

Portsmouth council decides armory will open up for recreational use

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PORTSMOUTH — Scores of Seacoast residents turned out at Monday night's City Council meeting to discuss the impact involving the intended reuse of the Paul A. Doble Army Reserve Center for future recreational fields.

A scheduled public hearing regarding the revised redevelopment plan for reuse of the property was met with several residents both for and against the plan.

Councilors ended up approving the plan by a vote of 5-3, but not before many residents offered ideas of alternative uses such as affordable housing for working families and the elderly.

The reserve center, which is located on a 3.4-acre parcel of land on Cottage Street, has been made available to the city under the federal Base Realignment and Closure process.

Under the BRAC process, the city was required to prepare a redevelopment plan for the Doble property and originally cited municipal use for either recreation fields or a new police station. After submitting the plan in June 2007, the Department of the Army and U.S. Housing and Urban Development informed city officials they must specify which of the two municipal uses the site would be used for and then must revise the redevelopment plan to provide more details on the selected option.

Recently, the Police Department withdrew its interest in the property, and City Manager John Bohenko directed city staff to revise the plan to reflect the potential for recreational use of the Doble site.

The updated plan includes the removal of the existing building, which was built in 1958, and the construction of a "multiuse recreation field," a "tot lot playground," bleachers, a snack bar facility including restrooms and a storage building, as well as parking to support the intended recreational use.

Under the BRAC conditions, the revised redevelopment plan must be submitted prior to the federal government turning over the property to the city sometime in 2011.

The public hearing not only included input from abutters who thought the idea was a great one, but also provided a forum for several concerned citizens who felt the council should not designate just recreational use given the growing need for more affordable housing for both families and senior citizens.

Dick Ingram, president of the **The Housing Partnership**, spoke to councilors about not limiting options to one intended use and instead suggested the city should consider the possibility of building alternative housing, as well.

Councilor Christine Dwyer said she didn't feel comfortable approving the revised plan and voted against the approval. Dwyer cited several "competing needs" throughout the city that should be looked at more closely before submitting a definite plan.

Fellow Councilor Ned Raynolds voted for approval based upon his belief that the housing dilemma throughout the city would not be solved with one single project.

"This is the right step at the right time," said Raynolds.

Before voting, Deputy City Manager Cindy Hayden informed the council that the Army and the HUD had originally expected the revised plan last month, and said she was unsure of the ramifications of the council not approving the plan.

The revised plan will now be submitted to the Army and HUD for review and approval.