

# Council Unites

## Recommends Site For Vietnam War Memorial

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COVENTRY — There may be a truce in the war over where to place a Vietnam memorial in town.

### COVENTRY

At its meeting last month, the town council voted unanimously to set a goal of putting the Connecticut Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the Memorial Green, across from Patriots Park. That's where all the town war memorials are. That's where Jean Risley, the woman working to honor the 612 from Connecticut who lost their lives in the Vietnam War, wants it to be.

"We've gone 360. That's right where I wanted to put it in the first place," Risley said Monday.

Risley's design for the monument includes listing the state's war dead on four panels made of jet black granite from South Africa, resting on a gray granite base. She has raised \$7,000 toward \$35,000 needed to complete the memorial. Masonry cannot be started until \$22,000 is raised, she said.

Town Manager John Elsesser told the council he would relay its strong sentiment for locating the memorial on the green to the town Veterans Memorial Commission. The site, which is on the parade route and near Coventry Village, offers high visibility, parking and easy access for out-of-town visitors, town officials agreed.

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"You've got to have both visibility and a spot where people can stop, get out safely and go look at it," Elsesser said.

Elsesser said Monday that the memorial commission, which had concerns that a statewide memorial would overwhelm town monuments, met over the weekend and will submit a letter with its reaction to the council in the next several days. Eric Ohlund, chairman of the commission, was unavailable for comment.

Before its decision in favor of the site on the green, the council had considered a location at Capt. Nathan Hale Middle School, where a student project several years ago researching the state's Vietnam War dead inspired the name of the school's Veterans Auditorium. In 2002, the school hosted a high-profile visit by the traveling, half-scale replica of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington.

The council had earlier requested that school officials accept the proposal, but Superin-

tendent of Schools Donna Bernard declined.

In an impassioned motion Nov. 20, Councilman Tom Pope urged council members to press Bernard to reconsider the rejection. Pope suggested that a pond area on the school grounds was a perfect place to mark the sacrifice of the young Connecticut war dead. He quoted Henry David Thoreau, who wrote he went to Walden Pond "to front only the essential facts of life."

"It is not too late to give them their place by the pond," Pope said.

But because the motion challenged the patriotism of the school decision, designated the site and gave a deadline for a response from school officials, several council members saw it as

divisive.

The discussion then centered on the Memorial Green site and, as a fallback, suggested sites on the town hall grounds.

Councilman Bill Zenko noted that the green is also the site of a French war memorial that does not involve Coventry soldiers. He also suggested that school officials may not want public attractions on school grounds that could draw loiterers and undermine school security efforts.

Councilman Donald Scussel asked Pope to withdraw the motion, and Pope did.

He then moved for the Memorial Green site, seconded by Zenko and passed unanimously.

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