landscape for biopharma, medtech and biomanufacturing
by Jones Lang LaSalle (JLL), a leading global provider of real estate and investment management services.



Demand for lab space has slowed but is poised to bounce back with expected Venture Capital (VC) funding

Boston is starting to see incremental increases in demand already.

However, tenants may resist spending their own capital on build-outs while the supply of lab space is elevated and will remain so through 2024.



Google search results for 'Biotech', 'Life Sciences', and 'New England Biolabs'

IRON RAIL MARKET PROSPECTS in BIOTECH, LIFE SCIENCES

What does this mean for the Iron Rail property?

An elevated supply in vacant lab space means that:

- firms are looking for turn-key rentals, which are in abundance in the region.
- constructing new facilities is risky in an uncertain market environment.

Despite the beautiful setting, the Iron Rail property:

- has a great number of physical and regulatory constraints that make siting large buildings more challenging.
- existing water supply constraints would make it challenging to accommodate a facility with greater demands for fresh water and wastewater treatment.
- does not possess the characteristics of a commercial real estate node.
- has an extensive array of existing uses already established on the site.
- has been identified as having open space and conservation importance.

History of the Iron Rail Property

Source: *Treasures Of Wenham History*, Helen Frick and the True Blue Girls, Jack E. Hauck

1638

Land-grant to Richard Dodge.

1703

Iron Rail House built. The property got its name from the iron railings in front.

1850-1899

Used as a working farm.

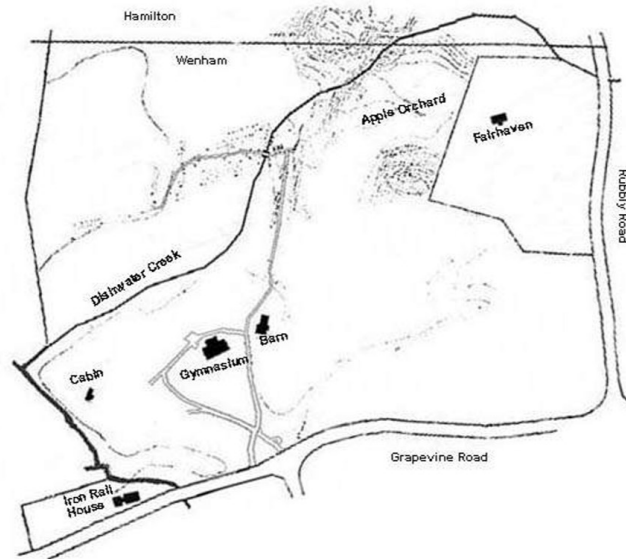
1909

Bought by Henry Frick, steel industrialist, for his daughter Helen Clay Frick who, instead of accepting a pearl necklace as a gift from her father, asked to be given a place in the country where mill girls from the city could spend a vacation in the county.

Helen had originally welcomed 62 young women to Stillman Farm and Eagle Rock, her family's estate in Beverly. After that, she quickly realized that she needed more space.



Back of Iron Rail Vacation Home in 1921.¹¹



Blue girls, 1932. (Photo courtesy of the Wenham Museum)

The life's work of Helen Clay Frick

was of making life more enjoyable for the mill girls of Lawrence, Lowell, and other New England cities, by providing them with a place for rest and respite during the summer.

With limited options for women outside of domestic life, mill work was an opportunity for women to be gainfully employed. Working-class girls at the time might begin working at fourteen years old and would work 70 hours a week for as little as \$5.25/week.

The "Blue Girls" would travel by train from Boston to Beverly and by trolley from Beverly to Wenham.

Helen Frick lived to the age of 96. She said that of all the things in her life, her "greatest interest" was the Iron Rail.

History of the Iron Rail Property

Source: *Treasures Of Wenham History*, Helen Frick and the True Blue Girls, Jack E. Hauck

1910

Nearly five hundred guests came to the Iron Rail Vacation Home the first summer. Over time, 10 additional cabins were built to accommodate guests.

1920

Helen built Fairhaven for Ellen Boyd, an experienced social worker from Boston, who lived there and directed the camp for 30 years.

1941

The brick auditorium and gymnasium was built, equipped with a large kitchen, dormitory, additional rooms and a library.

1953

44 years of Iron Rail vacations came to an end with appx. 32,670 vacations, and 20,000 mill girls in all.

1954

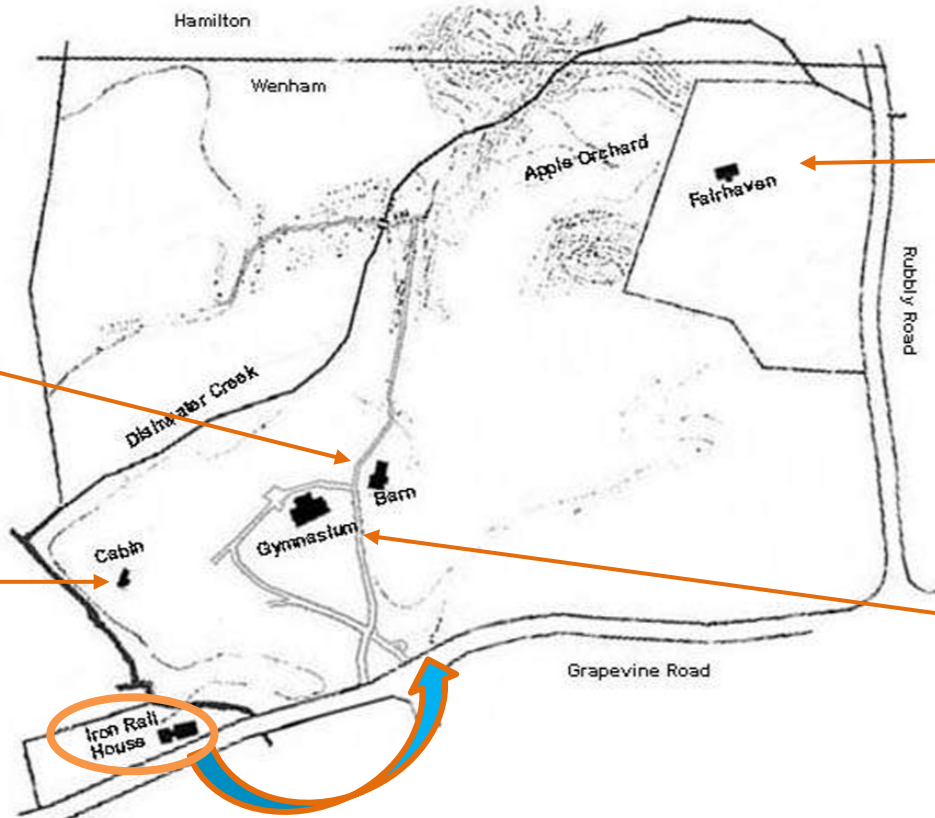
the property was transferred to the Girls' Clubs of America and the property was used as a summer camp.

1976

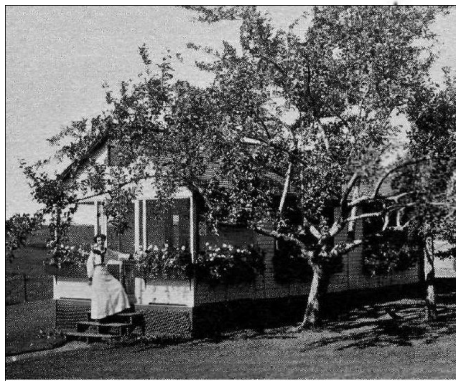
Iron Rail house was moved to Hamilton.

2017

the Iron Rail Property was recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for its significance in the early 20th century progressive movement.



Fairhaven house, 1924 (Photo courtesy of the Wenham Museum)



Friendship cabin, 1914.¹¹ At the peak, there were eight cabins on the property.



Combination dormitory, auditorium and gymnasium was built in 1941.^k

Survey says...

- Iron Rail Gymnastic is the destination for 26.8% of survey respondents who go to the Iron Rail property.
- 70% respondents said that the convenience of the Iron Rail location was either import, very important, or the most important in their choice to patronize IRGA.
- Of those who prioritized preserving gymnastics at the Iron Rail, 57.9% said it was a medium, med-high, or high priority, and 42% said it was the lowest, or low-medium priority.
- *"Please keep Iron Rail Gymnastics where it is. It is a vital resource for our kids. We love the staff and gymnasts and would be devastated to lose it."*

MARKET PROSPECTS:

A REAL-LIFE OPPORTUNITY

Iron Rail Gymnastics Academy (IRGA)

Has operated at Iron Rail for 39 years, has expressed interest in building a new 10,000-15,000 square foot building to move their operations.

The owner has expressed confidence that building a new facility would be financially feasible for IRGA and would also make space available in the Iron Rail building for another business to move in.

The academy contributes revenue to the town and serves numerous local families in the community.

If the Town were to advance the State's recommendation for listing on the Historic Register, the gym and the boy scout barn may become eligible for state or federal Historic Tax Credits to help offset the costs of needed upgrades and renovations.



The Boy Scout Barn

Survey says...

The Boy Scout Barn is the destination for 13.41% of survey respondents who go to the Iron Rail property.

25% respondents specified the Boy Scout Barn as a priority for the Iron Rail.

"It's incredibly beneficial to have a dedicated, affordable space for scouting for our kids to promote responsible citizenship and sense of belonging in the community."



(Photos by Dodson and Flinker)

The Iron Rail Soccer Fields

Hamilton-Wenham Youth Soccer Association (HWYSA) leases and operates three soccer fields at the Iron Rail property.

- The Landmark School and the Academy of Penguin Hall both have an annual field use agreement with HWYSA for limited use of the fields in exchange for assisting with maintenance and paying rent to the Town.
- When completed, the new recreational fields at the High School will help with current demands but won't replace existing uses. If an existing use is eliminated, the High School fields will not help to replace that.

Survey says...

The largest percentage of survey respondents who go to the Iron Rail property go for soccer (34.7%), compared to other uses:

- Walking = 32.3%
- Business with the DPW = 29%
- Visiting the Cemetery = 15%
- 78% of those who prioritized preserving soccer at the Iron Rail, said it was a medium, medium-high, or the highest priority, and 22% said it was the lowest, or low-medium priority.
- “We cannot lose the soccer fields!”



(Photos by Dodson and Flinker)

Iron Rail Survey Input

“It has an important women’s history and healthy living history.”

“prioritize building commercial spaces that will generate tax revenue to support the town.”

“Please make this town more affordable to live in, generate some tax benefits.”

“The Iron Rail is really the only place that teens are provided recreational opportunities, soccer, scouts, and gymnastics. There needs to respect for the services they provide, making Hamilton/Wenham great places to live.”

“Keep open space- development should happen in “downtown”....”

“The intent of the taxpayers who paid for this land was that it be used for a cemetery and passive recreation. And nothing else.”

“I understand the need to generate tax revenue, and I support expanding the commercial tax base in both Hamilton and Wenham, as residential taxes are already pretty high. That said, I would rather not change the way Iron Rail is currently used, as it has been a big part of our family for 10 years and counting.”

“the above priorities can be accomplished together... nature/paths, soccer fields, updated buildings, mixed-use/affordable options, commercial options, historic preservation, etc.

Concerns:

increased traffic on Rubbly Rd

increased pressure on the water supply

aesthetic impacts of **ANY** type of development

Other ideas:

Walkable neighborhood destination

Art, music, community events

Preserve nature to help the Town remain habitable as the planet heats up

Beautify it and maintain nature

RELEVANT OBJECTIVES FROM THE 2019 OSRP

Open Space and Recreation Plan

GOAL 1: To protect the Town's natural resources and open space areas that contribute to passive recreational enjoyment (i.e. walking/hiking, scenic views, picnicking, wildlife observation, etc.), drinking water supply, high value core wildlife and plant habitat, agricultural and forestry use, and rural and historical character.

Objectives:

- land conservation, habitat management, climate change mitigation,
- historic resources protection, education and outreach, partnerships

GOAL 2: To improve trail networks, cycling paths/lanes, and sidewalks to provide recreational opportunities for activities such as walking, running, hiking, cycling, and wildlife observation.

Objectives:

- connectivity and access to large open space systems by foot or bicycle,
- new trails on Town-owned land, way-finding, outreach, partnerships

GOAL 3: To provide and maintain facilities and resources for active recreation and opportunities for all residents.

Objectives:

- town-owned recreation facilities, additional amenities, mix of uses for a broad range of needs and interests
- universal access for all age groups and people with disabilities
- meet high demand for athletic fields

GOAL 4: To sustain the Town's commitment to carrying out this plan.

(Wenham 2019 OSRP)

RELEVANT OSRP OBJECTIVES FOR THE IRON RAIL

Consider additional conservation actions to protect existing biodiversity, ecosystems, and wildlife corridors connected to the Iron Rail property.

- Protect the corridor for wildlife migration between the upper Miles River near Longham Reservoir and the Iron Rail.
- Provide opportunities for public education, wildlife documentation, and wildlife protection in this area.

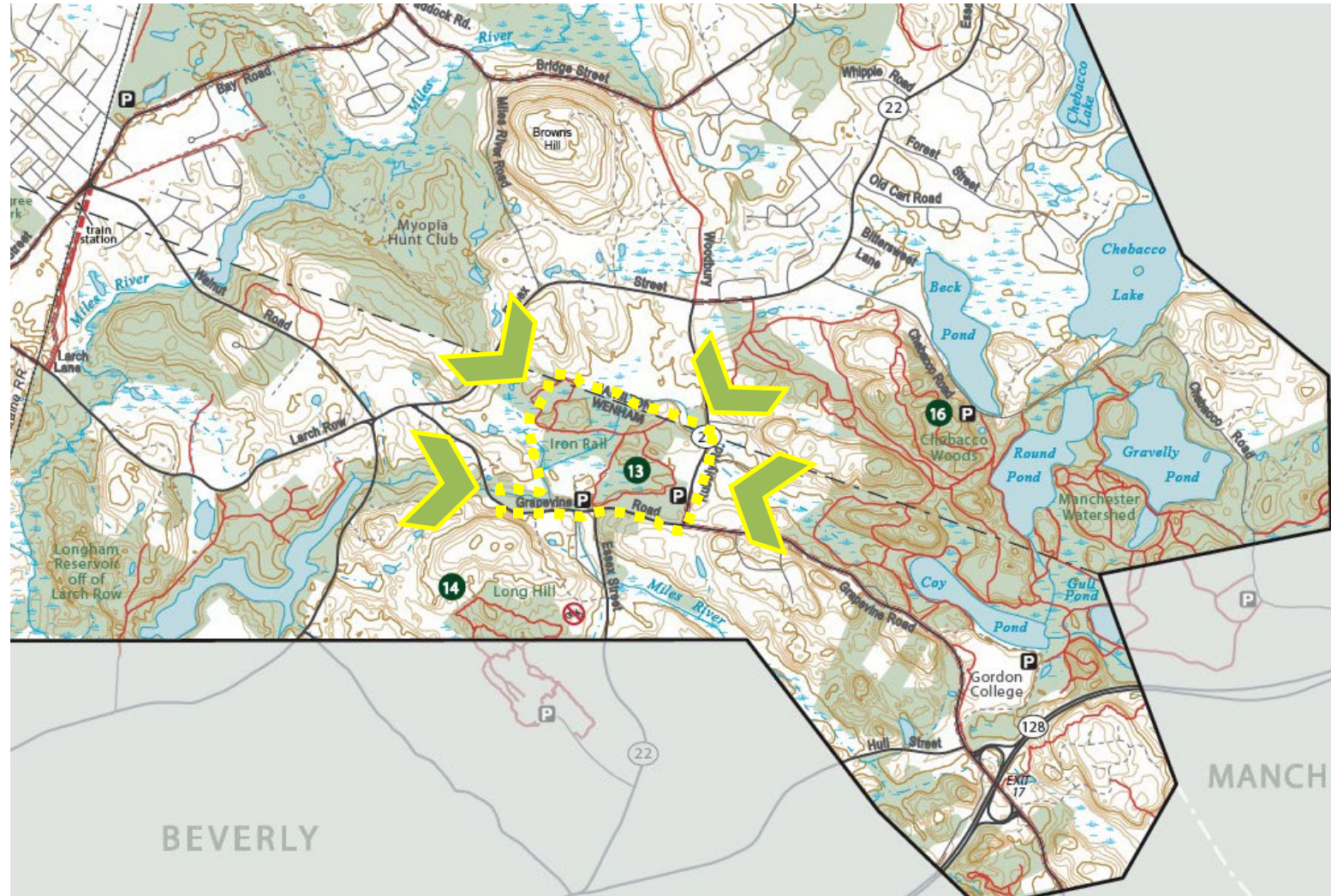
Improve the Iron Rail property as part of a larger system of trails and open space in East Wenham:

- Improve universal accessibility, existing trails, rebuild boardwalks, increase outreach and education.
- Prioritize improvements to protect historic resources.

Prioritize and plan for the high demand for active recreation.

- Complete the High School game field and track.
- Re-evaluate and prioritize other athletic field projects when the lease with HWYSA for Iron Rail fields expires July 1, 2024.

(Wenham OSRP 2019)



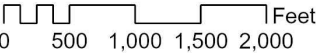
(Essex County Trail Association Map)

TRAILS & OPEN SPACE

Wenham, MA
09/26/2023

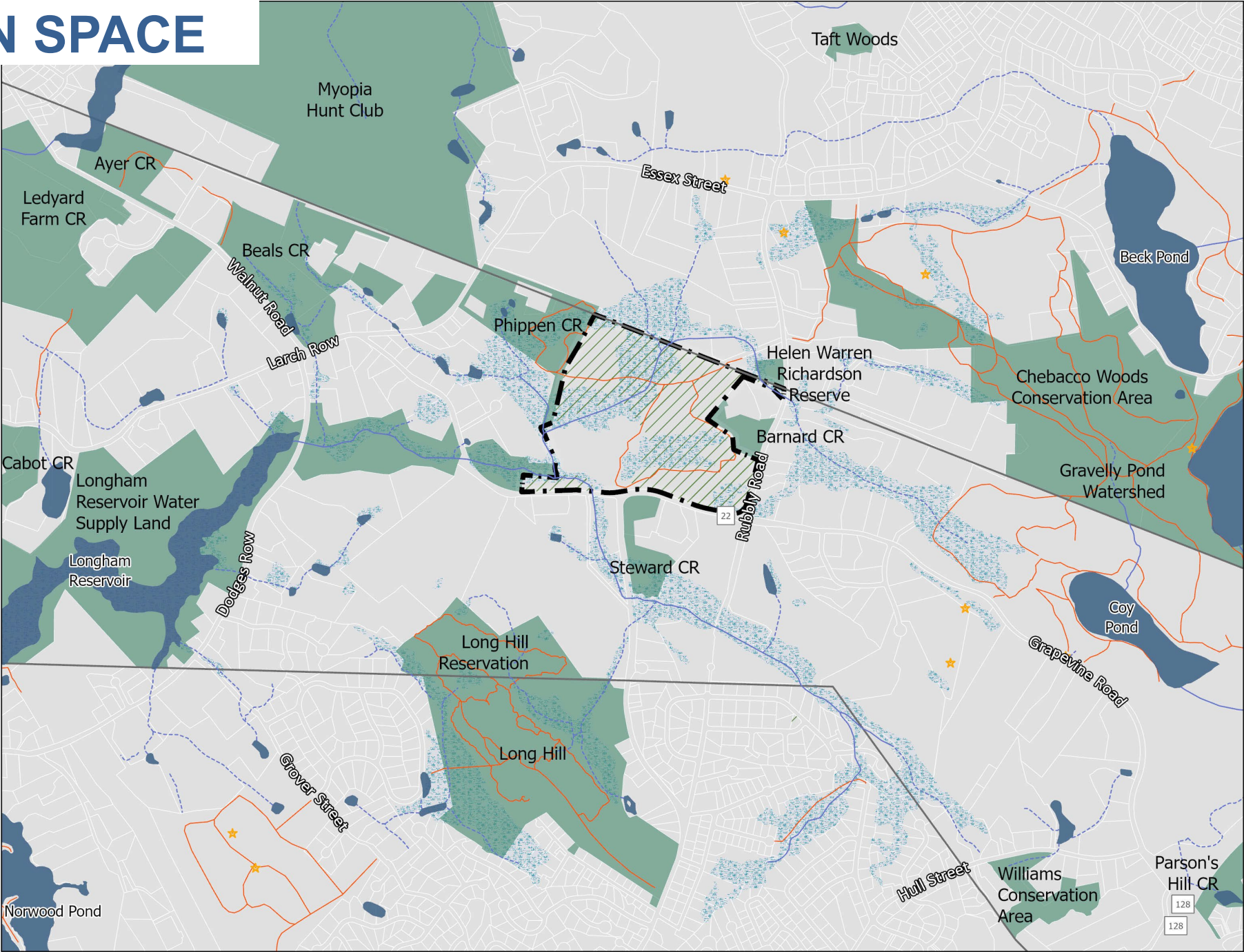
Natural Resources

- Iron Rail Property
- Town Boundary
- Protected Open Space
- Level of Protection
 - Limited
 - Permanent
- Trails
- Certified Vernal Pool
- Perennial Stream
- Intermittent Stream
- Wetlands



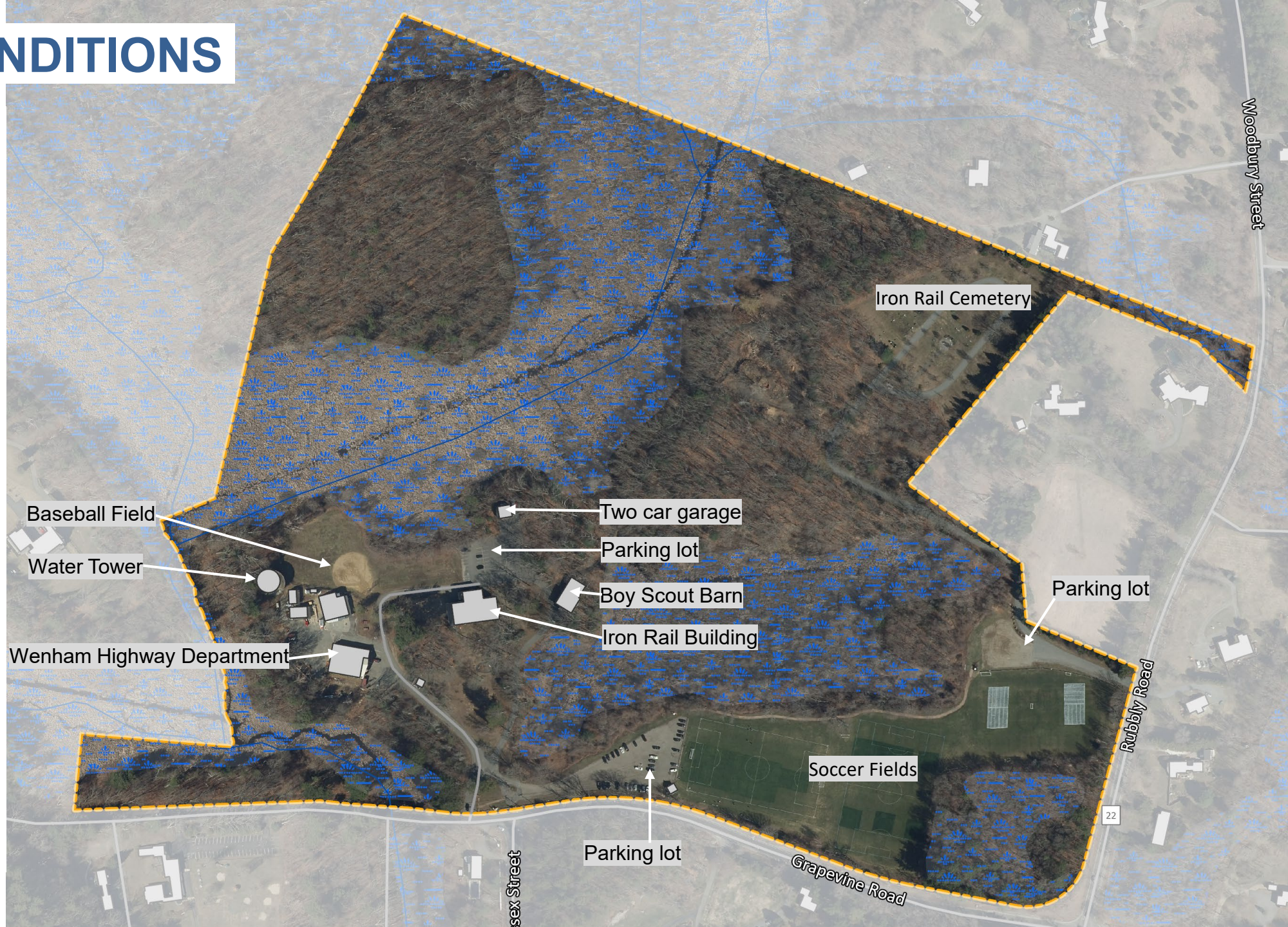
Prepared by:
DODSON & FLINKER
Landscape Architecture and Planning

Data Sources: MassGIS



EXISTING CONDITIONS

- 79.5 acres total
- Town-owned
- Iron Rail Commission coordinates use and maintenance
- Department of Public Works headquarters and main garage
- The Water Department water storage facility
- Cemetery
- Iron Rail Building & tenants
- Boy Scout Barn
- Baseball field
- 3 soccer fields
- 3 parking lots
- In total, property generates about \$150,000 in revenues annually.

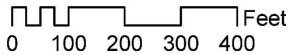


INFRASTRUCTURE

Wenham, MA
07/31/2023

Infrastructure Map

- Underground Storage Tank
- wStorageTank
- SystemValve
- Node
- Outfall
- Manhole
- Hydrant
- Fitting
- Stormwater Basin
- WaterMain
- Pipe
- ControlValve
- Wetlands



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Data Sources: MassGIS

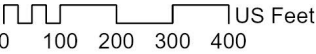


NATURAL RESOURCES

Wenham, MA
07/31/2023

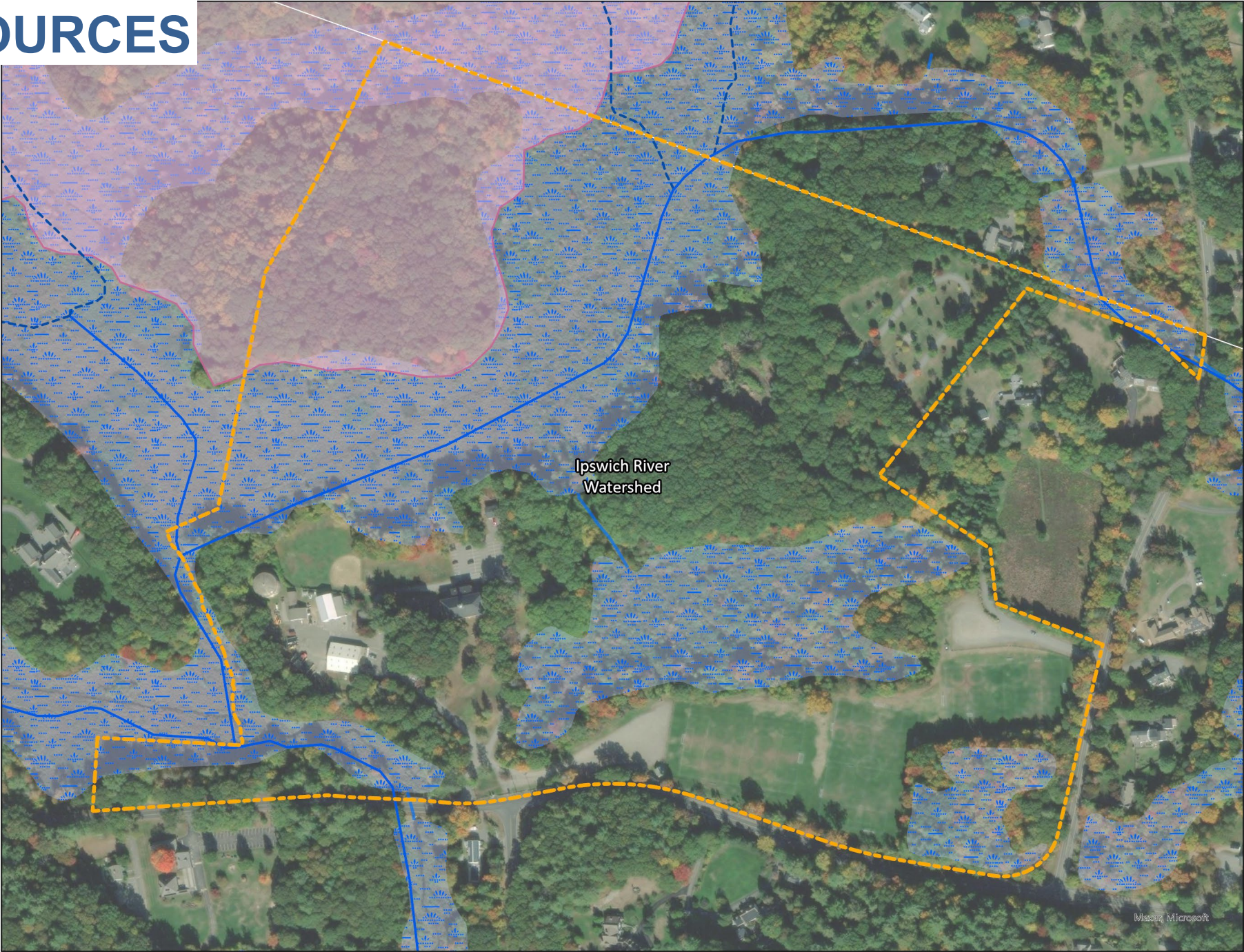
Natural Resources

-  Property Line
-  Perennial Stream
-  Intermittent Stream
-  Hydrologic Connections
-  NHESP Estimated Habitat of Rare Species
-  Wetlands



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VEGETATION

Wenham, MA
08/15/2023

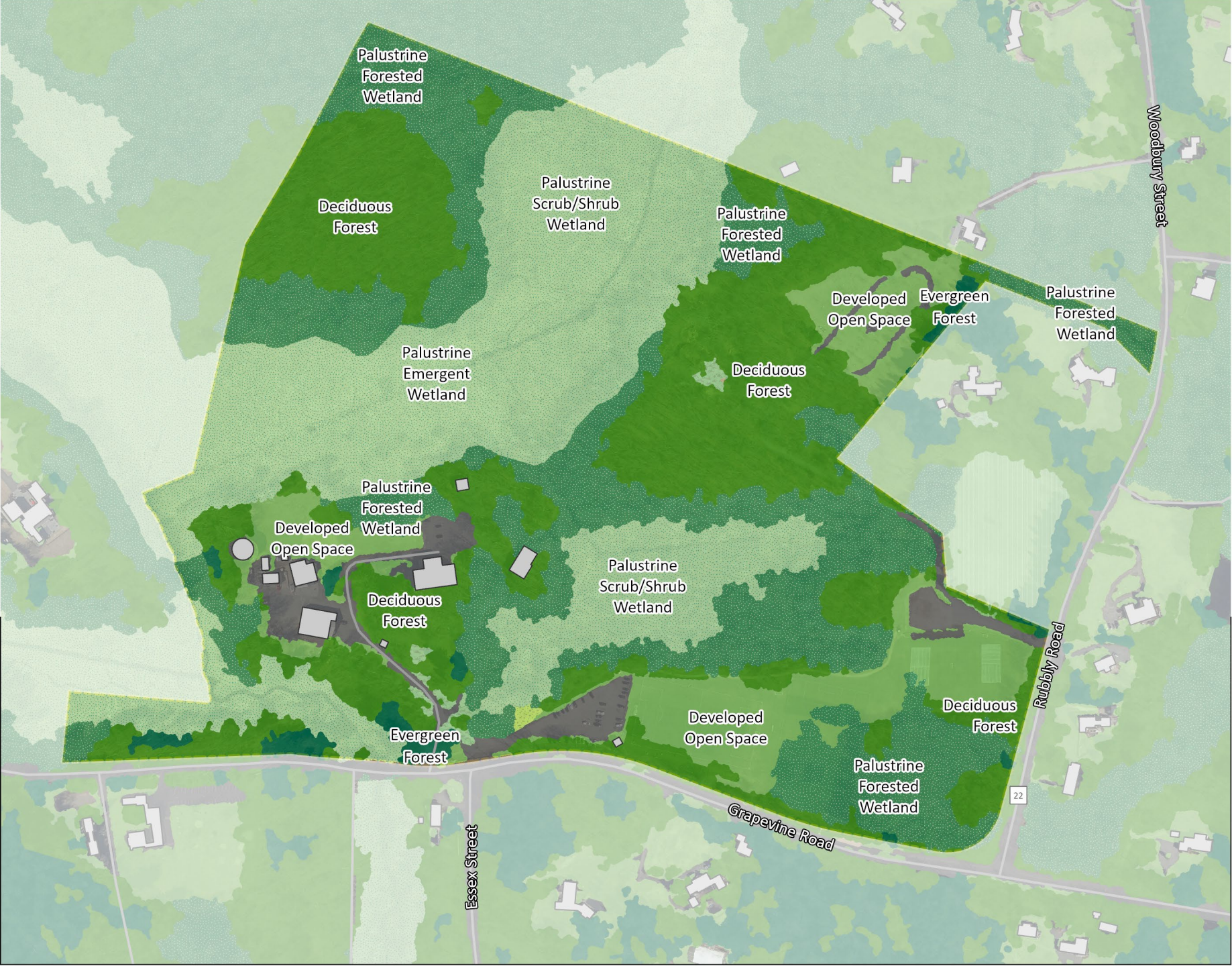
Landcovers

- Impervious
- Cultivated
- Developed Open Space
- Deciduous Forest
- Evergreen Forest
- Grassland
- Scrub/Shrub
- Bare Land
- Forested Wetland
- Non-forested Wetland



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Landscape Architecture and Planning

Data Sources: MassGIS

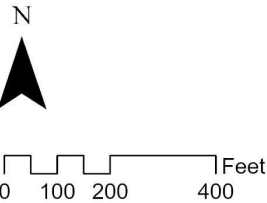


SOILS

Wenham, MA
09/25/2023

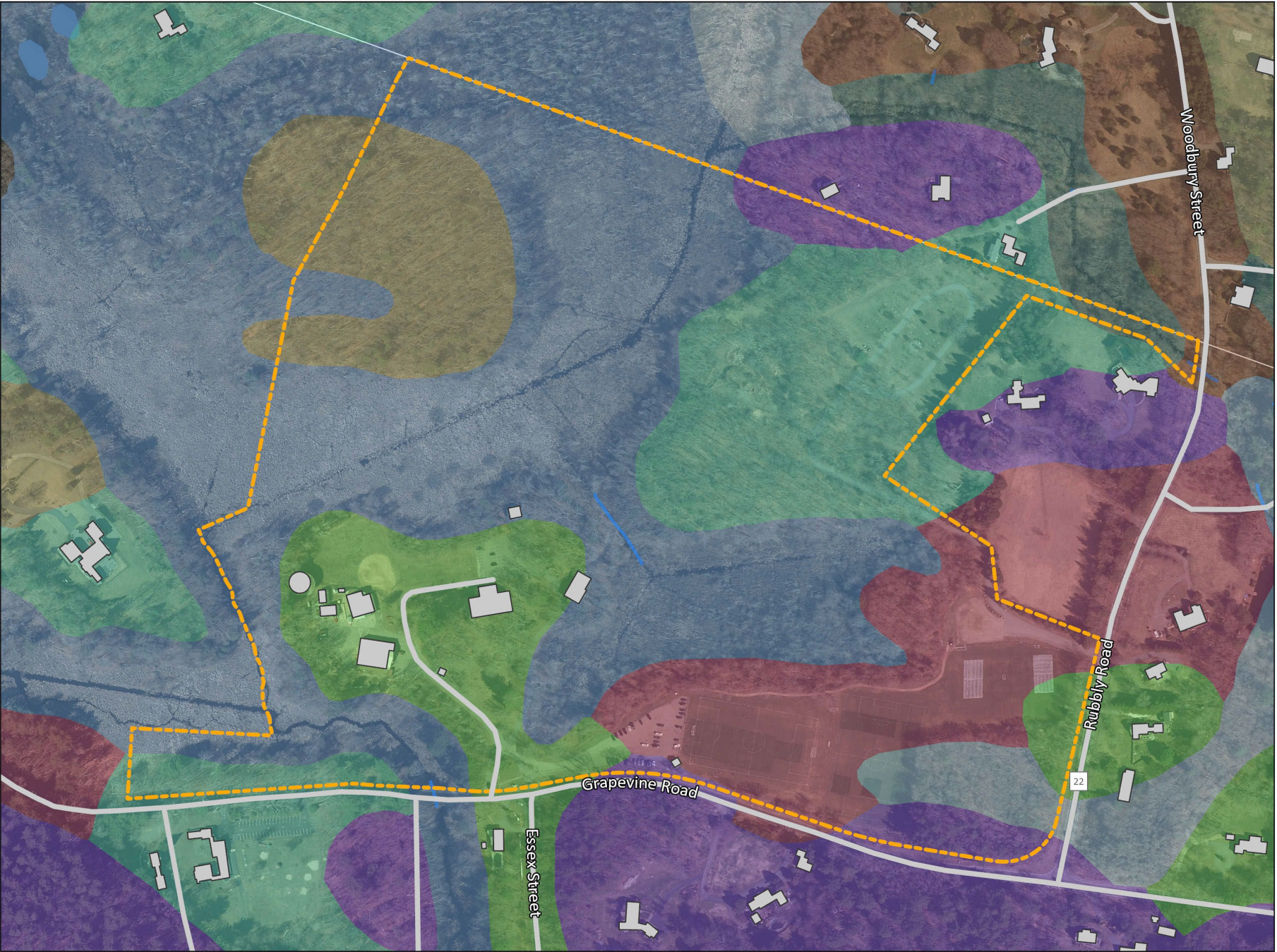
Soils

- Property Line
- Soil Types
 - Canton Fine Sandy Loam
 - Chatfield-Hollis-Rock outcrop complex
 - Deerfield loamy fine sand
 - Freetown muck
 - Hinckley gravelly fine sandy loam
 - Hinckley loamy sand
 - Scarboro mucky fine sandy loam
 - Sudbury fine sandy loam
 - Walpole fine sandy loam



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SURFICIAL GEOLOGY

Wenham, MA

09/25/2023

Legend

-  Property Line
- Surficial Geology
-  artificial fill
-  glacial stratified deposits, coarse
-  glacial stratified deposits, glaciomarine fine
-  swamp deposits
-  thin till
-  Areas of Abundant Outcrop

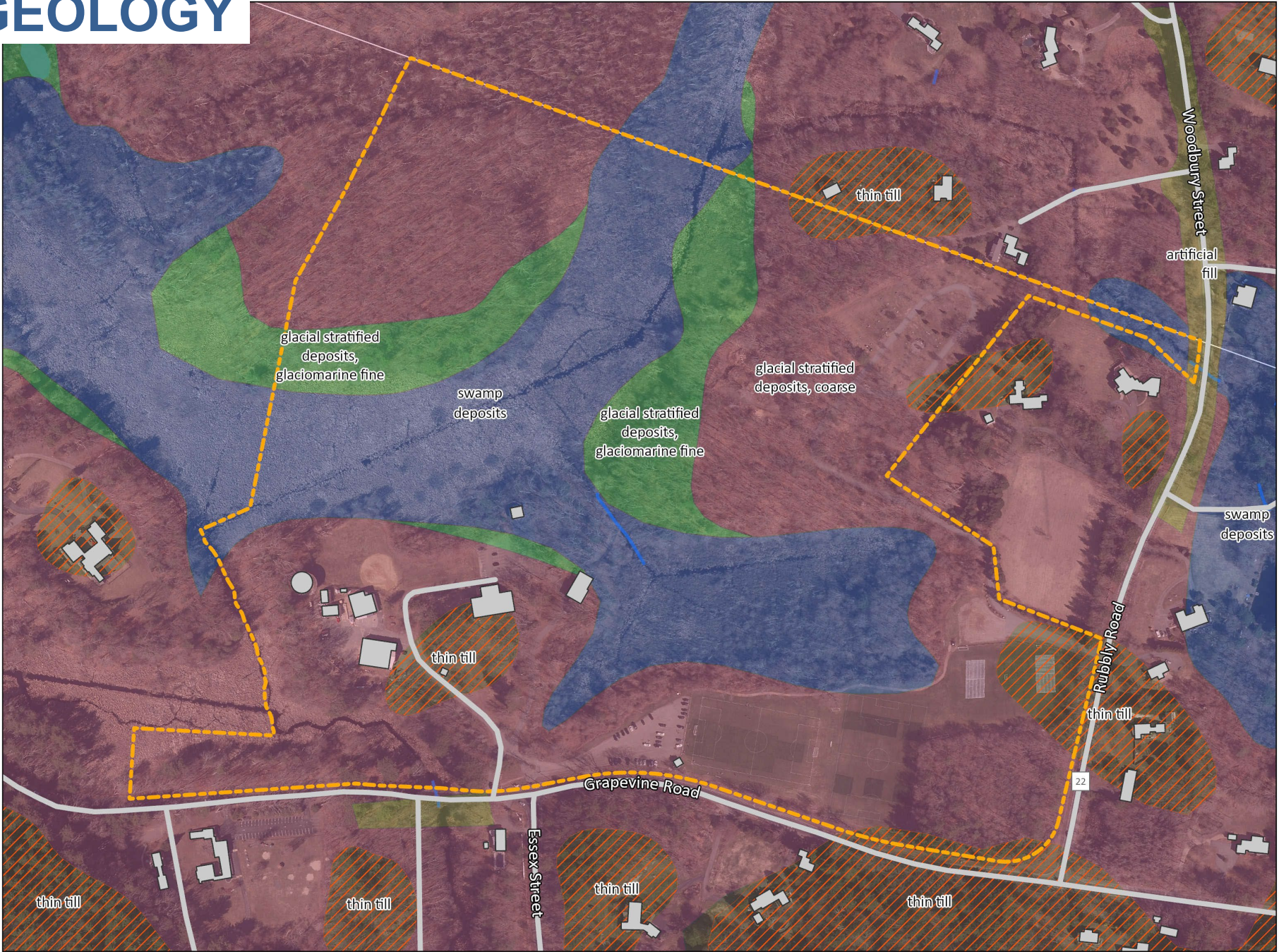


0 100 200 400 Feet

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SLOPES

Wenham, MA

07/31/2023

Slopes Map

 Property Line


 Structures


Slopes by Percent Rise

 0-2%

 2-5%

 5-10%


 10-15%

 15-20%

 20-25%

 >25%

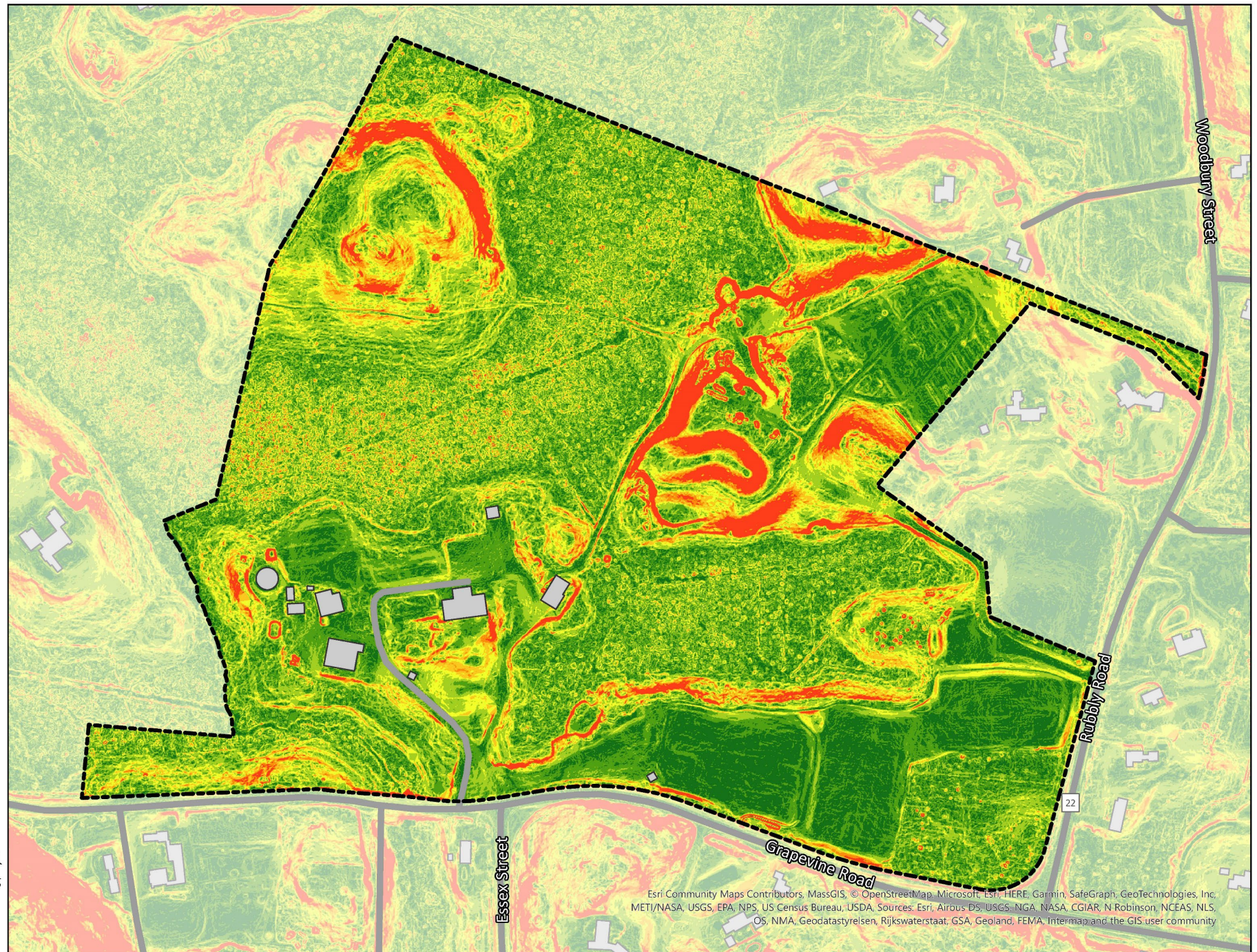


 Feet
0 100 200 300 400

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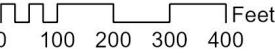
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REGULATORY CONSTRAINTS

Wenham, MA
07/31/2023

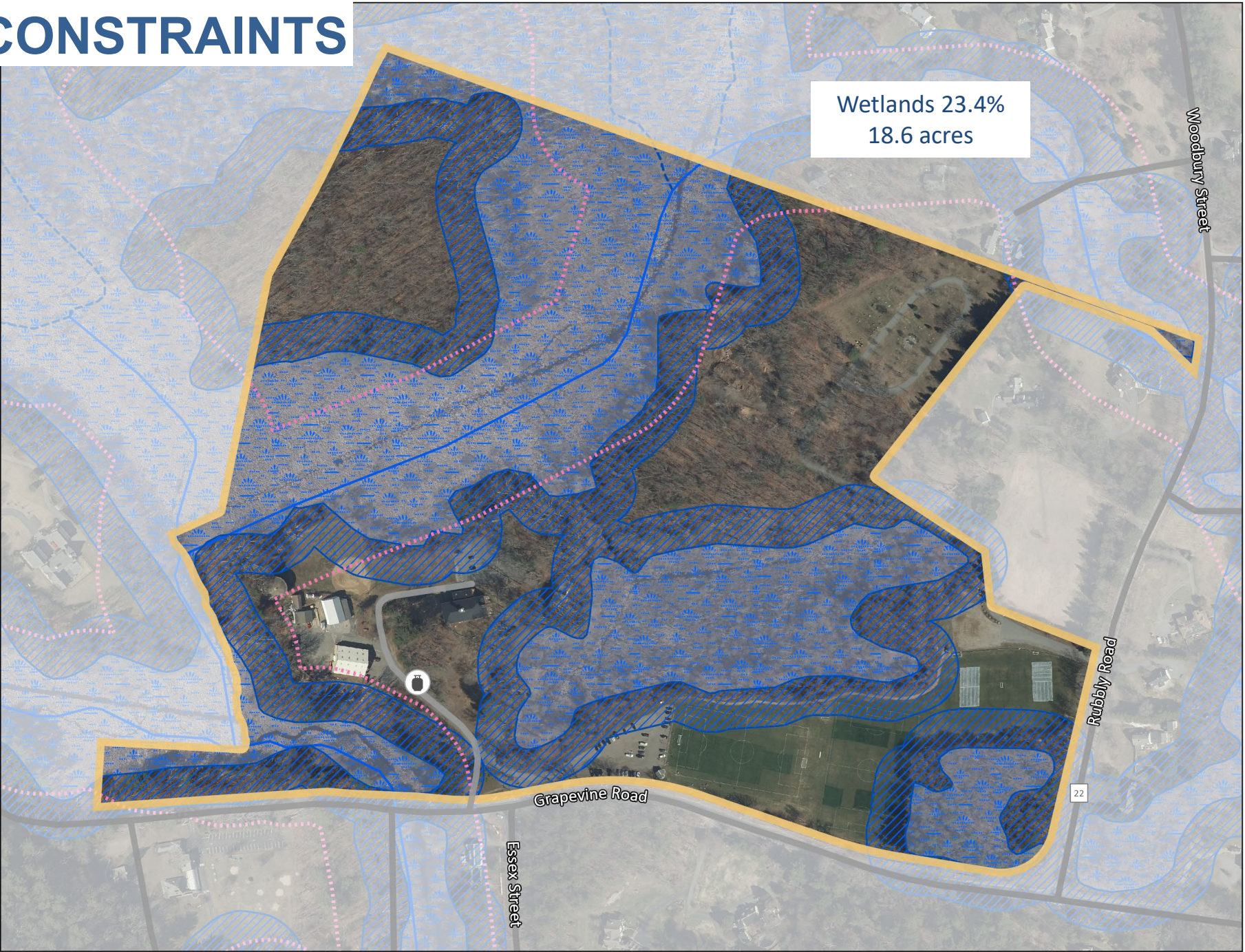
Regulatory Constraints

-  Underground Storage Tank
-  Certified Vernal Pool
-  Property Line and 20' Zoning Setback
-  100' Wetland Buffer
-  200' Riverfront Area
-  Perennial Stream
-  Intermittent Stream
-  Wetlands



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PHYSICAL CONSTRAINTS

Wenham, MA
07/31/2023

Physical Constraints

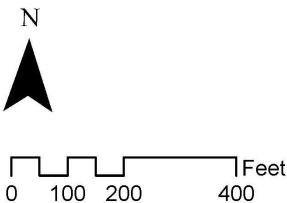
- 20% Slopes
- Wetlands
- 1% Annual Chance Flood Hazard
- Hydric Soils

Apx. 4.26 acres
no access roads,
steep slopes and
hydric soils

Apx. 6.55 acres
adjacent to cemetery
contains steep slopes

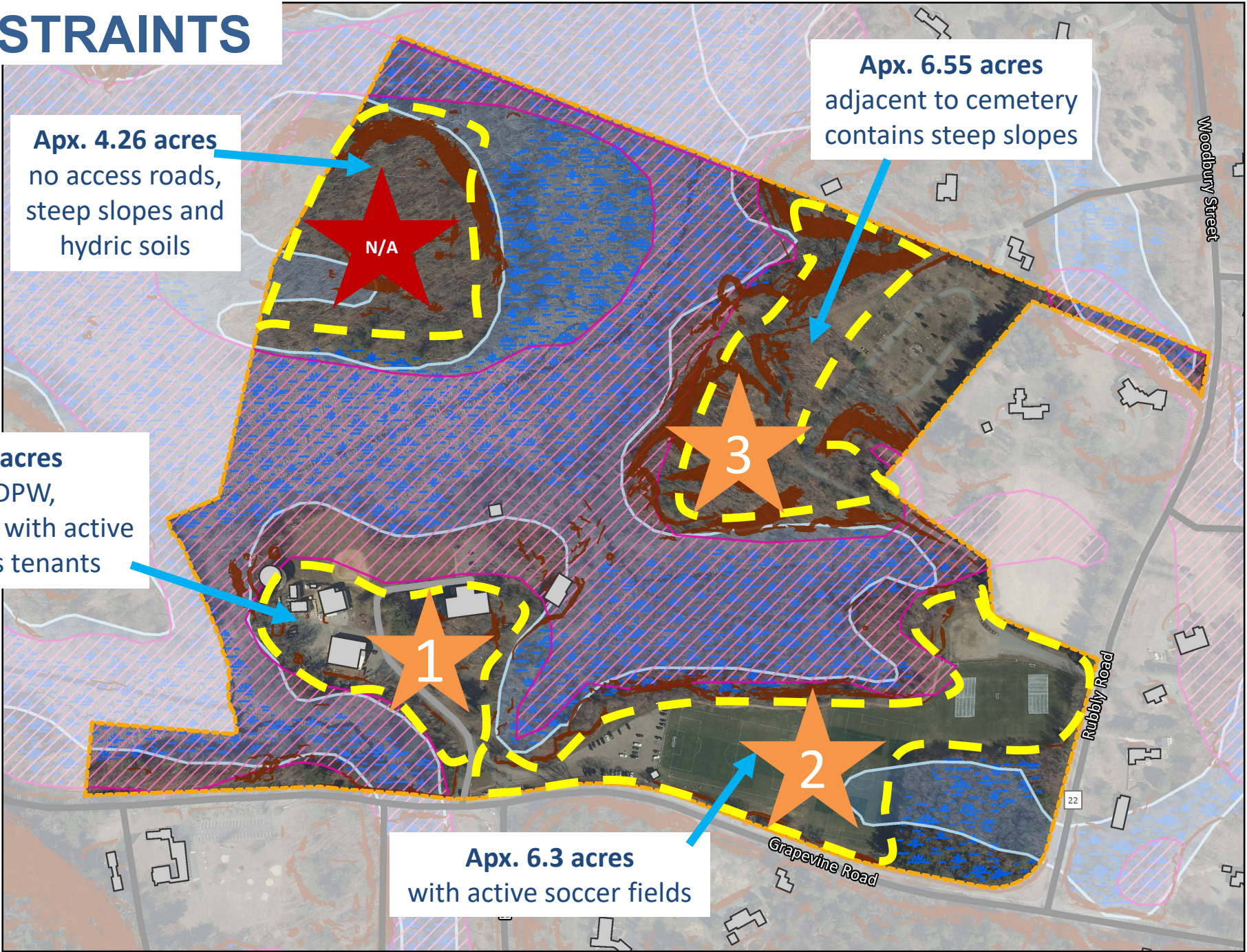
Apx. 4.11 acres
contains DPW,
historic building with active
local business tenants

Apx. 6.3 acres
with active soccer fields



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SITE 1: Apprx. 4.11 acres

Opportunities

- Good access to the site
- Potential adaptive reuse of historic Iron Rail building and Boy Scout Barn
- Access to recreational trails and other public uses

Challenges

- New uses must be compatible with DPW and existing uses
- Gym, barn, and wastewater systems require costly upgrades
- Constrained by wetlands, floodplain, shallow bedrock, and steep slopes
- Low visibility from nearby roads





SITE 2: Apprx 6.3 acres

Opportunities

- Good access to the site
- Existing access to recreational trails and the Cemetery
- High visibility from Grapevine and Rubbly Roads

Challenges

- New uses that are compatible with existing recreational uses
- Separate arrival needed for the Cemetery
- Significantly constrained by wetlands/floodplain

Envision...



THANK YOU!

Contact
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