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Land Use Department

12/4/2024

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52 Military Hwy
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Town of Ledyard Planning and Zoning Commission
Ledyard Director of Land Use and Planning
Ledyard, CT

Dear Commissioners and Ms. Burdick,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the health and quality of life of our town's military and Veteran population diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) regarding the proposed blasting at the Mt. Decatur site. I am strongly opposed to this application and urge you to consider denying it.

In addition to residing in the town of Ledyard, I am a Clinical Psychologist licensed in the State of CT. I have held a doctorate in clinical psychology for the past 15 years and have worked in the mental health field for over 20. During this time, I have received specialized training in the VA Connecticut Healthcare System in treating Veterans with combat-related PTSD and have provided intensive individual and group psychotherapy to these Veterans. I have also had the unique opportunity to assess and treat Veterans of mixed eras in the PTSD Residential Rehabilitation Program at the Newington VA. I routinely utilize empirically supported treatments for PTSD and I have received comprehensive training through the VA in Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) for Military Populations. I believe that my professional experience positions me to offer my clinical opinion on the deleterious impact of the proposed blasting to Ledyard's Veterans and active military.

PTSD affects about 5% of the US population, however within the Veteran population these rates are higher and vary by war/conflict. Please see the below chart obtained from US Department of Veteran Affairs, National Center for PTSD website.

	<i>Past Year</i>	<i>Lifetime</i>
Operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Enduring Freedom (OEF)	15 out of 100 (15%)	29 out of 100 (29%)
Persian Gulf War (Desert Storm)	14 out of 100 (14%)	21 out of 100 (21%)
Vietnam War	5 out of 100 (5%)	10 out of 100 (10%)
World War II (WWII) and Korean War	2 out of 100 (2%)	3 out of 100 (3%)

NOTE: The data in this table is from Veterans alive at the time of the study. As such, it does not include Veterans in any service area who have died and may have had PTSD.

Given our town's proximity to a military base, I can assume that Ledyard has a substantial population of both active military and Veterans. While I was unable to obtain exact statistics for Ledyard, data for New London County is readily available and notes the percentage of Veterans to be between 6.26 and 6.49% in our county. I was unable to find data on the percentage of individuals who are active military, but anecdotally I know of several within my immediate neighborhood. The current population of Ledyard is approximately 15,500. Based on New London County statistics, that indicates that about 1000 Veterans reside our in town (again, this excludes active military). Given the National Center of PTSD statistics on this disorder, we can estimate that our town may have up to 150 individuals with combat-related PTSD, which is likely an underestimate as active military are excluded.

The reason I am bringing this to your attention is that the blasting proposed by Cashan/GFI will undoubtedly adversely impact these individuals by increasing and exacerbating their symptoms, thus negatively impacting their quality of life and reducing their capacity to enjoy their homes. PTSD is a serious mental health issue with several symptom clusters, although for the purposes of this letter I am primarily concerned and with symptoms of hyperarousal/hyper-startle response and flashbacks. Hyper-startle response engages the bodies Sympathetic nervous system, which is essentially our "fight or flight" system. It makes your heart pound, increases your respiration, and sends blood to your muscles often tensing them. Stress hormones like Adrenaline are released and you might start sweating, fear scared, and you may jump. For most individuals, this response is short-lived and passes quickly. Individuals with combat PTSD however, may experience a heightened sense of it and it may take much longer to pass.

A flashback entails the individual re-living their trauma. During a flashback, combat Veterans often experience the same sensations and emotions as the original service-related trauma. They can be extremely intense and vivid and individuals will sometimes become confused as to where and when they are. They can last anywhere from a few seconds to a few hours. Based on my clinical work with these individuals, those who experience flashbacks find them to be extremely distressing, to impede their functioning at work, at home, and in their relationships.

Blasting would be a direct trigger for these symptoms in combat PTSD. While there are certainly other similar triggers (for example, 4th of July fireworks), in this example, Veterans are able to anticipate the trigger and perhaps take actions to mitigate the trauma-response, such as wearing earplugs. A blasting operation of the scale proposed by GFI and of the significant duration (7-10 YEARS) would not allow for this opportunity.

I urge the commission to consider the health and wellness of our Ledyard Veterans and active military members who suffer with combat PTSD. While I understand that these individuals make up a relatively small percentage of our town's population, they deserve the right to live in an environment free from the sounds of combat. Routine blasting at Mt. Decatur will undoubtedly lead to a decrease in their quality of life and exacerbation of PTSD symptoms. I urge you to deny this application.

Respectfully,

Laura Palmese, Psy.D.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura Palmese', written in a cursive style.