

Future of a New Hampshire Girl Scout camp hangs in the balance amid legal battle

By **Spencer Buell** Globe Staff, Updated August 18, 2026, 5:30 a.m.



The padlocked entrance to the former Camp Menotomy, a New Hampshire Girl Scout camp with ties to Arlington, Massachusetts. JIM DAVIS

LAKE WINNIPESAUKEE, N.H. — Summer after summer, s'more after s'more, a 95-acre plot of woods along the shore here was a second home for generations of girls.

[Camp Menotomy](#), as it had been called since 1939, once crackled with life around this time of year. Before it shut down in 2023, Girl Scouts spent their days swimming, hiking, and tie-dying shirts in the shadow of the White Mountains, and their nights singing “[rick-a-bamboo](#)” under the stars.

Whether it will ever be that kind of place again may soon be decided two hours south in Massachusetts, where a court is weighing if it should live on as a campground for girls or be [sold to a real estate developer for millions](#).

The case hinges on the wording of a 60-year-old deed, which calls for the land to be used as a camp benefiting young girls — specifically girls in Arlington, Massachusetts. The trustees who oversee the land say the best way to continue doing that is to sell and use the proceeds to support those girls in other ways, potentially as tuition allotments for them to attend other camps. The Massachusetts attorney general's office has come out in support of their effort to do so, saying it believes the sale is allowed under the law.

People rallying to save the camp from being turned into high-end private homes — among them neighbors, former campers, and now a New Hampshire elected official — say the language in the deed forbids such a sale. And they say there is a lot more at stake than safeguarding warm memories in the woods.



Bette Higley, who lives across the river from the former Camp Menotomy, is among neighbors who oppose plans to sell the property to a real estate developer. JIM DAVIS

As Bette Higley and her husband, Bob, steered a boat slowly along the former campsite's edges on a recent Saturday, all was quiet at the former Camp Menotomy.

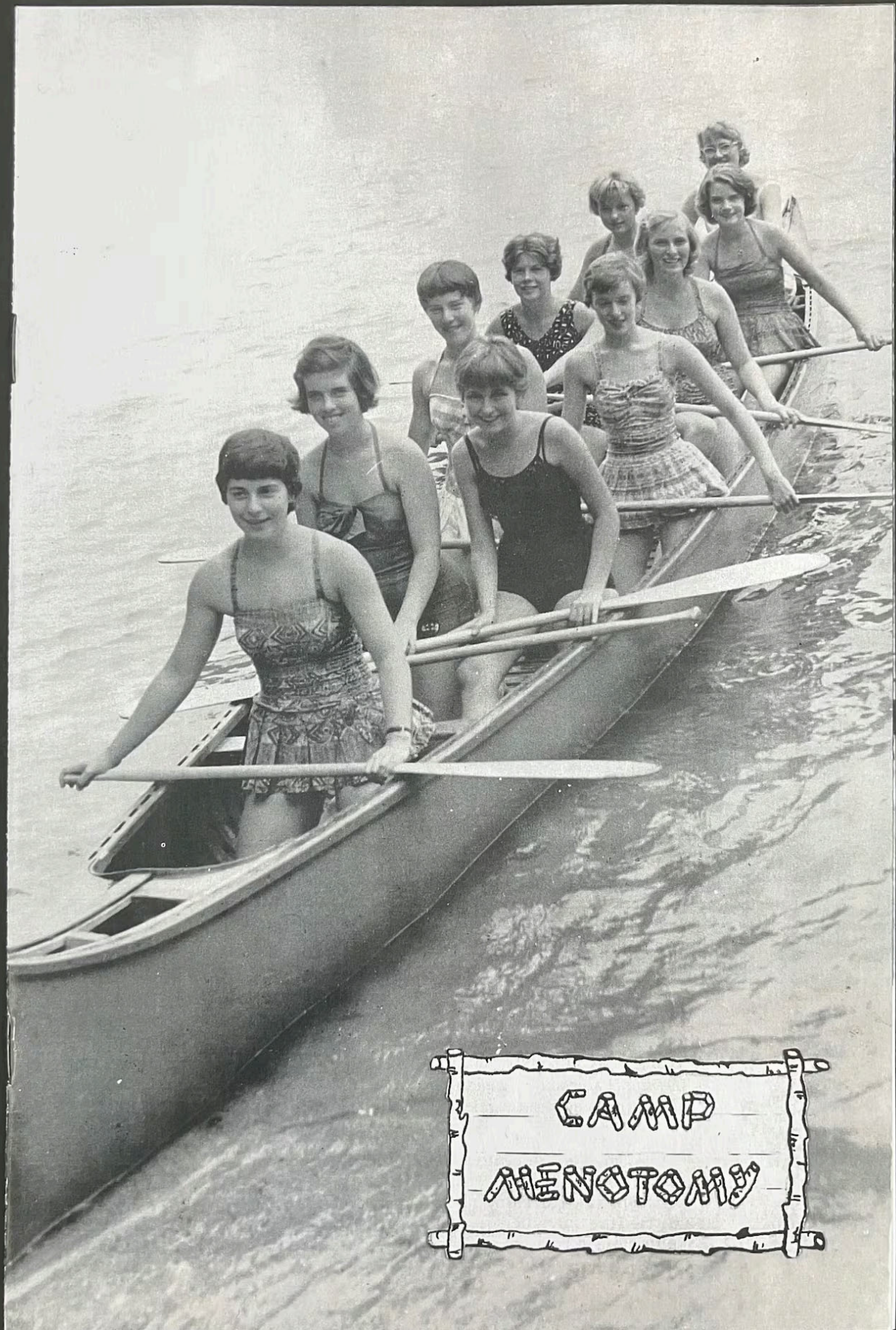
The camp's overgrown wooden platforms, where kids once slept under canvas tents, were visible through the trees. A dock on the lake was empty; canoes, latticed with spiderwebs, were stacked in a pile on the shore.

"It's a lost habitat for kids," said Higley, who lives across the water and is a board member of a group opposing recent efforts to sell it. "I think it's a terrible reflection on our culture that we don't value this asset as we should."

The Arlington Girl Scouts, who had run the camp since 1939, signed it over to a trust in 1962, with a deed that said it should be set aside for the use specifically of girls from their town. The arrangement dates back to a decidedly different time, when scouting was

much more popular and land along New Hampshire's picturesque Lake Winnepesaukee wasn't yet the white-hot commodity it is today.

The trust then leased it for \$1 a year, first to the local scouts, then over time to the Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts.



Camp Menotomy campers canoeing in 1961. LAKE WINNIPESAUKEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Girls -- not just from Arlington but across the state and in New Hampshire -- used it. So did mother-daughter and father-daughter groups who could book the site for family weekends.

The site was about as simple as they come. Campers slept under mosquito nets and used latrines. And cheap.

“Growing up, we didn’t have a lot of money, but this was a safe and affordable thing that my parents could send me off to do during the summer, and I got to have these incredible experiences,” said Jessie Trowbridge, who now has camp-aged daughters of her own. (She has also joined the legal effort to halt the sale).

But over time, according to the scouts and the property’s trustees, the campsite’s popularity waned. Girl Scouts preferred other options, including the six other camps the scouts currently operate in New England. In a petition the trustees filed with the state last year, they said the Girl Scouts told them in 2023 that it was “no longer economically feasible” to keep leasing the land. It’s been shuttered ever since.

The Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts in a statement said it was true that “patterns of camp usage changed in recent years,” which led to “the difficult decision not to renew our lease.”

Meanwhile, it was hard to ignore the evidence of the skyrocketing value of the property the Girl Scouts were sitting on, which is now surrounded in all directions by large and expensive lakefront mansions.

Nor did it take much imagination to see the coffers-filling potential of liquidating an enormous slice of prime Winnepesaukee real estate, let alone one that no one was using.

The trustees, some of whom appear to have backgrounds in scouting themselves, put it up for sale, and in 2024, accepted an offer from real estate developer Jeremy Martin of

the New Hampshire-based Lakes Region Design Group, for \$18 million.

It wasn't clear how the trustees planned to use that kind of money, or how much might go directly to girls in Arlington. The organization didn't respond to repeated requests for interviews over several days. Their lawyer also declined to comment and the Girl Scouts themselves said they wouldn't discuss the pending sale.

But in legal documents, the trustees suggested the proceeds would support camping elsewhere, saying in a petition to the state that the investment income alone "would allow the Girl Scouts of Arlington to attend one of the other various Girl Scout camps at no cost with money to spare."

For its part, the development firm said it plans to build seven palatial single-family homes on the property, while setting aside 30 percent of the land as a nature preserve and hiking trails.

That might have been the end of it were it not for that 60-year-old deed.

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Campers at Camp Menotomy on Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire. SUBMITTED PHOTO

The document, recorded in 1962, called for the land to be used as a camp for the Girl Scouts of Arlington, or for any other organization that similarly worked for the benefit of Arlington girls. It also allowed the land to be leased to someone else, as long as the rental proceeds went to causes supporting girls living in the town.

Recognizing that the scouts might not want the parcel forever, it set a framework for how the land could be sold and its value reinvested elsewhere. But, crucially, according to the growing and very vocal opposition to the sale, it said the trustees could do so only "if no other organization can be found to utilize the site for camping purposes."

Opponents to the sale have been pointing to those words as they press their case in Massachusetts' Middlesex Probate Court.

They argue that the trustees were so eager to sell that they didn't bother searching for a buyer who would run it as a camp — for less money, perhaps, but in a way that aligned with what they believe was the scouts' intent when they donated the land all those years ago.

So far, their motions to intervene in the sale have been denied.

The Massachusetts attorney general's public charity division, meanwhile, has so far backed the trustees' position.

Unless the sale's opponents can persuade that office to see things their way, they believe their best shot is a successful appeal, which would at least give them a chance to present evidence to a judge.

Another effort has begun over the New Hampshire border, with help from Joe Kenney, an elected member of that state's executive council. "I hope our state steps up to the table and says that trust was intended for it to remain as a camp, and it should remain as a camp," he said.

In the meantime, opponents of the sale say that they can prove the deed forbids it, and at the same, that there are ways the New Hampshire camping industry, and Girl Scouts in Arlington, can both benefit from this property — without handing its pristine woodlands over to a private developer.

Part of the land on Lake Winnepesaukee where Camp Menotomy was located. JIM DAVIS

One person they hope can make the case is Eric Carlson.

Carlson runs a for-profit summer camp in the Lakes Region called [Camp Quinebarge](#), a more traditional camp now in its 90th year. It had a tumultuous experience [trying to](#)

[remain open during the pandemic](#) but has since rebounded.

He believes he could also set up a sustainable new camp at the old Menotomy site and last year offered to lease the property for \$110,000. He said he would invest \$3 million to \$5 million in it and pledged to run it as a nonprofit and to give scholarships worth as much as \$600,000 to Massachusetts girls, with priority given to Arlington residents.

He said that his offer was fair and that he made it because he's a true believer in the power of camp to mold kids' lives for the better.

"I would love for somebody to keep it a camp," he said. "I just sort of raised my hand. Other people can, too."

But the trustees weren't impressed. In legal documents, they said that Carlson's bid for the property was well below fair market value and that the girls of Arlington would be better served by a cash payout than by some comparatively modest rental income and scholarships to a camp run by someone else. They turned down Carlson's offer.

Carlson, meanwhile, is crying foul. In legal filings, he and his lawyer allege the trustees didn't properly consider his offer, and didn't do enough to pitch the property to any other camp operators like him. They allege, among other matters, that the property was never listed in online forums for camp sales or on social media and it came off the market after less than 24 hours on real estate listing sites.

And regardless, Carlson said he still believes the contract the Girl Scouts signed all those years ago is on his side.

"I start getting a bit frustrated, because the deed is so darn clear that it's supposed to be a camp unless it can't be a camp," he said.

On Lake Winnepesaukee, meanwhile, the case is reverberating like speedboat wakes along the shore.

“We are just horrified that this would be turned into more McMansions,” said Gretchen Seifert, camp director at [Camp Nokomis](#), a YMCA girls program up the lake from Menotomy.

At her camp on Bear Island earlier this month, Seifert said she worries the region’s camps are at risk if they can be bought and sold like any other piece of sought-after lakefront property — even if the value of their pine needle-coated properties soar to heights that even the most outdoorsy and environmentally conscious organizations can’t resist.

“This has been a long, drawn-out battle, and I hope Eric hangs in,” Seifert said. “If this can happen to Menotomy, what can happen to the next one?”

A dock at the site on Lake Winnepesaukee where Camp Menotomy was located. JIM DAVIS

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