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News

Army seeking permit to fill Cucia Park wetlands

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By SLOAN BREWSTER, Press staff

MIDDLETOWN — The U.S. Army Reserve is seeking a permit to fill wetlands at Cucia Park.

The federal permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is part of the Clean Water Act, and one of the legal hurdles the military must jump in its plans to build an army reserve training center on the 42-acre park on Smith Street.

In July, Mayor Sebastian N. Giuliano signed the contract for the \$2 million sale of the park. Now he is waiting for the money, he said Tuesday. According to the contract, the military has until the end of the fiscal year to pay.

Last month at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Cromwell, the buyers held a preconstruction meeting with contractors that might be interested in building the proposed facility, the mayor said.

Construction on the three-story, 164,007-square-foot facility on 17 acres of the park will not begin until the permit is issued, said Todd Hornback, Corps spokesman for the Louisville District.

"Once the permit goes through, we can finalize the contract," Hornback said.

The permit will limit what can be done on the wetlands, said Larry Rosenberg, corps chief of public affairs for the New England District.

"We have to gain that permit to see what mitigation [allows], and how much can we fill," he explained.

In order to make such determinations, the corps must evaluate the construction plans and consider the impact to the wetlands, Rosenberg said.

"Our goal is always net loss zero," Rosenberg said. "The only thing that we issue a permit on is the least damaging practicable alternative. This is a public trust; we are charged by congress to not impact on the environment negatively."

There have already been changes to the plans for the wetlands, Hornback and Rosenberg said, specifying that the amount to be filled has been decreased. Neither spokesman knew the exact specifications of the changes, they said.

The permit can be denied, issued or issued with conditions, Rosenberg said, adding that 99 percent of such permits are issued with conditions.

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.

There is a 30-day period during which the public may file comments or request a public hearing on the permit review. Public comments must be filed no later than Sept. 11, to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District, Regulatory Division, (attn: Cori Rose) 696 Virginia Road, Concord, MA 01742-2751, or e-mail cori.m.rose@usace.army.mil.

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