

Sheriff backs off plan for Greene Valley-area firing range

By Katie Foutz

STAFF WRITER

The DuPage County Sheriff's Department decided against moving its outdoor firing range to county land around Greene Valley Forest Preserve after residents protested, a sheriff's department spokeswoman said Friday.

Woodridge officials remain skeptical and passed a resolution Thursday opposing the proposed shooting range location.

DuPage County Sheriff John Zaruba must keep looking for a place to move the range from DuPage Airport land in West Chicago because the DuPage County Technology Park is being built around it. Sheriff's deputies and officers from 35 area police departments use the facility for weapons training.

Sheriff's office spokeswoman Carol Roegner said Zaruba decided against the Greene Valley location two weeks ago, after homeowners associations and individual residents called and e-mailed to voice their opposition.

"We got a lot of input from the community saying that they don't want it," she said. "If they don't want it there, we're not going to put it there."

The proposed site was near a county-owned wastewater treatment plant in unincorporated Woodridge, south of 75th Street between Route 53 and the east branch of the DuPage River. Greene Valley Forest Preserve borders the area on three sides, and a residential area of Woodridge lies across Route 53.

The sheriff also planned to build 250 parking spaces to store impounded cars.

A group of environmentalists known as Preserve the DuPage County Forest Preserve District is working against this proposal and a separate proposal for a public shooting range within the forest preserves.

Wheaton resident Ruth Najacht, a member of the group, said a shooting range would be noisy, disrupting wildlife and human visitors to the preserve. A 250-car impound lot would be an eyesore, and lead bullets shot into an earthen mound also would pollute the soil, she said.

"Who's going to clean that up?" she said.

Dan Wagner, chief aide for DuPage County Board Chairman Robert Schillerstrom, said Schillerstrom and DuPage County Forest Preserve District President Dewey Pierotti opposed that location for the firing range.

The sheriff may have to look at existing ranges outside DuPage County, as areas within the county without houses or businesses become more scarce, Wagner said.

"Bob Schillerstrom wants it where it wouldn't impact people negatively and where there's no risk of any civilian being hurt," he said. "When you put those kind of parameters on it, there's not a whole lot of spots. The tech park is one of the few open areas left."

The future location of the vehicle impound lot remains to be settled. Zaruba was unsure whether the Woodridge site was acceptable for this use. Wagner said the county will further investigate the issue.

Woodridge Mayor William Murphy said he learned of the sheriff's decision at a breakfast Thursday morning, but the Village Board passed its resolution of opposition as planned for dual reasons.

"We await something in writing confirming that (the firing range will not move to Woodridge), but we have no reason to believe it's not accurate," he said. "And No. 2, we are still apprehensive because we're equally concerned about the impound or junk yard proposed. That's also inconsistent with being located next to a forest preserve. We continue to express our opposition."

Murphy added that the vocal opposition to this proposal should be a message to forest preserve commissioners that a firing range — whether it's an officers' training range or a public recreational range — doesn't fit into the forest district.

Forest preserve officials did not return calls for comment Friday.

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