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Opinion

## LETTER: Madison has opportunity to protect coastal land

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Madison has a long-sought opportunity to purchase the former Griswold Airport and preserve one of the few large, undeveloped coastal properties remaining in the state. The land is ecologically precious and has important recreational potential.

This is a sensible deal for Madison, and I want voters to be clear about both the market and environmental values of the land.

Since LeylandAlliance purchased the property in 2007 for \$4.4 million (a price negotiated for in 2000), its appraised value has more than doubled with subsequent approvals for development of 127 housing units.

The current price will be substantiated by independent appraisals, now under way. The appraisal process is based on federally approved standards used across the country.

The Register editorialized that development would bring in tax revenues, but doesn't account for the net impact. Two other considerations for voters: added costs to the town of services for a new development; and residents downsizing from homes to the new development, bringing down the aggregate tax base.

The boards of selectmen and Finance will consider a bond for a little more than 82 percent of the purchase price. The Trust for Public Land has committed to fundraising privately for the balance. There are no plans to go back to the voters for additional bonding to cover the remainder.

Finally, in a state with few intact coastal wetlands remaining, this property is a treasure. With frontage on the Hammonasset River, Salt Marsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow habitat, and tidal marshes, it is a unique and diverse coastal landscape deserving of protection for future generations.

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Editor's note: Alicia Betty is project and development manager, the Trust for Public Land.

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