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## Residents opposed to Army using Cucia Park

By: SLOAN BREWSTER , Press staff

MIDDLETOWN - While many, if not most, comments at a public hearing on the military training center proposed for the city were in opposition to building it on Boardman Lane, there were also quite a few voices against putting it at Cucia Park.

Some residents who live near the site said they were opposed to putting the facility on what some said used to be a lovely park.

"That used to be a nice park; they had fishing derbies there, a playscape there," said Roberta Seargent. "And Smith Street has the biggest residential area in Westfield ... well to me, fix the park; why did you let it get blighted? ... If there's undesirables there, fix it."

Martha Vermlan of Atkins Street suggested a portion of the park should remain as park land.

According to some residents and officials, some activity at the park is illegal. "Maybe work it out so the front part of the park could be used as a park," she said.

Common Council member Ronald Klattenberg said the idea had been raised in the past and would include the 4.4 acres of park already there; the 36 remaining acres consist of abandoned industrial property and are the acres where the army has said it would put the facility.

"When they look at Cucia Park, they can fit their facility without impacting the pond or wetlands," Klattenberg said. "The question remains if the public could still use it."

Diane McCartin, project manager for the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, said the corps was open to that idea.

"[We] don't want to close the door on that," she said. "We're not far enough along to make a commitment to that."

There were also comments in favor of putting the facility at Cucia Park.

"I highly support Cucia and I'd like to point out that it is a brownfield," said Jennifer Marr of Old Farms Road.

She added she hopes money from the sale of the park could be used for open space.

The corps held the meeting to give the public one last chance to comment on properties it is considering for the facility.

In addition to Cucia Park and Boardman Lane, the corps is considering putting the facility on a site on Mile Lane - formerly the Middletown Reserve Center - which the government already owns, and the Bysiewicz Industrial Site. The Bysiewicz property is 35 acres and is hooked up to city water, sewer and storm water utilities; gas and electrical are not currently at the site.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell added her thoughts to the mix of voices. Tuesday, she sent the corps a letter opposing putting the facility on Boardman Lane.

"While it is true that the Boardman Lane site meets the basic criteria, it is known to have some fundamental flaws, including its proximity to residential areas, potential impact on wetlands and the high likelihood that the Connecticut-listed species of special concern, such as the eastern box turtle are present on the site," Rell wrote. "I would strongly encourage you, therefore, to remove Boardman Lane from the short list."

The corps plans to announce its preferred site in early November and then begin a National Environmental Policy Act review process, said David Dale, deputy district engineer of the Louisville District of the Army Corps of Engineers.

To contact Sloan Brewster, call her at (860) 347-3331, ext. 211, or e-mail her at [sbrewster@middletownpress.com](mailto:sbrewster@middletownpress.com).

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