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Councilors take aim at target shooting

By Tim Riel

Following three public meetings in eight months, adopting an ordinance to regulate target shooting is in the town's crosshairs.

The Jamestown Town Council will have a public hearing on the contentious law Tuesday night.

A committee of Town Administrator Andy Nota, Police Chief Ed Mello and Town Councilors Kristine Trocki and Mary Meagher recommended four subsections to the weapons chapter. While the language has some blanks for specifics, the draft regulates setbacks, times and permissions.

The proposed section mandates ranges be private property. If firing in a neighbor's yard, the shooter must have written permission from the landowner. According to the draft, the shooter is required to show the consent to police officers on request.

Specific times and setbacks were left void, but the committee made suggestions at its February meeting. One recommendation was from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays. Shooting at night, Mello said, should not be allowed.

As for setbacks, Mello researched neighboring communities and reported regulations ranging between 375 to 1,000 feet. He recommended a 500-foot setback from any building or property line.

The ordinance also would define "firearm" and "discharge," and would prohibit shooting along or across public roads. Finally, language indicates that new regulations have no bearing on the right to use a firearm in self-defense.

The controversy began in August 2014 after residents expressed safety concerns.

"My son can't go for a walk in the woods without bullets whizzing by his head," William Brazil of

East Shore Road wrote then in a letter to the town councilors.

Residents complained about ranges on Wildflower Lane, North Main Road and Carr Lane. Gunshots also have been reported at the community farm on Eldred Avenue.

The first of the three meetings was conducted last July, and more than a dozen residents on both sides of the issue were heard. According to Councilor Blake Dickinson, outdoorsmen have a long history of self-policing.

“If someone was shooting near the schools, we wouldn’t tolerate it,” he said. “That’s why it’s never happened. We have too much to lose.”

Initially, Dickinson was open to regulations if they would alleviate fears. However, he believes the discussion has morphed. Opponents also questioned times. First, the final meeting of the committee to discuss target shooting was at 10 a.m. on a Tuesday. Second, the shooting hours discussed end by 4 p.m..

“What do you do at that time?” Dickinson asked. “Most people work.”

His brother, Bruce, said more people get hurt riding bicycles. Shooting is an Olympic sport, he said, and teaching gun safety is important. He shoots with his sons.

“I think it’s good that we’re talking about this,” he said. “But we have to be very careful about pushing young people back into the house.”

Jonathan Caito is also a target shooter. He fires guns at his mother’s house on Wildflower Lane. According to Caito, safety is his top priority. There is no alcohol allowed, he said, and everyone on the range wears eye protection. Also, he alerts the police department when he is shooting.

Phil Willis has been target shooting at his range on North Main Road for 40 years, he said, and there has never been an enforcement problem. However, he believes the problems stems from homeowners not being able to rent their properties.

“They hear shooting and they don’t rent,” he said. “That’s the crux of this whole damn problem.”

On the flipside, Mike de Angeli said he lives 200 feet from a range. While he is not against shooting, the noise has become a nuisance.

Under current law, Christian Infantolino said, shooters could begin firing at 2 p.m. near the schools and the police have no authority to stop it. Whether or not that happens, he said, is not the issue. Chris Cannon noted the town has a rule requiring a 4-foot fence around a swimming pool but no law governing firearms.

Paul Balzer, who was a police officer for 32 years in Jamestown, said he sees both sides of the

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