

**Town of Coventry
Firearms Safety/Home Shooting Range Study Committee
Meeting Minutes
Thursday November 7, 2024**

1. Call To Order, Roll Call:

By: Murray

Time: 6:34 p.m.

Place: Conference Room B & Zoom

		PRESENT	ABSENT
REGULAR MEMBERS:	Brian Murray, Chairperson	X	
	Brittany Debiase-Franco, Vice-Chairperson		X
	Dudley Brand	X	
	Kenneth Stein	X	
	Carolyn Batz		X
STAFF:	Jana Roberson, Director of Planning & Dev't.	X	
	Chief of Police Eric Peterson	X	

Also present: Jonathan Hand-Town Councilor/Steering Committee Chairperson, Erika Avellino, Alex Taylor-Special Projects Coordinator (Joined at 7:30 PM) and Jim Drumm-Town Manager (joined at 7:30 PM).

2. Approval Of Minutes:

A. Minutes, October 17, 2024:

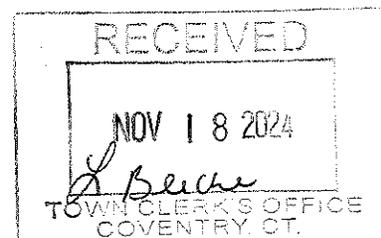
Motion: I move to accept the October 17th, 2024, Firearms Safety/Home Shooting Range Study Committee Meeting Minutes.

By: Stein

Second: Brand

Discussion: None

Vote: Unanimously in favor



3. Review of Incidents:

Police Chief Peterson selected a few applicable firearm/shooting incident reports that the Coventry Police Department has received over the last 2 ½ to 3 years for the committee to review. However, over this time period there were at least 30 to 40 calls received by the department. Chief Peterson explained that every one of these calls uses department resources, and often times there is only so much they can do. Reports that were inconclusive or unsubstantial were not included in tonight's review.

Chief Peterson reminded that there are no real guidelines (in terms of berm height or range distance) when responding to these types of calls. The officers have to determine course of action/response by matter of opinion, which differs between officers. If there was an ordinance or statute in place, that would give the officers the ability to have consistent determinations/course of action.

70 Riley Mountain Rd:

This was one of the largest cases the Coventry Police Department dealt with due to safety concerns of the home shooting range. Several different officers responded to this address on different occasions as the situation became escalated. Chief Peterson explained that he went out to the property and found some issues. One of which was that the homeowner was shooting into a berm on his own property that Chief Peterson felt could have been higher. Without proper guidelines this is only a matter of opinion. He continued that several neighbors called about this property, and the main complaint is the noise from shooting. This case escalated to the point that the State Attorney got involved. The State Attorney confirmed that there are no state-wide guidelines or ordinances for these issues as it is preferred the towns address these matters through their own governments. Chief Peterson reminded that this committee could recommend to the Town Council or Town Manager to establish an ordinance for the Town of Coventry if deemed the best course of action/solution. As the situation escalated over time, the resident was eventually arrested for disorderly conduct for intentionally antagonizing by use of his firearms on his home range. Chief Peterson explained that for some of the cases they will charge for disorderly conduct/reckless endangerment as those are the only rules they can go by. Since those rules are a matter of opinion on a case-by-case basis this can lead to difficulties. He reiterated that the majority of calls are for noise complaints not necessarily safety issues, as seen in the incident reports. Without a town ordinance there is little action that can be taken on noise complaints related to shooting. It was noted that while firearms noise can be disruptive; it is a relief that there aren't many safety concerns. Chief Peterson explained that now the home shooting range at 70 Riley Mountain has been moved elsewhere on their property and is at a safer distance of 400-450 feet from the neighboring property.

Some of the safety concerns that are seen are that a resident may not have a berm and are simply target shooting. Without a backstop/berm, a bullet can travel a great distance before something stops it (i.e. a tree). Property surroundings should be evaluated to ensure there is plenty of distance for a home shooting range in all directions. It was noted that depending on the angle the firearm is fired from, gravity will take into effect and pull the bullet to the ground, which can be considered when looking at safe distances.

142/258 Root Road:

Chief Peterson explained that this was an instance where the neighbor called with safety concerns. There seemed to be some misunderstanding of property lines, as well as a lack of an adequate backstop. The resident of 142 was on the property of 258, but it was resolved to being a mistake. Moving forward, the resident of 142 was reminded of safe shooting practices, including being aware of the surroundings, line of fire, as well as having a proper back stop. The neighbors agreed to communicate and make contact prior to shooting. The department has not been called back.

285 Brewster Street:

The property size is significant, and the owner is shooting into the direction of the woods at a berm which has been deemed safe. There have been at least 3-4 calls from neighboring properties in regard to noise, as well as complaints from a resident to the Town Council during Audience of Citizens. The range is currently 1000 feet from any neighboring homes in the direction of fire; however, there are homes in close distance to the 285 Brewster Street property. There were additional concerns of a walking path along Ash Brook behind the property, but those turned out to be incorrect.

Merrow Road:

A resident is shooting here, causing noise complaints to the shooting club on this street. The PD is often called out to this street for noise complaints.

South Street:

The PD is often called out to this street for noise complaints. Some of the firearm noise could be coming from Nathan Hale State Forest where hunting is permitted. Chief Peterson reviewed several of the calls that came in from South Street, and confirmed that while they were spread out, many did not occur during hunting season.

Discussion:

Chief Peterson reminded that a high percentage of the Firearm Shoot complaints are due to noise. He also stated that in most cases, he feels that the berms individuals are using are not high enough. Stein reminded that there are going to be differences between the berms used at a commercial gun club and those installed at a home shooting range due to a majority of factors like financial ability. Additionally, the recommendation for a berm at a commercial range is a height of 20 feet. A 20-foot berm would be too tall for a home shooting range.

Chief Peterson also explained that there have been calls where the shooting is going on during inappropriate times, where it is too dark or too late. It was noted that someone could be using their thermal imaging scope at that time to test it.

The police department response procedure was discussed. Peterson explained that they review the area, check the direction of fire, inspect if their range is near living areas or an area of safety concern. They also check to see if there is a berm or other stop for the bullets, as well as what is behind the berm or line of fire, like woods, uphill/downhill landscape, or residences.

It was questioned if an ordinance was developed, who would check the home ranges for safety and berm compliance. Chief Peterson explained that these would be checked on a case-by-case basis. It was suggested to have it checked ahead of time, and who would do the inspecting. Drumm explained that it would be a zoning enforcement officer's responsibility to ensure guidelines were followed.

Brand explained that Cromwell issues home shooting range permits, which are inspected by the Police Department. Other towns that have ordinances are Tolland and Winchester which cover home shooting range distances. Ordinances are hard to find for reference since very few towns have them. It was explained that simply having an ordinance does not fully resolve all safety and noise issues. Stein commented that one of the guidelines to be included in an ordinance or home shooting range permit is to ensure an area of safety concerns is not on the "same plane" as the range. The shooter should look left and right and not have anything adjacent, like a residence, playscape, pool, flammables, etc.

Brand commented that there are some colleges that have home shooting range designs which can be a resource for homeowners when constructing a new range or modifying an existing one.

It was discussed that there may be people calling with complaints due to the fact they are anti-gun. While this may be true, it will likely not be a majority of the calls, and it was not the case for Brewster Street as there were several complaints about noise and safety. Any of the calls regarding home shooting could be a complaint about noise, safety, or both. It was noted that with the difference in calibers, the bigger they are, the louder they are. This is important as any distance guidelines established in an ordinance may or may not resolve the noise issue.

Chief Peterson was asked what is something he wishes the town had to help resolve these issues. Peterson explained that he would like to have something on the books, for his officers to reference to ensure a home shooting range is safe. Additionally, he would like reasonable official guidelines for noise complaints in terms of appropriate shooting times and length of shooting. Stein explained the education is important as some of the main causes of firearms incidents are due to ignorance or recklessness.

4. Review of State Statute:

Section 53-203 covers the unlawful discharge of firearms, which states:

Any person who intentionally, negligently or carelessly discharges any firearm in such a manner as to be likely to cause bodily injury or death to persons or domestic animals, or the wanton destruction of property, shall be guilty of a class C misdemeanor.

This is used to determine whether or not a person is charged with reckless endangerment based on shooting practices. Reckless endangerment is outlined in section 53a-63 as:

(a) A person is guilty of reckless endangerment in the first degree when, with extreme indifference to human life, he recklessly engages in conduct which creates a risk of serious physical injury to another person.

(b) Reckless endangerment in the first degree is a class A misdemeanor.

Currently there are no state statutes around home shooting ranges, but there are hunting specifications which state:

(d) There shall be no hunting with firearms, discharging of firearms or carrying of loaded firearms within five hundred feet of any building occupied by people or domestic animals or used for storage of flammable or combustible materials, unless written permission of owner of such buildings is obtained and carried while hunting to allow closer shooting distances, except that the above referred to distance shall be not less than two hundred fifty feet unless written permission of owner of such buildings is obtained and carried while hunting to allow closer shooting distances when waterfowl is hunted in tidal water areas from land shooting positions or from floating blinds anchored adjacent to land or from rock formations. The provisions of this subsection shall not apply to landowners, their spouses or lineal descendants when hunting within five hundred feet of buildings owned by them or, when hunting waterfowl, within two hundred fifty feet of such buildings, but shall apply when said persons are hunting within said distances of buildings not so-owned.

(e) No hunting weapon shall be discharged toward any person, building or domestic animal when the same is within range or from or across the traveled portion of any public roadway.

Roberson explained the difficulties with measuring the noise when noise complaints come in. It is hard to enforce, even with an ordinance. However, noise guidelines should be considered when looking at the appropriate use of a home shooting range.

It was discussed if the committee did develop an ordinance, if there are any situations that would be grandfathered in. Drumm and Roberson explained that while this is typical for zoning regulations, it would not be applicable for noise. It was discussed that if existing home shooting ranges were grandfathered in, then the existing problems would not be solved, and there is the potential that unsafe conditions would remain.

5. Discussion of Topics to Review/Research:

The goal is to look into the best course of action to help resolve these problems in terms of safety and nuisance of home shooting range. Items to be research are:

1. Backstop/Berm Height and Material **Priority for Safety Reasons*
2. Best Home Shooting Range Practices **Priority for Safety Reasons*
3. Versions (Scalable) of Home Shooting Ranges

4. Other CT Town Ordinances/Policies-Taylor put together a memo of ordinances used in some other towns that will be shared with Roberson.
5. Neighborly Agreement-In terms of distance
6. EPA Documents for Shooting Ranges
7. Acceptable Noise Allowance
8. Shooting Frequencies
9. Number of Shooters Allowed

An educational public outreach was suggested to be hosted by the committee as things develop and the committee's work progresses. If an ordinance was developed, there would need to be a public hearing. Prior to the hearing, the committee can request public input on safety concerns, etc., This would also be a good time to educate the public on best practices for home shooting ranges, discuss ignorance versus recklessness, community safety, and guidelines for police department response.

Murray requested Roberson to reach out to Tolland regarding what their ordinance is, why they established one, and how successful it has been.

6. Other Business:

A Meeting schedule needs to be established for 2025, the 3rd Thursday of every month is being suggested. The next meeting will be held December 19th, 2024, at 6:30 PM. At this meeting the 2025 Meeting dates need to be prepared. The first few meeting dates for 2025 will be Thursday January 16th and February 20th.

7. Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned by consensus at 8:39 p.m.

Submitted by,

Nicole Archambault

Nicole Archambault

Minutes Clerk

PLEASE NOTE: These minutes are not official until approved by the Committee at the next meeting. Please see the next Committee meeting minutes for approval or changes.