

MEMORANDUM

TO: Firearms Safety Advisory Committee (Backstops/Shooting At Night)
FROM: Tyler C. Southall, County Attorney
DATE: February 20, 2026
SUBJECT: Materials for Meeting on February 24, 2026

Background

Following instances of unsafe firearms discharges in the County, the Board of Supervisors appointed this Committee to examine whether a new County ordinance was needed with respect to backstops and/or shooting at night.

In an effort to assist the Committee, attached please find a chart showing summaries of ordinances from other localities to include backstop/containment rules, distance rules, and time of day/night shooting rules. Copies of relevant portions of those ordinances are also included.¹ Although the County Attorney's Office makes no recommendation of what the Committee should recommend, it does want to point out several ordinances that other localities use. Isle of Wight County prohibits target shooting between 9 PM and 9 AM, which provision can be viewed in Section 12-11.1(3) of the Isle of Wight County Code on page 1 of the "Examples of Ordinances from other Localities in 2026" document. Chesterfield County has a simple and general backdrop requirement that appears in Section 14-10(b) of the Chesterfield County Code, which can be viewed on page 7 of the "Examples of Ordinances from other Localities in 2026" document. The City of Danville has much more detailed (and more difficult to comply with) backdrop rules on pages 2–6 of the "Examples of Ordinances from other Localities in 2026" document. A number of localities use distance requirements, and if there was a desire to do so, a distance requirement could be combined with a backstop requirement, which would have the effect of requiring backstops for target shooting if it was within a certain distance of others' houses.

Also in an effort to assist the Committee, some materials from a similar committee that met in 2014 and 2015 are included. Although a decade has passed and some of the sections of the Virginia Code have been amended, for the purposes of localities regulating backstops and shooting at night, Virginia law is basically the same. It is noted that references to the Commonwealth's Attorney in these documents are generally to Lisa Caruso, who was then Commonwealth's Attorney.

In discussions with the previous committee, it was noted that the noise ordinance may not be the best way to regulate gunshots. Virginia Courts have held that a noise ordinance must be objective rather than subjective. This means that noise ordinances must have measurable standards to constitute a violation. Thus, a noise ordinance could prohibit "noise that is plainly audible inside the confines of a dwelling place." The problem with such a formulation is that it might prohibit noises that were not intended to be prohibited, including firearms discharges in rural areas, far away from anyone. It is also noted that

¹ Although hunting may be referenced in some of the ordinances, no effort was made to summarize hunting ordinances as that is not the topic of this committee.

Virginia Code Section 15.2-917 states that “[n]o local ordinance regulating any noise shall subject a sport shooting range to noise control standards more stringent than those in effect at its effective date.”²

² Sport shooting range means “an area or structure designed for the use of rifles, shotguns, pistols, silhouettes, skeet, trap, black powder, or any other similar sport shooting.” Effective date means “the time the construction or operation of the sports shooting range initially was approved, or at the time any application was submitted for the construction or operation of the sports shooting range, whichever is earliest.” Va. Code Section 15.2-917(C).