

# LAND USE CONCERNS VETERANS GROUPS DON'T WANT RECREATION NEXT TO CEMETERY; MIDDLETOWN: [1N GREATER MIDDLETOWN EDITION]

Fay-Hurvitz, Joshua; Courant Staff Writer

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## ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

Some veterans are concerned that the land will be used to build either soccer fields or an indoor soccer facility to house the Middletown Youth Soccer League. The land was granted to Middletown by the state in 1998 with the stipulation that it be used for a recreation facility.

The plan for a Home Depot is dead, according to Rep. Gail Hamm, D- East Hampton, and Rep. Joseph C. Serra, D- Middletown, who met recently with veterans to ease their fears.

At the meeting, Serra and Hamm told veterans that because city control of the property is contingent upon using it for recreation, Home Depot is not a possibility. If the land is not used for recreational purposes, it goes back to the state.

## FULL TEXT

A 9-acre plot on Bow Lane across from Connecticut Valley Hospital and next to the state veterans cemetery has again become a source of concern for area veterans.

Some veterans are concerned that the land will be used to build either soccer fields or an indoor soccer facility to house the Middletown Youth Soccer League. The land was granted to Middletown by the state in 1998 with the stipulation that it be used for a recreation facility.

Veterans were first alarmed this spring when Home Depot eyed the site because of its proximity to Route 9. The company contacted the soccer league about buying land elsewhere in the city and helping the nonprofit league build fields there.

The plan for a Home Depot is dead, according to Rep. Gail Hamm, D- East Hampton, and Rep. Joseph C. Serra, D- Middletown, who met recently with veterans to ease their fears.

Members of the local American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Council of Veterans and other veterans groups joined Mayor Dominique Thornton and state legislators who represent Middletown at the meeting.

At the meeting, Serra and Hamm told veterans that because city control of the property is contingent upon using it for recreation, Home Depot is not a possibility. If the land is not used for recreational purposes, it goes back to the state.

The Home Depot issue has opened the eyes of local veterans, who now are expressing concern about any development so close to the cemetery.

"We consider that as sacred property," said Ron Organek, commander of Middletown's council of veterans.

While the veterans understand that children would be supervised while playing at a soccer facility built on the land, they are still concerned about noise, disruption and the possibility of vandalism to the cemetery, Organek said.

"Vets in town have nothing against youth facilities for sports," said Marty Reardon, Middletown's DAV chapter commander. "We don't feel it's an appropriate site."

The veterans' concerns may be moot, however, because the soccer league currently does not have money to build

either outdoor fields or an indoor facility.

Plans are in the works for a project that has been estimated at \$7 million, according to Frank Marchese, vice president of the Middletown Youth Soccer League. As a nonprofit organization, however, the league must wait until the state, city or a private sponsor steps forward to bankroll the project.

"Our first priority is outdoor fields," Marchese said.

As the land sits waiting, veterans hope that they will be invited to participate in any dialogue about uses for the site. "We hope to be put in the loop," said Organek. "Veterans organizations will be watching and try to have some input into what happens in that area."

Hamm said she supports a two- to three-year timeline for the land to be used for recreational purposes. She believes that by that time it will be clear whether a project can be funded, and if it cannot, the land should revert back to the state.

## DETAILS

<b>People:</b>	Hamm, Gail; Serra, Joseph C; Organek, Ron; Marchese, Frank
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