



**Report**  
**Martha's Vineyard**  
**Regional High School**  
**Feasibility Study**  
Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts

*Cultural Resources*  
*Due Diligence Assessment*

**Redacted Version-**  
**Does not Contain Sensitive**  
**Archaeological Site Information**

*December 2024*

Submitted to:

**Tappé Architects**  
40 Water Street, Third Floor  
Boston, MA 02109-3604

---

The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL) has completed a Cultural Resources Due Diligence Assessment as part of a study at the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS) in Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts (Figure 1). The MVRHS is undertaking a feasibility study to select a renovation or rebuild project within the existing approximately 60-acre high school property (Figure 2). The design-build project is eligible to receive state funding from the Massachusetts School Building Authority and will likely require federal and/or state environmental review and/or permits. The project will also be reviewed by the Martha's Vineyard Commission as a Development of Regional Impact. Tisbury, Massachusetts.

The project may be subject to review by federal, state, and municipal agencies including the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC). The Project may require compliance with federal and state regulations pertaining to historic preservation such as Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended; and Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 9, Sections 26-27C and regulations that guide MHC review of state funded, licensed, and permitted projects (950 CMR 70, 71).

The goal of the desktop cultural resources due diligence review was to collect information about previously identified archaeological resources within and in the vicinity of the project area; to document past land use history, previous disturbance and existing conditions; and to produce an archaeological sensitivity assessment of the areas where ground disturbance may occur. The assessment includes recommendations on the need for and scope of additional archaeological investigations that may be requested as part of potential development review by local, state and/or federal permitting or funding agencies and/or local historic preservation regulations.

## Project Area Description

The MVRHS project area includes two contiguous parcels that form a trapezoid bisected northeast to southwest by Sanderson Avenue. The area is bounded on the north by the Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road, on the south by the Oak Bluffs/Edgartown town line and the boundary of the Manuel F. Correllus State Forest, and on the east and west by woodlands and residential development (see Figure 1). The western project parcel includes the existing high school structure, paved parking areas, and an athletic track. The eastern parcel includes additional paved parking areas, paved sports courts, and multiple grass and sand athletic fields. Areas of undeveloped oak forest woodland are located along the eastern, southeastern, southwestern, and western parcel boundaries (Figure 2).

The entire project area is level with elevations that range from approximately 88 feet above sea level (ft asl) in the northeastern section to approximately 70 ft asl along the southern boundary. Soils across the majority of the project area are classified as Riverhead sandy loam with 0 to 3 percent slopes formed in glacial outwash, although the area surrounding the high school building complex is classified as Urban Land (USDA 2024). No wetlands are present within or within .5 miles of the project area.

## Results of the Inventory File and Research Review

The research review included a search of the Massachusetts Historical Commission's (MHC) *Inventory of the Historic and Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth* (MHC Inventory) using the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) database to identify archaeological sites, inventoried historic properties, and/or surveys completed in the vicinity of the project area. The study area established for the purposes of the assessment was broadly defined to provide information about the types of resources known and expected to be located within the vicinity of the project area. For archaeological resources, the study area was established as a one half mile boundary around the project corridor and for aboveground resources at one quarter of a mile.

Archaeological sites within the study area include eight pre-contact sites and one post-contact site within the towns of Oak Bluffs and Edgartown. The Girdlestone Trotting Park Site (OAK-HA-15) is recorded in the MHC Inventory in the approximate location of the high school building complex. The site documents a recreational harness-racing track that opened in 1873 and operated through the first decade of the twentieth century between (Baer 2014; Stoddard 1980). The *Centennial History of Cottage City* notes that the park was "located near where the Regional High School is today" (Stoddard 1980:85). Chris Baer, a Vineyard historian and MVRHS teacher, more precisely identifies Girdlestone Park as follows: "This popular half-mile circular racetrack, cut out of the scrub oak by local farmer George Smith, was located off Barnes Road not far from the present-day roundabout. Remains of the foundations of the viewing stands can still be seen from the road between the two entrances to Deer Run" (Baer 2014). The racetrack does not appear on any nineteenth or early twentieth historic or topographic maps examined as part of the due diligence, so the full extent of the racing complex and configurator of the half-mile racetrack could not be confirmed. The general site area was visited during the 1999 archaeological survey which reported that it "has been disturbed or destroyed by construction of the high school. The site is not eligible for inclusion in the National Register" (Mulholland et al. 1999:73).

The northerly portion of the MVRHS project area is within the Martha's Vineyard American Revolution Battlefield area (OAK.AC), a historic inventory area that documents the route of a British raid on Martha's Vineyard in September 1778. General Charles Grey sailed into Vineyard Haven Harbor and landed 150 men who marched to Chilmark along a route that included the present-day Edgartown- Vineyard Road. Known as "Grey's Raid," the men gathered sheep, oxen, and other livestock; food; weapons; and money, all of which were confiscated and taken away when the British fleet sailed out of port five days later. There are no specific recorded resources or historic properties within the MVRHS project area that are associated with this event, other than the general overland route which the British soldiers followed.

A review of eighteenth through twentieth century historic and topographic maps did not identify any improvements or structures or structures within the project area prior to the construction of the original high school building in 1959 (e.g. Bache 1846; Crapo 1830; Smith 1795; Walker 1891; Walling 1858).

### **Archaeological Sensitivity Assessment**

The results of the inventory file review, background research, and existing conditions review were used to develop a preliminary archaeological sensitivity assessment and predictive statements concerning the potential for the presence of pre- and post-contact cultural resources within the MVRHS project area. Pre-contact archaeological sensitivity was determined by assessing key environmental attributes, the presence of documented archaeological sites within and adjacent to the project area, and the likely degree of disturbance. Key environmental attributes are proximity to fresh or salt water, well-drained soils, and level topography. Numerous large-scale surveys have determined that historic EuroAmerican sites are not directly correlated with specific environmental variables and that documentary information is not always accurate. As a result, documentary research used in conjunction with an evaluation of the physical condition of a project area and the presence of visible sites is the most useful approach to determining the sensitivity of a project area. Post-contact (Native and EuroAmerican) archaeological sensitivity was determined by assessing information collected during the file review, historic research, and historic map review. Table 1 presents the criteria used to assess archaeological sensitivity.

The existing conditions plan review determined that the majority of the project area has been extensively disturbed and has a low archaeological sensitivity (see Figure 2). The existing high school building was constructed in 1959 with additions in the 1979 and 1995 (Tappé Architects 2016). In addition to the ground disturbance caused during the various construction periods, the structural complex is surrounded by landscaped yard areas and paved parking and access areas (see Figure 3). The southwestern project area contains an oval athletic track situated above the former septic system for the school is located (Tappé Architects 2016). The eastern half of the project area largely consists of constructed and maintained athletic fields including dirt and grass ball diamonds, grassy sports courts, paved tennis courts, and track and field courts. A number of ancillary structures are located in this parcel along with additional impervious parking and access areas. These areas have almost certainly been graded and/or filled and likely belowground disturbance includes electric and water utility lines.

**Table 1. Environmental and Cultural Variables Used to Determine Archaeological Sensitivity, MVRHS Project Area.**

Presence of Sites		Proximity to Favorable Cultural/Environmental Characteristics			Degree of Disturbance			Sensitivity Ranking
Known	Unknown	< 150 m	≥ 150 ≤ 500 m	> 500 m	None/Minimal	Moderate	Extensive	
.		.			.			High
.		.				.		High
.		.					.	Low
.			.		.			High
.			.			.		High
.			.				.	Low
.				.	.			High
.				.		.		High
.				.			.	Low
	.	.			.			High
	.	.				.		Moderate
	.	.					.	Low
	.		.		.			Moderate
	.		.			.		Moderate
	.		.				.	Low
	.			.	.			Moderate
	.			.		.		Low
	.			.			.	Low

The southeastern, southwestern, and western margins of the MVRHS project area are undeveloped woodland. The background research did not identify any previous documented land use of these areas. They are assessed with a preliminary moderate archaeological sensitivity. No professional or academic archaeological survey or excavations have been completed in the general project vicinity, and in fact very few investigations have been conducted in the island's interior. Avocational collecting and professional survey and excavation have focused on the shoreline and the coastal ponds, and in the project vicinity this includes the Head of the Lagoon area in Oak Bluffs, northeast of the project area. As described above, a cluster of ancient Native American sites has been documented around the head of Lagoon Pond, but in a very different and much more diverse ecological setting than that found in the project area. Most of the information about Native American sites in the interior has come from materials collected by local residents and avocational archaeologists, often from freshly plowed fields which can turn up and expose artifacts.

The lack of any wetlands within or in the vicinity of the project area also limits the likelihood that it was used in the ancient past for more long-term and significant activities like habitation. If present, Native American archaeological deposits within the archaeologically sensitive areas would most likely consist of include chipped and/or groundstone tools, stone chipping debris (the by-product of stone tool manufacture). It is also possible, though less likely, that evidence of more intensive use of the project area could be present, including evidence of food remains (charred bones and seeds), and

features (hearths, food storage/disposal pits, and living areas including post molds from structures such as wetus).

The 1959 high school construction is the earliest recorded post-contact/historic activity in the project area, although it is possible that a portion of the ca. 1873 Girdlestone racetrack extends into the westernmost project area. Since the size and physical layout of the grounds is unknown, evidence of clearing, grading, or possibly even the racetrack itself could be present in the moderate sensitivity area along the northwestern project area boundary. Associated archaeological deposits could include items used and discarded at the track, including horse furniture and cart hardware and/or bottles, containers, pipes, and clothing items.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The inventory file review and background research determined that one previously recorded post-contact archaeological site may be located within the northwestern project area, although evidence of the ca. 1873 horse track would likely be limited. **Overall, the majority of the MVRHS project area has a low archaeological sensitivity based on the lack of previously recorded archaeological or historic resources, the lack of favorable environmental characteristics, and the degree of previous ground disturbance. These areas are shown on Figure 3 as unshaded and it is unlikely they have the potential to contain significant archaeological deposits. PAL recommends that if proposed high school redesign or construction activities are limited to the low sensitivity areas, they would be unlikely to affect historic or archaeological properties.**

**Undeveloped and wooded portions of the project area located primarily along the edges of the project area have been assessed with a preliminary moderate archaeological sensitivity and are shown in blue on Figure 3.** The preliminary assessment is based largely on the existing conditions map review that suggests these areas have not been disturbed and likely contain intact natural soils that could contain archaeological deposits. **If proposed high school redesign or construction activities are proposed for any areas of moderate sensitivity, PAL recommends that additional archaeological review of the project plans be completed.** Additional study would likely include (but not be limited to) a walkover or reconnaissance archaeological survey of the specific areas proposed for disturbance in order to refine the preliminary sensitivity assessment. The review would include recommendations regarding the need for and scope of any additional archaeological survey and/or testing, if necessary, which would need to be conducted under an archaeological permit, issued by the State Archaeologist's office at the MHC in compliance with M.G.L. Chapter 9, Sections 26-27C (950 CMR 70).

If the project will involve any federal or state agency funding, permitting, or licensing, it will be subject to review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended) and/or review by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (9560 CMR 70). The results of this due diligence report can be used by the proponents to facilitate consultation as part of any future cultural resources review.

## References

Bache, A.D.

1846 *East End of Martha's Vineyard from Cape Poge to East Chop*. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey.

Baer, Chris

2014 This Was Then: Girdlestone Park. *The Martha's Vineyard Times*, May 28, 2014. <https://www.mvtimes.com/2014/05/28/this-was-then-girdlestone-park/>

Crapo, Henry H.

1830 *A Map of Edgartown, Shire Town of Dukes Conty, Mass.* Digital Commonwealth, <https://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/25152j944> (accessed November 19, 2024).

Huntington, E. Gale

1959 An Archaeological Study from Martha's Vineyard. *The Dukes County Intelligencer*, Vol 1, No. 2.

Mahlstedt, Thomas

2003 *Archaeological Testing for Deer Barn and New Maintenance Barn, Manuel F. Correlus State Forest, Edgartown, Massachusetts*. Report on file, Massachusetts Historical Commission, Boston, MA.

Smith, Benjamin

1795 *Plan of the Towns of Edgartown and Tisbury*. On file, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA.

Stoddard, Chris

1980 *A Centennial History of Cottage City*. Oak Bluffs Historical Commission, Oak Bluffs, MA.

Tappé Architects

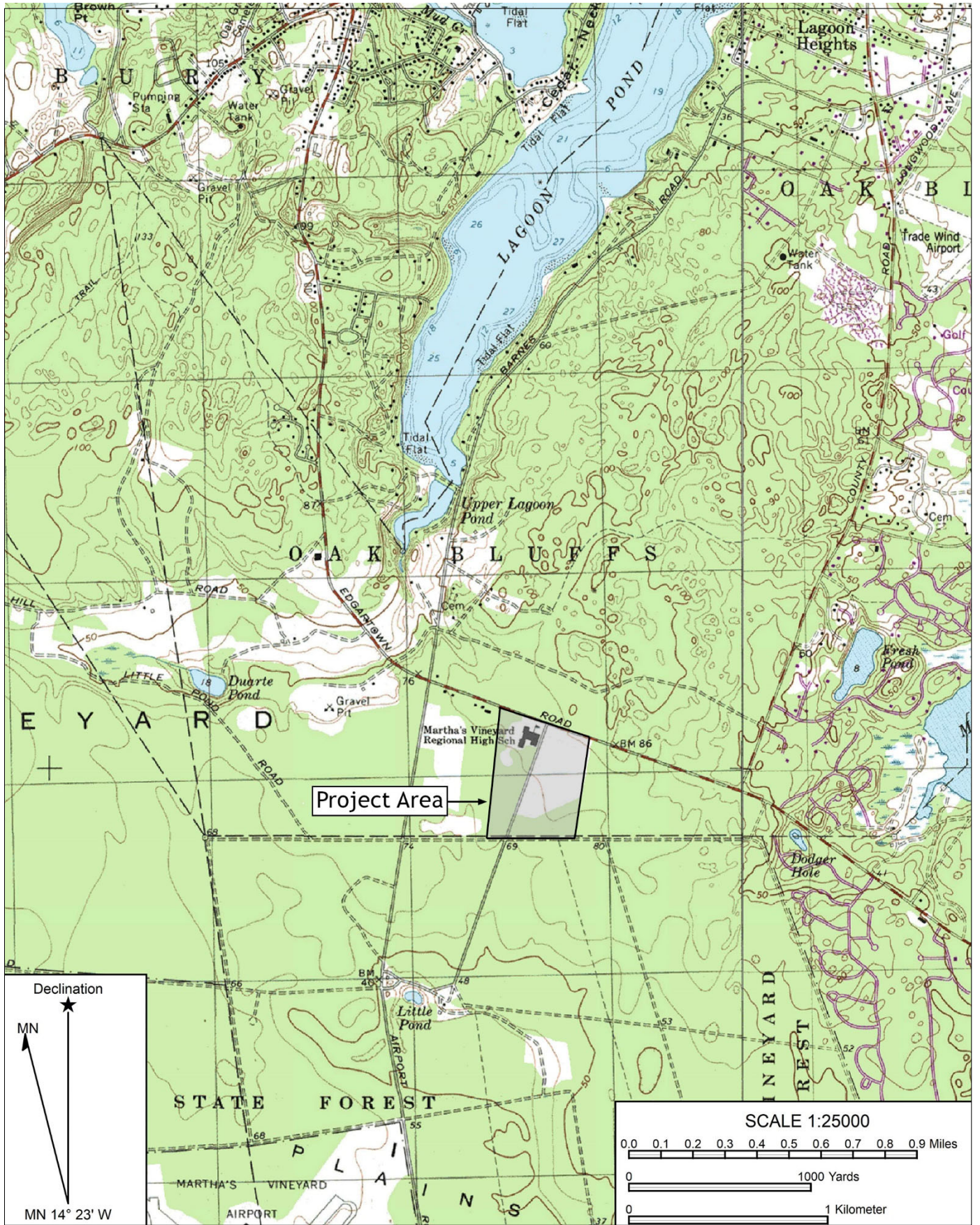
2016 *Martha's Vineyard Regional High School Space Needs Study*. <https://www.mvrhs.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Marthas-Vineyard-Reginal-HS-2.pdf>

Walker, George

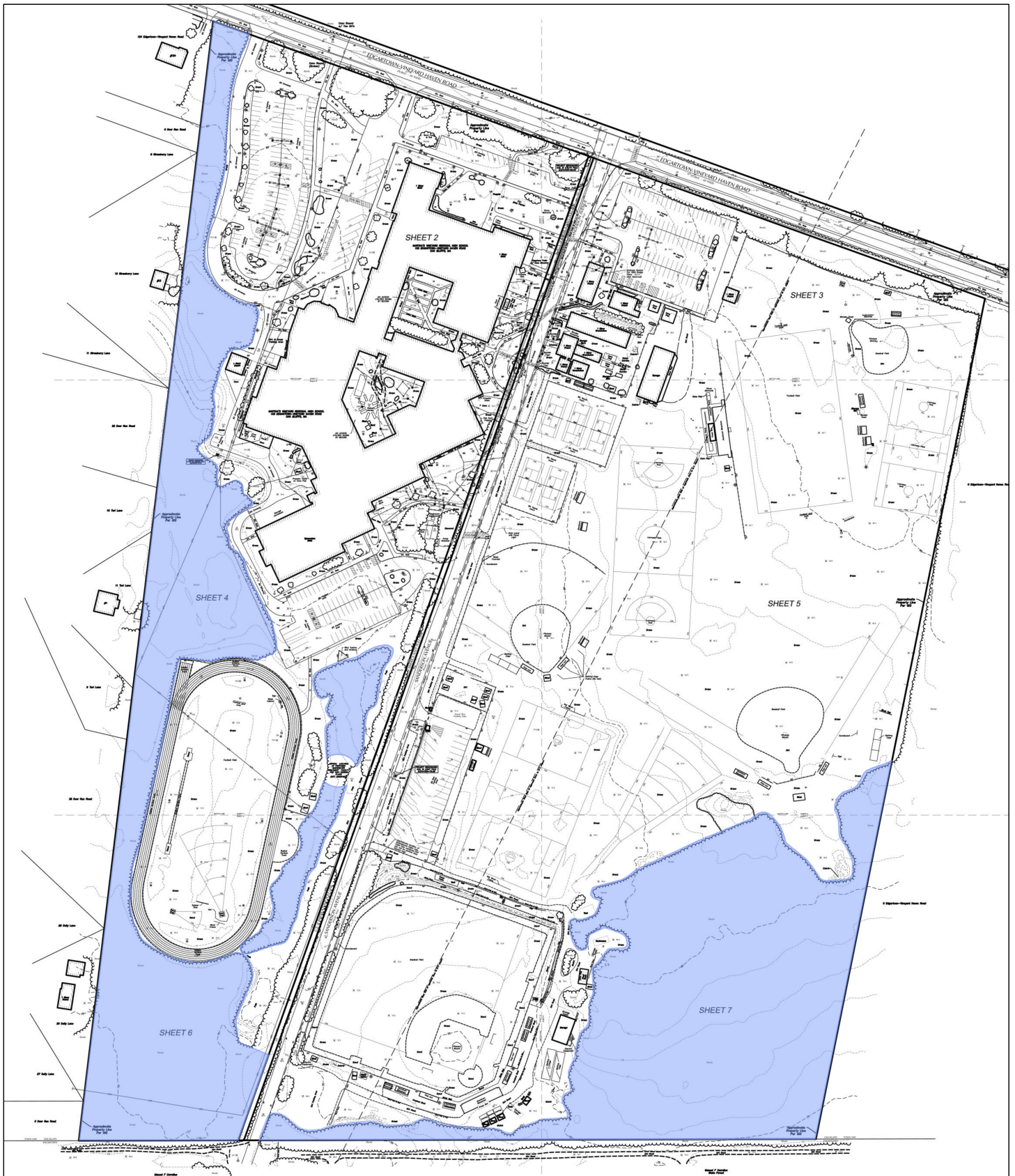
1891 *Atlas of Massachusetts*. George H. Walker and Co., Boston, MA

Walling, Henry F.

1858 *Map of Martha's Vineyard, Cape Cod, and the Islands*. Smith and Ingram, New York, NY.



**Figure 1. Location of the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School project area on the Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts, USGS topographic quadrangle, 7.5 minute series.**



Martha's Vineyard Regional High School



Source/Revision/Issue	Date
PAL modified: Indicate archaeological sensitivity	11-26-24
Map source: Samiotes Consultants, Inc.	10-2-24

The base information contained in this map was supplied to PAL as a professional courtesy for informational and illustrative purposes only. PAL makes no warranties, either expressed or implied, regarding the fitness or suitability of this map for any other purpose than to depict the location and/or results of cultural resource investigations conducted by PAL.

**PRIVILEGED INFORMATION - DO NOT RELEASE**

Archaeological Sensitivity:

- Moderate
- Low



**Figure 2. Plan of the MVRHS project area showing existing conditions and preliminary archaeological sensitivity.**