

COVENTRY TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
1675 Flat River Road, Coventry, RI
December 16, 2009 at 6:30 P.M.

Present: President Raymond Spear, Vice-President Laura Flanagan, Glen Shibley,
Kenneth Cloutier, Frank Hyde

Town Manager Thomas Hoover
Town Solicitor Patrick Rogers

President Spear called meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

Motion made by Glen Shibley seconded by Laura Flanagan to recess to Executive Session. All voted Aye.

EXECUTIVE SESSION
R.I.G.L. 42-46-5 (a) (1)

Discussion of job performance, character or physical or mental health of a person or persons provided that such person or persons affected may require that the discussion be held at an open meeting.

Motion made by Laura Flanagan seconded by Frank Hyde to close Executive Session, seal the minutes and return to the regular meeting. All voted aye.

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING – 7:00 P.M.

President Spear announced that the purpose of this meeting is for discussion and consideration of a resolution regarding a proposed Police Training Facility located at the former Picillo Pig Farm, Perry Hill Road. The resolution would authorize the Town Manager and Coventry Police Department to conduct an evaluation and analysis of the Picillo Farm to determine its suitability for a municipal training facility, including firing range.

Motion made by Laura Flanagan seconded by Frank Hyde to read resolution into the council record. All voted Aye.

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, public safety is a top priority within the Town of Coventry; and

WHEREAS, a well trained municipal police force is essential to ensuring the public safety of Town residents, businesses and visitors; and

WHEREAS, in recent years members of the Coventry Police Department have had to travel long distances to out of state locations for firearms training, at great financial expense to the Town; and

WHEREAS, the Town is the owner of property within Coventry, land know as the Picillo Farm on Perry Hill Road, that may be a suitable location for a police training and a controlled firearms discharge range; and

WHEREAS, in order to fully evaluate the feasibility of such site for such police training purposes, the Town Council has determined that there should be an initial and careful evaluation and analysis of such site for such purposes; and

NOW, THEREFORE, the Town Council hereby authorizes the Town Manager and Coventry Police Department to conduct an evaluation and analysis of the Picillo Farm on Perry Hill Road to determine its suitability for a municipal training facility, including firing range. Pursuant to this authority such persons are hereby authorized to:

- a) have full access to the premises,
- b) discharge firearms under police supervision and proper protocol for appropriate sound and related testing,
- c) evaluate related public safety and police training issues,
- d) seek public input and comment from members of the Coventry community, including affected neighbors and other stakeholders,
- e) report to the Town Council on the costs and expenses of any such facility/range, including any cost savings and training benefits

Colonel DaSilva gave informational presentation pertaining to a Police Training Facility. (See entire power point presentation in Town Council file). The demonstration included reasons why Coventry Police need their own facility and shooting range, what is needed for an effective range, site requirements, location, how it would be built, design, environmental concerns, community concerns, and depictions of various ranges located in and around Rhode Island.

Colonel DaSilva further stated that costs, which are mostly materials, would be minimal especially if the National Guard does the construction. The closest the range would be to the nearest neighbor would be 1,100 feet. Currently the cost to send officers to other ranges is \$3,000 to \$4,000 with approximately \$5,000 in overtime.

Vice President Flanagan and Councilman Shibley both commented on the dangers facing officers when they go out on a call. Mrs. Flanagan stated she believes a range is needed in Coventry, the officers deserve a professional range, and driving to Attleboro to use a range is ludicrous. Many times the officers have to make split second decisions. Colonel DaSilva runs a professional department and will run a professional range with a safe environment.

President Spear endorses what has been said by council members, but would like to add that there is a group of citizens who have been involved in this for a few years and he wants to make sure this is done including the involvement of those citizens who will be directly impacted.

Kathy Wilcox, 323 Perry Hill Road, abuts Picillo property, is totally against this and does not want it in her backyard. Her concerns are noise and safety. She asked whether anyone would use this other than the Coventry Police Department.

Roy Remar, 335 Perry Hill, suggested the town look at other sites. His concerns are pollutants, the safety of the children, and where the money is coming from for this project.

President Spear remarked that this would be over 1,000 feet from any resident. There is \$20,000 for this project in Capital Improvement money, don't know how much more is needed.

Bob Guastini, 861 Perry Hill Road, gave background information on the Picillo site and added that up to two million gallons of waste were buried there. He suggested that the police department use Camp Fogarty and is concerned about liability. Several abutting owners have died of cancer and lupus, even though it can't be proven that it was because of the site.

Ralph Pratt, 900 Hopkins Hollow Road, Greene, thinks you should look at the suitability of the site first, and then have a presentation. Thought this would be an open discussion about whether we need the range and also take a look at the feasibility and cost analysis. This has been presented as if it is going to happen.

Kim Dowling, 219 Perry Hill Road, stated that the people elected the Council, pay the Council and the people want to remain involved with what happens at the Picillo Farm. We voted you in, you should work with us.

Steven Pezza, 76 Rawlinson Drive, commented that the topic tonight is about a resolution to study the area, not about a done deal to put one in. The police officers need a facility; it is senseless to send them to Attleboro, Ma. The EPA and DEM are extremely stringent. This resolution allows us to find out what we need to know, including the costs, and whether this is a feasible facility.

Bernie George, Perry Hill Road, has concerns are about the cost of construction and insurance.

Marcia Welch, 8 Fen Way, raised issue of impact on property values and asked if the town would have to spend money to hire someone to work at the range.

Ralph McDougald, 55 Barbs Hill Road, asked how the Town can find money for the range when there is no money to fix the Barb's Hill Road Bridge.

Gary Cote, 29 Pettine Street, commented that the western end of town has open space for these types of uses. The police need a range, and we need to provide for them. It would be for the benefit of the Town. Oak Haven School was closed last year, for the benefit of the town, and that has affected property values in the Oak Haven area.

Jeff Ballew, 110 Piggy Lane, stated that the Town does not own the road; it is a private road and he owns a portion of it. The road is maintained by the EPA. He is concerned about the toxicity of the site and whether police officers should even be in there at all. Don't believe the use warrants its own facility.

Skip Mays, 710 Perry Hill Road, former law enforcement officer, suggested scheduling police training at Camp Fogarty. Also, the proposed resolution should be amended to include that a resident from District 1 be put on the study commission.

Donna Rustigian, Hopkins Hollow Road, suggested there may be a conflict of interest since two council members have ties to law enforcement.

Wayne Asselin, Lorraine Ave., is interested to know if previous ideas for using this site for wind and/or solar energy would be effected if a firing range is built. Manager Hoover responded this would not prohibit the possibility of that happening; however, we are only in the talking stages at this time.

Ron Gizzarelli, 50 Harrington Road, remarked that Council should have a public hearing before a decision is made. Also, a number of appointees should take party in a study commission that could address a lot of the concerns of the public.

Scott Kusiak, 712 Hope Furnace Road, asked about a resolution that was passed for removal of invasive plants in a swamp on Sandy Bottom Road a year or so ago. He believes the firing range is more important than the plants. He also asked if the range would be open to the public for shooting.

Barry Begos, 429 Perry Hill Road, asked why in 2007 Councilmen Cloutier and Hyde voted to ban shooting at the Picillo site and whether that decision would have to be reversed. Solicitor Rogers stated that a new resolution would supersede the old one. Resolutions are not binding as ordinances are.

Justin Pomfret, 420 Victory Highway, thanked council for bringing this to the public, seems like

every year we would hear about this. Although I was against the Picillo site, I do believe that the Coventry Police need a range.

Sally Ruzanski, 1 Fen Way, chose to live out there for the peace and quiet and is against this proposal.

John Ricci, 111 Piggy Lane, is concerned about property values and noise. However, he does feel that Coventry should have the best police department in the state.

Councilman Cloutier stated that answers will come out of the study. If this is dangerous, and not a good site, it will be put to bed for good.

Councilman Shibley stated that Council was asked to look into the feasibility of this site. If it's hazardous, I don't want any police officer there, but you won't find out unless you do the study. Our citizens will not be well served if we don't have well trained police officers.

President Spear asked Council to consider two adjustments to the proposed resolution as follows:

1) Incorporate an additional paragraph "Whereas, earlier discussion and consideration of this subject has brought forth unresolved concern and matters of dispute by citizens in the area of the suggested site for a firing range..."

2) Now, therefore, the Town Council hereby authorizes the Town Manager, the Coventry Police Department and appropriately designated community representatives, to conduct an evaluation.....

Motion made by Laura Flanagan seconded by Glen Shibley to adopt resolution as originally read.

Motion made by Ray Spear to amend resolution as noted above. No second.

Vote on motion to adopt original resolution 4-1 (Mr. Spear votes Nay) Motion passes, resolution is adopted.

Motion made by Vice-President Flanagan seconded by Councilman Cloutier to adjourn. All voted aye.

Cheryl A. George
Town Clerk