

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 10, 2010

Former Griswold Airport Property Conserved

Town of Madison purchases land for new public open space and park

MADISON, CONN., May 10, 2010 – The Trust for Public Land (TPL) and the Town of Madison announced today that they have completed the purchase of the 42-acre Griswold Airport property from Madison Landing Company, LLC, a subsidiary of LeylandAlliance LLC. The purchase is the final step in a two-year negotiation and campaign to purchase the land for the Town, creating a new park and protecting important natural areas rather than allowing dense residential development. Madison voters approved a \$9 million bond in January, which contributes to both the purchase of and improvements to the land.

First Selectman Fillmore McPherson, said, “We are doing this for our children and grandchildren as much as for ourselves. Saving this beautiful property will enhance the lives of all Madison residents for countless generations, long after the bonds are retired. After all, they’re not making land anymore.”

The 42-acre property, located on the Boston Post Road, shares a half-mile boarder with the tidal wetlands of the Hammonasset State Park and includes prime wetland habitat, upland forest, and significant frontage along the Hammonasset River. The conservation goals for the property are to maintain the land as natural open space with walking trails and viewing areas along the river, with the potential to restore a portion of the grasslands to accommodate a variety of birds. On the portion of the property closest to the Post Road, Town officials envision several recreational fields for use by Town families and possibly a small area reserved for future commercial use compatible with a park.

“TPL is delighted to add to Madison’s charming character and protect the Griswold Airport land from development, creating a new coastal community park where families of all ages can be active and enjoy nature,” said Alicia Betty, Project Manager with The Trust for Public Land. “This land was one of the last remaining chances to protect such a large parcel along the Connecticut coast.”

LeylandAlliance purchased the former airport property in 2007, after holding an option to buy the land since 2000. Approvals of a plan to build 127 housing units on the land were finalized in 2008. The development plan faced opposition from some Madison citizens. In 2008 the Town of Madison invited the Connecticut office of TPL, a national conservation organization, to negotiate with LeylandAlliance for a conservation solution. TPL announced an agreement to purchase the property in September 2009, and in January 2010 Madison voters approved a \$9 million referendum to cover \$7.8 million of the \$9.5 million purchase price and \$1.2 million for improvements to the land. TPL, with support from Audubon Connecticut, Stop Griswold Over Development, and local volunteers, agreed to fundraise the remaining \$1.7 million needed for purchase.

TPL and partner Audubon Connecticut announced last week that they have successfully raised \$1.35 million of the purchase price and have secured bridge financing for the remaining funding necessary for the Town's purchase of the land today. Fundraising will continue throughout the summer to reach the final goal of repaying the financing and covering program costs.

"The protection of this critical habitat from over-development will assure its function as valuable open space, for people and wildlife," said Tom Baptist, Executive Director, Audubon Connecticut. "The voting public and hundreds of donors have risen to the challenge to protect this important land and water resource. We have more fundraising to accomplish, but today we've secured the future of this land which will be transformed into a park for all to enjoy forever."

"Thanks go out to many people involved in this effort, but especially to our Town leaders that had the vision and dedication to work together to succeed in the admirable goal of creating a new coastal park." added Betty.

"While our vision was to create a wonderful, sustainable neighborhood developed in the best traditions of New Urbanism, we are pleased that the land will be conserved in a manner that will serve the people of Madison in the years to come. All of us at LeylandAlliance extend our congratulations and best wishes to the Town of Madison and The Trust for Public Land, and thank our supporters for their long-standing interest and encouragement," said Howard Kaufman, Executive Vice President of LeylandAlliance.

Saving this precious environmental treasure will be an enduring gift to citizens of our state and future generations," Attorney General Richard Blumenthal said. "I am proud to have been part of this historic effort which gives new meaning and momentum to the fight for preserving open space and natural resources."

"I have a bumper sticker on my car which says, 'What Open Space have you saved today?' Well, I helped to save the open space of Griswold Airport today!" said State Senator Edward Meyer.

"I am so pleased that we have been able to save this important resource. Residents of Madison should be proud," said Representative Deborah W. Heinrich.

Local citizens, including the volunteer group called Stop Griswold Overdevelopment (SGOD) had contested LeylandAlliance's proposed development on the former airport property for years. SGOD was concerned about the density of the proposed development and the impact its community septic system would have on the land, Hammonasset Park's tidal wetlands and Long Island Sound.

"I could not be more delighted that The Trust for Public Land has protected the Griswold Airport land. So many people have worked hard over the last eight years to bring us to this point," said Dr. William McCullough, with Stop Griswold Overdevelopment. "The citizens of Madison and our leaders should be commended for seizing our last chance to save this land."

The land has more than 400 feet of Hammonasset River frontage and a 2000-foot marsh land border with the Hammonasset State Park's tidal wetlands. It also consists of approximately 10 acres of salt marsh and 32 upland acres. It is part of the Atlantic coastal flyway and serves as a key breeding ground for finfish in the Hammonasset River leading out to Long Island Sound. In 2004 the area was recognized by Audubon Connecticut as an Important Bird Area of global significance due to birds like the Salt Marsh Sparrows that make their home there.

“The tidal wetlands of Hammonasset Park, which border on the old airport land, have been said by Audubon Connecticut to be the finest remaining tidal wetlands on Long Island Sound,” added McCullough.

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national nonprofit organization which works with partners and communities to conserve land for people to enjoy as working landscapes, parks, gardens, and natural areas, ensuring livable communities for generations to come. TPL has protected more than 6,000 acres of open space, watershed land, working farms, forestland, and historic resources in 32 communities across Connecticut. For more information, please visit tpl.org/connecticut.

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