

News

Army delays release of NEPA assessment on 3 prospective sites for training facility

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By SLOAN BREWSTER, Press staff

MIDDLETOWN — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has delayed the release of a National Environmental Protection Act environmental assessment on three sites it is considering for a military training facility.

Meanwhile, according to William Warner, director of planning and conservation, a seven-acre portion of one of the three sites is in the process of being sold. The sale will render the property in question — known as the Bysiewicz Industrial Site — unusable for the corps' purposes, he said.

"I don't know how they could use it, if seven of the acres in the middle are being built," Warner said.

Corps Spokesman Todd Hornback said the corps had not been given confirmation the site had been sold, so will continue to move forward on the assessments of all three properties.

Diane McCartin, chief of the corps' North Section Reserve Support Team, informed Ronald Klattenberg the National Environmental Policy Act environmental assessment would not be released this week as scheduled. It will be delayed until the first week of April, he said.

"They're not telling me why," said Klattenberg, a Common Council member and leader of the city's advisory panel, which is working with the Corps in the site selection process.

Hornback, however, said the release was not that much off schedule and may still come out before the end of March.

"We're not expecting the delay, but it could be," Hornback said. "I'm still hoping it will be in March."

If the sale of the Bysiewicz property goes through, as Warner expects, that will leave only two sites open for consideration. Cucia Park, a 37-acre park with approximately six acres of wetlands, which the city has endorsed as its choice for the facility, and Boardman Lane, an 88-acre site with access through another site on Ken Dooley Drive.

Residents, along with local and state officials, have vocally opposed the Boardman Lane site for the facility for various reasons, including it has an historic farm house and active farm and contains two species of concern, the eastern box turtle and sedge grass.

Attorney General Richard Blumenthal has said he will fight the Army to prevent it from putting the facility on the environmentally-sensitive land.

The training center is a response to the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Act, which mandates smaller individual reserve bases be closed and replaced with larger combined locations, where reservists train on alternate weekends.

According to corps officials, the center will resemble a college campus with the type of training, including firearm training, completed on computers and in classrooms. Outdoor drills will be done elsewhere. The Middletown facility will also have storage space, but will contain no firearms. The facility will have the capacity for 655 reservists, but will house a full-time crew of 70 workers.

Once the environmental assessment is released, there will be a 30-day period during which time officials — including those from the EPA and local, state and federal government — and the public may give input on the sites. After that period, the corps will make its decision on which site it will select.

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