

Decision on Entertainment Park Awaits Study, Developer Says Waterford site faces several obstacles to major development

By Christopher Arellano and Heather Vogell - Day Staff Writers

Waterford – a developer said Tuesday that no decision on whether to locate an entertainment complex in southern Connecticut will be made until a feasibility study is completed in a few months.

J.D. DeMatteo, chairman of Amalgamated Industries Inc., said the study will focus on whether 1,200 acres is needed for the project and examine each of the sites being considered.

DeMatteo said that while the former Waterford Airport parcel is among the candidates, other sites in the region are under consideration as well. The Pittsburgh, Pa., area and southeastern Connecticut are the leading contenders, he said. Amalgamated Industries Inc. and the Pennsylvania Trust in late December announced plans to develop a massive entertainment complex similar to the popular country and western tourist attraction in Branson, Mo., which attracts more than five million visitors annually. Plans for the development call for live entertainment, concerts, Broadway shows and children's programs.

The industrial site south of Interstate 95 encompasses several hundred acres, including the airport parcel. The zoning allows hotels, professional offices, warehouses, theaters and commercial recreation.

A number of earlier proposals that never came to fruition. A company targeted 300 acres there for a 19th century theme park in the late 1970s. Americaland Inc. boasted its \$130 million park could draw as many as 30 million patrons.

In the early 1990s, plans for a 26-lot business park also fell through. The town has sued the developer, Reynolds Metals Development Co., for unpaid sewer work that would have supported the industrial park. The entire zone is hooked up to sewers or has access to them. Developers of the entertainment complex might have some competition for the site if they plan to build on more than just the airport parcel. Bridges Communities of New London announced last month that it plans to propose a \$12 million, 91,000 square foot assisted living complex for elderly on 32 acres on Parkway South.

That project calls for demolishing an unfinished office building that stands on the site and replacing it with a 113-unit rental complex.