



Town of Arlington
Department of Health and Human Services
Office of the Board of Health

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MEMO

To: Board of Selectmen
From: Natasha Waden, Public Health Director
Date: February 26, 2017
RE: Health Department Comments- Article 15

The Health Department has reviewed Article 15, which looks to amend Title V, Article 12 of the Town Bylaws as it relates to noise abatement and has the following comments:

The current bylaw establishes a maximum sound level of 85 dB (A) for sounds other than those associated with construction or maintenance work; practically speaking, a noise meter would not be used to measure the sound generated from a party or event. The effective intent of the noise abatement bylaw as it relates to maximum noise levels is to ensure that fixed, continuous sources of noise do not exceed 85 dB(A), as lasting exposure to sounds above this threshold could be detrimental to public health.. Common examples of applications of the decibel threshold include HVAC units in disrepair, the placement of backup generators, restaurant exhaust systems and other equipment using motors. Whereas an event or party is a single, temporary occurrence and the noise generated by a group of people can be fleeting and highly variable, it would be challenging to accurately measure this type of noise given the fluctuating magnitudes, and would need to be conducted over some extended period of time. For sounds associated with human activity, including the operation of public address loud speakers, and not the operation of equipment or machinery, the effective intent of the bylaw is not to place sound limits, but rather to limit the timeframe the activity is permitted. This type of activity is commonly dealt with as a non-measured noise disturbance by APD who manage issues related to disturbing the peace. As the proponent noted, the Health Department would not have personnel available at the this time of day, or on weekends to measure noise levels of parties. Additionally, if the Health Department were to be the responsible department to enforce a neighborhood communication plan for parties of more than 10 people, it would be difficult for our department to ensure compliance with such a requirement and/or conduct spot checking. The Health Department's recommendation would be to investigate the number of complaints received by APD and the time of day that these types of complaints are received, prior to making any changes to the Bylaw.