

Former airport not earmarked for casino site - Owners hope to develop park for tech industry

By New Media Writer

Waterford - A member of the consortium that owns 328 acres of prime real estate adjacent to Interstate 95 has informed the town that the consortium has no plans to pursue a casino development there.

In a conversation Friday with First Selectman Paul B. Eccard, the chairman of the board of Amalgamated Industries Inc. dismissed speculation that American Indian tribes seeking federal recognition want to develop a casino on the property, site of the former Waterford Airport.

J.D. DeMatteo's firm has been marketing the land for the Swartz Family Trust of Coraopolis, Pa., since the trust bought it from a New Jersey developer last year. The trust includes real estate developer Crossgates Inc. of McMurray, Pa. DeMatteo also provided Eccard with a lengthy letter from Thomas A. Kokaska of Windsor, his firm's Connecticut attorney.

"I have been involved in the project to pursue and develop this land, one of Connecticut's premier locations, from its inception," Kokaska wrote. "I assure you, as Mr. DeMatteo did, that this project is entirely independent of any casino or gaming activities.... The airport property is not a casino, gaming or Indian-related project." DeMatteo and Kokaska reaffirmed their interest in developing the property for research and high-technology firms, Eccard said.

Amalgamated's eight-year business association with the Paucatuck Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation has no bearing on the future development of 188 acres that was once home to the airport and 140 adjacent acres purchased by the consortium this spring, Kokaska said. The firm recently obtained a two-year extension from the Planning and Zoning Commission to retain the airport property's zoning designation for office, industrial or business park development.

The trust also is exploring inquiries for other unnamed uses from around the country. Offering the land for sale "is just good business," Kokaska said.

DeMatteo and Eccard agreed to keep one another informed as developments involving the property progress, Eccard said. DeMatteo could not be reached for comment.