

Citrus Springs Civic Association

Current Events Information

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Director of Communications

The Civic Association Board has received inquiries and comments about gunfire events in our community. Because this could possibly affect anyone with life threatening consequences, we have decided to look into the situation.

Florida is still for the most part a very rural area, with vast amounts of farm and natural woodlands. It is only natural that firearms use is still very common in the state and especially for hunting. It is also still a state where individual freedom and rights to private land use without heavy handed government control still exists.

Communities such as Citrus Springs have sprung up across the state and with that growth comes the need for at the very least some common sense land use regulations. Citrus Springs was developed with specific Deed restrictions in place but does not prohibit the discharge of firearms except for hunting.

We in Citrus Springs are blessed with a community that was designed with purpose. This community was integrated well within the natural beauty and scope of the land while still providing abundant space for homes, businesses, schools, recreation and future development.

There are 15,000 acres of land within the boundaries of Citrus Springs most of which is still undeveloped. Over the years, county citizens have utilized the undeveloped areas for recreational purposes including target practice with guns and bow and arrow. The sounds of gunfire can be heard especially on the weekends and because of the topography, sounds are bounced and deflected over large areas making it difficult to determine its actual origin. Many gunfire events are actually occurring outside the boundaries of Citrus Springs where large farm tracts still exist and gunfire sounds closer than it is. Gunfire events are not an epidemic and are relatively infrequent in most areas of Citrus Springs.

Recent outcries from residents across the state were heard by the Florida State Legislature last year so another attempt was made to address the concern. One of the major concerns was the uneven and scattered jumble of city and county ordinances that had sprung up in an effort to stop the shooting. Some of that outcry was from those that were disturbed by the noise, some by legitimate fear of being shot and by those that wish to (for whatever reason) believe that no one should even own a gun. The new amendment addresses that problem by eliminating those local ordinances and instituting state statutes instead. However the resulting amendment appears to have more holes than a spaghetti strainer and does little to address the real issue.

We as US Citizens are guaranteed by our Second Amendment that "the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."

That statement as basic as it is can only be regarded as a fundamental hard line fact and any effort to modify or delete it would be disastrous to the very survival of the United States as we know it. The founding Fathers knew that without this kind of protection the citizenry would have zero chance of protecting itself from a tyrannical government.

Now having related that, it doesn't mean that we all can without cause fire those weapons willy-nilly at random without any consideration for others safety. We have all heard the tragic stories of accidental shootings where folks have been killed and or severely injured. Gun related accidents are far too common and firearms training should be mandatory with the purchase of any new or used weapon. However backyard shooting range injuries are virtually unheard of across the country with none that I can find in Citrus County. The facts are clear that despite the danger, chances of anyone being injured or killed from a correctly built backyard gun range are miniscule at best. Your chances of injury or death are astronomically higher every time you ride in a car from drunk and distracted drivers, heart disease or even getting hit by lightning. Citrus County residents are not bullet proof and everyone that fires a weapon is not an expert; however it lends one to believe that when done using (above all) common sense and a well built and maintained backstop that a backyard shooting range can be operated with safety.

Now the question remains were should they NOT be permitted. The legislature defined that as a residential area with more than one or more homes per acre or less. Ok, so that would include large parts of Citrus Springs and most other residential areas of the County. This appears to be a good common sense rule because lots that small are way too confined to provide any sort of safety buffer from neighbors. In some parts of Citrus Springs as in the Estate areas the lots are all one plus acre per home thus appearing to fall out of the scope of the law as it is written. There is zero mention in the law about using a "Backstop" or to provide recommended and required design, installation or maintenance of such a device. The addition of such language would go a long way in improving the law.

Now of course when you read both the original law and the new amendment you will see that strict enforcement and punishment is included for reckless and or negligent behavior, shooting across any roadway, right of way, or occupied premises and of course criminal activity. The law and amendment as written are wide open to interpretation and I expect that sooner or later it will be either changed again by the Legislature and or challenged in court.

The Citrus County Sheriff's Office was questioned on the subject. Their response is that they will respond to all calls about gunfire. They will attempt to locate the shooter and investigate the circumstances. A Supervisor may be called in to make the decision on whether or not the shooter is abiding by the law as written and whether reasonable safety standards are being applied. They will make every effort to educate the shooter about the law and to make certain that current law is being followed. The loopholes in the law are clear as mud so the Sheriff's Office has no choice but to use their best judgment when responding to a call. Questionable calls could be turned over to the States Attorney's Office for review.

As Citrus Springs and Citrus county as a whole grows and homes and businesses fill in the many acres of now vacant land it is imperative that the State legislature revisit the law, using some real world common sense and strengthen the law to provide equal protection both to the residents as well as shooting enthusiasts. This will only happen if enough people will contact their Senator and Congressman. Safety has to be a joint effort with all parties and has to be a number one priority.

Our best recommendation is to read the law and the amendment, then make your own decision using your best judgment, common sense and a profound respect for your neighbors. Your Second Amendment rights are not violated by the State imposing common sense regulations on firing ranges. Safety should always be everyone's primary concern.

IMPORTANT

This article must not be any way construed to be a Legal opinion and should only be taken as friendly advice. If you have questions then everyone is encouraged to contact your personal attorney and or your local Law Enforcement office.