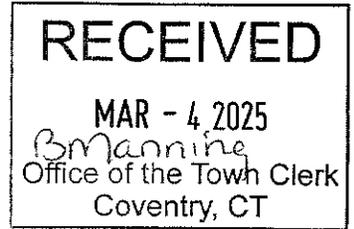


Town of Coventry
 Firearms Safety/Home Shooting Range Study Committee
 Meeting Minutes
 Thursday February 20, 2025



1. Call To Order, Roll Call:

By: Murray Time: 6:33 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

Debiase-Franco has resigned as of today and will no longer be a member of this Committee. Chief Peterson provided notice for his absence.

Also present: Special Projects Coordinator Alex Taylor.

2. Approval Of Minutes:

A. Minutes, January 16, 2025:

Motion: I move to accept the January 16th, 2025, Firearms Safety/Home Shooting Range Study Committee Meeting Minutes.

By: Brand Second: Batz

Discussion: None

Vote: Unanimously in favor

Motion: I move to add agenda item 2.B. Correction of the November 7th, 2024 Meeting Minutes.

By: Batz

Second: Stein

Discussion: None

Vote: Unanimously in favor

B. Correction of the November 7th, 2024 Meeting Minutes:

Roberson explained that a correction was suggested for clarity of an incident, as requested by Chief Peterson and Town Manager James Drum. The language currently included does not accurately represent the arrest that occurred. She noted that page 2, under 70 Riley Mountain Road, sentences 10 and 11, read, "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...".

The suggested correction is as follows:

"As the situation escalated over time, the resident was eventually arrested for disorderly conduct for intentionally antagonizing the neighbors regarding a number of issues, especially including loud noise from music and from firearms use on his home range, which is close in proximity to his neighbor's property. Chief Peterson further explained that for some of the cases...".

Motion: I move to accept the change to the November 7th, 2024 Meeting Minutes.

By: Stein

Second: Batz

Discussion: None

Vote: Unanimously in favor

3. Review of Additional Requested Ordinances:

Special Projects Coordinator Alex Taylor reviewed and shared highlights the following ordinances, as requested last meeting:

Avon:

- No minor under 16 years of age, without supervision.
- No firearm discharge within 500 feet of a structure.
- Written consent from landowners to use property for firearms discharge/usage.
- Violations of the ordinance result in fines.

Cromwell:

- Permit must be obtained by the Chief of Police (there are a few exceptions where this does not apply)
 - Permits are granted for any lawful purpose and valid for 1 year.
- No minor under 18, without supervision.
- No firearm discharge within 500 feet of a structure.

- Violation of the ordinance results in fines
- Does not apply to an established target practice range of an organized rifle, gun or hunting club or on any approved indoor range, nor shall it apply to any landowner using firearms when in the act of protecting his or her property from destructive animals or under circumstances permitted by state law.
- Clarifies that the chapter is subject to all State of CT state statutes.
- The purpose of this ordinance is to limit firearm discharge in the interest of public safety.

Hartford: Taylor noted this was less applicable to Coventry, and was very lengthy.

- Clear definitions of key verbiage is provided.
- Restrictions for sale or transfer of pistols and revolvers
 - Permit required
 - Application process including (issuance, expiration, fees, revocation, displays, record keeping, purchase applications, sale/transfer reports).
- Lost or Stolen Firearms requires report, with consequences for failing to report.
- Permit to carry pistol or revolver
 - Requirements which include application process, issuance, and fees.

This ordinance does not focus on requirements surrounding the actual discharge of firearms.

Middletown:

- Specified for carrying of firearms or hunting.
 - Prohibited in city parks or recreation areas.
- Exceptions for current and retired police officers.
- Violations result in fines.

South Windsor:

- No discharge of firearm or dangerous device within 500 feet of a dwelling, unless provided permission of all owners/occupants
- No discharge in the direction of people, domestic animals, building or vehicle.
- Dangerous device defined to: any air rifle, BB gun, slingshot, crossbow, bow and arrow, or any other device capable of projecting an object with sufficient force so as to cause injury to person or domestic animals or to cause damage to property.
- Does not apply to reasonable self-defense or legal duty.
- Consequences for violations.

Questions/Discussion:

Taylor explained that should this committee proceed with an ordinance, a draft can be put together pulling relevant pieces from any of the reviewed ordinances as they apply to the needs of Coventry.

It was noted that it seemed that Hartford pulled their ordinance straight from state statute, and only focuses on licensed arms dealers, not home ranges or firearms discharge associated with a home range.

Murray commented that it was interesting South Windsor had bow and arrow listed as a dangerous weapon in the ordinance. He reminded that there are state hunting regulations that do not put restrictions on things like bow and arrows, so Coventry would need to be careful as to not impede any existing hunting regulations.

Stein also commented that it was odd that "out-of-doors" was specified. He explained that this should not be included in such an ordinance as many fire arms discharge that occurs indoors, for whatever reason, will likely end up out-of-doors. He also stressed that in a lot of cases the 500 ft distances from neighbors will be difficult, so it may depend on the lay of the land. Additionally, he explained that air rifles, BB guns, cross bows and compound bows should not be included, as it could restrict family hobbies or target practice that does not endanger neighbors. He stated that if any of those were used intentionally to harm a neighbor, etc., that is usually considered a criminal activity. Brand agreed that including such verbiage would make an ordinance too broad.

Murray was curious to the effectiveness of these ordinances, and if things are being enforced.

Taylor explained that he can submit a list of questions drafted by the committee to Chief Peterson, if they want to put one together to get further information on effectiveness, functionality and available man power. Roberson explained what is required in order to enforce zoning violations, including witness testimony.

4. Discussion of Preferred Solutions to Identified Problems:

Roberson pointed out that Taylor drafted a list (attached to the agenda) of potential ordinance components based on identified problems, should an ordinance be the desired solution. Taylor explained that this list is in no way town staff suggesting an ordinance or specific course of action. However, based on discussions from the previous meeting, it seemed that an ordinance may be a possible approach. This list is to serve as a tool to help develop solutions/guidelines to problems that have brought forward.

Taylor added that at this committee is at the halfway point of their meetings as designated by the charter. He felt it important that the committee look towards next steps to present solutions for the problems identified based on what has been studied thus far.

Stein noted that in one of the earlier meetings, Chief Peterson expressed that he had no tools to enforce some of these complaints. Having an ordinance would allow him to have that tool, and is a written law for a municipality. He questioned if there is any other solution available that would allow our police department to be able to take corrective action. Roberson couldn't think of one, and it was reminded that while a zoning regulation is an option, it is not ideal for reasons discussed previously. Roberson also discussed that it would be a great tool for this committee to provide and educational presentation as education is a great tool.

Brand felt there was enough information to work with, and they would review and select what best fits Coventry. The committee went through the list of components to determine what would work best for Coventry. Taylor also noted that this committee could draft safety guidelines for firearm discharge and home shooting ranges, and recommend those be enacted along with the recommendation that the Town Council adopts a noise ordinance.

1. Prohibition on discharge of a firearm within a distance from another building:

- Taylor noted that distance wasn't as commonly reported in terms of a complaint, but noise was. While the noise itself is difficult to measure, distance is the next available measurement to determine what the noise level may be.
- Distance is attributed to both noise and safety.
- Roberson suggested that property lines be ruled out for measuring purposes as they are invisible. It should be from firearm discharge to structure, habitable area, flammable materials, etc.
- Stein stated that Tolland has 250 ft listed, and they have explained they have never had to enforce their ordinance. He reminded that Tolland has a similar geographical layout to Coventry, in terms of being rural, so 250 ft may work better than 500 ft for Coventry. Roberson felt that this guideline would rule out areas by Main Street, and around the lake in an appropriate way.

There was consensus to use a distance of 250ft as the distance in a draft regulation/ordinance, with exception of written permission.

2. Range Design

- Require a backstop with reasonable limits. Technical documents should be used to set back stop requirements. Firearm calibers should be considered for this.
- Stein suggested including: The back stop should be of sufficient depth and strength to stop any size projectile the user intends to use now, or in the future.
- Provide a definition for "range".
- Police Department involvement in inspecting and permitting home ranges as safe, with possible home range registry. There are concerns with Police Department manpower to accomplish this.
- Concerns were discussed surrounding legal action, if the town/PD signs off on a home range as safe, and a component fails leading to damage or injury. Taylor explained he will be reaching out to the town attorney.
- Registration could be through online portal, similar to dog license, making this simple/low commitment for a homeowner. Batz reminded that if there was ever an issue/violation, the individual in violation would get consequences for both violation and failure to register.
- It was reminded that firearms records are protected and cannot be public knowledge. This may be applicable to home range registration.

Taylor explained that he plans to put together a draft based on components discussed and have it reviewed by both the Town Manager and Town Attorney, especially to make sure liability of the town is not increased.

The committee discussed the differences between safety related to distance, and deliberate reckless endangerment/illegal use of a firearm. This will be discussed further with Chief Peterson.

3. Exceptions

- Stein felt putting restrictions on air rifles/air pistols, discourages parent/child hobby time. Especially one that is crucial to establishing a weapons and firearm safety foundation.

- Committee agreed to limit the draft to firearms at this point, and leave out air rifles/air pistols. A clear definition of firearm will need to be included.
 - Include the exceptions listed like self-defense, law enforcement, shooting ranges/gun clubs.
 - Pest control was discussed in terms of agricultural crop and livestock damage, as well risk to domestic pets from coyotes, bears, etc.
 - Roberson suggested that ceremonies be more clearly defined.
4. Time Restrictions
- Set start and end time, with end time adjusted seasonally.
 - Batz suggested a set end time, or sunset, whichever comes first.
 - Committee agreed on start time of 10 AM. A hunting restriction would be needed.
 - End time was suggested as 8 PM or sunset (if earlier).
 - A shooting time window was discussed for its practicality, as well as challenges to enforce one.
 - Holidays were also discussed as being difficult to enforce.
5. Requirement to notify law enforcement
- The committee wanted to run this by Chief Peterson to see if this is something the department could take on.
 - Taylor noted that some residents have done this already, as a courtesy.
6. Restriction on use by minors
- Don't duplicate if it is already in state law.
 - Require supervision.
7. Restriction on rate of fire/frequency of shooting
- Complaints have been received about the intensity of shooting.
 - Back stop requirement may limit the number of shooters firing at once.
 - There was consensus to leave this off the draft.
8. Fine for failing to comply
- Monetary (Approx. \$100).
 - Very effective enforcement tool.
 - Look into legal limits for fines.
 - Suggested \$100/day or per offense.
 - Failure to pay fine can result in further legal action.

Taylor will compose a list of questions to submit to Chief Peterson.

5. Discussion of a Report to the Town Council Regarding Study Progress:

Taylor explained that the charter does not require this committee to formally go back to the Town Council to inform they have selected to move forward with an ordinance. It is expected at the end of the life of the committee, the committee will present their findings/suggestions.

However, Drumm suggested that the committee provide an update on committee progress via town staff member. Murray volunteered to write up a status memo to share with the Town Council on the study committee's progress.

6. Other Business:

The resignation of a member was discussed as a potential issue. Taylor explained that he believes it is on an upcoming Steering Committee meeting agenda, where it will be addressed and the process to fill the seat will begin.

Taylor reminded with Debiase-Franco's resignation, there is no longer a Vice-Chairperson, so the committee should select another one. The committee requested to wait until the vacant seat is filled.

Roberson reminded the next meeting is on Thursday, March 20th.

7. Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned by consensus at 8:58 PM.

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.