

Task Force Facilitator Cynn timer Gaasch called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

ROLL CALL: Present - Cynn timer Gaasch, Facilitator
Joseph Cantafio, Councilman
Jonathan Brotka
Sheri Courteau
Amanda Escobar
Robin Foster
Mary Earsing
James Hinton
Peter Holdsworth

Absent - None

WELCOME

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

Ms. Gaasch asked if there were any edits to the October meeting minutes, there were not.

REVIEW OF COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED

Mr. Brotka stated the Deer Task Force received seven emails and of those four indicated deer were not an issue while three indicated deer were an issue.

Ms. Gaasch stated she and a few members of the task force met with Supervisor Dickson on October 22, 2021, and will provide more information later in the meeting.

Ms. Gaasch referred to a letter received from Leslie Just and stated the task force would like to address the concerns:

- Methods used for the survey: Dr. Foster stated there were concerns that people may be taking the survey multiple times; it is understood that anytime a survey is online there are risks of biases. IP addresses are not being actively collected as the intention was to make the survey truly anonymous; some of the questions indicate illegal behavior, for example, feeding deer. With that said, the computer system does track the computers that log into it to take the survey and a search could be run to identify multiple submissions from a computer. However, it may be an instance that multiple people used the same computer to take the survey, for example a library; any red flags that pop up will be reviewed as the results are analyzed.
- Appointment of task force members: Councilman Cantafio stated when the Town Board puts out a call for committees, they will utilize many means of advertising including the town's website, the West Seneca Bee, and board meetings. Once the applications are received, the Town Board looks to get a good cross section under the criteria of a board. The goal for the Deer Task Force was to have eleven members, of which five were to be West Seneca residents appointed by a Town Board member, one from the West Seneca Environmental Commission, one Town Board member, and four members with relevant professional qualifications nominated by the Supervisor and approved by the Town Board. Members may

be added or removed by the will of the Town Board, there does not need to be cause, and the main goal is there is a group of people with mutual respect working towards the goal of gathering information and reporting to the Town Board. The Town Board will then have public hearings and decide on how to move forward.

- Ms. Gaasch stated they are volunteers and currently have nine members and suggested ten members may be better, Councilman Cantafio is not a voting member. The task force is looking for an additional member with a biology, managing park space experience.
- Ms. Escobar stated the purpose of the initial survey was to determine a need for a task force and further action for deer management. The task force put forth the second survey in recognition of the importance of public feedback. Many concerns have been expressed regarding overdevelopment and the negative impact on the natural habitat of the deer. A quick summary of the initial survey results: 1,466 respondents; 1,374 self-identified residents; 294 concerns were mentioned with some respondents mentioning more than one concern in their comments; 80 of these comments included concern about overdevelopment and loss of natural habitat, which was the top concern expressed by residents. As a result, the task force is taking this under serious consideration and discussing potentially presenting possible changes in zoning laws. Ms. Escobar reiterated the fact that the task force does not make the final decision but has been tasked with making recommendations to the Town Board; the Town Board has the ultimate decision making authority. Community feedback is very important, and the task force is taking this under serious consideration.
- Ms. Gaasch thanked the members of the task force for being hard working, open minded, working on research, pleasant to work with, and taking seriously their responsibilities to the community.
- Mr. Holdsworth spoke about what motivated him to participate on the task force and his 35 years as a deer hunter make his perspective relevant and valuable; as well as dispel any misconceptions that he would not be objective in considering all options. It is incumbent on the committee and all to educate themselves on all options including doing nothing. The presence of deer enhances the quality of life in West Seneca, but they are habituated to people, they are having a growing and adverse impact on plant species and observes the balance to be disrupted. He believes there is far more that people do not understand than do understand about the balance of nature and every piece of the mosaic has an important part to play. The good thing is that enough research has already been done on deer and their impact on ecosystems, and the various population control options. The committee can educate itself on what has been done and anyone capable of reading and remaining objective can contribute in a productive way. Anyone that demonstrates an inability to remain objective should be removed. We all must remain open to learning through the course of this process and valuing different opinions and perspectives.
- Mr. Hinton summarized the actions the task force has taken so far:
 - ✓ gathered information relative to deer habits
 - ✓ solicited input from emails, public meetings, and special presentations; for example, Ryan Rockefeller from the NYSDEC and committee member Dr. Robin Foster
 - ✓ issued a press release
 - ✓ initiated a second public survey to obtain additional information from the community
 - ✓ comprised of a diverse committee
 - ✓ scheduled a public meeting for January 18, 2021
 - ✓ the task is to do what is best for the community
 - ✓ will be deliberating a set of proposals to present to the Town Board and public
 - ✓ the task force has made steady steps forward under Facilitator Gaasch's leadership

On a personal note, he enjoys the deer and changes to his plantings have helped deter the deer.

MEETING WITH SUPERVISOR DICKSON

Ms. Escobar stated on October 22, 2021, task force members Ms. Gaasch, Mr. Hinton, and herself met with Supervisor Dickson and Chief of Staff Greenan to provide an update on the progress of the volunteer Deer Task Force, the press release, and the second public survey. It was decided a public information session would be needed following the closing of the second survey; this will be held in January. Additionally, concerns were raised at the meeting regarding former task force member Saundra Mercado including a formal complaint filed by a resident and conduct concerns raised by multiple members of the task force. Vacancies were discussed and additional professionals with a background in horticulture or biology would be a good fit. The task force representatives questioned funding that may be available within the town budget for a deer management program; Supervisor Dickson replied as a basis for consideration, likely the cost of any deer management plan of approximately \$50,000 - not stating this is the cost - would have a 0.01% of the annual budget and likely have virtually no financial impact on residents.

TASK FORCE MEMBERS HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

Ms. Gaasch

- ✓ worked with Dr. Foster and Ms. Greenan to get public survey out
- ✓ worked with Dr. Foster and Supervisor Dickson to get cameras placed around town
- ✓ worked with Ms. Greenan on the press release
- ✓ created fliers for sharing the survey
- ✓ shared the survey and press release with the Burchfield Nature and Art Center and the Environmental Commission
- ✓ working with Ms. Greenan to schedule the January public meeting
- ✓ Supervisor Dickson and Dr. Foster regarding an education and awareness signage program
- ✓ Spoke with a reporter from the West Seneca Sun, article this coming Friday
- ✓ Began outline for the deer management plan – which identifies the outstanding research to be completed

Ms. Courteau

- ✓ Followed up with the Dorr family about deer processing:
 - Currently have contracts with Cheektowaga and Lackawanna
 - No cost to the town to process the deer, should the town decide to do a cull
 - All meat is used for the Feed More Western NY Foodbank
 - They put money back into the community as they are very supportive of conservation and education

Ms. Earsing

- ✓ Monitor Facebook to have the survey reach as many people as possible
- ✓ Contacted Highway Supervisor Adams regarding the deer carcasses they pick up, learned it can be between 1 – 8 per day, this does not include state roads
- ✓ Animal Control Officer Stacey will maintain a spreadsheet of the number and location

Mr. Hinton

- ✓ Reaching out to the Chief of Police to obtain the total number accidents for 2021 and forecast November and December and the locations, any deer hit that wandered off, and a map

Mr. Holdsworth

- ✓ Reading and educating himself on other management plans
- ✓ Wrote a draft of an introduction noting it will evolve as pieces of the plan are filled in

Dr. Foster

- ✓ Cameras were placed around town: Soccer Park, Mill Road Park, Ms. Courteau's home, and Sunshine Park to assess the health of the deer by scoring body condition; shared a situation of a person feeding the deer she encountered at the Soccer Park; this person suggested putting up signs to stop people from feeding the deer
- ✓ Created a survey with feedback from the task force
 - 1,004 completed surveys, a number more started but did not finish
 - Different response rates between the northern and southern areas of town: A – 150, B – 148, C – 407, D - 338
 - Brings to mind non-response bias, unequal response rates between groups that may differ in their opinions or perceptions; studies on survey design that show people are more likely to respond if they have a vested interest in the topic (does this indicate people have more problems with deer in the southern part of West Seneca or are people trying to cheat the system?)
 - Is there a better way to get the survey out in the northern areas of town and promote active response?
 - Looked at the yes or no question "I have personally experienced deer related issues in West Seneca" and looked at the difference in responses: A & B – 70 to 75% answered yes; C & D – 80% answered yes
 - Looked at the question about attending education, noting education must be a component of the town's plan, much larger portion indicating they are unlikely to attend educational programs – 500 to 600, and 200 to 300 that would be interested. How will the committee market information going forward?
 - Looked at question about management opinions that had 4 options: supporting lethal methods (450), absolutely not supporting lethal methods (215), supporting lethal methods only after trying something else first (174), and I need more information before I can support anything (130). A & B lean about 40% for lethal measures and C & D lean slightly more than 50%
 - Looked at the deer feeding questions. One asked if the respondent feeds deer, prepared for low number of admissions, so far 71 people have responded yes. Question "Have you observed someone else feeding deer?" over 600 responded yes; this is indicative of a serious issue and C was mentioned specifically in the comments.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Comments and questions received by members of the public:

- ✓ Asked the board how many members are biologists
- ✓ December 21st meeting will not allow public comments, why? Ms. Gaasch stated the task force has allowed public comments at every other meeting, this will allow the task force to get work done and the session in January is dedicated entirely to public comments. There are many opportunities to receive comments.
- ✓ Requested the Town Board have the Police Department issue tickets to people feeding deer – Ms. Gaasch stated this has been brought to Supervisor Dickson's attention. Councilman Cantafio stated the Town Attorney is investigating this for the Town Board.
- ✓ Property owner and farmer on Berg Road stated the new subdivisions on the opposite side of his property,

Princeton Estates, have resulted in more deer on his property – Ms. Earsing asked if he considered applying for a nuisance permit. The property owner has not and had questions about the process. Ms. Gaasch suggested he speak with Rick Richert about this.

- ✓ Complimented the survey and thanked the task force members for their work
- ✓ Believes one of two things could happen: nothing or culling of the deer and if the town decides to pursue a nuisance permit, he would like to see a provision allowing residents to take one or two deer for themselves if they take care of the processing costs themselves; he is able to teach people to process their own deer.
- ✓ Would like to see more enforcement of speed limits across the town before lethal measures are used – Ms. Gaasch stated this element is a topic to research included in the first draft of the outline.

WORK SESSION

Ms. Gaasch asked the task force members if there was anything they would like to address.

Dr. Foster is working on a literature review for the Outer Harbor Task Force of deer management methods, effectiveness, and pros and cons and offered the West Seneca Task Force a copy when it was completed.

Ms. Gaasch spoke to a reporter from the West Seneca Sun newspaper and indicated the survey would remain open beyond November if necessary, and asked for ideas of how to encourage more responses from A & B. The Supervisor shared it with the respondents from the first survey and Facebook, fliers are available for the library and Senior Center, and possibly the schools. Councilman Cantafio volunteered to help with the teachers that live in West Seneca. Dr. Foster asked if there was a difference in population density. Councilman Cantafio stated there is a difference and the southern areas are where newer developments that have taken the land away from the deer. Ms. Gaasch agreed that larger properties seem to exist in A.

Ms. Gaasch asked if anyone knew of email lists. Ms. Martin suggested the Police Department's Facebook page due to its popularity. Ms. Gaasch understands their Twitter feed is very popular as well and will reach out to them. Please take fliers to pass out.

Ms. Gaasch stated the task force has been asked to provide an update at an upcoming Town Board meeting and asked if anyone would be available to provide a short presentation including survey results. Mr. Holdsworth and Ms. Courteau volunteered.

Ms. Gaasch asked the members to think about the January meeting and how to handle it. For example, they could provide a handout but will not present anything and asked for other thoughts. Councilman Cantafio suggested laying ground rules at the beginning and the parameters for the speakers, a time limit, and how to take turns, etc. Ms. Gaasch suggested West Seneca taxpayers and residents would speak first. Councilman Cantafio also suggested stating in the ground rules that we will take your questions and the committee always has the option to state that we will get back to you to avoid grandstanding and debates. Speakers should indicate if they have a statement, information, or a question.

Mr. Hinton reminded everyone Ryan Rockefeller was willing to attend, also.

Ms. Gaasch asked the task force how they felt about providing public comments at every meeting. Dr. Foster stated Ms. Gaasch was correct in responding that the task force needs to get work accomplished and writing a management plan is going to be very time consuming. Councilman Cantafio agreed and stated purpose of the

task force is to gather information and people can speak at a Town Board meeting. Ms. Gaasch stated Ms. Escobar suggested not having comments at meetings at some point to get work done and there are many ways to provide input. Councilman Cantafio stated people can be referred to him directly and once the recommendation is given to the Town Board there will be open public hearings. Ms. Gaasch asked Ms. Martin to change the website to indicate the last opportunity for public comment at a meeting will in January. Ms. Escobar stated it is good to have the meeting after the survey as more people will be aware of the opportunity to speak.

DEER MANGEMENT PLAN OUTLINE

An initial outline of the components of the deer management plan has been created. Members of the Task Force took on specific pieces prior to the meeting and the following assignments were claimed: Mr. Brotka volunteered to handle the education pieces v and vi. Mr. Hinton will reach out to Erie County regarding town level data for ticks. Dr. Foster volunteered to take on the Contraception section. Ms. Courteau will follow up with Town Attorney regarding issuing tickets and part of the education. Mr. Holdsworth will work on the park signage pieces; Ms. Escobar will work on traffic management. Ms. Gaasch is pulling key pieces from the Town's Comprehensive Plan.

Margaret A. Martin, Deputy Town Clerk