

Council approves rec facility for Doble Center

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PORTSMOUTH — The City Council approved plans Monday to transform the Paul A. Doble Army Reserve Center into a recreational facility, despite protests from some councilors and the public to use the land for workforce housing.

The council's 7-3 vote allows the process of transferring ownership of the 3.4-acre Cottage Street property from the federal government to the city to move forward. In 2011, the center will end operations as a military facility and be conveyed to the city, if the plan is approved.

Most of the councilors and residents who spoke felt that the recreational use, which would include a multi-use, 380-foot-by-180-foot recreation field, a children's playground, bleacher seating, a snack bar, a bathroom and storage facility, and a parking area, was appropriate for an area that is a densely residential. Others felt the site was prime for work force housing,

"Every time we have a chance, we turn away from the housing option — even though we give a lot of lip service to it," said councilor Chris Dwyer.

"When we campaigned, a lot of us talked about affordable housing," said councilor Nancy Clayburgh. "Perhaps this is a place to start."

Clayburgh suggested other city projects, such as the middle school, could solve the field shortage issue. Clayburgh, Dwyer and councilor Eric Spear voted against the recreational plan.

Some pointed to the city's capital plan, which has funds for a comprehensive study on the need for recreational fields.

Representatives from the Workforce Housing Coalition and **The Housing Partnership** also asked the council to reconsider and use the site to address a serious housing shortage problem.

Councilor Ned Raynolds said small parcels of city owned property are not the way to seriously address the issue of work force housing. Providing incentives for developers through zoning will be the most effective way, he said.

"The only way to get the kind of workforce housing we need to be done will be at the Planning Board level," said Raynolds.

City staff suggested there could be opportunities to modify the plan in the future, but the federal government required a detailed plan.

Residents who live in the area liked the idea of the recreational facility.

"I know my family is excited," said Alec McEachern, of 85 Cottage Street. "I think it's a great idea and the neighborhood would welcome it."