

Mary Ann Jacob, Chair
Phil Carroll, Vice Chair
Joe Girgasky, Recording Secretary
A. Jeffrey Capeci
Robert Merola
Neil Chaudhary



TOWN OF NEWTOWN

Minutes of the Legislative Council Ordinance Committee DRAFT-DRAFT-DRAFT

The Ordinance Committee meeting originally scheduled for May 29 took place on June 6, 2013 at the Newtown High School Lecture Hall. Ordinance Committee Chairman Jacob called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm.

Present: Ms. Jacob, Mr. Capeci, Mr. Merola, Mr. Girgasky, Mr. Carroll joined at 7:50 pm. Absent: Mr. Chaudhary

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

Laura Duffy, 17 Dover La., SH – lives on cul-de-sac where homes are kept nicely with exception of absentee landlord property; wishes to see landlord held to standard that maintains neighborhood values.

Andy Buzzi, 38 Obtuse Rd., Newtown – thanked committee; proposed changes seem fair & reasonable; respects the rights of citizens & landowners; suggest adding mention of new eligibility certificate for long guns (state of CT).

Pierre Rochman, 82 Taunton Hill Rd., Newtown – ordinance should deal with safety issues not types of firearms owned; thinks 500' is not enough.

Lawrence Thompson, 60 Osborne Hill Rd., SH – looking to make Newtown a safer healing place; outdoor target shooting should not be allowed within earshot of victims; suggests permitting with ombudsman who can be called to assist with complaints.

Dave Ackert, 6 Cider Mill Rd., SH – not clear on permitting; met with PD Chief where Chief explained permitting not a viable option; can the Town issue permits, rather than PD, to avoid liability?; consider lot size for ranges; target shooting should be part of healing process where children are not frightened.

Robert Hutchinson, 8 Split Rock Rd., Newtown – acknowledged Chief stated that permitting too complex, too burdensome, presents liability; keep permitting, have Town agencies permit; ban firearms discharge in entire town as done in Weston; if no ban, don't allow use of machine guns or assault weapons; suggests no target practice within 2.5 miles of schools; Middle Gate had a recent complaint of target shooting and an arrest was made near Newtown High.

Pete Muckell, 14 Dinglebrook La., Newtown – feels weapons are not safe within 500'; target shooters need to be regulated; Newtown resembles Weston who is excellent model.

Gary Lilgrenjen, 15 Split Rock Rd., Newtown – safety is the issue; no examples of accidents found; target shooting is very safe; sports such as football and cheerleading have produced a number of injuries; some self-inflicted injuries during hunting have been reported.

Bob Brand, 5 Arrowhead La., SH – hunters/hunting should not be restricted through this ordinance.

Aaron Cox, 31 Pond Brook Rd., Newtown – thanked committee; emotions will play into decisions; trusts that a fair ordinance will be found; Ste of CT already has “unlawful discharge” regulation that could possibly be included in ordinance.

Ellen Aho, 81 Taunton Hill Rd., Newtown – discussed email (see attached)

Andrew Morosky, 11 The Boulevard, Newtown – has frightened children; target shooting should be done in areas where it would be less noisy; possibly sunset clauses on restrictions.

Josh Siebert, 69 High Rock Rd., SH – opposes permits for people; PD Chief said there have been no deaths or evidence of injury; discussion all emotional due to tragedy; target shooting has been safe.

Luke Aho, 81 Taunton Hill Rd., Newtown – safety is a concern; 500' doesn't seem to be enough; 4 hour window is a long time; neighbors recent target shooting was disruptive.

Eric Poupon, 23 Split Rock Rd., Newtown - thanked committee; would like to see more onus on person who has weapons; add language to make owner responsible; unsafe practices need to be stopped.

David Stowe, 15 Patricia La., Newtown – thanked committee; sports vs. target shooting, cannot be compared; range has risk so why not have permitting? burden of risk should be on target shooters.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR 5-8-13: Mr. Capeci made a motion to accept the minutes from May. 8, 2013, seconded by Mr. Merola, all in favor.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON THE FOLLOWING:

a. Firearms Ordinance – Discussion took place on the following: **(a)** definitions **(b)** nuisance animal control and self-defense **(c)** ratios that may accommodate unlicensed individuals **(d)** long gun eligibility certificate **(e)** statutory limitation of fine **(f)** school area consideration. Continued adjustments and clarifications to follow.

b. Anti-Blight Ordinance – Ms. Jacob stated that the correction to the “appeals” section have been completed, reviewed by counsel and ready to be forwarded to the Council. Mr. Capeci motioned to move the Anti-Blight Ordinance to the Legislative Council, seconded by Mr. Girgasky, all in favor.

The Committee agreed to meet on June 25, 2013, 7:30 pm, location to be determined.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

Lawrence Thompson, 60 Osborne Hill Rd., SH – concerned over sensitivity to others regarding target shooting; reiterated the ombudsman process; wishes for permitting to be in place.

Robert Hutchinson, 8 Split Rock Rd., Newtown – mentioned a self-defense exception; use of lower half of backstop.

Dave Ackert, 6 Cider Mill Rd., SH – consider use of assault weapons and high capacity magazines; lack of permit or approval for use would limit construction error.

John Rondano, 15 Hi Barlow Rd., Newtown – former building inspector, building inspectors do not inspect shooting ranges.

Tim Aho, 81 Taunton Hill Rd., Newtown – 4 hours of shooting is a long time; shooting into town property or preserves should be excluded.

Andy Buzzi, 38 Obtuse Rd., Newtown – firearms within school zones already in State statutes; explained how birdshot does not carry far; licensed adult should be able to supervise a non-licensed individual or some other ratio; most complaints are noise related; firearms courses are all about safety; Newtown has a safe track record; earth, proper blocks, steel all make good backstops; agrees that 10' backstop from top of target is good; reiteration of State statutes not needed.

Aaron Cox, 31 Pond Brook Rd., Newtown – 500’ would make it impossible to ever discharge a firearm; 20’ backstops are huge even 10’ is rather large; 500’ would exclude much property from target shooting.

Ken Locke, 7 Valley Field Rd., SH – Newtown is safe; some individuals automatically interpret target shooting as reckless; neighbors should discuss their issues.

Ryan Cameron, 12 Split Rock Rd., Newtown – new to town since Sept.2012; surprised to hear shooting; shooting should be away from where people live; wants safety and peace of mind.

Robert Hutchinson, 8 Split Rock Rd., Newtown – composite materials good for backstop construction; rubber tires not desirable backstop material; 10’ is good for a youth range at 50’; target shooting is different than hunting.

Eric Poupon, 23 Split Rock Rd., Newtown – thanked committee for considering changes to backstop; consider some ratio for licensed/unlicensed individuals.

Aaron Cox, 31 Pond Brook Rd., Newtown – nuisance animal control covered by hunting?

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Girgasky, seconded by Ms. Jacob, all in favor. .

Respectfully Submitted,
Joe Girgasky

Attachments:
E. Aho, email

June 6, 2013

Dear members of the Newtown Legislative Council Ordinance Committee,

My name is Ellen Aho. I live at 81 Taunton Hill Road with my husband, Tim Shearin, and our three children. We have been lived in our home for 14 years. We love living in Newtown; our children attend the Newtown schools (one is a 2012 graduate) and we have put substantial investment into our home and property.

I have been following the Ordinance Committee in the news, but have not been involved prior to this time. Now I find that I have a personal interest in this subject.

Recently a new owner moved into the house next door. Ten days ago, on Memorial Day, that neighbor spent the morning target shooting.

I have never experienced anything like that before. First, it was terrifying. The sound of close range gunfire is upsetting and frightening to me and my family. It is not a sound we associate with sport or fun. My 10 year old ran into the house because she was frightened. One of my neighbors came running across the street to see what was going on.

Beyond the frightening part, the shooting was loud. Loud, inescapable and intrusive, especially since it went on for a period of time. This activity was disruptive to our home and our peace of mind.

Most important, having a neighbor who is target shooting raises serious issues of safety. We live in a residential neighborhood. I have three children, a dog and two horses. Nearby there are homes with pets, people, CHILDREN – spending time outdoors, especially in nice weather. In addition, my house and the neighbor's house both back up to Holcombe Hill, the headquarters of the Newtown Forest Association. Hikers and nature lovers come from all over to enjoy this open space, and it is a popular dog walking spot.

When someone is shooting a gun in a residential neighborhood, there is inevitably a risk of physical harm to the people and animals nearby. How do we know that the shooter is qualified? What if he invites others to shoot at his home? A person shooting a gun can have the best intentions, expert training and excellent safety precautions, but there is no way to guarantee that there will never be a stray bullet or a mistake. Shooting a gun in a residential area, even with safety measures, simply IS NOT SAFE.

It's my understanding that there has been some focus during this revision process on pre-existing shooting ranges in town. I want to draw the attention of the Committee to the situation facing me and my family: The idea that apparently anyone can move into a home and decide to start up a private backyard shooting range in a residential neighborhood, whether or not there has ever been such activity there before. (Given the size of most lots in Newtown, the 500 foot rule is easily satisfied). Hikers, nature lovers, children at play, gardeners, horseback riders, landscapers – all in the area who play or work or simply sit outdoors – can find their peace of mind and safety at risk at any time.

I believe that if other Newtown residents knew that they, too, could suddenly find target shooting ranges popping up next door, this Committee would be inundated with people who want to restrict target shooting. There are relatively few private shooting ranges, so relatively little objection. But I have shared my story with many people, all of whom are shocked and aghast to learn that I now have a neighbor who engages in target shooting next door to my home.

Having a right to own a gun does not and should not mean that a person has the right to shoot that gun for fun in his yard. There are appropriate places for sport shooting, such as shooting ranges or hunt clubs. Target shooting does NOT belong in residential neighborhoods.

I would like to see target shooting banned completely in residential areas. Barring that, I believe there should be strict limits on times of day, duration, and distance from other property lines, as well as strict requirements for proof of safety and registration of any ranges. I believe that the vast majority of residents in our town do not participate in target shooting and have no desire to do so. Please uphold the peace and safety of our residential areas.

Thank you for your attention to my thoughts.
Respectfully submitted,
Ellen Aho