

County to look at discharging firearms in residential areas

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Hearing people fire pistols for target practice has become the norm for Patty Brown in Spartanburg.

She lives in the Hillbrook subdivision near the city limits. She's complained about the shots since they're fired so close to other homes, but Spartanburg County's statute permits it.

Unlike the city of Spartanburg that has an ordinance prohibiting the discharging of a firearm within city limits, there are no such restrictions in the county.

Spartanburg County Council is hoping to change that.

Council Chairman Jeff Horton is forming a citizen's advisory committee to study the issue and find a solution. Committee members will be appointed Monday. The group will be comprised of residents selected from each council district, Deputy County Administrator Jim Hipp, County Deputy Attorney Ginny Dupont and Capt. Tim Metz from the Spartanburg County Sheriff's Office, Horton said.

Brown, who is a gun owner and concealed weapons permit holder, said hearing shots has become nearly a daily event. She spoke at the last County Council meeting and asked council to prohibit residents from firing guns in their backyards and densely populated areas.

Councilman David Britt addressed Brown's concerns and urged Horton to form the committee to work toward an ordinance.

"I know people are around here with their children. They play outside. There's no telling where a ricochet could go," Brown said of her neighborhood. "We don't need a Dulaney's law for example. That's my daughter's name. I can't even imagine the horror of that."

Brown isn't the only one who has expressed concerns.

Britt said he and other council members have received numerous complaints from residents who live in the more densely populated areas.

"We're not talking about restricting gun ownership or hunting out in the county, but when you live in a subdivision, that's the concern," Britt said. "What we're trying to do is come up with an ordinance or law. There's 150,000 people living within two miles of the city limits of Spartanburg. All you have to do is be one foot on the other side of the city limits where there are no restrictions."

Horton said the formation of the committee will help ensure any ordinance that comes to fruition will be done with various perspectives. He said the vast majority of county residents understand firearm safety, but a select few have made the community concerned.

"I wish we weren't having to do this, but again, you have a couple of situations where

it's creating a problem. Hopefully, we can come up with a solution that doesn't create a firestorm here," Horton said.

Hunting should not be done in residential subdivisions, Horton said, and gun owners should understand that.

"It can hit and ricochet. We don't need someone killed, some innocent person, because someone thinks they should be able to hunt in a neighborhood," he said.

The National Rifle Association has state liaisons that get involved with local legislation as it pertains to gun laws. Spokeswoman Catherine Mortenson said the NRA would be more than willing to offer a voice in the advisory committee as it gets underway to study the possibility for an ordinance.

She said she could not weigh in on Spartanburg County's situation since an ordinance has not yet been proposed, but she added that they have seen this done in other jurisdictions.

"When it comes to these local discharge ordinances, everyone is a little different," Mortenson said. "We look at each one on a case-by-case basis. In this case, we welcome the opportunity to be involved in the citizen's committee."

Some in Spartanburg County say they would disagree with any proposed ordinance to restrict discharging firearms in neighborhoods.

Jacob Coble, who lives in Brown's neighborhood, said he uses his firearm for target practice in his backyard at times but has been safe.

"I feel it's safe enough if you set it up properly, as long as you know what you're doing," he said.

Brown has called law enforcement about Coble before when hearing his gunshots.

"They've been out here before, but they said we were straight," Coble said of the Sheriff's Office responding to the complaint.

Brown said the ordinance would only impact a select few who choose to fire guns near houses, businesses and schools.

"It's just common sense. It really doesn't infringe on any Second Amendment gun rights at all," Brown said. "It doesn't take away their right to keep or bear their arms. It's a matter of willful neglect."

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