

UMaine Eyes Former Navy Site Near Corea

By TOM WALSH

GOULDSBORO — The fate of the 50-acre site near Corea that once housed a top-secret U.S. Navy communications center is now in the hands of the University of Maine System.

Meeting Monday in Bangor, the system's trustees authorized Chancellor Joseph Westphal to explore the implications of accepting title to the property.

The trustees were told the UM System would hold the property only long enough to transfer ownership to the Bangor-based Acadia Capital Corp. (ACC), a non-profit corporation established in 1986 to encourage economic development in Maine.

ACC would be responsible for promoting the site's use for development related to land-based aquaculture research, development and commercialization.

The trustees were told there would be no direct cost to UMS beyond internal costs related to a legal and environmental review of the transfer.

"The state's decision to accept the property would require commitments for external funding, including our federal delegation, to support and cover all related actions and activities," a summary of the proposal reads in part.

"The property had to be transferred [by the Department of Defense] to some governmental entity," University System Facilities Director David Wilson said. "The town of Gouldsboro was approached, but they didn't want it. The University System was approached by the Governor's office, which thought we should try to use it."

Wilson said the shorefront property could facilitate expansion of private-sector aquaculture businesses now affiliated with the UM's Aquaculture Center on Salmon Road in Franklin.

Among those businesses is Maine Halibut Farms Inc., an incubator tenant that is testing and developing land-based approaches to halibut farming.

Maine Halibut President Alan Spear described access to the site as a "wonderful opportunity" that his company would investigate as it explores expansion

and relocation options.

"It's a wonderful, land-based site in terms of being adjacent to deep open ocean," he said. "It's already been developed to a certain extent, and there's a talented workforce in the vicinity that has a tradition of working in fish-related industries."

Another Aquaculture Center tenant, Seabait Maine LLC, is interested in the site as well. That company raises sandworms for use as bait or as feed by fish-farming operations like Maine Halibut Farms.

"We're looking at it as a possible expansion site," said Seabait Maine Managing Director Peter Cowin. "Worm-growing can fit in very well with fish-growing, as we can use some of their waste products."

"We have quite a few bridges to cross, but that's a potential route for expansion. We will keep an eye on Corea as an expansion site."

The U.S. Navy abandoned the parcel in 2002, along with property in Winter Harbor and at Schoodic Point.

The Navy's 100-acre Schoodic Point complex was turned over to the National Park Service for development as an education and research center. Naval housing in Winter Harbor was deeded to the town, which has since resold the 20 homes, 14 duplexes and 32 apartments left behind.

The Navy continues to maintain a satellite communications facility within a six-acre shoreline complex in Prospect Harbor.

Gouldsboro Town Manager Brad Vassey recently tried to interest L.L. Bean in the Corea site as the location for a new call center. Two existing buildings, including one wired as a communications center, would collectively provide 60,000 square feet of office space.

The Freeport-based retailer announced in February that the site had not made the cut for possible locations of a fourth L.L. Bean call center in Maine.

Vassey said he is eager to see the parcel generate property tax revenues. For that, and other reasons, he said he never favored acquisition of the site by the town.

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