

Raft race faces fight

By DIANE KELLSEY

ESSEX — If the Deep River raft race is held August 4 as scheduled this summer, it won't receive any support from Essex officials.

First Selectman Richard Riggio Wednesday night announced his firm opposition to the race, and the Board of Selectmen agreed that he should meet with Department of Environmental Protection and Coast Guard officials to inform them of the board's opposition.

The race, which has been held for the past six years, brings

rafters down the Connecticut River from Deep River, past Essex, and onto Nott's Island, across the river in Old Lyme.

Four years ago only six rafters entered the competition.

Last year over 150 rafters entered the event, and spectators "completely closed down downtown Essex," Riggio said.

Spectators jammed into Essex to watch the contestants race down the river, packing up Main Street and leaving a "very dangerous" situation, Riggio said.

The Fire Department was

highly concerned, because if there had been an emergency at the center of town, "we couldn't have coped with it," Riggio said.

"Emergency vehicles couldn't have even gotten in there," he added.

Also, since the race became a charity oriented fund-raiser, it took countless dollars away from merchants last year, he said.

The Connecticut River is not wide enough to accommodate 150 rafts safely, Riggio complained. "This year I've heard they may have as many as 250

entrants," he said.

The large numbers of rafters means Essex has to keep its marine patrol at full force during that day, also.

Worst, Riggio complained, is that Essex has seemingly no control over whether the race is held or not.

The DEP and Coast Guard have control of Connecticut River related events, "and while we can voice our opinions against it, they are the ones who have control," Riggio said.

After conferring with various
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