

News

Rell thinks Cucia Park only acceptable place for local army training center

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MIDDLETOWN — Like most officials who have weighed in on the matter, Governor M. Jodi Rell does not believe an army training center belongs on a Westfield farm.

In an e-mail released Friday, Rell wrote it was her strong opinion that Cucia Park is the only suitable site in Middletown for an Armed Forces Reserve Center and that she had directed the state's Adjutant General, Air Force Major General Thad Martin, to contact the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and relay that message.

While Rell has demonstrated her support of the military by fighting to keep the Groton Sub Base and the 103rd Air Wing stationed at Bradley Airport in the state, she must weigh that support with the needs of residents, her spokesman Rich Harris said Friday.

"We need the Armed Service Reserve Center to replace the smaller centers and want to help the servicemen and women, but not adversely affect men and women of Middletown," Harris said. "The governor wants to strike that balance."

Rell has heard the voices of residents who do not want the center to harm the environmental and historical significance of the 88-acre farm on Boardman Lane the army is considering for the center, Harris said.

"Of the sites the Defense Department is considering, Cucia Park is, by far, the most sensible," Rell said. "It has all the space the military needs, has the power, water and other utility connections nearby and is located in an area that is zoned for industrial use. It is also convenient to Interstate 91 and in an area that will not have a major impact on Middletown's neighborhoods."

Mayor Sebastian N. Giuliano appeared pleased to hear Rell's announcement.

"We agree with her 100 percent," the mayor said, adding putting the center on Boardman Lane would be expensive. "You have to mitigate wetlands, blast rock and build another access road. Cucia Park is right there, utilities are in the doorstep."

The Corps welcomes Rell's comments and will include them with all comments from the public and agencies, said Corps Spokesman Todd Hornback.

The Corps will be accepting public input during a 30-day comment period after the release of the National Environmental Policy Act Assessment of the three sites in consideration for the center. It will release that assessment some time in April. All comments will be considered prior to the Army's final site selection decision, Hornback said.

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 it will contain no firearms. The facility will have the capacity for 655 reservists, but will house a full-time crew of 70 workers.

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