

Lincoln officials ‘hopeful’ wet areas won’t curtail industrial plans



Nick Sambides Jr. | BDN

Lincoln officials fear that vernal pools, such as these, on the Lincoln Regional Airport property will inhibit further industrial development.

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LINCOLN, Maine — Town officials are cautiously optimistic that the recent discovery of suspected wetlands near Lincoln Regional Airport won’t too badly curtail the town’s ability to develop its only industrial zone outside of a local paper mill’s campus.

Preliminary word from students with the School of Forestry at the University of Maine who are studying the problem indicates that many of the areas that town officials feared might be wetlands requiring preservation are actually insignificant vernal pools, said Ruth Birtz, the town’s economic development coordinator. The students reviewed the land early this month.

“It looks very hopeful,” Birtz said Friday.

After examining swampy areas near the airport in mid-April, Ted Ocana of Foresight Engineering of Lincoln told town officials he feared that the state might classify them as wetlands, which would require protecting them from development. At the time, Ocana was preparing to design a road from the airport to the floatplane dock in the Penobscot River for construction this summer.

The Town Council agreed last month to pay the students about \$1,050 to determine the environmental significance of the swampy areas. A final determination on how much of the industrial park is compromised will likely come in July, Birtz said.

The wet areas sit on an approximately 60-acre site between River Road and the airport off Flyaway Drive that town officials hope to convert into an industrial park, Birtz said. The site, which is also close to West Broadway, has been a key element of the town's master plan for development since 1988.

Given its proximity to the airport and Interstate 95's Exit 227, town officials want to develop the park with three-phase electricity and water and sewer utilities to eventually draw light-industrial manufacturing facilities — businesses that typically deliver well-paying jobs — to the area.

The park development plan would build on several small aviation-based companies around the airport, which is located off West Broadway and River Road. The town has purchased a pilot's lounge building, a hangar and a campground near the airport in recent years as part of the development plan.

Ocana has said he suspects that the vernal pools are man-made — the result of River Road and the airport being built at elevations that helped facilitate runoff and wildlife growth in the shallow areas between them.

The next step, Birtz said, is to have town officials meet with Ocana and members of the Maine Department of Environmental Protection to see what the town's options are. That meeting won't likely occur for a few weeks, Birtz said.

The only project likely to be delayed at this point, Town Council Chairman Steve Clay said, is the road to be built from Flyaway Drive to the campground and the dock. The installation of an airplane refueling facility, however, has not been impacted.

"We have to find out what we need to do to build the road," Clay said Friday.

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