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A Win For Open Space

MADISON PARCEL • Residents and environmentalists battled for shoreline site

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A decade-long battle over a prime piece of shoreline property might have ended with a win for posterity. The 42-acre site of the former Griswold Airport in Madison will become open space and recreation fields instead of an over-55 housing development, according to a deal announced last week. The arrangement is subject to approval by Madison voters; we urge them to do so.

The land, one of the last large parcels near the shore, has more than 400 feet of frontage on the Hammonasset River and shares a 2,000-foot border in tidal wetlands with Hammonasset Beach State Park.

Since 2000, after a highly questionable land swap by the state Department of Environmental Protection opened the property to potential large-scale development, a developer has attempted to build housing on the site.

Many local residents and virtually every environmental group in the state opposed the development, saying runoff and sewage discharge would damage the ecologically fragile river and salt marshes. Despite intense opposition, DEP eventually approved a wastewater permit, which caused many to wonder if the state's water-quality standards were adequate — a fair question.

Fortunately, the Connecticut office of the nonprofit Trust for Public Land, along with local officials, began negotiating with the developer, LeylandAlliance. The result was a \$9.7 million deal, contingent on voters approving an \$8 million bond authorization to buy the land. A referendum could be scheduled for December.

If approved, the town plans to maintain most of the land as natural open space with walking trails along the river, and possibly recreational fields on the portion closest to Route 1.

Residents who supported the idea believed it would add property tax revenue. Towns' heavy reliance on local property taxes often leads to bad land-use decisions. We hope that won't happen this time.

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