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Treated Wastewater Can Go Into Hammonasset Peninsula

Upscale Housing Project In Madison Gets State Permit

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MADISON —

After years of wrangling, the upscale Madison Landing housing project on Route 1 has finally won a state permit to flush treated wastewater into the Hammonasset peninsula.

In a decision Tuesday, state Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Gina McCarthy said developers had made the case that they won't harm the environment.

McCarthy's OK is the project's last major approval, although a legal challenge is expected. Also, changes in the project's plans need approval from the planning and zoning commission.

"We're very pleased with the decision," said Howard Kaufman, an executive with developer LeylandAlliance of Tuxedo, N.Y. "I don't think there's been another site in the history of Connecticut where the project got this kind of careful scrutiny."

Despite turmoil in the real estate market, Kaufman said he expected the climate to improve and he hoped to start building homes at the former Griswold Airport site before the end of next year.

LeylandAlliance has touted the development as a model of "smart growth" — a cluster of 127 apartments, town houses and single-family homes for people over age 55 that will sit more lightly on the environment than typical suburban sprawl. Proponents say it will provide a badly needed boost to the property tax base.

Opponents insist that the project is too dense for the 42-acre property and that its wastewater, pumped into leaching fields, will harm nearby tidal marshes and the Hammonasset River. McCarthy's decision "comes as no surprise," said William McCullough of Madison, a longtime opponent.

McCullough said he and others will likely appeal.



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"An appeal should be taken because the stakes are too high here," said attorney Keith Ainsworth, who represents opponents. "It's probably the single worst project in one of the nicest locations."

The approval, McCullough said, leaves the town with "a huge financial responsibility." The DEP's decision sets conditions meant to ensure that the project's septic system is properly designed, built and maintained. How that happens, and who will pay if the system fails, will have to be negotiated by the developer and the town's water pollution control authority.

The development will use a community septic system from Zenon Environmental Inc. that is designed to treat wastewater more effectively than standard household septic systems. Such systems are designed to remove most of the nitrogen and other nutrients that are the source of problems in Long Island Sound and other waters.

Opponents say the state's own data show that Zenon systems frequently fail to perform as advertised. Kaufman countered that such treatment systems "are the things that the coastal waters need. The notion that these are bad for the environment is upside down."

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To read the DEP's final decision on the Madison Landing housing project, visit www.courant.com/landing

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