

Firearms Training Facility Overview and Frequently Asked Questions

Project Summary

The County of Albemarle is working to develop a Public Safety Training Facility at the closed Keene Landfill site off Fortune Lane (Rt. 704) in the southern portion of the county. The facility will include critical training infrastructure to improve the safety and effectiveness of our local law enforcement and jail agencies. The City of Charlottesville is committed to sharing 50% of the development cost.

We began discussing this project with the community in mid-January. Colonel Steve Sellers and Fire Chief Dan Eggleston sent a letter to each property owner within a ½ mile radius of the proposed range. The letter provided a short overview of the County's plans for the landfill property. The following week, law enforcement leaders from the City and the County made personal visits to the neighboring homes to share more details about the project and gain input. In an effort to be as transparent as possible and based upon the suggestion of a neighbor, the Albemarle County Police Department established a public website to allow the community to track the project. Since that time, county officials have met with many neighbors and have adjusted various design elements based upon feedback. Colonel Sellers spoke about the range and fielded questions in February and March during three Town Hall meetings sponsored by Supervisor Dumler and Supervisor Snow and other Albemarle County officers spoke in community meetings earlier this fall. Finally, the plan went before the Planning Commission in April.

The public feedback from these events and encounters has helped direct the project. In the early planning stages, we took community advice to make the range more centrally located on the property. We understand the questions and are working to make sure everyone is informed about the project. We are doing everything possible to lessen the impact on the surrounding community.

Project Benefits

The facility would serve as a tool to enhance training efforts for the local police departments. Officers within the Albemarle/Charlottesville communities would use the facility to improve their firearm skills. The departments have outgrown their current arrangement with the Rivanna Rifle & Pistol Club. Currently, officers are only able to train with their weapons an average of one day per year because of range availability. The new facility would allow officers to train to a national average¹ of three times per year. This training is critical for the officers' safety and for the safety of the community they serve.

Locating the training facility within Albemarle County allows resources to remain available if needed in an emergency. A county owned facility also reduces long term training costs over short term facility expenses. This is accomplished by eliminating travel expenses and user-fees associated with other facilities.

¹ Police Firearms Training Survey: Final Report; Gregory B. Morrison, PhD, 2008

Additionally, the Albemarle-Charlottesville community will realize a regional benefit when officers respond to critical incidents. When a large critical incident occurs, or a high attendance event is planned, the partnerships formed in training will enhance the response and handling of the incident. Events like the Aurora, Colorado theater shooting, highlight the need for both advanced firearm skills and effective regional partnerships. By allowing regional officers to train closely together, this facility ensures a higher level and faster response in an emergency.

Project Location

The County has evaluated numerous sites and determined that the reuse of the old Keene Landfill is the most cost-effective and low impact location for this project. The land belongs to the county and is not currently being utilized. In addition to those aspects, the land is remote and large enough to accommodate the proposed facility. Studies were done on three county properties and the Keene Landfill was selected. The Keene site was ideal because of remoteness, soil conditions and size. The other properties evaluated in previous studies are no longer available for consideration. In April, the Planning Commission approved the site, saying it was most compatible with the project and the County's Comprehensive Plan.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. What will the facility consist of?

The facility will be comprised of three outdoor ranges, enclosed on three sides with 20-foot high earth berms. This design will contain fired rounds and mitigate noise impacts. The facility will include a semi-permanent classroom building, a small sheltered area, and a vault toilet. The surrounding area will be fenced and gated for security and will remain forested to create a visual barrier and sound buffer. A gravel road across the property will provide access to the facility from Fortune Lane. The estimated average traffic load will be 10 – 15 police vehicles, 3 – 4 times per week and not on weekends.

The police firearms range is the first phase of a larger concept to utilize the 169 acre county-owned landfill property in rural Keene to train our police, fire-rescue, jail and sheriff's departments on the critical skills they must maintain to keep our community safe. Future phases could include a burn building to train our fire fighters, shared classroom spaces and a drivers' training track.

2. What is the noise impact of the proposed project?

Understanding that this project will generate noise, we are working to minimize this impact through design, operations and future enhancements. Noise studies were done to help us evaluate the site location. The facility location was centrally placed on the property to create equal distances from all adjacent neighbors. Based on a feasibility study, the facility's design will be constructed to both

absorb and re-direct noise away from the closest neighbors. In addition, trees will be maintained around the property to serve as a sound buffer and visual barrier.

Once the facility is operating we will continue to monitor noise impacts. If the noise impact is greater than expected, we will evaluate and propose ways to further mitigate the facility's impacts to the Keene area.

Neighbors have expressed concern about the noise being a constant issue. We plan to post dates and hours of usage and update that information weekly. The facility would not be used on holidays or weekends and nighttime training would be limited. We expect the facility to be used an average of 3-4 days per week with a general operating time frame of 8 am until 5 pm.

Actual noise within a day will be intermittent as classroom training, safety briefings, gun cleaning and range cleanup occupies part of the day. Limited night shooting would be reserved for the late fall and winter months so that we can be off the range by early evening.

3. What will be the traffic impact on Fortune Lane?

The estimated average traffic load will be 10-15 police vehicles, 3-4 times per week and not on weekends. We believe the traffic impact will be less than when the landfill was in use.

VDOT plays a major role in evaluating the expected increase in road use and its impacts on the community. A VDOT engineer will study the road and provide comments during the site plan review process. Those comments will be included in the recommendation to approve or deny the proposed facility.

4. What is the environmental impact of the proposed facility?

Environmentally, we are taking the utmost precautions to ensure no hazardous materials associated with the facility leave the site. We have designed this facility in accordance with the Environmental Protection Agency's Best Management Practices for Lead at Outdoor Shooting Ranges. Our design meets or exceeds the EPA's recommendations.

The County is taking a four-step approach using the EPA guidelines. The four steps include; 1) careful design of earthen berms which best support reclamation and soil testing; 2) regularly scheduled soil testing, lead immobilization methods and carefully designed runoff controls; 3) professional lead removal and recycling; and 4) comprehensive record keeping and monitoring of effectiveness of program.

In addition, the county has hired an environmental consultant to author an Environmental Stewardship Plan outlining facility operation, maintenance and lead management. The soil makeup of the property is ideal for mitigating lead migration and this mitigation is enhanced through effective storm water management.

The county is committed to not disturbing the area of the landfill to ensure the continued stability of the landfill closure plan. The Department of Environmental Quality was consulted and provided input on the facility's design.

5. What safety concerns are associated with the facility operation?

As law enforcement officers, we strive to enhance safety in everything we do. We understand accidents can happen but we are committed to a culture of safety that lowers the potential for harm. The operation of this facility virtually eliminates any possible off property incident. This is accomplished through a high instructor to student ratio, strict adherence to facility rules and a high level of accountability.

The facility is designed to capture all bullets within designated impact areas. These areas, called berms, exist on three sides of each range. The berms are 45-50 feet thick, 20 feet high and are backed up by a high natural grade. The impact areas are double EPA recommendations of clean fill depth. The impact areas have four feet of dirt that contains no solid material to cause a ricochet. Also, there are no structures in the line of fire that could cause a ricochet.

As professionals committed to saving lives, the last thing this department wants it to cause unintentional harm. We have taken every feasible opportunity to ensure the safety of the surrounding area. This training facility will also help ensure our officers are prepared and safe in the line of duty.

6. Who would use the proposed site and how often?

The proposed facility would be used for police officers, deputies and jail staff in Albemarle County and the City of Charlottesville. The City of Charlottesville has committed to providing funding for 50 % of the project's cost. It is anticipated that there would be between 15-20 people on site per use. The facility would not be used on holidays or weekends and nighttime training would be limited. We expect the facility to be used an average of 3-4 days per week with a general operating time frame of 8 am until 5 pm.