

Dear Zoning Board & Town Council Members:

As a resident of Gales Ferry, father of three young children, college professor, and Iraq War veteran (2003-2004), I strongly oppose the application under consideration to permit blasting near Fort Decatur. As others have noted in the previous zoning meeting, there are countless veterans in our town. Of the few houses on our cul de sac, two of my neighbors are also veterans; one with 100% disability due to PTSD, the other a Marine veteran with multiple tours. Our street is a mere mile downriver from the proposed site, and, as we know, sound travels far over the wide and unobstructed space of the Thames River. As an Iraq War Veteran and scholar who has read extensively and published articles on forms of trauma, I can provide special insight into why this will be a problem: why something innocuous to most people, loud explosions, will likely alter the quality of life for myself and for many others.

My own research focuses mainly on how veteran writers of WWI attempted to articulate, grapple with, and understand the then widely misunderstood impacts of extreme trauma. Both the British and American governments had neither the medical framework nor the policies to address and care for the disruptive and often paralyzing effects of war. More recently, Hollywood continues to take its cue from WWI, with depictions of veterans as deeply disturbed, thereby reifying a narrowly conceived understanding of PTSD. In reality, most of us are not diving for cover, but our bodies may nonetheless experience chemical changes. Twenty years ago, I spent most of my yearlong deployment in one of Iraq's most deadly cities, Ar Ramadi. In fact, our combat outpost was situated just outside the urban center and experienced mortar attacks on an almost nightly basis. Between incoming rounds and outgoing artillery counter-barrages, most (if not all) of us developed what psychologists call a "conditioned response." For those of us who have sat through introductory psychology classes, we are well aware of the seminal work of B.F. Skinner and accept that certain stimuli can have an associative response. In other words, sensory inputs (i.e. loud noises) are closely associated in the brain with traumatic memory. When I returned home, I experienced what's called hypervigilance for years—an inability to relax, a sense of always being on the edge, overreactions to aggressive drivers, an inability to sleep. This often-overlooked aspect of PTSD was probably present in every returning veteran who spent a year or more embedded in a combat environment. Meanwhile, chemical changes likely lurk beneath the surface of most forms of hypervigilance, such as chronic bouts with acute stress response and hyperarousal, which are marked by elevated cortisol and adrenaline levels as well as spikes in anxiety, heart rate, and blood pressure. While my own experience with hypervigilance has gradually lessened with time, it resurfaces in certain situations. When I hear loud noises (e.g. explosions), even today, I may seem fine on the outside, but my blood pressure, heart rate, and mood certainly change. To put it in frank terms, I feel an irrational, aggressive, teeth grinding, blindingly combative urge to fight. As an Iraq War veteran, should I expect my peaceful weekends on the porch to be shattered by noise pollution that brings me back to those days in Ar Ramadi?

It appears Jay Cashman Inc. has no concern for those who sacrificed a great deal for this country. I ask those on the Town Zoning Commission to be more considerate of their veteran neighbors and deny any future blasting in this town. In the very least, hire a wide range of outside consultants at the expense of the applicant to assess the various adverse impacts we face.

As a father of three, I find the proposed blasting plan reprehensible. Silica dust, a known carcinogen, is 100 times smaller than a grain of sand, and so, my wife and I worry that our three children (Adelaide 8; Declan 5, and Colette 1.) may one day be on the playground at school, inhaling microscopic particles that become trapped in lung tissue, impeding one's ability to breathe, with long term prognoses like lung cancer, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, Kidney Disease, and/or silicosis (CDC). Gales Ferry School, Juliet W. Long, and the middle school are only 1.2 miles from the proposed blasting jobsite. Since silica is 10 micrometers in diameter and can remain airborne for days, will even a gentle northerly breeze of about 5 knots, common on the Thames, carry that material to school grounds? For roughly ten years, we should expect one truck every five minutes to rumble down route 12 right by school property: will the busted and jostling material from those dumps further deliver a perpetual cloud of silica to our children?

The answer to all these questions is "likely," but we don't know yet. If history is our guide, industries have constantly exploited any uncertainty in "the science" to push through their agenda until the ramifications are plainly visible and legislators put measures in place to protect public health, local ecosystems, etc. As many of my neighbors have pointed out in the previous townhall meeting, Cashman Dredging cannot contain all (or likely even most) of the silica dust. Take their lawyer's careful crafting of words, for example. On many occasions, he uttered the word "mitigate." According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term "mitigate" means "to alleviate or give relief from (an illness or symptom, pain, suffering, sorrow, etc.); to lessen the trouble caused by (an evil or...)" ("mitigate" *OED*). In other words, the best and most diligent engineers in the world can only hope to *lessen* exposure, not eliminate it. The air quality, the Thames watershed, local fisheries and wildlife, our community, and our children stand to lose when "mitigation" is the best and only option.

What we do know about silica dust exposure is concerning. According to the California Department of Industrial Relations, 300 workers per year die, thousands are diagnosed, and countless others remain off the estimated record due to mis- and underdiagnosis. While the U.S. requires protection for its workers and exposure limits, several advanced countries are far more stringent on all accounts. Current regulations do not seem to permit a massive quarry at the heart of a residential area, but even so, regulations in general usually provide a minimum safeguard, especially in our nation. Comparatively, U.S. regulations are far from comprehensive and instead offer gaps where the private sector can seek huge profits before the public becomes aware of the risks (e.g. the tobacco industry, oil & gas, the ongoing opioid litigation involving the Sackler family, etc.). The list goes on, and, frankly, the FDA, OSHA, and most regulatory bodies are reactive, not proactive. What's more, current regulations that require exposure limits during 8-hour shifts as well as protective masks are intended to cover workers, not the nearby residents. Our children won't wear protective gear on the playground. Jay Cashman Inc. won't invest

millions in detection technologies all over town (assuming they exist). Realistically, we will just wait and see what happens.

For ten years, my wife and I have lived on a ledge overlooking the Thames near the historic Harvard boathouse. Beyond raising three young children, we have busy occupations at our respective colleges, so we had paid little attention to Cashman's entry into our small town, that is, until we began doing our own research. During casual conversation over dinner, we expressed disappointment that the town missed the opportunity to rezone the area for more advantageous commercial use, not unlike the Mohegan's plans for the old Norwich Hospital grounds. Other towns have been far more strategic than ours, becoming tourist destinations with posh reputations that enrich the town's coffers while making it a highly desirable place to live. When Jay Cashman, Inc.'s dredging company arrived, we shrugged, resigned to the fact that our town likely wouldn't transform itself the way Mystic did fifty years ago. It would take incredible patience, civic leadership, organizing, and federal grant funding to rezone, clean, and repurpose that site. But the alternative is grim: Jay Cashman Inc. has gradually revealed its true intentions for purchasing the old Dow Chemical grounds in recent weeks. Frankly, we were surprised, if not appalled, that someone would blast and sell off 40 acres of the historic Mount Decatur site. And it didn't add up: the earnings from that material seemed slender compared to the multiple, multi-million-dollar contracts Jay Cashman Inc. manages each year. Then, at the last town meeting, Jay Cashman Inc. laid all the cards on the table during their lawyer's closing argument in which he pitched expanding the footprint (from 10 to about 50 acres, I assume) for expansive industrial use, opening the door to more industries, more applications, and, ultimately, unchecked industrial creep that would prohibit the town from any future plans of reimagining that area of town as a commercial waterfront destination. While the taxes are high in Gales Ferry, we would never trade our idyllic town and our home's panoramic view of the Thames for an industrial polluter and eyesore that may one day rival the Electric Boat stretch of the Sound in Groton. Would residents of Groton Long Point, Noank, Black Point, Lord's Point, or Stonington Borough allow this in their beautiful shoreline communities?

Even if Gales Ferry/Ledyard community members stand shoulder-to-shoulder in opposition, I remain concerned that Cashman, who is a multi-millionaire with deep pockets and a reputation for walking over small towns, will stay the course and eventually obtain whatever he wants. For nearly a decade, residents of Brockton, Massachusetts unanimously opposed the development of a power plant. In an interview, Cashman, who became a substantial partner in Brockton Power Co. LLC, disclosed his plans to push through his agenda with advertising, personal PR appearances, and a 68-million-dollar lawsuit that alleges his proposal wasn't given due process.¹ To put this plainly, Brockton elected 11 town councilors, 10 of whom voted against the project, but democratically elected officials and the voice of the people matter little when the other team has enormous financial resources. In fact, Jay Cashman Inc. is no stranger to leveraging their financial advantages in court to earn even more money. The company was jointly awarded \$183 million in 2014 after suing the Massachusetts Transportation Department for "escalating costs"

¹ [Quincy developer Jay Cashman enters Brockton power plant fight \(patriotledger.com\)](http://patriotledger.com)

during Boston's "Big Dig," a 15-billion-dollar infrastructure project.² In 2019, a Massachusetts jury awarded his company another \$21.3 million in a lawsuit against the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center because they had encountered a boulder when dredging and demanded more compensation on top of the \$113 million dollar project.

Jay Cashman, Inc. has a reputation for disregarding regulations, willing to pay tens of thousands of dollars in fines when the company is estimated to have an **annual revenue of \$300 million.** Here is a brief sample of Cashman's fines: In 2010, the company was fined \$50,000 on multiple violations of the Ocean Dumping Act, including being caught dumping sediment in Beverly Harbor. According to the EPA, the company illegally dumped sediment on 28 occasions, effectively damaging important fisheries habitat and a vital cornerstone of the ecosystem, eelgrass.³ The Occupational Health and Safety Administration also levied fines against Cashman for not properly securing its cranes to barges. \$85,000 of the \$191,000 fine was for repeat offenses.⁴ Jay Cashman, Inc.'s disregard for safety and environmental regulations is a pattern, not a one-off accident. Again, we cannot assume regulations will deter any company with a penchant to take shortcuts for the sake of faster profits. Expect this to happen in our community in the near future.

My purpose here is to profile a powerful, ultra-wealthy, and out-of-touch company with no regard for the communities it damages. The abovementioned fines and regulatory agencies as well as the small towns that voice opposition are perhaps mere nuisances to man who can afford to spend over \$30 million of his own personal wealth renovating a castle in County Kildare, Ireland into a luxury hotel. After paying a genealogist to lay some claim on Irish lineage, Cashman appears to have exploited Ireland's economic hard times by purchasing Kilkea Castle in Castledermot from a family that had owned it for 800 years. In Ireland, Cashman feels welcome, admitting that "I've been involved in a lot of controversial projects, so I'm just used to a kind of 'unwelcomeness' sometimes; it's just part of what I do," he said. "Here? I'm the most liked person in town. I've never done anything where the people have been so grateful." In a PR profile published on the hotel's webpage, Cashman marvels that "we were Irish peasants here." Come winter, the Cashman's of today can now hunker down in their castle for Christmas, surrounded by their paid and agreeable Irish help as well as amenities such as "falconry, skeet shooting, and a variety of tailored spa treatments." Once a month, Jay and Christy cross the Atlantic to return to their castle sanctuary for a week, where they can partake in "equestrian excursions" through the 180-acres of their "lush woodland." While Christy roams through her "rose-filled gardens," my children may one day breathe in the toxic dust that adds another \$4 to 6 million dollars to their family's enormous assets. While Jay tee's off on his "world-class" golf course, my neighbors will hear the constant crushing of boulders, contend with an estimated 500

² [Joint Venture Recovers \\$183 million in Big Dig's Final Lawsuit - Hinckley Allen](#)

³ [Dredging of rivers leads to \\$50K fine against firm | Local News | salemnews.com](#)

⁴ [EPA hits Quincy's Cashman Dredging with \\$185,000 fine \(patriotledger.com\) OSHA fines contractor \\$191,000 after accident \(southcoasttoday.com\)](#)

hundred trucks per week on the busy (and occasionally fatal) route 12, and settle into quiet despair as their property value plummets.⁵

For the record, my wife and I oppose blasting and any application Jay Cashman, Inc. submits or attempts to litigate and push through the zoning commission and town council. We believe it's in our town's best interest to limit the scope of any industrial expansion beyond Cashman's current dredging operations. Preventing an expanded footprint that will result from blasting is our only recourse to "mitigate" further industrialization. We also advise town leadership to hire lawyers and proceed with the utmost care when dealing with this organization. A man who runs away from angry neighbors to hide in a castle may fancy himself a king. And kings don't take kindly to "peasants" who say no.

Sincerely,

Christopher J. La Casse, Ph.D. (local peasant of Mull Berry Dr.)

⁵ [Boston developer turns old Irish castle into posh hotel - Kilkea Castle Estate & Golf Club](#)



[Boston developer turns old Irish castle into posh hotel - Kilkea Castle Estate & Golf Club](#)