

Written by Administrator
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MILFORD — The 187-acre parcel on Route 16 at Interstate 495, where Foxwoods Massachusetts had hoped to build a \$1 billion resort casino, still stands undeveloped as a sand-and-gravel operation.

The proposed casino project was rejected by a nearly 2-to-1 ratio at a townwide referendum Nov. 19, a stunning defeat that was widely attributed to the grass-roots efforts of the opposition group Casino-Free Milford.

Now, a year after a group of residents — many with deep roots in the community — got together to stop what they saw as a casino's threat to the environment, safety and quality of life in town, the core members of Casino-Free Milford have upped their civic engagement through a new nonpartisan organization, Citizens for Milford.

The new group's mission is to research and provide objective information to Milford residents and public officials about issues facing the town, and to encourage active citizen participation through events that seek to improve the quality of life in the community, according to Steven Trettel, co-chairman of Citizens for Milford.

Mr. Trettel and John Seaver, who also serves as co-chairman of Citizens for Milford, were co-chairmen of Casino-Free Milford.

"We have very liberal people; we have conservative people; we have people interested in different issues," Mr. Trettel said in an interview. "In reaching a consensus for an issue like the casino, we had to work for it. It demonstrated at the grass-roots level that we can get a very diverse group of people together and get a consensus if you work with them respectfully."

Mr. Trettel said the core of Casino-Free Milford, about a dozen members, got together for a potluck supper in January and expressed a unanimous sentiment that they wanted to keep the activism going.

Citizens for Milford's first event will be a candidates forum from 6:45 to 8:45 p.m. March 25 at the Milford Town Library.

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Candidates for contested seats have been asked by Citizens for Milford to submit answers in writing about their positions on various issues. The answers will be tabulated so voters can compare the candidates and ask questions directly at the forum. Mr. Trettel said all the candidates have agreed to participate in the forum.

Voters will decide at town election April 1 on races for School Committee, highway supervisor, tax collector and Board of Library Trustees.

The group also donated the roughly \$2,000 it had left over from the anti-casino campaign to Milford Regional Medical Center's new addiction referral service.

Mr. Trettel said they chose the hospital's program, coordinated with Riverside Community Care, "because addiction is what casinos are all about."

He said Casino-Free Milford raised about \$27,000 and spent \$25,000. Foxwoods spent \$1.6 million on public relations.

Future issues that Citizens for Milford might address could include the town purchase of the water company. But right now, Mr. Trettel said, they were taking baby steps.

He said: "Probably we'll be quite cautious of the issues we get involved in. We're not going to jump on every bandwagon. Because when we get involved, we really get involved."

Veterans of other communities' casino-opposition groups may be involved individually in the effort to Repeal the Casino Deal, a statewide proposed ballot initiative that would repeal the law that legalized casino gambling, but others contacted had not continued their organizations.

"We pretty much dispersed," said Iris Cardin, co-chairman of Quaboag Valley Against Casinos, which successfully fought the Mohegan Sun proposal for a Palmer resort casino. "We went through so much for so many years."

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She said, "I hate to see it (an MGM casino) go to Springfield as well, but I only have so much in me."

Lesa B. McWalters, president of No Slots in Millbury, helped gather signatures for the Repeal the Casino Deal initiative after Chicago-based Rush Street Gaming pulled out of plans for a slots parlor near the Shoppes at Blackstone Valley shortly before a scheduled local referendum.

In September, Attorney General Martha Coakley refused to certify Repeal the Casino Deal's petition, claiming it would be an unconstitutional breach of contract with casino applicants. Repeal the Casino Deal's legal team is preparing to argue its case to the state Supreme Judicial Court.

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