

**ZONING COMMISSION  
November 18th, 2021  
Regular Meeting Minutes**

**Members Present:**

- Matthew Walker, Chairman**
- Norm Peck**
- Bill Dwyer**
- Terence Donovan**
- Denise Markovitz, Alternate (Sat as a Regular Member)**

**Absent:**

- Kimberly Kalajainen**
- Anne Thurlow**
- James Liska, Alternate**
- George McPherson, Alternate**

FILED

*Dec 1, 2021 AT 3:30 AM/PM*  
*Bruce Horen ATC*  
 EAST LYME TOWN CLERK

**Also Present:**

- Bill Mulholland, Zoning Official**
- Rose Ann Hardy, Ex-Officio**

Chairman Walker called the Regular Meeting Zoning Commission meeting to order at 7:33 p.m. and sat Ms. Markovitz as a Regular Member for the evening.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

Mr. Walker led the Pledge.

**Public Delegations** - Time set aside for the public to address the Commission on subject matters not on the Agenda.

There were none.

**Public Hearing –**

- 1. Application of Viking Firearms and Training, LLC, for a Special Permit for Indoor Recreation (Section 11.2.4), Retail Sale (Section 11.2.5) and Office (Section 22.1.9), at property identified in the application as 15 Industrial Park Dr, East Lyme Assessor’s Map 26.1, Lot 2.**
  - Mr. Walker noted for the record that the legal ad for this item has been run.
  - Mr. Donovan read Mr. Mulholland’s memorandum dated November 18th, 2021 into the record.
  - Ted Harris Of 351 Main Street, Attorney for the Applicant, submitted 2 additional exhibits for the record.

1. Photos of sample ranges that will be constructed on a site (attached.)
2. An additional parking calculation (attached.)

Mr. Harris gave his presentation and said some of the following:

- This is a dual application for a training facility as well as commercial recreation.
- The office use and minimal retail use is ancillary to the main use and doesn't need separate permitting.
- The public notice sign was posted on the site more than 15 days before this public hearing.
- This is an existing site that was constructed in the early 1970s.
- They do not propose any change to the exterior of the site; there's adequate parking for their proposed use.
- They're going to renovate the interior to make it appropriate for their use.
- They're a tenant in the property and are under a lease as a result of that.
- One of the principals of the proposed business has been in the training business for over 30 years.
- He's been a law enforcement officer for that 30 year period and his initial training routine involved actual weapons, guns, ammunition and more recently, the advent of virtual weapons which have become more prevalent and that piqued the interest of all the principals here.
- The concept of virtual recreation and training is seen as a very viable alternative to using live ammunition.
- Most of the training nowadays is done virtually by many police departments and in the military as well.
- The equipment that would be in this facility is basically the same equipment that would be used to train law enforcement officers and is highly sophisticated.

Mr. Harris detailed the history of the property and the various businesses that were previously in operation there.

Mr. Harris also offered these comments:

- This proposal will bring back the building to its original purpose.
- They're not going to change anything on the outside of the building or the site itself.
- The building will contain virtual weapons and no actual/real weapons.
- The virtual weapons get their start from real weapons; the firing pin and the firing mechanism are removed from that and a laser is put in its place.
- In some instances there's a compressed air cartridge which will actually give the recall you would have with a normal weapon.
- A laser weapon is the same concept as a laser pointer.
- They will not be using imagery of real people or violence but static images and slow moving objects.
- There will be 16 pistol ranges, an area for individual training as well as a dedicated space for training classes or even corporate meetings.
- There is a dedicated rifle area complete with virtual wind to give the feeling of being outside.
- There is an additional space for future virtual activities or additional range activities.
- No one under the age of 16 will be permitted entry unless accompanied by a parent or guardian.
- No actual weapon is allowed on the site and there will be a locked box before entry into the foyer area to secure any weapons.

- There will be a metal detector located at the entrance of the facility.
- The pistol ranges are roughly 12 feet, have a screen, and after shooting at that screen field you'll get a response that tells whether you're accurate or not.
- Everything is virtual and digital so there is no noise.
- The virtual guns will be supplied by the vendor and no one else can bring one in.

Mr. Harris detailed his parking calculation (see attachment) and noted there is a lot of open space not being used that has an immense impact on calculation in terms of area versus parking. The approach he used is based on what they anticipate for actual use on the site itself and the suggested total would be 90 spaces, which is actually the same total that would result from the area calculation formula. They have a total of 120 spaces so they have more spaces than are required.

Mr. Harris briefly discussed their sidewalk waiver request and explained that neither of the previous businesses in this location had a sidewalk and there is a stretch of lawn in front of the building that would meet this need. He further explained that given that this is light industrial, this isn't a location where you want to encourage or attract pedestrian traffic.

Mr. Harris said he thinks this use is a boon for the Town and law enforcement who will be able to utilize this facility for practice. He added that the military is currently using similar technology and this technology is in fact military grade.

Mr. Harris directed the Commission to the newly submitted photos which show samples of the target imagery (attached.)

Mr. Walker called for Commission comments or questions and some of the following was discussed:

- Mr. Walker asked what the hours of operation will be and Mr. Harris said 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.
- Mr. Walker asked if there is another such facility in Connecticut and Mr. Harris said another one does not exist.
- Ms. Markovitz asked if there will be live shooter training and Mr. Donovan directed the Commission to a letter from Mueller Greene in their packet.
- Attorney Matthew Greene of 300 State Street in New London said that it's his letter and he explained that all of these activities are for the average person, and active shooter training is given in every municipal building including the town hall that they're standing in.
- He added that this would enable a group such as a local bank or other organization to come in and receive some professional training as opposed to someone going out to their worksite.
- Mr. Peck asked if a use has been determined for the smaller building on site and Mr. Harris said it will be used for storage.
- Mr. Donovan asked about signage and Mr. Harris said the sign will be on the building itself and subject to Mr. Mulholland's approval.
- Mr. Donovan asked if they have to follow the Connecticut State laws in terms of firearms.
- He noted that Mr Harris said before that anyone under the age of 16 must be accompanied by an adult but you have to be 21 in the State of Connecticut to carry and be licensed.
- Mr. Harris said that once the guns are modified they're no longer weapons.

- Mr. Walker asked why the age cutoff is 16 as opposed to 18 and Mr. Harris replied that the thought process is that children of that age using safe laser technology can become marksmen as well.

Mr. Donovan read letters the Commission received from Lucira Jane Nebelung, Brendan Cunningham, Kate D., and Esteban Garcia (all attached), into the record.

The Commission received a letter from Christine Stahl of 41 Oswegatchie Road (attached), but since she was in attendance she read it into the record herself.

Mr. Donovan read the letter the Commission received from Steve Luber (attached) into the record.

Mr. Walker called for further Public Comment.

1. Rich Steel of 23 Rose Lane had the following comments:

- Will this present a potential danger to our police that serve our community?
- He doesn't know if these laser modified weapons will be out on the street at all, but it's hard enough to tell fake weapons from real weapons.
- Will they be marketed so that people can set up galleries in their basements if they want to?
- Having the general public receive tactical training could endanger police officers.
- It's hard enough to be able to de-escalate situations much less to go against somebody who is well versed in how to handle weapons.
- This is in close proximity to two schools.
- It's in close proximity to an orthopedic clinic, which probably has a pretty fair amount of geriatric patients that go there.
- There is also a nearby gym and gymnastic studio.
- In terms of gun safety will that be an important component of the training?
- Will there be devices such as trigger locks that will be available to clients who attend this facility to prevent accidental shootings at home?
- He feels the age limitation of 16 is well below what it needs to be.
- An adolescent brain doesn't mature until the age of 25.
- It's reasonable to at least go to 18 but 21 would be preferable.
- One of the letters mentioned the felons that may be in the local area. Will there be background checks as the clientele go in?
- He doesn't think the entertainment and the training aspects coincide.
- He hopes that if this does get approved, that there'll be separate hours and locations for the training and for the competitive nature.
- The sign should be tasteful and since vikings are the school mascot he thinks a different name would be appropriate.

2. Janice Orsini of Seaspray in Niantic had the following comments:

- She loves this town and thinks our biggest asset is our wonderful school system.
- She did some research for this proposal but could only find one article in the Connecticut Examiner about this application.
- She verified this information with the New London Day and they also said they did not run any information about the virtual gun range.

- She thinks most people in Niantic get their news from the New London Day So she was very disappointed that so little information was being brought to the public about this facility.
- The blueprint on the East Lyme Zoning website of this facility was unreadable even when she enlarged it, so that wasn't very helpful.
- Her concern is for our youth who will be able to have a fun experience by holding a simulated exact firearm replica in their hand complete with a kickback feature that simulates actual ammunition being discharged.
- We need to be mindful and responsible in regard to how this virtual technology impacts our culture and our species.
- As a mother, grandmother and a retired healthcare professional, she cannot support this business.

3. Spencer Clapp of 11 Chadwick had the following comments:

- He's been a responsible sportsman since he was 12 years old.
- He's held a Connecticut hunting and waterfowl license for over 20 years.
- He has a valid Connecticut license to carry a handgun.
- He owns several firearms, both long guns and handguns.
- He's also a retired public school administrator.
- He had to call a lockdown in his middle school with over 1000 children and adults because of a report of a gun.
- He had to quietly and stealthily search classrooms trying to identify the student with the gun before his school became another Sandy Hook.
- Over the past three years there have been over 400 school shootings.
- Our culture has been so desensitized to this violence that is not even reported.
- He's neither for nor against this proposed facility.
- in certain circumstances he could easily see himself availing himself of it.
- But he has several pertinent questions and concerns that the Commission should consider.
- Any firearms facility should not be named after our high school interscholastic mascot.
- These two things are inherently incompatible, guns and high school sports are diametrically opposed.
- He would note that the Vikings never had firearms.
- Given the national crisis, mental health for adolescents today, depression, suicide and drug abuse, this facility should be strictly restricted to adults 18 and over.
- As an educator, parent of three and sportsmen, he cannot emphasize the importance that firing a gun, including a simulated and modified firearm, creates a dopamine response in the shooter- a pleasurable euphoric experience.
- A child does not have the mental and emotional wherewithal to process this response appropriately.
- What sort of content will these so-called recreational training videos contain?
- Will the videos reinforce racial, ethnic and religious stereotypes?
- Will the bad guys be wearing turbans and beards?
- Or will the criminals have dark skins and kinky hair?
- What types of firearms will the facility be offering?

- Will they be capable of firing semi automatic or fully automatic modes, which for a real gun would require a class three license?
- Does East Lyme really want to attract this element to our community?
- There's also an issue of liability.
- He's a lawyer and despite the fact that the facility would make users sign a waiver of liability to protect the business, Courts have considered these waivers to be contracts of adhesion and they are frequently not enforced.
- If a mentally unstable person trains here and then uses a real weapon to kill or injure people, families of these victims could bring suit against the town.

4. Ron Stevens of 1 Cherry Street had the following comments:

- He came down tonight because he thought that they should hear from somebody that took the Applicant's training.
- They were nice enough to train him and his wife with the laser training when they got their gun permits and were licensed in the State of Connecticut.
- He heard all the comments from the people that spoke prior to him about safety concerns and ramifications, and he'd like to address this.
- When they first started their training the first thing they were taught for over an hour was safety.
- Halfway through their training they were taught safety.
- At the end of their training they were taught and concluded with safety.
- The applicants here are very professional, very knowledgeable, and very concerned about the safety factor.
- Whether we like it or not, guns are a part of American life and he thinks it's important for people, and for children who are 16 and 17 to be familiar with firearms and well educated in the safety factors before they get them.
- It's a necessary commodity, at 16 you can hunt and you can carry a gun.
- When he hears these concerns he thinks about all the video games he sees his kids and grandkids playing; that's the concern.
- Proper safety training is not the concern but the solution.
- He would warmly welcome this environment into the town of East Lyme.
- If we're properly trained with safety precautions concerning firearms we're going to be a better and safer community.

5. Geoff Rouisse of 2 Day Road had the following comments:

- He agrees with the former speaker.
- The Applicants are Grade A, 100% gentlemen.
- It would be nice to train at a reasonably priced facility since ammunition gets expensive after a while.
- It's not necessarily aimed at the kids, it's to help everybody to train.
- Everyone is aware how dangerous guns can be and these gentlemen teach safety.

6. Dr. Charles Platz of 81 Arbor Crossing had the following comments:

- He has known the applicants for many years and in particular Mr. Comeau.
- He is one of the most honorable men that he has ever met.
- Detective Comeau loves his wife, his community, his job, his family, and his friends.
- He owns, along with his business partner, a gun store and is an NRA instructor.

- There is no one that they choose to support to train and educate their customers other than Viking Firearms and Detective Comeau.
- Each and every day, they deal with firearm enthusiasts and customers of varying levels of experience and he can tell you with absolute certainty from this very first hand experience, safety is of absolute importance.
- You're never too young to start learning proper firearm safety because firearms are in many American homes.
- Mr. Comeau teaches the finest class and he'd like to thank Mr. Stevens for essentially taking all of the words out of his mouth and leaving him to come up here and adlib.
- Someone who comes from Mr. Comeau's class quite frankly has better knowledge and respect of firearms than anyone else.

7. Mike Rogers of 56 Oakwood had the following comments:

- He's a former light infantry weapons specialist that fired on military simulators in the past and can't wait to see the change in technology between the 1980s and now.
- He's also a certified NRA Range Safety Officer.
- The Applicants drill safety home every time they talk, handle, or mention firearms and ammunition.
- Kids are pretty resilient; when he was in high school they had a rifle team and ledger, and carried rifles on the school bus.
- Nobody threatened or shot anybody else.
- If you tell children it's bad and they hide what are they gonna do when they find an unattended firearm?
- Those are the kids that get in trouble, not the ones that are trained, not the ones that their parents or their grandparents take shooting and explain safety to.
- Show them safety, live safety.
- There's a school back there but there was also a Budweiser distributor there.
- Did we raise a generation of drunks?
- If we did it wasn't because it was a Budweiser place there.
- There's just so much misinformation and sheer ignorance out there.
- People are scared of their shadow.

8. Justin Hanna of 34 Park Place had the following comments:

- He's had the pleasure to work with Mr. Comeau for several months in a law enforcement capacity.
- He got his pistol permit when he was 21 years old.
- He had shot prior to that and frankly feels he should not have handled a live firearm prior to that.
- He wishes he had the opportunity to train and make up his mind with something like this laser fire training.
- He was probably 14 years old and went to the range with his cousin, and he had no concept of firearms, safety training or anything at the time.
- He got his pistol permit at 21 years old and at the NRA class he went to teach the bare minimum.
- He looks at this proposal in general and this business, as a wonderful opportunity for people to take that NRA class and take the next step before

they go out and buy a pistol, or even before they apply for the permit- and familiarize themselves with how to regulate a firearm.

- He thinks from a law enforcement capacity, this offers training that they would not have otherwise; the State range times are incredibly hard to come by for law enforcement.
- In standard ranges you can't stand in your lane, and drop holsters because of the risk of a misfire or striking somebody.

9. Michael Poletto of 4 Wilbur Lane had the following comments:

- Before he moved here last year he was a New York City Police Officer and an instructor for the active shooter unit.
- They were wholeheartedly dependent on laser firearm training simulators.
- This is a way for police officers and the community to come out and be put in actual scenarios where they're able to determine if they're going to be pulling their firearm and use it or use de-escalation devices.
- It gets you comfortable with your weapon systems and shot placements.
- It makes you comfortable in real life, in areas where you might be walking down a parking lot alone at night and someone approaches you; it puts you in realistic scenarios.
- This is nothing but a video game and a way for people to become comfortable with firearms.
- This isn't pro firearm or anti firearm because it's just a video game.
- He's for this business because it will bring people to the community, and it will also bring revenue.

10. Clayton Walters of 35 Latimer Drive had the following comments:

- A weapon is something a criminal carries, his gun is a safety device.
- You can have a firearms license in the State of Connecticut at 12 years old.
- This is an opportunity for this community to bring a business here that can attract people from probably a 100 mile radius.
- In the wintertime when all our restaurants are suffering, because all the beach traffic is gone, this is going to create an opportunity to grow this community and he thinks it's going to be a great asset to the town.

11. Michelle Maitland of 6 Acorn Drive had the following comments:

- She's not not a fan of the idea of the collocation of firearms themed recreation with professional training.
- They've heard a lot about the sincerity and character of the owners, which she's not disputing, but they haven't heard a lot of things about the recreation piece.
- She happens to work for the town of Groton and happens to be responsible for the contracting of the cleaning of the Groton firing range so she's familiar with the fact that police need training.
- She thinks that maybe this would be a great business just dedicated to that.
- She doesn't find a lot of detail in the proposal and has many concrete questions as a result.

Ms. Maitland provided the commission with a list of her questions.

Ms. Maitland said examples of some of her questions were:

- If a traffic study had been conducted in that area in light of the new I-95 interchange work happening?
- Is there an accreditation body for this type of business?
- Will recognized gang and hate group imagery be regulated?
- If this enterprise struggles, what prevents them from changing their business model?
- What if they sell to another person and can they begin selling guns or ammo?
- She asks that any zoning permit be limited to activities presented and that any expansion or change require approval.
- She added that a training and recreation center could have been offered as a not for profit, but it was not.
- The Town benefits from new tax dollars but at what expense?
- We must be clear eyed that profit motive will be the driver and all decisions at least in part, including employee recruitment training, product offerings and marketing.
- A lesser known charge of the Zoning Commission is securing safety from panic.
- Given rising gun statistics and our nation's current social climate, it doesn't take much imagination to see that even a minor mission creep in this business, or one errant staff person could be a cause for alarm.
- The Commission is also tasked with encouraging the most appropriate use of land and conserving the value of land homes and other buildings.
- She doesn't know that she would personally deem this business the most appropriate use.

12. Jamie Barr Shelburn of 31 McElaney had the following comments:

- She heard everyone speak here tonight and had a lot of the same questions and concerns.
- She chose to call up the owners and even got a call back immediately from Detective Comeau, who alleviated most of her fears and addressed a lot of the items people have brought up tonight.
- She doesn't want to belabor it and repeat everything everyone else said.
- She thinks Mr. Stevens covered just about everything but she can't say enough about how much she supports this project.
- She looks forward to more people learning safe gun ownership and gun safety.

13. David Harlow of 80 Upper Pattagansett had the following comments:

- He's strongly opposed to this facility.
- He's a former US Marine and combat veteran from Vietnam.
- This experience has led him to feel very strongly that having simulated combat is really a bad idea.
- He's against making a game of such activities.
- He'd like to underscore the fact that this business will be near schools.
- In terms of attracting people in a 100 mile radius, they have no control over who those individuals might be.
- There's no controlling mentally unstable individuals either temporarily or for the long term.
- We're notoriously unable to identify those individuals ahead of time and he doesn't think our society is equipped to do it.

- He has a lot of admiration for the police and what they have to face.

14. Gary Pivo of 4 Colonial Drive had the following comments:

- He has 40 years of experience as a Town Planner, Town Planning Zoning Officer and a Professor of real estate and urban planning.
- He has three basic concerns that lead him to be doubtful as to the wisdom of this.
- The proposed retail and office use don't seem to be allowable as a special use in this district because it's not related to manufacturing.
- That sales are just ancillary and therefore can be okay leaves him confused.
- There are questions here raised pertaining to the general standards in Section 23 that its uses shouldn't disrupt orderly development or have objectionable influences.
- He knows for a lot of people here tonight, this is nothing objectionable whatsoever, but for a lot of other people, there are things objectionable about this.
- There are concerns that this might be an attractive nuisance bringing folks to town from long distances away that could bring guns in their car thereby increasing the chance of guns being discharged illegally by accident or in anger, in East Lyme.
- The training might encourage people to keep guns at home, which unfortunately, increases the chance of suicide, deadly accidents and domestic violence.
- Studies indicate that this could set up a cycle of economic development around guns services and retailing- a kind of geographic clustering, as people interested in guns are attracted to East Lyme, which in turn attracts more gun related business, and so on.
- There's a concern that it would shift our town's character and it's reputation in a direction that some would find objectionable.
- It could also harm economic development and property values as vacationers, homebuyers, restaurant owners and others choose not to come to a community known for a strong gun culture.
- If it meets the standards, you may give it a permit, but you also need to determine that it meets the standards of protecting public health, safety, property values, and general welfare.

15. Judd Andres of 42 Dean Road had the following comments:

- He's a certified VP hunter safety instructor, adjunct professor for UNH in project management, a business management consultant for the pharmaceutical industry, and for over 15 years has been involved in youth high school and college sports coaching.
- As a hunting safety instructor, he has aspects of both classroom and scenario teaching, as well as practical experience.
- It's often clear when there are students that need more than just that experience to truly understand how to operate on the field.
- This is one of the things that he's really excited about, they can partner and provide real life scenario planning without the fear of actually using live ammo.
- This isn't about an active shooter.

- They're not generating gun crazy people but actually encouraging good responsible gun owners and operators from many different aspects of what you would use a firearm for.
- Simulation is what this is about.
- Pilots go through tons of flight simulation, experience and history.
- This business improves and increases responsible gun ownership behavior, has low costs, low environmental impact, low safety risks, simulation, competitive recreation, and hunter safety instruction.
- You can actually start hunting with a parent as early as 8 years old.
- There is no study whatsoever that has a cause and effect relationship between businesses whos intent is to improve responsibility and safety, and an increase in violence and suicide.
- The more that you have responsible gun owners the less you will have accidents.
- Do we ask for background checks and not to have kids at other other real shooting type activities like paintball, laser tag or airsoft?

16. Dr. Ronald Michaels of 15 Oak Tree Lane had the following comments:

- He's also a DEEP Firearms Instructor, a College Professor, and one of the officers of the Niantic Sportsmen Club.
- At the Sportsmen Club they have one of the strongest youth education practices in the entire state.
- In fact, they do a lot of laser simulation to practice for their competitions.
- They have been the recipient of numerous shooting scholarships that still go on in this country.
- He's very proud of their efforts to educate and train youth as young as 8 years old with real firearms.
- This opportunity is absolutely incredible.
- The proposal stresses safety and training which we have heard ad nauseum.
- The principles of this organization are probably the most professional folks he has ever had the pleasure of knowing and working with.
- It's his pleasure to support this proposal.

17. Jas Awla of 15 Freedom Way had the following comments:

- He's one of the principals of this business.
- He's a resident of this town, a father of two, a husband and a local business guy.
- He's a Yale graduate and an immigrant.
- It would be very foolish for them to launch a business that doesn't have a broad appeal.
- It continues to be a hope that as people understand more about what they are doing, that they will embrace it and understand that their intent is for the benefit of everyone.
- He's a man of God and up until the age of 18 years he used to wear a turban, which is part of his religion.
- For anyone to imply that this business would promote hate with any race or ethnicity is just plain ignorant.
- They offer an open invitation for anyone who wants to know more to reach out and they'll be more than happy to detail their operation.

- For anyone to say that they have been holding information is just plain convenient.
- Regarding the naming of the business, never to this day and never does he plan to volunteer himself to name someone else's child.
- He thinks it's a privilege of capitalism and for anyone to claim otherwise is just plain unamerican.

18. Nicole Giansanti of 277 Main Street had the following comments:

- Her fiance is a CEO at Corrigan, a chemical weapons specialist, and with her three children they actively practice sound gun practices on a regular basis.
- She's here to advocate on behalf of all community engaged mothers within Southeastern Connecticut.
- Mothers and families were not properly offered the public notices required that offer opportunity and first touch information regarding the list of special permits applied from VFC.
- The sections cited did not accurately support the categories of interest, and two sections were missing entirely from the notice.
- 11.2.2 is arguably the most critical permission requested.
- The word "training" is mentioned eight times in the application submitted by Attorney Greene and his crew; however, the topic did not make it to print.
- Any mother looking to have a self-informed exchange and healthy debate within the respective community did not receive a fundamentally proper opportunity to weigh in.
- The publications offered were woefully deficient.
- The application is littered with nonsensical inferences.
- It leaves a myriad of industry related opportunities for expansion with minimal need for formal paperwork submissions.
- This provides additional revenues and income for Detective Comeau and Matthew Fleisher who have already previously taken ownership of firearms involved in East Lyme residents' search and seizures.
- She humbly requests that the Board require a resubmission from the Applicant with both legally coherent requests and proper citations to properly notify mothers about this proposal.

19. Spencer Iannantuono of 6 Old Black Point Road had the following comments:

- He wants to talk about the amount of opportunities that the VFC will create for us, "us" being his age group.
- He's 17 years old and a senior at East Lyme High School.
- He was class president his junior year and is full senate president so he oversees everything going on with the governments of the school.
- He's talked about this application with his friends and there is excitement, not only for entertainment purposes, but also for opportunities as young people to find jobs.
- He thinks it's an important thing for his age group to find jobs that they love and discover an appreciation for working.
- What teenager wouldn't want to go work at a virtual shooting range, not only to find work and find entertainment in working, but also to gain an education?
- He feels a lot of kids would benefit from getting this kind of education.

- Before he learned about them, guns were always scary not only because of what they could do, but because of what he didn't know they could do.
- He now feels more educated on the topic of guns, and feels safe whenever there are guns in the room.
- He feels like a lot of fear comes from not knowing exactly what they can do.
- You may see police as someone who is scary because they carry a gun, because you're not familiar with guns.
- Obviously you don't have to work at this range but you can go there and learn, and also be entertained at the same time.
- He thinks nothing bad could come from this, only learning and opportunities for everyone, including his age group.

Mr. Walker said irregardless of what Mr. Iannantuono said, to be a high school senior and stand before this crowd with that kind of courage and bravery is impressive; if that's our future, we're in pretty good shape.

20. Erin Geurtin of 8 Old Black Point Road had the following comments:

- She thinks asking if the targets will be racially linked was extremely inflammatory.
- She thinks it was purposeful in order to incite anger, fear and other feelings against this proposal.
- In terms of close proximity to a school, we have Ron's Guns in our town which has real guns, real ammunition, that people of whatever age with a permit can have access to, and it's on Boston Post Road across from our high school.
- We have Stone's Ranch Military Camp in town as well as the Sportsmen's Club; all which have real guns and real ammo.
- She went through Mr. Comeau's class a few weeks ago and he is excellent at proposing a safe, professional environment.
- They spent many hours learning, going over safety, going over the parts of a gun, going over what to do, what not to do.
- They took a written test and practiced with lasers before they even went near real firearms.
- People who go off on shooting rampages have mental instability.
- These are not people who are going to a laser range to learn target practice, to train as professionals, to train as pre professionals.
- Her daughter is also here and took the class with her and her husband; She is currently in school and she may want to become a police officer.
- She may go up to that laser range to perfect her shooting skills and her safety and handling of a firearm.

Mr. Walker called for Commission questions or comments.

Mr. Dwyer asked about sales and Mr. Harris clarified that there will be no weapon sales, just t-shirts and items of that nature.

Mr. Dwyer and Ms. Markovitz asked about the sign and Mr. Mulholland explained that staff has spoken to the Applicant at great length about this and it's a purview of his office; they've spoken about appropriate and tasteful signs and this is something that will be

worked out on the staff level. Mr. Walker said he has every confidence that staff will take care of the signage issue and ensure that it's fitting for our town.

Mr. Donovan asked if there is any possibility of holding tournaments in there for simulated weapons and Mr. Harris said there is that possibility.

Mr. Peck suggested going through any of the questions submitted by Ms. Maitland that have not yet been addressed.

Mr. Harris said in answer to the traffic study question, one hasn't been done since one is not required given that it's in the light industrial zone.

Ms. Markovitz said one of the questions was what measures will be taken to identify or deny services to troubled individuals and if they would ask for identification of some sort? Mr. Harris explained that when an individual approaches the front desk, their age will be reviewed and obviously, if there's any outward indication that the person is unstable they would certainly be denied admission to the facility.

Ms. Markovitz asked who will be doing the training and Mr. Harris said the staff, principally Mr. Comeau.

Mr. Harris said he doesn't think training and recreation are mutually exclusive; the result of the training would be the use for recreational purposes so they go hand in hand. He further explained that whether it's a training component to what's happening, or it's an entertainment component, safety is of the utmost concern and this is a controlled environment.

Ms. Markovitz said another question asked by Ms. Maitland is- whether there is anyway of vetting for background checks required so specialized training is not given to felons, militia or terrorist groups? Mr. Harris responded that this is training on how to function with a weapon.

Mr. Harris said he doesn't see how you could require background checks for this type of activity, which is far less invasive and far less dangerous than some other painful activities; this is a controlled environment and it's all based on lasers.

Mr. Donovan said he's a big advocate for sidewalks and questioned if it would really be that bad to have them here. Mr. Harris said you don't want to attract too much walking because it's a dead end and if they try to come across the bridge, it's extraordinarily dangerous. He also noted that these people are tenants here; it's a substantial expense and analogous to a capital expense, which is usually handled by the landowners.

Mr. Walker said his opinion differs from Mr. Donovan because he doesn't think they should promote walking in a light industrial area.

Mr. Harris said he thinks this is an ideal location for this use, it's close to the highway, has good access, and is in a building that is basically off by itself. He doesn't think the comments about this business being a detriment are valid; it's better to have this controlled facility teach people the right way to handle weapons than for them to just get a permit and buy a weapon.

Mr. Harris reiterated that this business would be a benefit to the community as well as law enforcement in general, because they expect law enforcement to utilize this facility for training purposes as well.

**MOTION (1)**

**Ms. Markovitz moved to close the Public Hearing at 9:52 p.m.**

**Mr. Peck seconded the motion.**

**Motion carried, 5-0-0.**

The Commission took a 7 minute comfort break and reconvened at 10:00 p.m.

**Regular Meeting**

- 1. Application of Viking Firearms and Training, LLC, for a Special Permit for Indoor Recreation (Section 11.2.4), Retail Sale (Section 11.2.5) and Office (Section 22.1.9), at property identified in the application as 15 Industrial Park Dr, East Lyme Assessor's Map 26.1, Lot 2.**

Mr. Walker called for Commission comments and some of the following was discussed and said:

- Mr. Dwyer said he'd like to be assured that no assembling will be occurring in the parking lot.
- Mr. Donovan clarified that he means loitering.
- Mr. Mulholland said should they choose to move forward they could have a condition that the Applicant monitors the parking lot.
- Ms. Markovitz said she has no concern with the tactical training.
- Mr. Donovan said the more education that occurs the better and that he sees the competition aspect as more of the recreation component.
- Mr. Walker said he's sensitive to the differences in opinion expressed here tonight but based on everything he has heard he thinks it's a good fit and benefits the community.
- He agrees that the comments about targets that were made and references that were made about the targets, race and color and ethnicity were inflammatory and weren't necessarily here tonight.
- He thinks that this is more of a solution than a concern and that it stresses safety.
- Mr. Walker said it's a business and they have a right to name their business what they want; this is America.
- He fully respects the concerns of the community but doesn't see any basis from a health & safety standpoint, or land use perspective, to deny this proposal.
- We've got an empty building that has been sitting there for the last couple of years and we have a bonafide business that's willing to move in there, make it viable, and create tax dollars for the town.
- Ms. Markovitz said she does have a problem with the name since it's the high school mascot.
- Mr. Peck said he came here tonight with an open mind as he always does, learned some valuable information, and that it would be easy to turn this into a political discussion but when looking at what they're charged with, the application fits.
- He thinks this is a positive thing and he understands and respects the opposition but thinks the pros outweigh the cons.

**MOTION (2)**

Mr. Peck moved to approve the Application of Viking Firearms and Training, LLC, for a Special Permit for Indoor Recreation (Section 11.2.4), Retail Sale (Section 11.2.5) and Office (Section 22.1.9), at property identified in the application as 15 Industrial Park Dr, East Lyme Assessor's Map 26.1, Lot 2, with a waiver on the sidewalk.

Mr. Dwyer seconded the motion.

Motion carried, 4-1-0.

Nay: Ms. Markovitz

**Old Business – None****New Business**

1. Any business on the floor, if any by the majority vote of the Commission.

There was none.

2. Zoning Official

Mr. Mulholland had no report.

3. Comments from Ex-Officio

Ms. Hardy noted Mr. Walker's term is about to end and new members will soon be joining. She would like to thank him for his services and all he has done for the town. She looks forward to continuing to work with all who will remain on the Board.

4. Comments from Zoning board liaison to Planning Commission

- a. Peck– November 9, 2021
- b. Liska – December 14, 2021

Mr. Peck noted the December 14th, 2021 Planning Commission meeting was cancelled.

5. Comments from Chairman

Mr. Walker said it was nice to see so much interest from the community and to see so many people come out tonight to give their feedback and opinions.

**Approval of Minutes**

- a. October 28th, 2021
- b. November 4th, 2021

**MOTION (3)**

Mr. Donovan moved to approve the Meeting Minutes of October 28th, 2021 as posted.

Ms. Markovitz seconded the motion.

Motion carried, 5-0-0.

**MOTION (4)**

Ms. Markovitz moved to approve the Meeting Minutes of November 4th, 2021 as posted.

**Mr. Dwyer seconded the motion.  
Motion carried, 5-0-0.**

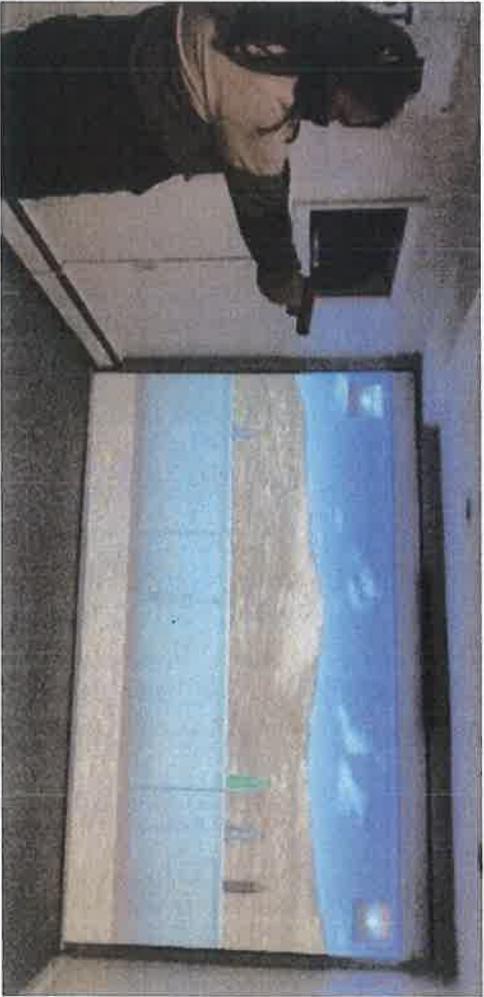
**Adjournment**

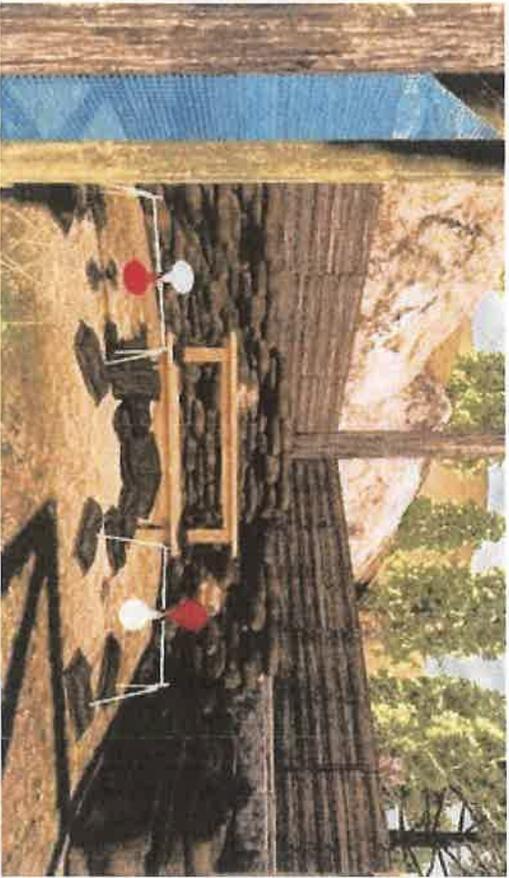
**MOTION (5)**

**Mr. Donovan moved to adjourn the November 18th, 2021 Zoning Meeting at 10:18  
p.m.**

**Mr. Dwyer seconded the motion.  
Motion carried, 5-0-0.**

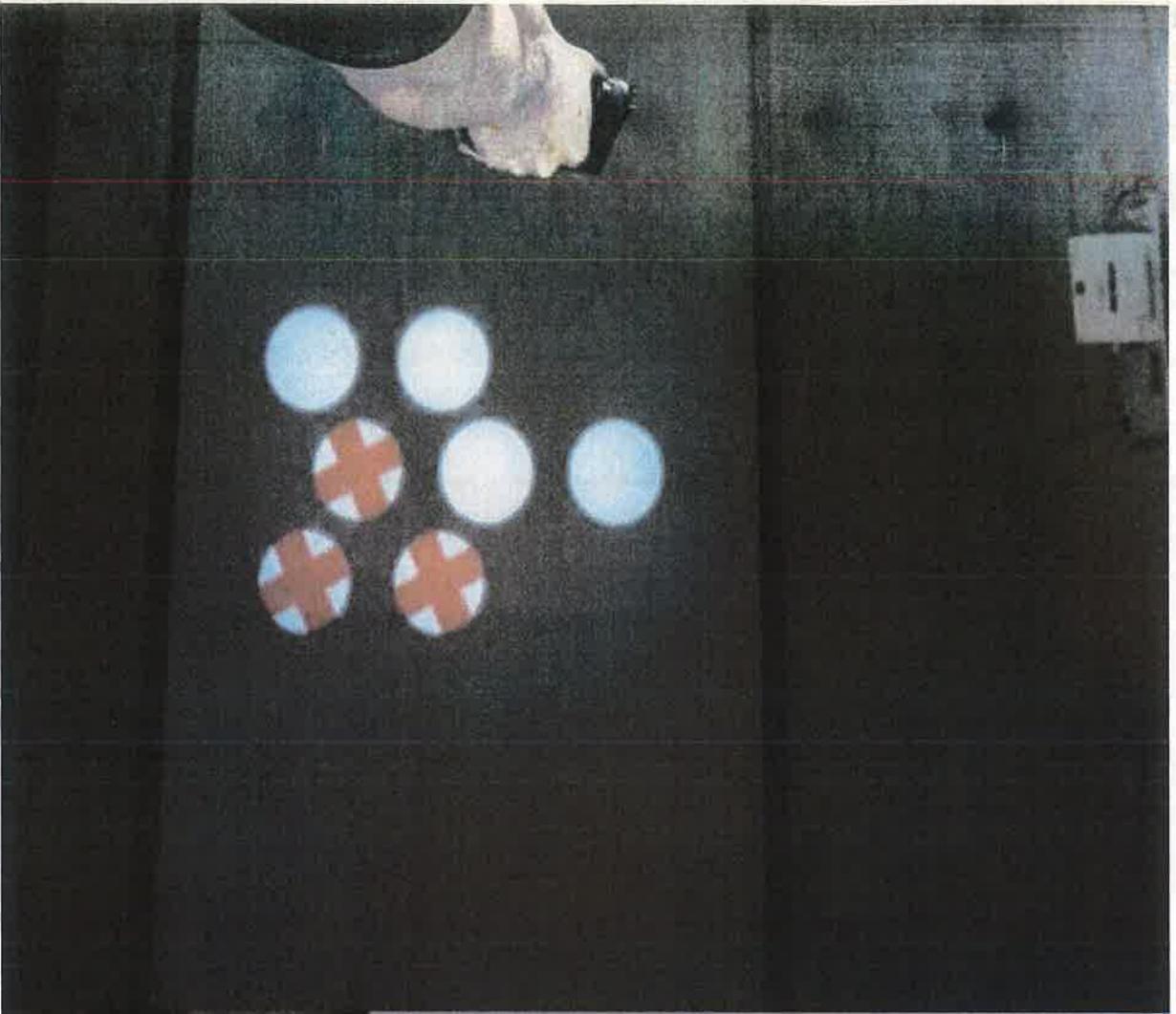
Respectfully Submitted,  
Brooke Stevens, recording Secretary











## PARKING CALCULATION

Small Training Room	2
Conference/Training	15
Main Range (16 Booths)	
$18 + 9 \text{ waiting} = 27$	
Other Virtual Activities	30
Instructional Range (Large Booths, 2)	6
Employees 4-10	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<u>90</u>

November 18, 2021 EL Zoning Commission Public Comments – Viking Firearms

To the Chairman and Members of the East Lyme Zoning Commission:

I ask that you consider two issues regarding the Special Permit application of Viking Firearms and Training, LLC.

The first issue is that there is little detail about how they will operate. Questions that come to mind (this list is not comprehensive):

Given the proximity to schools, will those under 21 be allowed to enter without a directly supervising adult?

My father was an NRA instructor in the 1960s and 70s and I learned to shoot using paper targets. Will moving “targets” include the choice for “people” for the general public?

Do they expect to operate with 450 people at one time which is implied by the capacity limitations in the application?

Do they expect to turn their venue into a “destination” that allows buses from other locations as an “outing”?

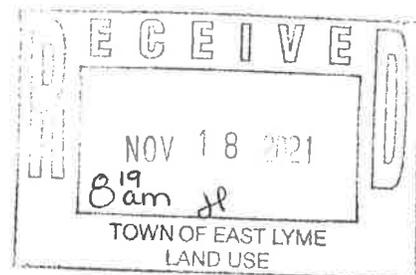
Which leads me to the second issue: Given the epidemic of gun violence and our gun culture, do we want East Lyme to become a destination attraction for this kind of “entertainment”?

Finally, we have to assume that those coming are gun enthusiasts and will have real firearms in their vehicles.

Choices have implications.

Thank you for your time and attention.

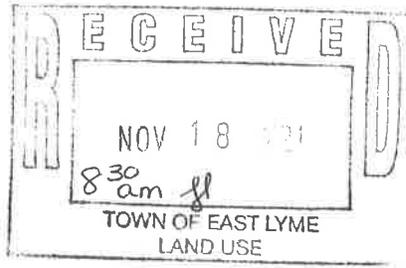
Lucira Jane Nebelung  
Niantic CT



William Mulholland  
Zoning Official  
East Lyme, CT

November 18, 2021

Brendan M. Cunningham, PhD  
90 Columbus Ave.  
Niantic, CT 06357



Dear Mr. Mulholland –

I write in opposition to the agenda item “Viking Firearms and Training, LLC, for a Special Permit for Indoor Recreation (Section 11.2.41, Retail Sale (Section 11.2.5) and Office (Section 22.1.9), at property identified in the application as 15 Industrial Park Dr, East Lyme Assessor's Map 26.1, Lot 2” slated for the agenda at tonight’s East Lyme Zoning Commission Meeting. The basis for my opposition is as follows:

1. Wrong Zoning Category. This is a venue for adult entertainment. It should be zoned under the “Adult Arcade” category of the town ordinances.
2. Proximity to East Lyme Middle School School shootings and violence are a crisis in America. Sandy Hook, Connecticut had one of the worst in American history. Children now regularly practice school shooting drills, something prior generations never had to deal with. We should do better. We should not place a reminder of gun violence so close to one of our schools.
3. Accidental Injury and Death Risk Even Hollywood, with its years of experience handling “safe” firearms, has numerous accidents from supposedly disabled weapons. The death by firearm of a production crew member on the set of *Rust* last month is a grim reminder that any firearm is inherently dangerous.
4. Felony Possession of Firearms Risk There are twelve registered sex offenders living within a three mile radius of the Industrial Park Drive address. Felons are prohibited from possessing even disabled firearms. There are inadequate procedures in this proposal to ensure that felons are not given replica firearms.
5. Conflict of Interest Risk There is a risk that a town employee will receive a second stream of income from this facility. State employees are expressly prohibited from this kind of thing due to the risk of corruption.
6. Oversaturation of the Market There are multiple alternatives for firearms training in the immediate vicinity.

Best regards,

Brendan M. Cunningham, PhD

## Bill Mulholland

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**From:** Kate Day <minutesheep@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, November 17, 2021 4:23 PM  
**To:** Bill Mulholland  
**Subject:** Testimony: VFT zoning permit

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Zoning Commissioner:

We know right now that our children are bearing a disproportionate burden of the Covid pandemic. It has clearly taken its toll on their social and emotional health. We see it in how they are socializing in schools, whether it's in the rise in school violence or disrespect towards peers and adults. As community members, when there is an opportunity to provide a healthy space for children and families to interact, we should take it. However, we cannot rationalize that laser shooting and tactical training fits this need, especially given the current crisis. If anything, this could exacerbate the problem. Please consider not approving the zoning permit for Viking Firearms and Training LLC.

Thank you,  
Kate D.  
East Lyme Resident



Nov 18 2021  
286

## Bill Mulholland

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**From:** Esteban Garcia <esteban.garcia84@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, November 17, 2021 12:52 PM  
**To:** Bill Mulholland  
**Subject:** Public Comment for 11/18/21 Zoning Meeting

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

My name is Esteban Garcia and I am a resident of 10 Winston Rd, East Lyme, CT 06333. I'm writing concerning the application from Viking Firearms & Training LLC.

I have concerns about how this business is being promoted. According to news reports and direct quotes by the owners, it is being proposed as competitive socializing and it has been suggested that no live rounds will be used. However, the business name has "Firearms" which according to the ATF is defined as "*Any weapon (including a starter gun) which will or is designed to or may readily be converted to expel a projectile by the action of an explosive*" source: <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/firearms-guides-importation-verification-firearms-ammunition-gun-control-act-definitions> So it begs the question that there is a feeling of bait and switch and that there will be eventually be firearms sold or used in the facility.

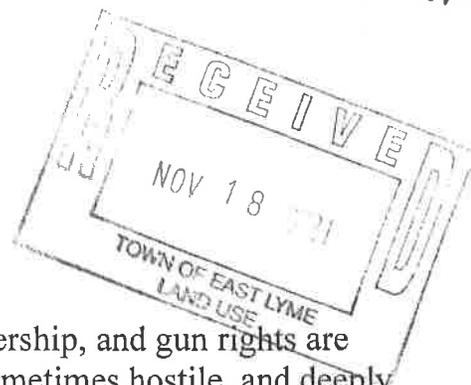
Sincerely,

Esteban Garcia



Zoning Meeting 11/18/21

RE: Viking Firearms and Training



Conversations about guns, gun violence, gun ownership, and gun rights are complex and have grown increasingly stressful, sometimes hostile, and deeply disheartening. So, it is not surprising that a new business proposing a mix of entertainment and training relating to firearms has caused such a divided reaction.

Responsible gun owners who hear any hesitancy about gun-use may feel demonized and become defensive, and they have a right to those feelings. There are also many reasonable and responsible citizens who feel traumatized and want to see a reduction in gun violence. Safety efforts that were once common sense and widely accepted have been twisted in national politics for self-serving needs. Deep and painful fractures have divided our country, our state, and our town. Fear and anger have been perfectly manipulated marketing tools for selling more guns and we are ALL worse off for it.

That is evident in the way we project our feelings on one another through the words we use, the signs we wave, the decals we display, and the flags we fly. Our children absorb these messages and only time will tell the impact it will have on them.

Gun violence takes many forms, but domestic gun violence and gun suicide are of particular concern for us in East Lyme, especially on the heels of the pandemic that has left many people financially and emotionally struggling. The zoning board and town leadership need to exercise wisdom and exhibit courage when evaluating Viking Firearms and Training's proposal. We should all avoid reflexively taking sides.

We need to ask critical questions about this business as proposed as well as what it could morph into.

We need to consider what we want East Lyme to be known for?

We need to weigh the potential costs of unintended consequences.

We cannot let a failure of imagination lead to poor risk assessment.

Some questions I want all town leadership to be asking themselves include:

Should the use of real-life modified guns be marketed in East Lyme as entertainment? Does this desensitize people, particularly children, to the lethality of guns?

Given the deadly serious nature of guns, would East Lyme be better served by a law enforcement only training facility?

If there is a need for safety-training and de-escalation wouldn't non-tactical training on topics such as safe storage, and recognizing the warning signs of suicide and domestic violence better serve civilians than an active shooter scenario?

When considering zoning approval, for a special permit, within a light industrial area, I want you to ask if our current zoning laws have EVER interpreted "training" as ANY type of training, including non-classroom physical training? And if so, are there ANY limits to the type or rigor of training -- or on its recipients? Are we in danger of opening Pandora's box?

My intent tonight is not to appear hyperbolic. I am here with my neighbors to present sincere concerns and to implore you to take the time to do the research necessary to be sure that you are making the best decision for East Lyme and its residents' future.

Thank you  
Christine Stahl  
Niantic, CT

## Jennifer Lindo

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**From:** Bill Mulholland  
**Sent:** Thursday, November 18, 2021 11:46 AM  
**To:** Jennifer Lindo  
**Subject:** FW: Viking Firearms and Training Statement



**From:** Steve Luber <steve.luber@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, November 18, 2021 11:26 AM  
**To:** Bill Mulholland <billm@eltownhall.com>  
**Subject:** Viking Firearms and Training Statement

**CAUTION:** This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear members of the Zoning Board,

I write in objection to the green lighting of Viking Firearms and Training. While I understand this is an opportunity for a large business in the area, run by three citizens of the town, I have to object for the following reasons:

The statistics are clear that the more the gun industry is regulated by a state or city, the fewer violent crimes and deaths occur, not to mention a drastic reduction in suicides

([https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/about/publichealthapproach.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fviolenceprevention%2Fpublichealthissue%2Fpublichealthapproach.html](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/about/publichealthapproach.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fviolenceprevention%2Fpublichealthissue%2Fpublichealthapproach.html)). While this establishment is dealing with simulations and not real ammunition, it still encourages the culture of gun ownership and use, which I would prefer not to increase in East Lyme.

If this were a truly fantastical laser tag venue, this would perhaps be a different conversation. But the fact of the matter is that an important point, even a selling point for this proposed establishment is that everything is as real and faithful to the real tools and training as possible. It is this training that is particularly concerning to me: **what possible need do civilians in East Lyme need for tactical training?** While it is within everyone's rights to learn things, this strikes me as entirely unnecessary. And, while the January 6 Investigation is ongoing in Washington about the strategic and coordinated plan to overthrow the Capitol, approving this would be at best tone deaf, if not explicitly detrimental to the community.

I want to encourage business, especially local businesses, in our town, but this does not seem like the right avenue to pursue. With my apologies to the proposed owners, I do not wish to have this establishment in our town, as a parent to two small children, as a teacher, and as a general citizen. Thank you for your consideration, and please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions you might have.

Steve Luber, PhD  
2 Spencer Ave.

# MUELLER GREENE

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

300 State Street, Suite 209, New London, CT 06320  
Telephone: (860) 442-2252 Facsimile: (860) 442-2253

Mathew H. Greene, Esq.  
*matt@muellergreene.com*

Victoria S. Mueller, Esq.  
*victoria@muellergreene.com*

September 29, 2021

Matthew Walker, Chairman  
Zoning Commission  
Pennsylvania Ave.  
East Lyme, CT 06333

Dear Chairman and Commission Members:

The undersigned is writing as Agent for Viking Firearms and Training LLC (VFT) with respect to the attached application for Special Permit under Sections 11.2.2 Training Facility, 11.2.4 indoor recreation, 11.2.5 retail sale, and 22.1.9 office, for the premises located at 15 Industrial Drive.

It is the intent of VFT to occupy the commercial buildings previously occupied by Bob's Furniture. The use will be a combination of training and entertainment in the form of a laser simulation shooting range, allowing for varying degrees of training and recreational activities. There will NOT be any live fire at this location and all shooting devices will be gas driven blowback devices that, in essence, fire infrared lasers at targets projected on a screen. The use is designed to cater to a wide range of patrons from the average recreation enthusiast to competition seekers and groups of varying sizes seeking friendly competitive gamesmanship. VFT will provide professional grade equipment for a real-life experience. There will be varying areas that replicate a range port, areas to practice de-escalation or scenario training, typical marksmanship type training, USPSA competition shooting, modular walls in areas that will be able to simulate virtually any building for use in active shooter training or similar.

Attached is a floor plan setting forth the proposed use which includes, in addition to the training and recreation spaces, a retail area, food area and office area.

The site plan attached is not an updated A-2 survey. It is the same plan submitted and approved for the prior use as Bob's. There are no plans to change any of the existing exterior buildings or grounds and as such we request this be accepted in lieu of an updated A-2 Survey.

There are currently 113 parking spaces which meets the requirements for the proposed use. The buildings combined equal 40,982 gross square feet. Of this, approximately office and retail account for 2,000 sq' requiring 8 parking spaces at 1/250 sq'. There will be approximately 2,000 sq' of storage leaving approximately 37,000 sq' of recreation/training area. Per 22.1.18, the Commission may set the parking requirements by taking into account similarity of this use to

other uses for which number of spaces is specified. Section 22.1.9 requires 1 space per 5 seats for theater, auditorium or public assembly. Along these lines of 1 space per 5 patrons, this would require 90 parking spaces for up to approximately 450 patrons at one time. As such, we suggest the amount of parking spaces provided is adequate to meet the parking for this use.

I thank you for your attention to this application and look forward to presenting this to the Commission.

Very truly yours,

Mathew H. Greene

