

Veterans memorial will be erected on town land, council reaffirms

By James White

For the Journal Inquirer

COVENTRY — The Town Council Monday night decided to let stand its original decision to place on town property a state memorial dedicated to those who died in service during the Vietnam War.

The council last fall agreed to allow the memorial to be placed on town property, but Eric Ohlund of the Coventry Veterans Memorial Commission Monday asked the council to reconsider.

"The small-town, rural atmosphere of Coventry does not lend itself to the memorial," Ohlund said. He suggested that locations such as Hartford or the state Veterans Home and Hospital in Rocky Hill would be "more appropriate."

Jean Risley, a Coventry resident who has spearheaded efforts to place the memorial in town, disagreed with Ohlund, saying that past efforts to construct memorials in Hartford and Rocky Hill have been unsuccessful. "We don't think Hartford will accept a memorial," she said.

Resident Patricia Brown supported keeping the monument local, saying, "This is a monument that belongs in Coventry."

Town Council members agreed and by unanimous consensus allowed their previous decision to stand.

Councilmen Don Scussel and Thomas Pope spoke of their support of Risley.

Scussel said he was "disappointed" the Veterans Memorial Commission would not want the statewide memorial located in town. "The town of Coventry deserves to be the location of the memorial," he said.

"I would endorse this," said Pope. "We would be a proud community to have this memorial."

The proposed memorial would be at the entrance of Patriot's Park, at Cross and Lake streets, a location the council said it believes is convenient partly because there already is a parking lot there.

Risley has supplied a conceptual image, which is reminiscent of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington D.C. The memorial would be constructed from black granite, in a "V" shape, and etched

with the names of the 612 Connecticut soldiers who died in the Vietnam conflict.

The memorial would stand 2 feet wide, 15 feet long, and just over 6 feet tall at the highest point. Clark and Riley Memorials of Manchester has volunteered to create the monument at cost, which is around \$28,000, Risley said.

An artist's representation of the monument can be viewed on the Coventry town Web site,

www.coventryct.org

Risley has said she was inspired to propose the memorial by other states' Vietnam veterans memorials. Risley's brother, Army Spc. Robert Tillquist of Branford, was a combat medic killed in action at the age of 23, while trying to perform first aid on a wounded comrade. He was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and the Distinguished Service Cross.

Risley has been raising funds for the memorial since the summer. Those interested in helping her may contact her by phone at 742-8841 or via email at rwisley@snet.net.