

News

Army: Cucia Park preferred site

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By SLOAN BREWSTER, Press staff

MIDDLETOWN — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has announced that its preferred site for a proposed armed forces reserve center is Cucia Park.

The process will not be officially over until the corps completes the National Environmental Policy Act assessment, which includes a 30-day public input period, and gives its final decision, said Ronald J. Elliott, chief of public affairs for the corps' Louisville office.

The corps is expected to release the draft assessment for the for the 30-day comment period by the end of April, Elliott said. After that, the Army invites anyone interested to review the document and send back any comments.

City and state officials had endorsed Cucia Park over an active farm on Boardman Lane the corps is also considering for the center.

Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz, who advocated against the Boardman Lane site and a site on Freeman Road in the Maromas section of town, expressed her satisfaction with the choice.

"We are thrilled," she said in a phone call. "I am thrilled that the army listened to the citizens and leaders in Middletown and chose Cucia Park as the preferred site. ... It's clearly the best choice from the standpoint of farm preservation and protecting open space."

Bysiewicz was also pleased with the choice of the park as it is former industrial property that will be used wisely. And, the corps' plan makes use of smart growth principles by developing near Interstate 91, she said.

Bysiewicz plans to continue to work with corps officials to ensure Cucia Park is their final choice for the center, she said.

"I think that we need to continue to be vigilant because the Army has said that this is the preferred site, not the final choice," Bysiewicz said.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell and Attorney General Richard Blumenthal also expressed pleasure over the choice.

"This is great news for Middletown," Rell said. "Of the sites the defense department considered, Cucia Park is, by far, the most sensible. The Corps of Engineers has listened to us. This is a big victory for the state and the city."

Mayor Sebastian N. Giuliano, however, while pleased about the choice, was not ready to celebrate.

"When they come and ask us for a deed, I'll be relieved," Giuliano said.

Joseph Redlinger, of the corps real estate division, will meet with Giuliano next week to discuss the city-owned property, Elliot said.

The facility will have the capacity for 655 reservists, but will house a full-time crew of 70 workers.

When released, the draft report will be available at the Middletown Public Library or online for download from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers site at lrlcoepao.wordpress.com or via a link from the Corps Middletown Armed Forces Web site at lrl.usace.army.mil/poi/default.asp?mycategory=309.

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