



Decas School Redevelopment Study

December 25, 2020



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Project Web Page -
www.srpedd.org/Decas-School

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

Based on a close reading of the town's 2019 *Economic Development Strategy* (EDS) and working in partnership with SRPEDD, the Wareham Redevelopment Authority (WRA) explored several redevelopment scenarios at the John Decas School site. The school will be decommissioned in 2021, leaving a large parcel that is well positioned for economic development due to several characteristics and assets documented in this report.

The study's *Preferred Scenario* - an "Office-Using Lab/Flex Space" development that yields approximately 170,000 s.f. and 270 jobs - is based on various EDS take-aways and builds on aspects of Wareham's existing planning - keeping both economic and community development in mind.

While the *Preferred Scenario* represents an ideal outcome for the Decas School site, the study also explored other "build-outs" to establish a plausible range of different facility demands, site designs, and benefits/costs that will enable effective marketing to prospective developers and firms. Establishing this "range of expectations" will also help the WRA determine what public infrastructure investments, if any, and policy initiatives it should pursue to achieve its desired scenario(s).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Before the reader dives into the details of the report, please consider the following main "Take-Away" messages:

- There are no significant site constraints (e.g., wetlands or flood plains).
- The existing school building has a moderate asbestos liability, which increases the estimated demolition costs to approximately \$1M; some asbestos remediation has already been completed.
- The site has sufficient sewer/water service and roadway capacity.
- The nearby Business Development Overlay District (BDOD) zoning and a Federal Opportunity Zone offer connections to larger policy goals - both local and national.
- The 2019 EDS market data, prior town planning, nearby comparable development, and anecdotal evidence support the "Office-Using Lab/Flex Space" *Preferred Scenario*.
- Several other Scenarios - all with connections to the local and regional market - also offer a range of desirable benefits.
- All of the Scenarios limit themselves, more or less, to the Decas School's existing development footprint;

this leaves surplus land on the site to remain recreation or for other complementary uses that the town is considering for the future. These include a public safety facility, a commuter rail station, or senior housing. In short, economic development and other activities can take place on the large site.

- A 2- to 3-year Action Plan included in the study leads to private redevelopment of the site by 2022 or 2023.
- The WRA should work with the town to rezone the site - and all of Wareham Crossing to the North - to BDOD to enable the envisioned uses. (This will also position Wareham Crossing for potential re-use and redevelopment should in-person, big box retail no longer be the site's "highest and best use.") The site is currently zoned Multi-Family Residential (MR-30).
- The WRA will need to work with the School Board and Board of Selectmen to take ownership of the site. It will also need to work to prepare the site for redevelopment by removing the asbestos and razing the existing building.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The study began with a thorough analysis of the site and its context. This “existing conditions” work included a drone survey, site visits, research, and mapping.

The reader can explore interactive drone data at: www.srpedd.org/Decas-School

Additionally, the map series (on the following five pages) provides an overview of GIS data analyzed in early 2020; this map series reveals no site constraints and explores the following data themes:

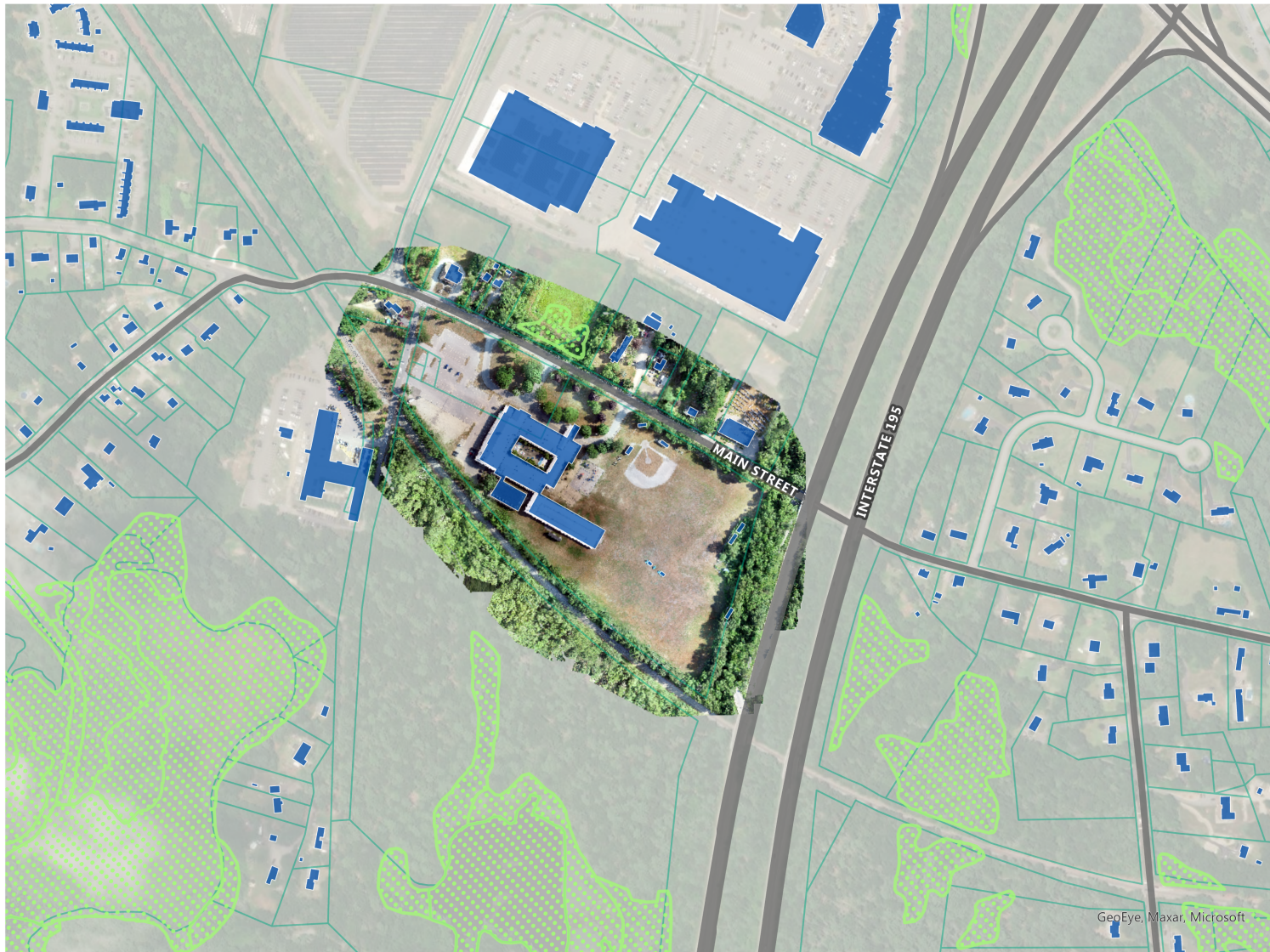
- Site Characteristics
- Zoning
- Land Use
- Environmental Resources
- Hazards

The project team conducted basic research to understand the site’s history. That information appears as a timeline graphic on page 8.

The Existing Conditions analysis concludes that the site has no major constraints and is well positioned for redevelopment.



Top: The Decas School (foreground) with Wareham Crossing, to the North. Bottom: A still image of the drone survey’s 3D model; this information enabled accurate site assessment and served as context for rendering the development scenarios.



Wareham Decas School Economic Development Site Site Map

0 400 US FEET

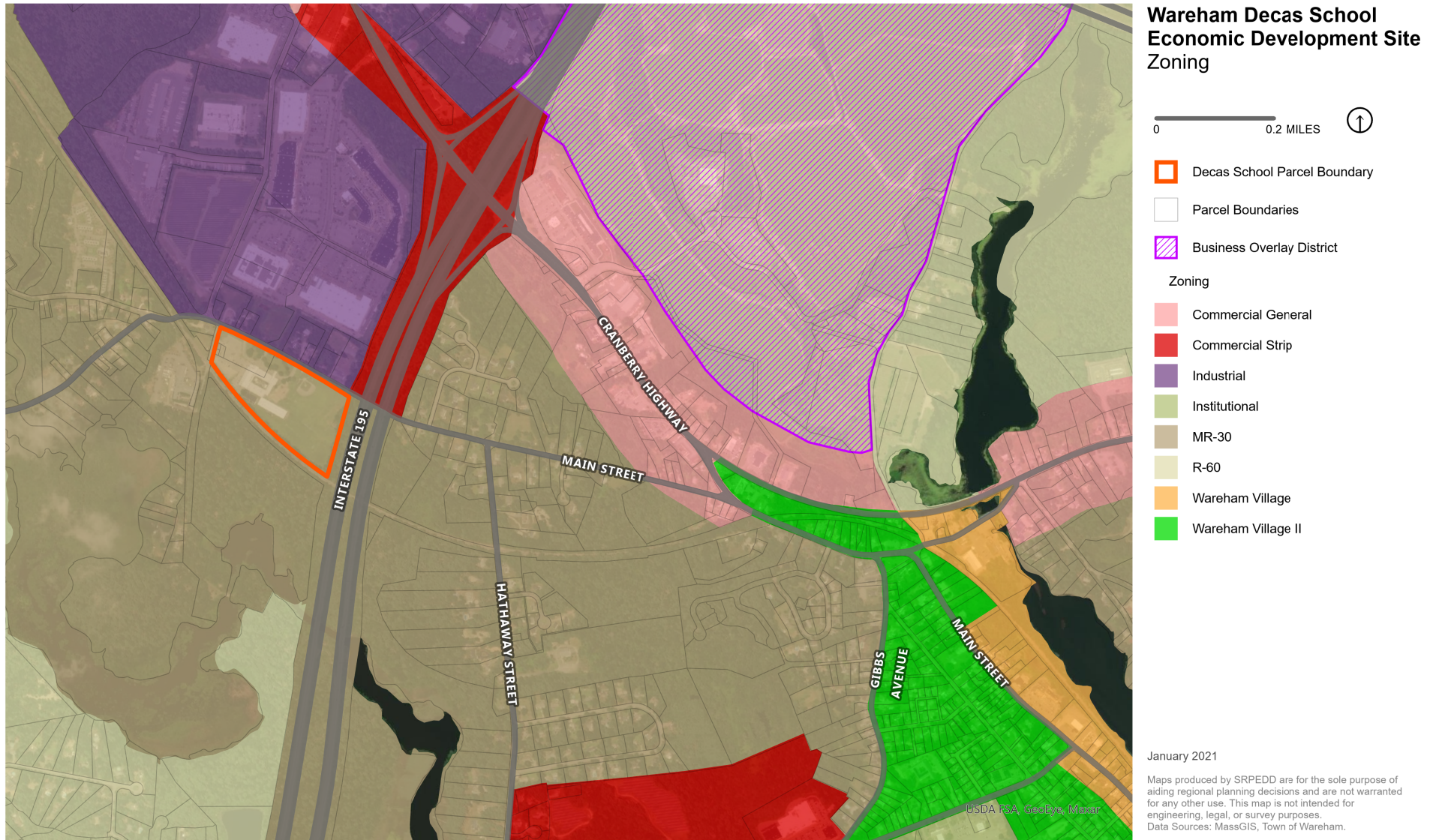
- Parcel Boundaries
- Structures
- Wetland

January 2021

Maps produced by SRPEDD are for the sole purpose of aiding regional planning decisions and are not warranted for any other use. This map is not intended for engineering, legal, or survey purposes.
Data Sources: MassGIS, Town of Wareham.

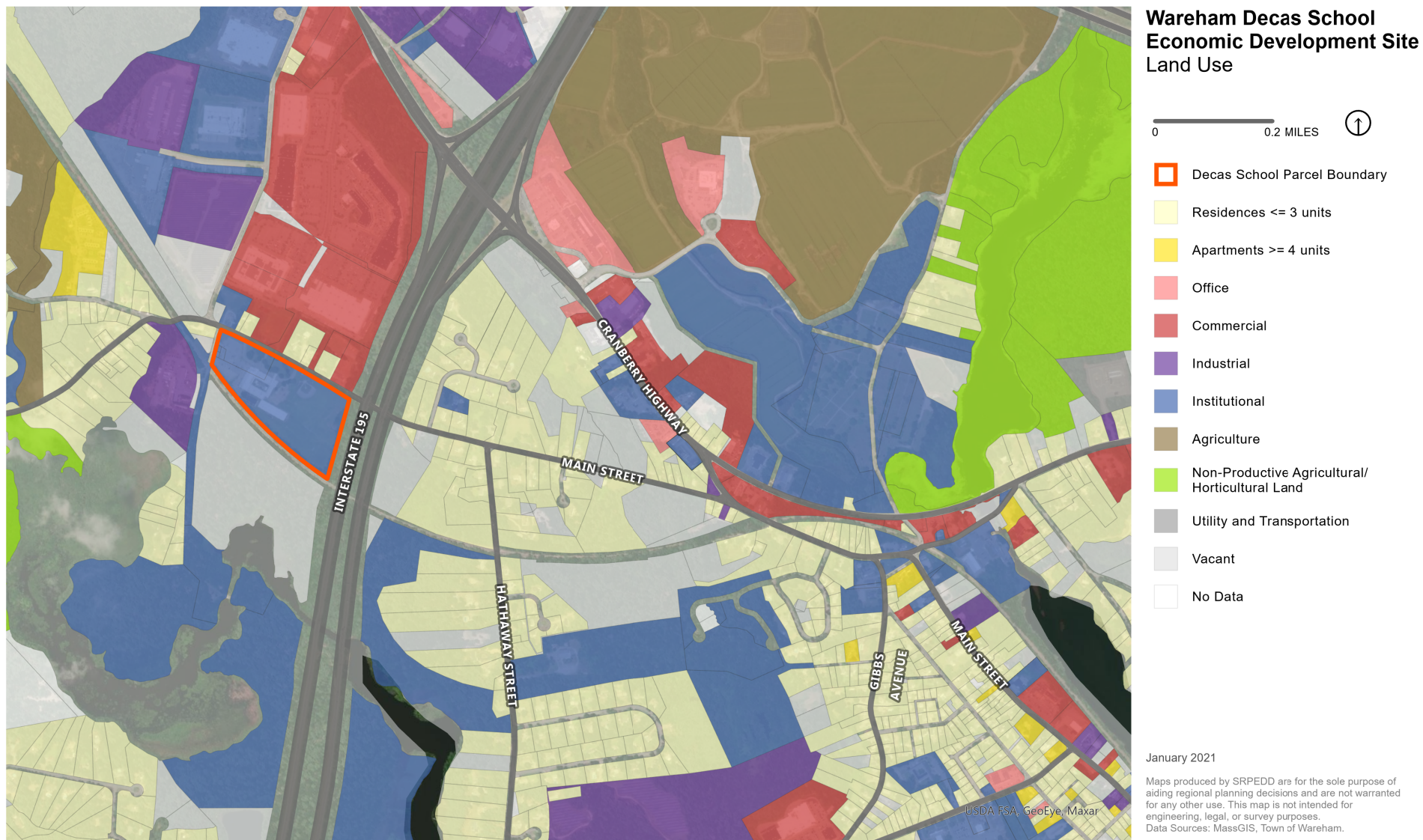
SITE MAP

The Decas School and its associated parking occupy roughly one-half of its 15.5-acre site. The site is bound by Main Street to the north, Interstate 195 to the east, the State-owned rail road right of way to the south, and Station Street to the west. The Smithers/Viscient facility (shaped like a capital H) is located directly to the west of the site, across Station Street. Large building footprints on the southernmost edge of Wareham Crossing are visible to the north.



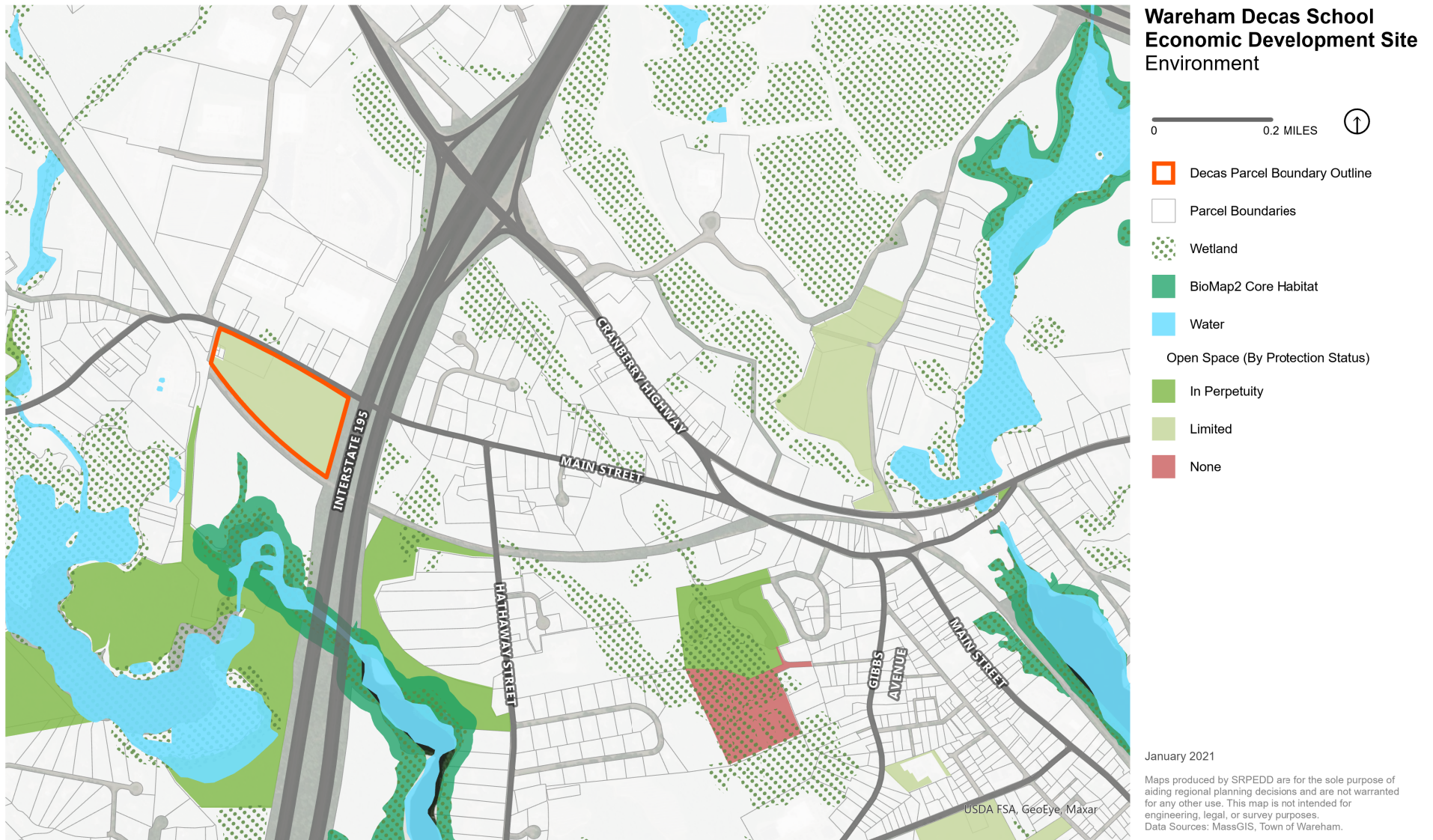
ZONING

The Decas School (outlined here - and in all subsequent maps - in orange) is within a Multi-Family Residential (MR-30) zoning district. Immediately to the north, Wareham Crossing appears in the Industrial (I) zone. The nearby Commercial General zone and Business Development Overlay District (BDOD) cover the recent Rosebrook Way and South Coast Health Developments (north of Cranberry Highway). In general, these more intensive business uses characterize the study area and represent the site's immediate context.



LAND USE

The general pattern of more intensive, commercial uses around the Decas School appears again on this traditional land use map. Commercial uses (in red), industrial uses (in purple) and vacant land (in gray) surround the site. While there are some residences (in light yellow) between the site and Wareham Crossing, most densely settled, well established neighborhoods are at some distance from the school and are separated by physical barriers (e.g. Interstate 195).



ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

According to MassGIS “Protected and Recreational Open Space” data, the Decas School site has “limited” protection status. However, this appears to be due only to the presence of existing recreation fields and the fact that the property is owned by the Wareham School Board. In other words, further research did not reveal article 97 or other restrictions on redevelopment potential. There are no wetlands on the site.



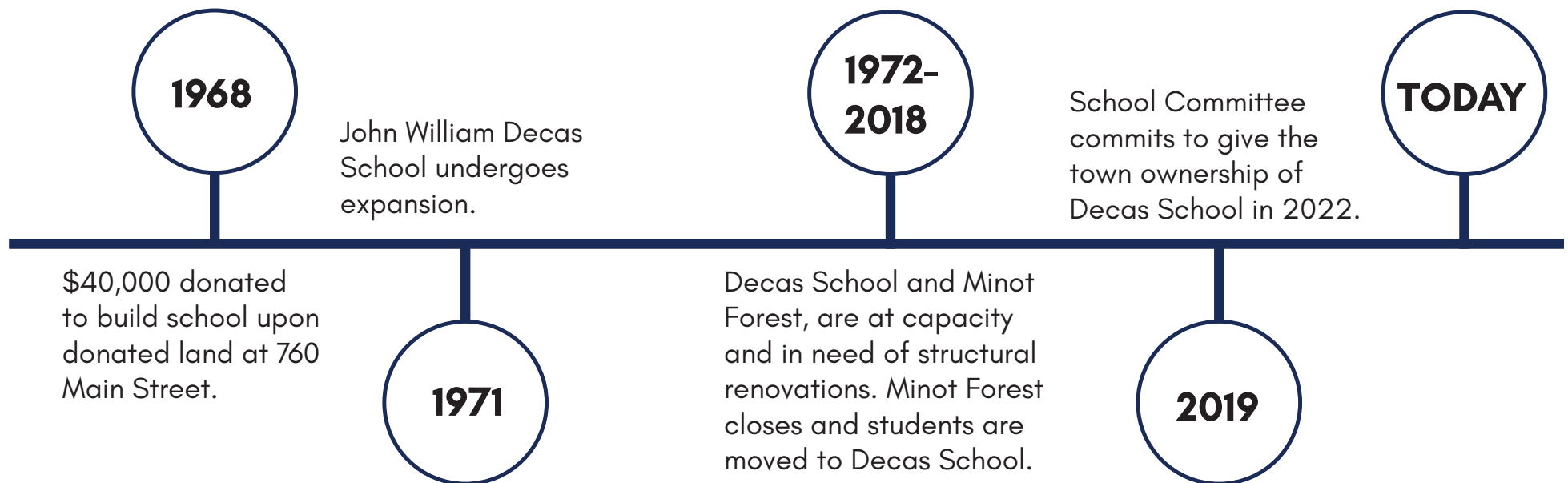
HAZARDS

While the beautiful tidal Weweantic River makes a close approach to the site, the associated FEMA AE/1% ("one-hundred year") flood plains do not affect the property.

The existing school building has a moderate asbestos liability, which increases the estimated demolition costs to approximately \$1M; some asbestos remediation has already been completed.

SITE HISTORY & BACKGROUND

TIMELINE



SITE HISTORY (AND EXISTING CONDITIONS SUMMARY)

The project team also researched and summarized the Decas School's past to provide context for all discussions of and plans for its future reuse.

The Existing Conditions analysis concludes that the site has no major constraints and is well positioned for redevelopment.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND MARKET SUMMARY

The town's 2019 *Economic Development Strategy* (EDS) served as the principal source of local market information that informed the report. In addition to the data highlighted in the EDS, the project team consulted prior local, regional, and national planning to establish a clear market for redevelopment and to identify and describe the need for that redevelopment. The main findings of this "Needs Assessment" are summarized here.

- Wareham has experienced recent population growth (approximately 10% from 2000 to 2015); those growth rates are higher than rates in the Commonwealth, as a whole, and in the SRPEDD region over the same period. Growth is projected to continue.¹
- Wareham has likewise experienced recent (pre-pandemic) job growth that is projected to continue to translate into demand for commercial, office, and industrial space.² This report

explores demand for office and manufacturing "flex space" in more detail on page 10.

- The Wareham EDS establishes demand for other uses explored by this report's various build-out scenarios; these include health care and office uses.³
- Existing town planning documents, including the 2016 *Town of Wareham Route 28 Economic Development Study* and the 2017 *Master Plan* target Route 28 (west of I-195), Tobey Road, and the Decas School's immediate context for economic development.⁴ Further, in addition to economic development, this site has been considered for complementary uses, such as a commuter rail station.
- The nearby Business Development Overlay District (BDOD) has enabled significant recent growth in Wareham, including Rosebrook Way's mixed-use development⁵ and a 70,000 s.f.

SouthCoast Health facility (constructed in 2010).

- The adjacent Federal Opportunity Zone⁶ offers connections to larger national policy goals and seeks to improve economic outcomes for low-income residents in that Census Tract. Wareham's median household income of approximately \$65,000⁷ is well below its neighbors, the region, and MA, as a whole.
- Anecdotally, the neighboring Smithers/Viscient facility - literally across Station Street from the Decas School - provides evidence of market activity and demand for "Office-Using Lab/Flex Space" - the *Preferred Scenario*. Interviews with local officials indicate that similar firms have made informal inquiries about the future of the Decas School site.

assisted living, and medical uses.

6 The Opportunity Zone (OZ) Program was created by the U.S. Tax Cut and Jobs Act of 2017. Its goal is to incentive investment in low income communities throughout the country. State Governors nominated eligible census tracts for participation in the federal program. The site is approximately one-quarter mile outside of an OZ covering downtown Wareham.

7 According to Census data the most up to date figure for median income in Wareham is \$65,825 with a 10.4% poverty rate. MA stands at 85,843 with a 9.4% poverty rate.

Workforce Development; Wareham's Economic Development Strategy (EDS), SRPEDD's Data Center.

3 Wareham Economic Development Strategy (EDS) page 26/Fig. 12, page 36/Table 7, and page 51.

4 Please note that both plans pre-date the School Committee's decision to decommission the Decas School; otherwise this site would likely have been identified for reuse and redevelopment by those plans, as well.

5 Rosebrook Way includes retail, office, hotel, apartments,

.....
1 U.S. Census Bureau; UMass Donahue Growth Projections; SRPEDD's 2020 Regional Transportation Plan; <https://srpedd.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2020-RTP-Appendix-B-Trends-Projections-and-Patterns-071619.pdf>;

2 Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and

WAREHAM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Industry Trends – Demand for “Office-Using” and Manufacturing Space

Projected Space Demand Based on Historical Employment Trends		
	Projected New Jobs	Projected Space Demand (SF)
Information	(14)	(3,525)
Finance & Insurance	63	15,750
Real Estate & Rental Leasing	47	11,784
Professional, Scientific, & Technical	48	12,090
Administrative & Support	(21)	(5,191)
<i>Office-Using Subtotal</i>	<i>124</i>	<i>30,907</i>
Manufacturing	66	32,831
Total Associated Demand	190	63,735

“Flex space is considered by local brokers and developers to represent an opportunity for expansion in Wareham. Because it can be adapted to different uses in ways that traditional industrial space typically cannot, flex space commands a higher rent and is therefore more feasible to develop”

SPACE DEMAND

Page 36/Table 7 and page 50 and of the 2019 Wareham *Economic Development Strategy* (EDS) (summarized in the above graphic) help make the case for “Office-Using Lab/Flex Space” - the *Preferred Scenario* identified by this Needs Assessment.

REDEVELOPMENT SCENARIOS

Working in close consultation with the WRA,¹ the project team used guidance from the Existing Conditions Analysis and Needs Assessment to identify and explore examples of regional developments that were plausible for the Decas site's future re-use. Basing future "Scenarios" on these regional examples allows the work to remain grounded in a range of real world expectations (e.g. availability of relevant expertise in the regional labor pool, expected job densities per use type, realistic values per s.f. of built space, and anticipated infrastructure needs).

Once the team identified these examples, it sampled several key characteristics, resulting in the following measurements:

- Year Built
- Building Area
- Lot Size
- Number of Floors

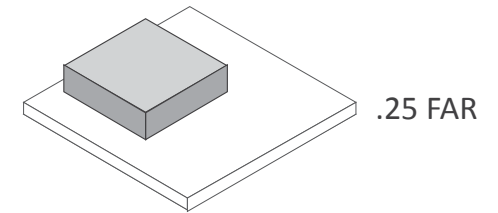
.....
1 Staff held several working sessions with and made two formal presentations to the WRA during the course of this project

- Floor-Area Ratio (FAR)²
- Building Value
- Value per s.f.
- Jobs
- Jobs per s.f.

Armed with these numbers, the team could then conduct the following thought experiment: "If you were to redevelop the Decas School site like this, what would you get?" In other words, by applying an example development's measured FAR to the Decas parcel, the team could estimate a potential building size if the property were built at the same intensity; and from that building size, the team could estimate various "indicators" (benefits and costs).

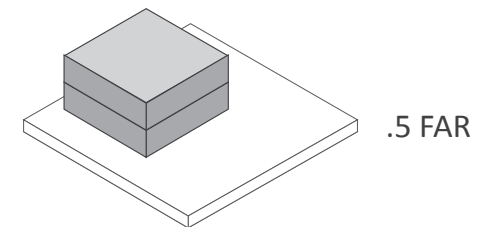
The following pages of this report present these Scenarios, created using City Engine and SketchUp and visualized in ArcGIS. Detailed estimates of their indicators appear in the table and assumptions on pages 17 through 19. A summary of the WRA's *Preferred Scenario* - High Intensity "Office-Using Lab/Flex Space" - appears on pages 14, with a more detailed visualization on page 20.

.....
2 FAR is a measure of density calculated by dividing the built area of a parcel (its "floor") by the land area of the same parcel (its "area"). This results in a ratio where the higher FARs indicate more densely built parcels. Please see the illustrations to the right.



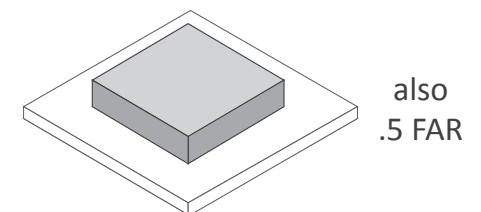
.25 FAR

a 2,500 s.f. building on a 10,000 s.f. parcel



.5 FAR

a 5,000 s.f. building on a 10,000 s.f. parcel



also
.5 FAR

a 5,000 s.f. building on a 10,000 s.f. parcel

Illustrations of Floor-Area Ratio (FAR) - a key variable in creating Redevelopment Scenarios.

HIGH-INTENSITY HEALTH CARE CAMPUS

South Coast Health
Wareham, MA

Built: 2010

Building Area: 69,901 s.f.

Lot Size: 6.7 acres

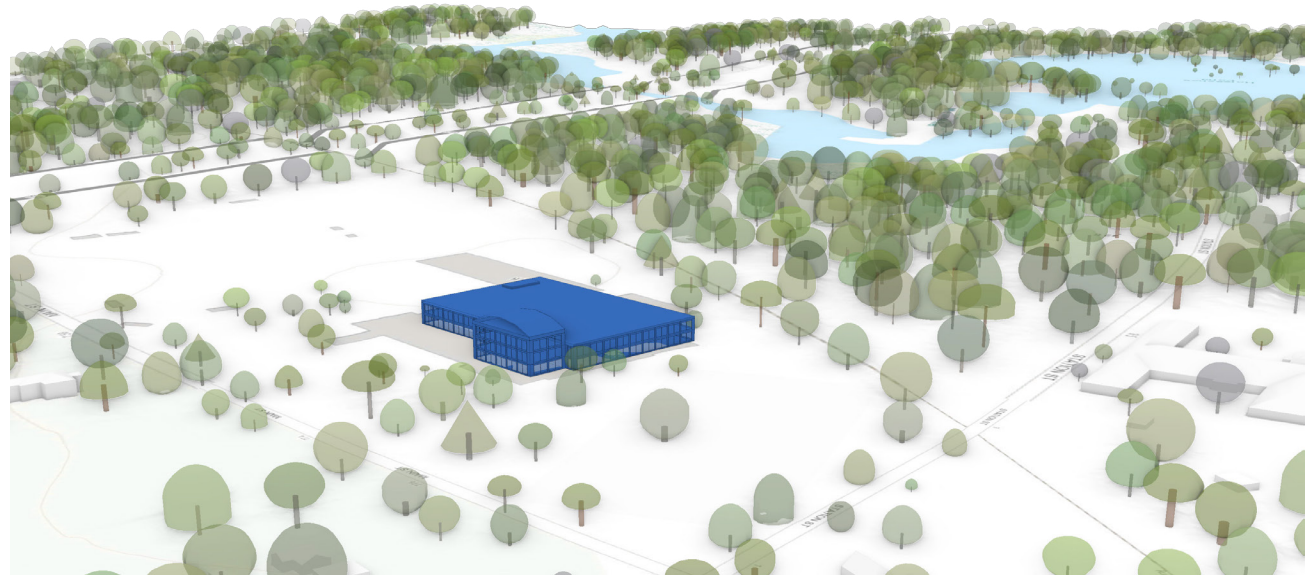
Floors: 3

FAR: 0.24

Building Value: \$7,793,700

Value per S.F.: \$111

Jobs Estimate: 250



“If you were to redevelop Decas like a
South Coast Health ...”

185,000 S.F.
\$227,00 Annual Tax Revenue
300 Jobs

LOW-INTENSITY HEALTH CARE CAMPUS

*Boston Children's
Dartmouth, MA*

Built: 2015

Building Area: 16,056 s.f.

Lot Size: 2.5 acres

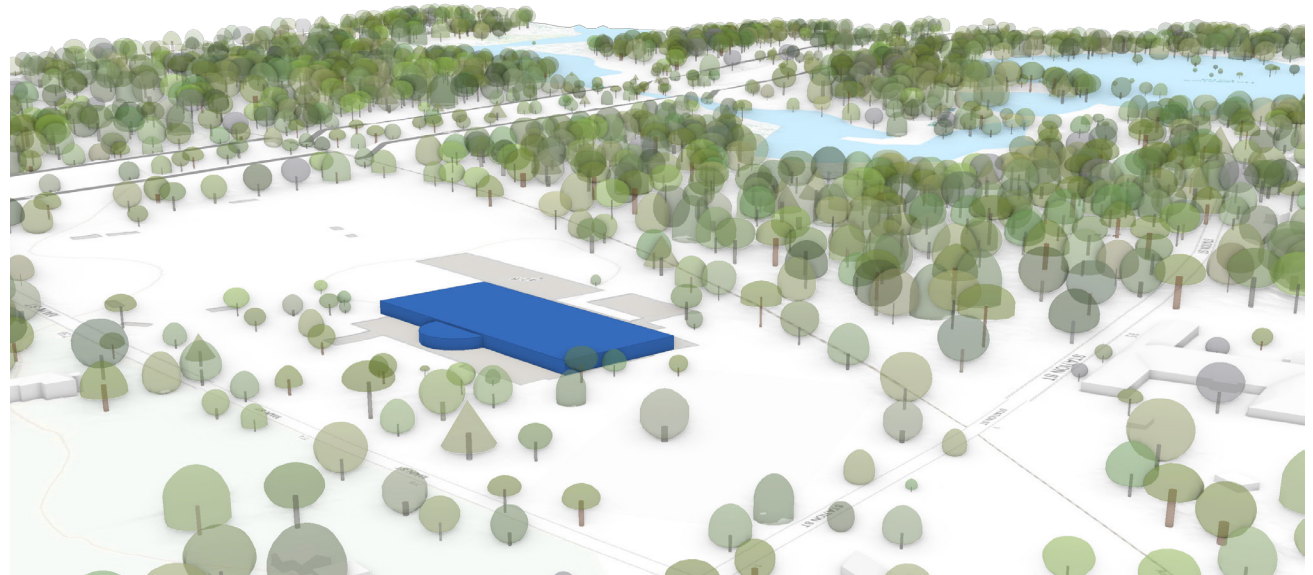
Floors: 1

FAR: 0.15

Building Value: \$3,051,400

Value per S.F.: \$190

Jobs Estimate: 80



"If you were to redevelop Decas like a
Boston Children's (Dartmouth) ..."

113,000 S.F.

\$236,000 Annual Tax Revenue

180 Jobs

HIGH-INTENSITY LAB/FLEX SPACE (PREFERRED)

Sensata Tech
Attleboro, MA

Built: 2005

Building Area: 228,378 s.f.

Lot Size: 17.88 acres

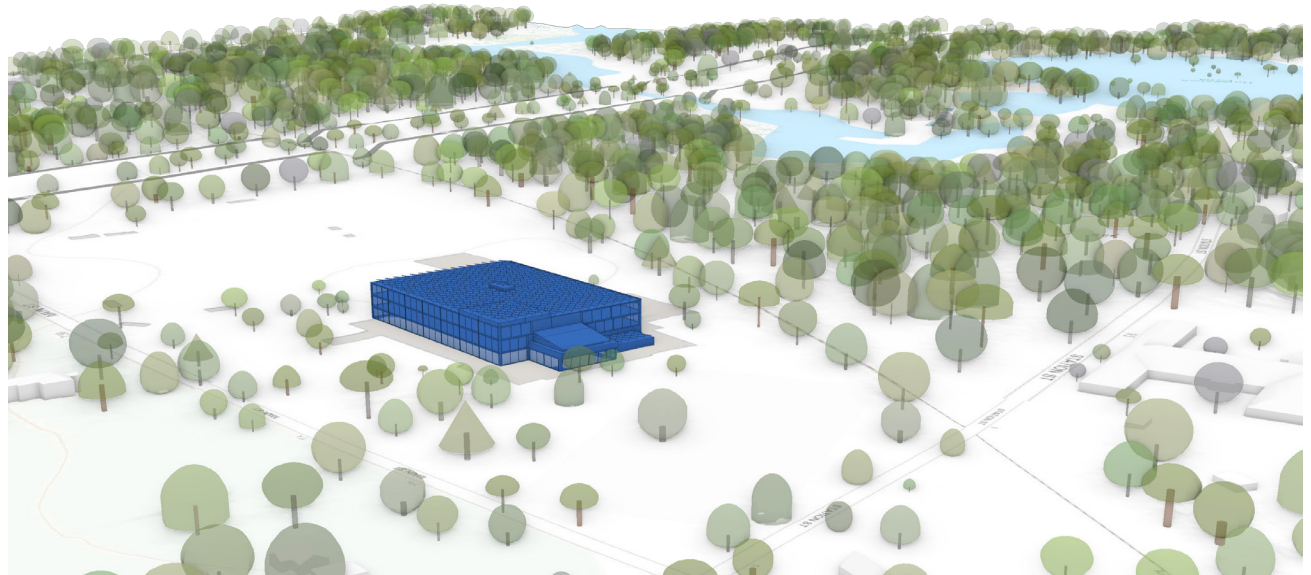
Floors: 3

FAR: 0.21

Building Value: \$26,696,300

Value per S.F.: \$117

Jobs Estimate: 1,200



“If you were to redevelop Decas like a
Sensata Tech ...”

204,000 S.F.

\$262,000 Annual Tax Revenue

330 Jobs

LOW-INTENSITY LAB/FLEX SPACE

Lockheed Martin
Marion, MA

Built: 1969

Building Area: 148,200 s.f.

Lot Size: 22.5 acres

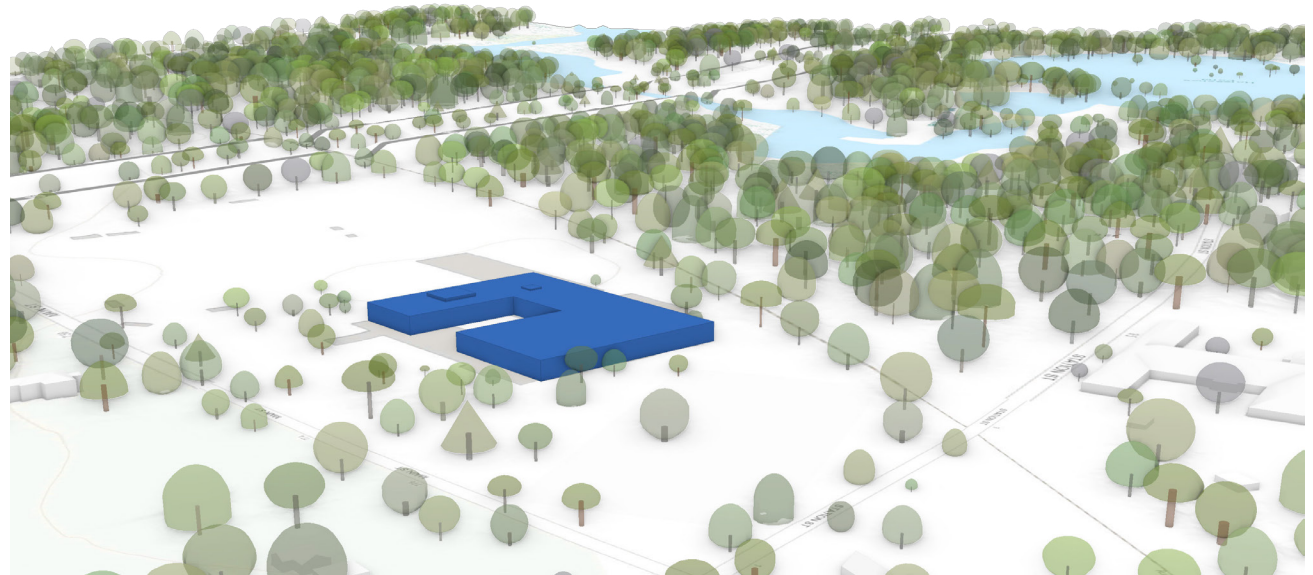
Floors: 1

FAR: 0.15

Building Value: \$6,694,500

Value per S.F.: \$45

Jobs Estimate: 300



"If you were to redevelop Decas like a
Lockhead Martin ..."

117,000 S.F.

\$58,000 Annual Tax Revenue

190 Jobs

HIGH-INTENSITY OFFICE/WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

UMass Center for I&E
Fall River, MA

Built: 2001

Building Area: 60,358 s.f.

Lot Size: 3.8 acres

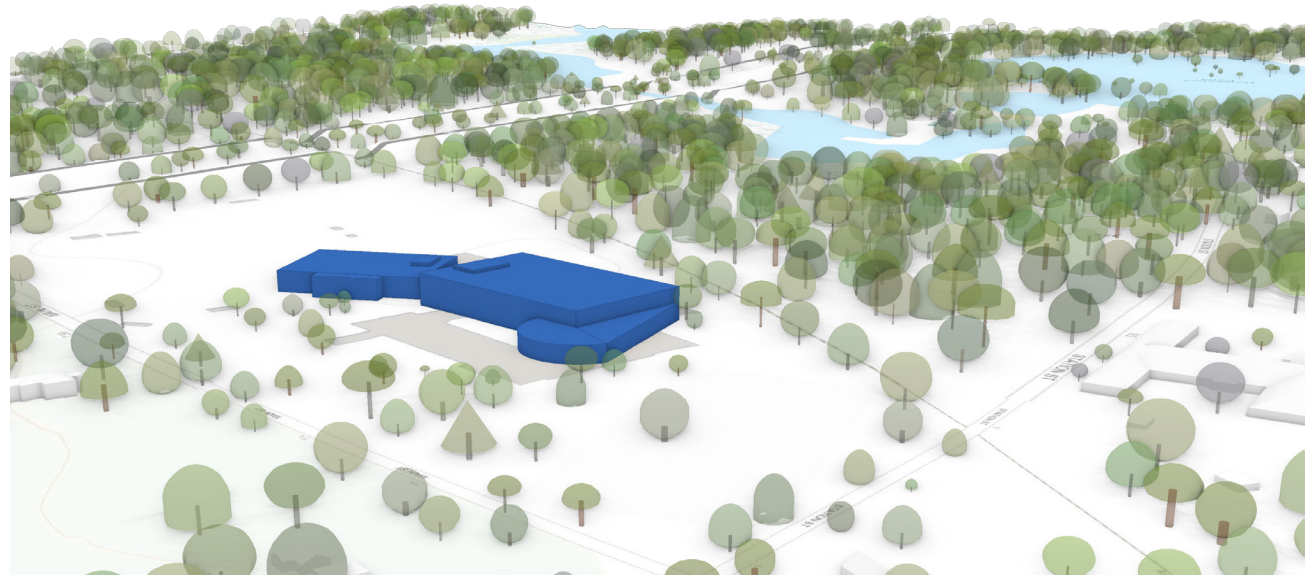
Floors: 2

FAR: 0.36

Building Value: \$4,415,000

Value per S.F.: \$73

Jobs Estimate: 150



“If you were to redevelop Decas like a
UMass Center for I&E ...”

279,000 S.F.

\$224,000 Annual Tax Revenue

450 Jobs

	High-Intensity Health Care Campus South Coast Health	Low-Intensity Health Care Campus Boston Children's	High-Intensity Lab/Flex Space Sensata Tech	Low-Intensity Lab/Flex Space Lockhead Martin	High-Intensity Office and Workforce Development Umass Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship	Current Use Decas School	Formula
Example FAR	0.24	0.15	0.22	0.15	0.36	0.09	Observed
Example Commercial S.F.	69,901	16,056	228,378	148,200	60,358	68,028	Observed
Example Number of Jobs	250	80	1,200	300	150		Observed
Example Building Value per S.F.	\$111	\$190	\$117	\$45	\$73	\$91	Example Building Value/Example Commercial S.F.
Modelled Commercial S.F.	185,022	113,026	170,313	116,897	278,695		Decas Lot Size * Exanple FAR
Modelled Building Value	\$20,629,300	\$21,480,329	\$19,908,832	\$5,280,477	\$20,385,655		Example Value/S.F. * Modelled S.F.
Modelled Annual Tax Revenue	\$226,510	\$235,854	\$218,599	\$57,980	\$223,834		(Modelled Building Value / \$1000) * \$10.98
Modelled Jobs	296	181	273	187	446		(Modelled Commercial S.F. * 80% Efficiency) / S.F. per Job
Modelled Daily Vehicular Trips	2,446	1,494	1,187	815	2260	1050	(Modelled Commercial S.F. / 1000 S.F.) * Daily Trips
Modelled Daily Water Use/Waste Water Gen.	2,960	1,808	4,496	3,086	5,797	6,030	

Assumptions

Decas Lot Size	774,152
S.F. per Job	500
Commercial Tax Rate (Millage Rate)	\$10.98
Number of Students	603

Daily Trips per 1,000 sq. ft.

Light Industrial	6.97
Hospital	13.22
Elementary School	15.43
Research and Development	8.11

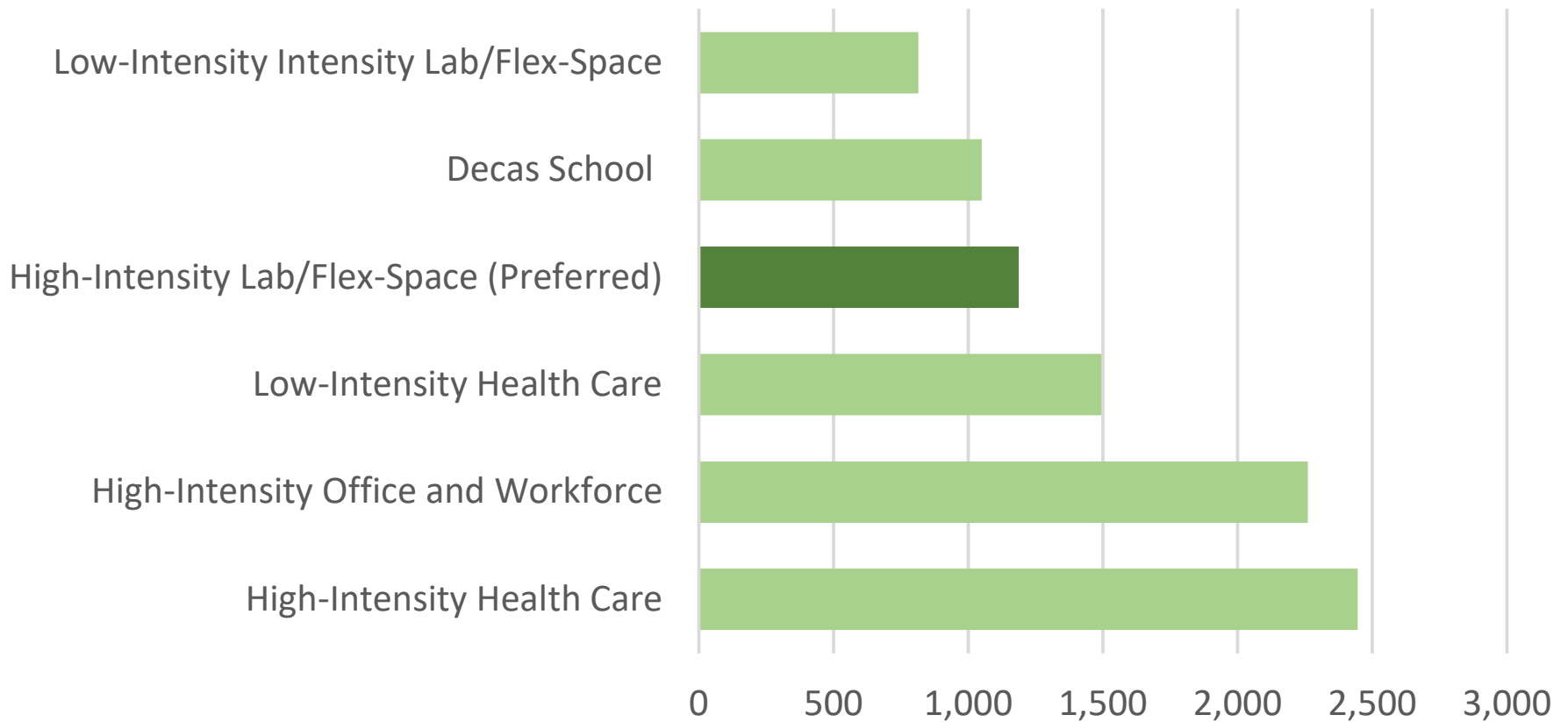
Water Use and Waste Water Gen. per Employee/Student

School (with cafeteria)	10
Industrial (sanitary only)	20
Office	13
Office/Industrial average	16.5
Hospital	10

SCENARIO INDICATORS (BENEFITS AND COSTS)

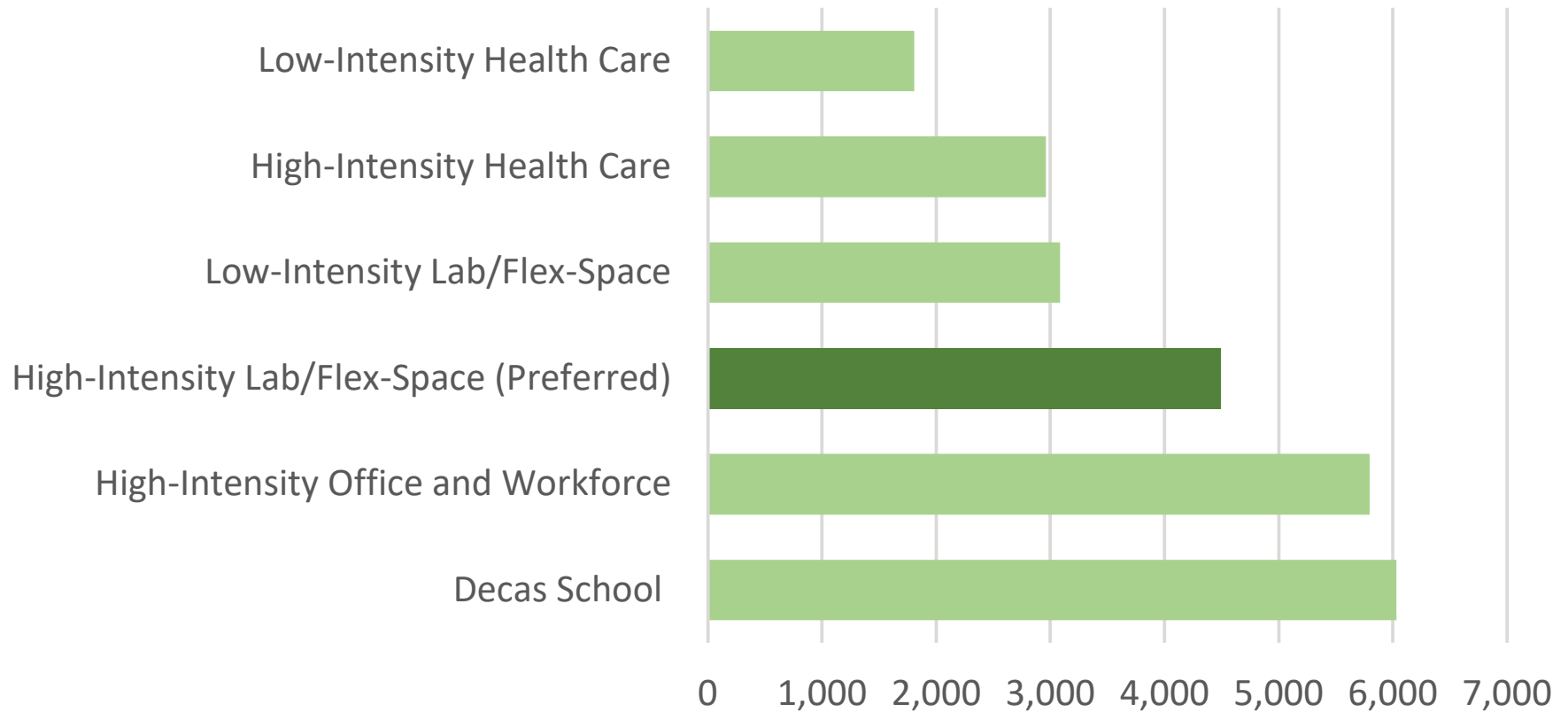
The above table shows all the math behind the development Scenarios. The calculations rely on observed measurements and industry standard assumptions. They allow the project team to provide a realistic estimate of all the benefits and costs that each Scenario might generate. Key impacts on area infrastructure - water/wastewater and roadways - appear in illustrations on the following pages, 18 and 19. No negative impacts or major infrastructure investments are anticipated for the *Preferred Scenario*.

The table illustrated above is available from the project web page - www.srpedd.org/Decas-School



MODELED DAILY VEHICULAR TRIPS

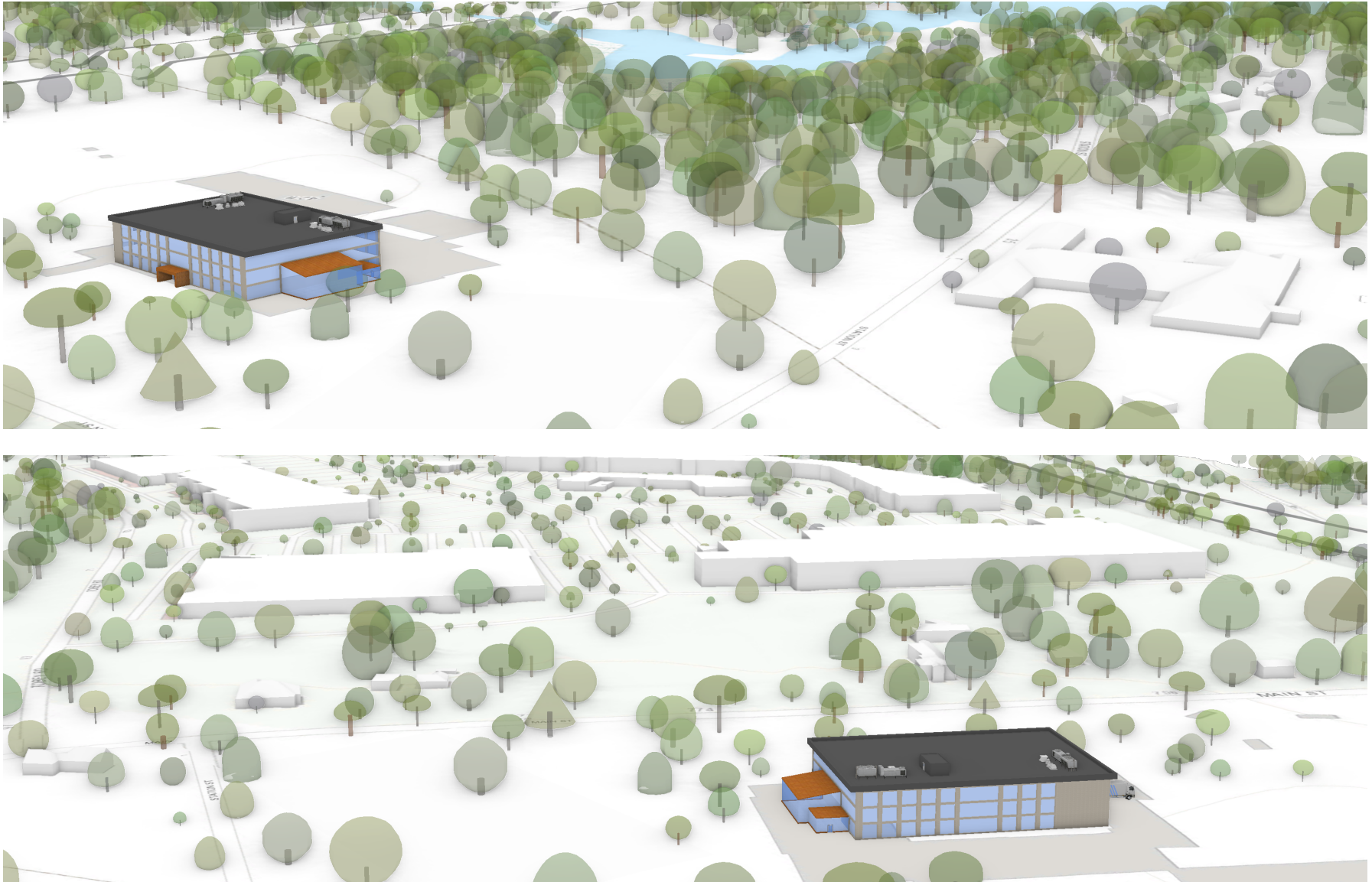
Analysis indicates that the *Preferred Scenario* (highlighted above in dark green) will generate slightly more trips on local roads than the existing, already fairly intensive (in terms of trip generation) elementary school use.



MODELED WATER/WASTEWATER USE (GALLONS PER DAY)

Similarly, since the Decas School is an already fairly high-intensity use (in terms of water and sewer “gallons per day”), analysis indicates that the *Preferred Scenario* (pictured above in dark green) will result in less demand on local services.

DECAS SCHOOL PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE



Top: Final draft renderings of the Preferred Scenario looking southeast; the more detailed architectural features are based on a Smithers/Viscient facility in Akron, OH. Bottom: the Preferred Scenario looking north to Wareham Crossing.

ACTION PLAN

Finally, the project team assembled a list of actions necessary to make the *Preferred Scenario* a reality. These are broadly outlined below, with detailed steps and timelines illustrated in the Action Plan on page 22.

An interactive version of the detailed Action Plan is available on the project web page - www.srpedd.org/Decas-School.

1. Zone the Site Business Development Overlay District - Current zoning on the Decas School site will need to be changed to enable the densities and uses envisioned by this study. The town's existing BDOD meets these needs. (Zoning should also cover all of "Wareham Crossing" to the north of the site.)
2. Transfer the site to Wareham Redevelopment Authority (WRA) ownership - The Decas School is currently owned by the School Board. In 2019, the School Committee formalized the process by which ownership of the school would be transferred to the town. Based on the study's recommendations, ***the town should transfer ownership to the WRA as soon as possible.***
3. Develop Incentive Program - To bring the Preferred Alternative to life, the town and its partners should pursue specific incentive strategies to incentivize private investments in town.
4. Prepare the site for redevelopment - The study explores a variety of scenarios, but each envisions a new development. As such, to move forward with any of the recommendations, the town should take steps to prepare the site for development, including razing the existing structure.

Action Item	Description	Winter 2021	Spring 2021	Summer 2021	Fall 2021	Winter 2022	Spring 2022	Summer 2022	Fall 2022	Winter 2023	Spring 2023	Summer 2023
Zone the site Business Development Overlay District (BDOD)	Current zoning on the Decas School site will need to be changed to enable the densities and uses envisioned by this study. The town's existing BDOD meets these needs. (Zoning should also cover all of "Wareham Crossing" to the north of the site.)											
Public Education and Outreach	Conduct outreach to ensure a successful Town Meeting vote											
Spring Town meeting 2021 (STM 21)	Fall Town Meeting 2021 (FTM 21) can serve as a "rain date"		STM 21		FTM 21							
Transfer the site to Wareham Redevelopment Authority (WRA) ownership	The Decas School is currently owned by the School Board. In 2019, the School Committee formalized the process by which ownership of the school would be transferred to the town. Based on the study's recommendations, the town should transfer ownership to the WRA as soon as possible .								possible time savings			
Public Education and Outreach	Conduct outreach to ensure a successful Town Meeting votes											
Transfer ownership from the School Board to Board of Selectmen (BOS) at Spring Town Meeting 2022 (STM 22); potential direct transfer to WRA	-						STM 22					
If necessary, Fall Town Meeting 2022 (FTM 22) transfers ownership from the BOS to the WRA	-								FTM 22			
Develop Incentive Program	To bring the Preferred Alternative to life, the town and its partners should pursue specific incentive strategies to incentivize private investments in town.											
Develop and Issue Request for Interest (RFI)	Issue RFI											
Calibrate the Incentive Program based on private sector interest	-											
Explore further infrastructure Investments (Optional)	At this time, it does not appear that further water, sewer, or roadway investments are necessary for the redevelopment scenarios											
Issue Request for Responses (RFR)	Working with private partners, the WRA lays the groundwork to dispose of the property											
WRA sells the property subsequent to RFR	-											
Tax Increment Financing (TIF; Optional)	Complete the TIF process with private partner											
Chapter 43D (Optional)	Either the WRA (at Fall Town Meeting 2022) or the private land owner (at Spring Town Meeting 2023) could optionally designate the site a Chapter 43D PDS.								FTM 22		STM 23	
Prepare the site for redevelopment	The study recommends a variety of scenarios, but each envisions a new development. As such, to move forward with any of the recommendations, the town should take steps to prepare the site for development, including razing the existing structure.								possible time savings			
Secure CDBG, MassDevelopment, or other funding to raze the existing structure; estimated \$1M	Refine necessary demolition costs and potential funding sources; have these applications/funds in place for WRA ownership								time			
Raze the existing structure	-								savings			
Optionally subdivide the property to allow for Public Safety use in addition to Preferred economic development Scenario	-											
WRA sells the property	-											
Private redevelopment begins	-											

CONCLUSION

The Decas School site represents an opportunity to foster economic development in the town of Wareham and the adjacent Opportunity Zone, achieving local and national goals in the process. The site's characteristics, coupled with the market conditions and forecasted demand, offer promising opportunities for new development across a wide range of scenarios. Though each scenario offers job growth and increased tax revenue, high-intensity lab/flex space demands a higher value for its adaptability, offering the most competitive benefits for both prospective developers and the town of Wareham.

To achieve the recommendations and any of the scenarios, the study lays out an action plan. This path to private development is aided by the lack of site or capacity constraints, in addition to nearby existing zoning that would be appropriately applied to this site.