

## Condo owner wants gun range at Ritz-Carlton penthouse

By Peter Hermann, *The Baltimore Sun*, March 05, 2011

The prominent author and promoter of best-selling war-themed video games had, and may still have, a two-lane shooting range at a house he owns overlooking the Chesapeake Bay. That's according to a 1999 article in *The New York Times*, whose reporter spent an afternoon with the writer as he shot an array of automatic weapons and candidly talked about his affection for guns and his disdain for "anti-gun screwballs."

With no official paperwork or applications for permits filed with the city, talk of a private gun range is just that. And as much as city leaders talk about seizing illegal guns, and as much as criminals in the city seem to use guns, the topic of a firing range for legal gun owners has apparently never come up.

"I don't know if it can be done in the city," said Councilman William H. Cole IV, whose district includes the Ritz-Carlton. The city offers comprehensive guidelines for people who want to build rooftop decks or add rooms to their houses, but there is no guidance for people who want permission to fire weapons inside their homes.

"I seem to think that logically it may not be possible," Cole said.

City officials noted that, if it is Clancy, he pays more city property taxes than most, if not all, Baltimore homeowners. His bill this fiscal year was more than \$280,000, a sizable amount in a city struggling to attract residents and revenue.

"If he can figure out a way to do it, and it's safe and legal and his neighbors don't care, then more power to him," Cole said.

Federal Hill residents have battled upscale developments to preserve waterfront views and are now fighting reports of lewd, drunken behavior on the floating Tiki Barge lounge.

But if "the client" gets approval, Paul Robinson, of the Federal Hill Neighborhood Association, said he sees no reason to stand in their way.

"I'm sort of a live-and-let-live kind of guy," Robinson said. "If it's a permitted use and it's a private residence, I trust they have some experience handling firearms and the ability to hire a firm that would design it safely. I think that pretty much is the end of the discussion."

The spokesman for the Ritz-Carlton would not say whether a firing range would violate the condo association's rules or covenants.

It's also unclear whether a firing range would be legal in Baltimore. State law prohibits the firing of guns within 150 yards of any residence. Whether that would prevent a permitted gun owner from shooting indoors in a controlled environment such as a firing

range is one of the questions being considered by authorities. City regulations also prohibit noises exceeding 55 decibels in residential areas.

Building shooting ranges in homes, mostly in basements, is relatively rare, said Mike Stilwell, the Mid-Atlantic sales manager for Utah-based Action Target, the nation's leading builder of ranges. It built the one used at the National Rifle Association's headquarters in Virginia.

Stilwell said the cost depends on many things, including the type of weapons used, which dictates the type and thickness of the steel. He said a standard, 25-yard, single-lane firing range in a residence would typically start at \$36,000. That would include steel 3/8 of an inch thick, enough to stop a .223-caliber bullet fired from an M-4 assault rifle.

The most important design aspect, perhaps even more so when shooting in a condo complex, is that "we make sure it's safe and sound and the bullet can't leave," Stilwell said.

Penthouses are ideal for shooting ranges, he said. Steel plates are typically hung from girders, which are strongest in the roof, and the system must be ventilated to remove lead contaminants and gunpowder residue. That means installing ductwork and putting an industrial-size air unit on the roof.

"A shooting range has all kinds of things you don't want to breathe," said Stilwell, who said he has not been contacted by anyone inquiring about a shooting range at the Ritz-Carlton.

Assuming that a firing range could be built in one of the condos, the owner would still have other hurdles to overcome. Laurie Feinberg, division chief of Baltimore's comprehensive planning office, said it would probably require an interpretation of existing rules, which could lead to challenges.

"Firing ranges are not specifically laid out" in the rules, she said. "There are a lot of issues."