N.J. company saves course as open space

Hackensack Water Co. has been granted permission to lease 32 acres of property to the prospective new owner of an adjoining tract, making possible the preservation of a 132-acre golf course.

The approval by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU) of the 59-year lease was a key element leading to the Feb. 22 sale of the adjoining 100 acres by Winthrop Products, Inc., an Eastman Kodak Corp. subsidiary, to an undisclosed buyer willing to continue a country club at the site.

An earlier plan to destroy the course and convert the site to a corporate office building will be abandoned.

Robert A. Gerber, chairman of Hackensack Water, applauded the BPU decision as the second in a series of positive steps this year for recreational open space preservation in northern New Jersey.

"This is an example of leveraging," where our 32 acres were the key to the preservation of the entire golf course. Since the first of this year four golf courses, totaling more than 500 acres, have been preserved through this kind of initiative," said Gerber.

The state watershed property review board ruled in February that the long-term lease could not be exempted from a moratorium on watershed land transfers, because the golf course use of the property imposed no threat to the water supply.

In February the BPU approved a plan to permanently preserve three other courses nearby, when it allowed the water company to transfer 290 acres to a non-utility affiliate. As part of the company's Evergreen Formula, it agreed to place perpetual deed restrictions on that land so that it would never be developed.

The River Vale site was not considered for a similar transfer, since part of it overlaps the protective buffer zone that surrounds Lake Tappan Reservoir. Hackensack Water intends to retain permanent ownership of the acreage as part of the 2,500 acres of protective land that surround the company's water supplies in New Jersey and New York.

The company's 32 acres has been leased to River Vale Country Club for more than 40 years to extend its golf course. In 1985, when the country club sold its 100 acres to Sterling Drug Capital Corp. for a corporate office headquarters, the drug company leased the water company's land to ensure an unobstructed view of nearby Lake Tappan Reservoir.

Supporting this idea was the BPU's decision to withhold a decision on water company land.

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