

BOARD OF ALDERMEN

ITEM NO. (2)

AGENDA ITEM ABSTRACT

MEETING DATE: October 12, 2010

TITLE: Staff Report on Options to Deal with Deer Overpopulation

DEPARTMENT: Police	PUBLIC HEARING: NO
ATTACHMENTS: A. Resolution B. Memorandum to Chapel Hill Town Manager, dated 1/11/2010	FOR INFORMATION CONTACT: Carolyn Hutchison, Police Chief; 918-7412

PURPOSE

At the April 20, 2010 Board of Aldermen meeting, North Greensboro Street resident Ashley Stanford addressed the Board about the Town's growing deer population and the various problems caused by deer. Mr. Stanford asked that the Town of Carrboro investigate options to deal with its deer overpopulation and that we consult and coordinate efforts, where possible, with the Town of Chapel Hill staff as we consider available options.

INFORMATION

Deer overpopulation is a growing problem throughout the United States and in North Carolina. In Orange County's municipalities, including Carrboro, deer populations have adapted and adjusted to the urban environment. Deer are able to find shelter, and they forage freely, treating landscaped yards and gardens as salad bars provided for their nourishment. While they freely roam, they apparently don't travel too far from home, and they reproduce easily and quickly, which is why we see more deer in our area at all hours.

The police chief spoke with N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and Chapel Hill staff in an effort to more fully understand this issue. Chapel Hill staff shared a January 20, 2010 memorandum to Chapel Hill Town Manager Roger Stancil, written in response to a petition for an urban deer hunt in the Mt. Bolus Neighborhood. That memo is attached to this report as it more fully explains various deer management and population control methods that are briefly described below. Unlike population control methods, deer management methods are not designed to reduce the number of deer inside Town limits; rather, they serve to educate the public about living with deer.

Management methods include the use of deer resistant plants, deer repellants, and fencing. It is important to note that when food supplies are low, deer will eat plants that they don't choose to eat otherwise. They will also eat plants that have been treated with repellants (that smell or taste bad to deer). Repellants must be applied repeatedly, and such repeated use becomes expensive. Fencing is the best method for protecting landscaping from deer; however, it is often neither practical nor possible to enclose certain landscaped areas.

Population control methods include capture and relocation, capture and euthanasia, sterilization, and hunting. **Capture and relocation** is not permitted in our area. The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission does not approve of this method. Even if it were an option, capture methods, including traps, pens, nets, and anesthesia darts, are both expensive and complicated to use. Apparently, many deer die from stress associated with capture, making this a less viable option. **Capture and euthanasia** is

expensive, and to be effective, requires the “harvesting” of a large number of deer in a select area. This method would have to be repeated, probably annually, since the “harvested” deer would be replaced by new deer moving in from other areas or by others born within the area. Such a program would require approval by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. **Sterilization measures** have not been approved for use in North Carolina. According to the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, sterilization methods would have to be approved at the federal level before they could be approved by the Commission.

Hunting deer, in areas where hunting may be conducted safely, is the most effective and least expensive way to control the deer population. The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission recommends the use of urban hunts to curb deer overpopulation when possible. Municipalities may apply to participate in the urban archery program if they determine that such a program would benefit them.

Carrboro’s current ordinance prohibits the discharge of any pistol, rifle, shotgun, or other gun or any air pistol, slingshot or any like instrument used to eject a pellet or projectile within Town limits [Chapter 5, Section 5-15(a)]. As a result, the use of a bow and arrow within Town limits is not permitted. Certainly, the Board could reconsider and rewrite this ordinance to allow that use, and the Town could submit an application to participate in the urban archery program during the winter months of 2011. However, the current ordinance has served the Town exceptionally well, and any alteration to the ordinance must be very carefully considered. Carrboro is very densely populated and there are very few areas where an urban deer hunt could be safely conducted. Even if the Town were to identify an area in which to hunt, ensuring that the hunt could be safely conducted would be a very difficult task. Town staff would be responsible for developing the urban archery program to be used within Town limits. Town staff would also be responsible for ensuring the safety of hunters and anyone else who may purposefully or mistakenly enter the hunt area. Some Carrboro police officers hunt deer but are not interested in hunting within Town limits as they believe that hunting here would be too dangerous.

It is also important to note that deer struck by arrows do not always die immediately. In fact, on September 28, 2010, in a Carrboro neighborhood off Eubanks Road, a deer that had been shot by an arrow wandered into the yard of a residence. The resident was quite upset and called for assistance. She did not want the young children inside the house to witness the very grim situation. Carrboro’s animal control officer and a police officer responded and found the badly wounded deer standing close to the house. The deer finally ran away, which in this situation, was the best case scenario. “Dispatching” a deer in the yard of a private residence is difficult at best and would require the removal of the carcass.

To date, the Town of Chapel Hill has not held a town- sponsored deer hunt. Staff has researched the issue and the Council will consider options in the near future. While Carrboro and Chapel Hill personnel are able to share information about this issue, each Town must decide individually what option, if any, to pursue. The Towns are governed by separate ordinances, and the deer who roam in Carrboro may not ever visit Chapel Hill.

It is clear that the green space that in many ways defines our community and enhances our quality of life is also very attractive to deer. As long as green space is available, the deer will live within it. As long as residents provide landscape plants that deer enjoy eating, the deer will return to their gardens to eat. Some have suggested that it should be illegal to feed the deer. While the Board may adopt an ordinance prohibiting the feeding of deer, it may be extremely difficult to prove that food left outside is intended for deer, and thus may be very difficult to enforce.

FISCAL IMPACT

If the Town were to help to educate residents about deer management methods, there would be minimal costs associated with that effort. There would be significant costs associated with the use of any population control method.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff does not believe that an urban archery program within Town limits is a viable option. We recommend that the Board adopt the attached resolution, which authorizes Town staff to develop an information packet for residents interested in protecting their landscaping and gardens from deer.

