

Dear Planning Board,

As you proceed to discuss the proposed Firearms Business Zoning By-Law, we would like you to consider our concerns as the local law abiding firearms owners in Westford. We are plumbers, electricians, doctors, lawyers, scientists and more. Some of us are sportsmen, some are competitive shooters. Many use firearms as a protective deterrent, and others just enjoy exercising a Constitutional freedom.

Above all, we are your neighbors, and want to be clear on our thoughts on the proposed draft to date.

There is NO credible data that Firearms Businesses Negatively impact crime or communities

The premise of the entire proposed Zoning By-law is the assumption that a “firearms business” is so dangerous that it must be kept physically far away from people. This is false. There is NO credible study that shows any such thing.

Now, to be clear, the proponents of a By-Law say otherwise. They claim there is a study, published in Scientific American (SA) showing that changes in Federal Firearms Licenses (FFLs, which is a proxy for firearms businesses) drive a change in crime. More FFLs equals more crime according to the SA article. A copy of the graph is attached to this letter and you will see people using it on posters.

But that article and graph are based on a study that was published on the Social Science Research Network (SSRN) website. SSRN is not a peer review site, but rather an on-line sharing portal of “working papers”, i.e., papers that were NOT published. And the article on that site makes a bold statement up front. It clearly states:

We additionally show the effect of gun dealer density is limited mostly to counties that have a high percent of Black residents. We propose that the so-called “Ferguson Effect”-a sharp increase in violent crime in urban and Black communities after 2014- might be partially explained by an in flux of gun dealers in and near Black communities, rather than just a change in the propensity of Black residents to call the police or changes in police behavior.

In other words, the authors of the original paper were uncertain what came first, “the chicken or the egg.” Did FFLs suddenly race into neighborhoods driving up crime, or were they responding to the crime already in the neighborhoods. The paper is inconclusive on this. The abstract for that paper is also attached.

Therefore, the entire premise for this effort is based on a large flawed and unproven assumption.

The other parts of the By-Law we are concerned about are:

Setbacks where “children generally congregate”

We are completely opposed to this. This is subjective and removes too many potential places for businesses to locate and should itself be removed.

Firearms Businesses capped at 4

This was originally 5, and should be restored to 5. It was reduced as an overreaction to the fact that another business had been approved prior to this By-Law effort. As of now, that business will likely not be moving to Westford.

Either a Cap, or Daycare Setbacks, but not both

We do not like caps, and we do not like setbacks. But both together are far too restrictive.

For the record, at least Daycare facilities are permitted. There is no ambiguity about who and where they are. Our point is that a lawful business should have flexibility to be able to exist and survive. To do that, one of these requirements has to be eliminated.

Open Route 40 to Businesses

Currently, only the overlay district of route 110 (and a few roads off 110) are included for these businesses. Route 40 has an Industrial Zone which would be appropriate for certain businesses. We feel this zone should be included.

Miscellaneous

Lastly, we are concerned about language regarding hours of operation, and the types of FFLs (gun sales, ammunition sales, gunsmiths etc). We feel none of these should be restricted. All businesses are under immense pressure to survive in the current economic climate. We should not be restricting them in ways that they need to operate to be successful.

Two notes of “Concession”

We are aware of 2 other items in the current proposal that we are not happy with, but are prepared to live with. The first is the setback from schools and churches. While we feel this is completely unnecessary we are willing to accept it even though it removes a lot of locations from 110. We would draw your attention to the fact that one of the fish and game clubs in town abuts school property, and would challenge anyone to show us where there has been a problem.

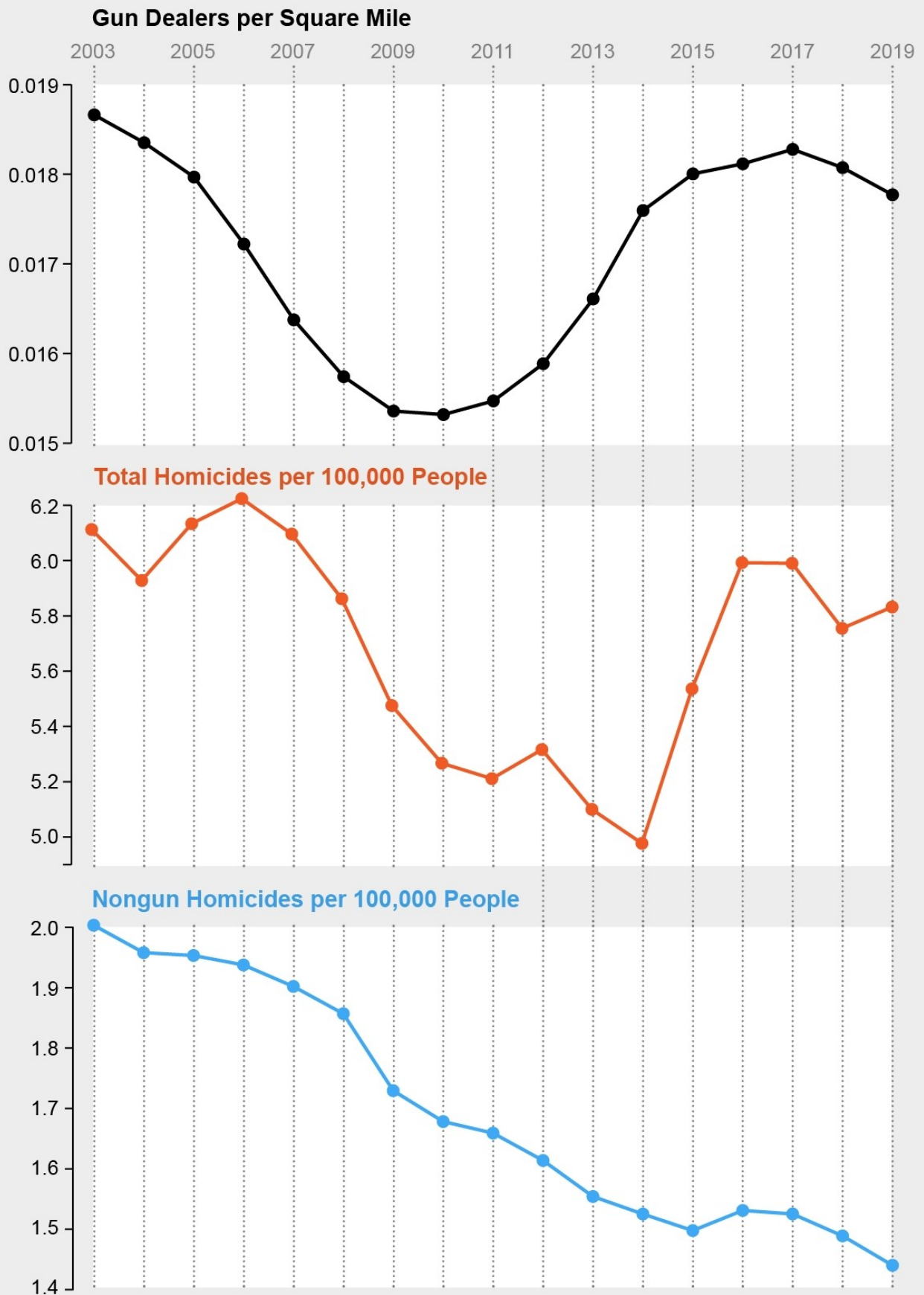
Second, is the setback *between* firearms businesses. This is also the reason the “special permit” is being pursued. This is to address an issue brought up by the Police Chief. While we are prepared to live with it, we would caution the Board and the Chief. We do not believe this will achieve what the Chief wants it to. Representatives of our group would be willing to talk further on this matter.

Thank you for your consideration.

Westford Pro 2A and the law abiding firearms owners of Westford.

PS: Due to time constraints regarding the posting deadline for the Planning Board packet for the meeting to be held June 5, 2023, Westford Pro 2A respectfully requests the right to gather and submit signatures of Westford residents, for the public record, who support our cause.

Graph from Scientific American



Abstract for Original Article

Gun Dealer Density and its Effect on Homicide

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November 17, 2021

Abstract

We explore the relationship between gun prevalence and homicides in the United States from 2003–2019. Unlike previous research, which typically uses an indirect, state-level measure of gun prevalence, we use a direct measure of guns in a narrow geographic area: gun dealers. We find an increase in gun dealer density is significantly and positively associated with increased homicides in subsequent years. We compare estimates from our preferred measure, the number of dealers per 100 square miles in a local area, to those found using other gun prevalence measures. We find our preferred measure to be more consistent in magnitude across three different estimation methods and two different data sources. We additionally show the effect of gun dealer density is limited mostly to counties that have a high percent of Black residents. We propose that the so-called “Ferguson Effect”—a sharp increase in violent crime in urban and Black communities after 2014—might be partially explained by an influx of gun dealers in and near Black communities, rather than just a change in the propensity of Black residents to call the police or changes in police behavior.

JEL classification: D0, I12, I18, Z18

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