

Rep. Lee Terry said Tuesday that he will introduce a bill in the U.S. House to authorize a new national veterans cemetery in eastern Nebraska .

Advocates of creating a cemetery near Offutt Air Force Base have tried for years to convince the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs that enough demand exists.

To establish a new cemetery, VA guidelines call for identifying a geographic area with a large population of veterans unserved by a national or state veterans cemetery.

So far, advocates in Nebraska have been unable to prove that enough veterans live within a 75-mile radius of the proposed Bellevue location, said Terry, R-Neb.

"The bill would be to specifically allow that eastern Nebraska be recognized for a federal veterans cemetery, because right now we don't meet the criteria," he said. "If you just add on a few miles, we would."

Former State Sen. Paul Hartnett of Bellevue , an advocate for the cemetery, said the VA policy discriminates against rural communities, where people are spread out and are accustomed to traveling longer distances.

Hartnett said other communities across the country have won approval for cemeteries although they failed to meet the criteria.

The location most talked about for a cemetery lies east of 36th Street, between Cornhusker Road and Nebraska Highway 370, under the path of airplanes landing at Offutt.

To demonstrate local backing for Terry's effort, Hartnett and others are soliciting support from service clubs and local government.

The Sarpy County Board passed a resolution Tuesday encouraging federal officials in "the strongest possible terms" to do what's necessary to establish a national veterans cemetery in eastern Sarpy County .

Bellevue historically has had a military presence. Fort Crook , an Army infantry post, was founded in 1888. The Martin bomber plant, built in 1941, produced B-26 and B-29 bombers for use in World War II. In 1948, Fort Crook and the bomber plant became Offutt Air Force Base and the home of the former Strategic Air Command.

Offutt currently serves as home to the unified U.S. Strategic Command and the Air Force's 55th Wing.

The County Board said residents have welcomed military personnel and made them a part of the communities in Sarpy County, and many military personnel have stayed to raise families.

If the cemetery became reality, it would be Nebraska's second national cemetery for veterans, joining Fort McPherson National Cemetery near Maxwell, east of North Platte.

