

Memorandum

Joint City of Bloomington Monroe County Deer Task Force
Thursday, 17 February 2011, 5:30 PM
McCloskey Room (#135)
City Hall, 401 N. Morton St.

Present:

Task Force Members: Dave Rollo (Acting Chair), Josh Griffin, Stefano Fiorini, Sarah Hayes, Thomas Moore, Iris, Kiesling, Bob Foyut, Laurie Ringquist and Judy Granbois.

Staff: Stacy Jane Rhoads (City Council Office), Dan Sherman (City Council Office) and Elliot Englert (Intern).

I. Welcome & Introductions

Rollo welcomed all to the fifth meeting of the Joint City of Bloomington-Monroe County Deer Task Force. Everyone present introduced themselves.

II. Minutes for Approval

- **10 November 2010:** The group approved with the following changes:
 - Moore requested that it be made clear that while he was researching flying squirrels at Lake Griffy, each trip, at some point, he would be within 30' of a deer.
 - Griffin wanted to make clear that the *Earn-a-Buck* program he mentioned as part of the IDNR Rule changes had been withdrawn because the first of rule changes were withdrawn completely. There is a new set of rule changes are now pending before the Indiana Natural Resources Commission and those rules include an *Earn-a-Buck* requirement in Urban Deer Zones.
 - Griffin also wanted to clarify that, where hunting is permitted, private landowner's could require that any hunters on their land take a doe before a buck.
- **07 December 2010:** The group did not have any changes and voted to preliminarily approve these minutes pending final approval by Keith Clay.

III. Letter from City of Bloomington Commission on Sustainability

Dave Parkhurst spoke to a letter submitted to the Task Force last month by the Bloomington Commission on Sustainability. Parkhurst is a member of the Commission's Food Subcommittee and pointed out that the letter encourages the Task Force to consider the implications that overabundant deer populations have on people trying to foster local food production. The Food Subcommittee is concerned that overabundant deer may

discourage people from planting food gardens. The Commission is asking the Task Force take the competition between deer and human food needs into consideration.

- Griffin responded that with small plots, deer can be excluded pretty easily with adequate fencing. For large-acre plots, the risk of damage would be greater and fencing would have to be much more substantial.
- Hayes suggested that it would be helpful to talk to some local to the various Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) groups and the Local Growers Guild to discern the extent they are experiencing deer damage. A set of questions could be developed by members of the Task Force and circulated among local growers.
- Parkhurst commented that often an 8 foot fence such as the one he has around his garden is not adequate enough to keep deer out. He has also seen deer inside the Willie Streeter Community Gardens. There is a concern that deer could damage the new community orchard because the fence surrounding it is 7 ½ feet high. Griffin commented that slanting a fence is an effective method to keep deer from jumping it because of deer's lack of depth perception.
- Rollo indicated that the city's planning department is reviewing the city's zoning code (the Unified Development Ordinance) to foster more urban agriculture.
- Fiorini pointed out that deer are part of the natural environment and that BCOS's concern – while important – glosses over the fact that deer are part of the ecosystem and perform an important ecosystem function in terms of providing meat to many. It is useful to think about deer in a broader “sustainability” context.

IV. Appointing a Media Liaison

As the media takes in increased interest in the work of the group, Rollo said that this would be a good time to appoint a member of the Task Force to serve as Media Liaison. This person will work with the rest of the group to develop responses to media inquiries. Judy Granbois volunteered to take on this role. Any inquiries would be directed to Granbois and she would draft a response and get feedback from Task Force members before submitting a response to media. All members were in favor of appointing Granbois to this position and thanked her for her willingness to serve in this capacity.

V. “Hotline” Reply

Herald-Times columnist Marci Creps has inquired about what is happening with the Task Force. Rhoads has drafted a possible response. It is too long. Granbois will edit it down and run her proposed response by the rest of the Task Force.

VI. FAQ

- Rhoads drafted a set of Frequently Asked Questions to be posted on the Task Force's website. Griffin suggested that some of the management strategies could be condensed into short responses. Hayes suggested that the whole FAQ should be shrunk down to a one-page set of questions and short responses. Responses could provide links to more detailed information for readers who want to explore further.
- Fiorini commented that the document as a whole did a good job to not appear controversial or sided, while still providing a lot of information. His concern is that all information remains accessible, while keeping the reader's attention. Shrinking it too much may make it appear like information is not being provided. It should stay balanced in this respect.
- Rollo added that he received an anecdotal account of coyotes taking a wounded deer that was hit by a car, and asked if coyote predation is keeping a check on the deer population. Griffin responded that coyotes normally don't seek deer; they take whatever is easiest. This is probably a rare case in which they only went after the deer because it was wounded. He added that the subject of predators should be addressed in the FAQ.

VII. On Language

Responsible Approaches

- Hayes pointed out that much of the Task Force's language to date has pointed to its two-part mission of mitigating social conflict and ecological damage. It is just as critical to point out that the group is vested in responsible approaches to deer management. Rollo said that this is good language to add as it makes clear that the group is also taking into consideration the welfare of the deer.
- Ringquist added that community acceptance may be gained by showing that deer management does not automatically mean culling for the sake of nuisance mitigation; instead, it doing what is in the best interest of the for the health of the deer population.
- Moore added that it is important to make clear that the Task Force is committed to strategies that are humane.
- Griffin stated that an article circulated among the group earlier from the Sustainable City Network, [*No One Wins When Urban Deer Run Rampant*](#) recounted that in areas of Kansas City and Topeka, Kansas some areas are experiencing as many as 200 deer/sq mi. Deer in Bloomington are no where near this level. However, as pointed out in the article, the longer communities wait to deal with increasing deer herds, the more difficult and expensive it is to deal with in the future.

Interaction v. Conflict

- Ringquist also advised that it might be better to frame the social aspect in terms of "deer-human interaction," rather than "deer-human conflict." The word "conflict" is more loaded while "interaction" is more neutral.

VIII. Communication Plan

Rollo pointed out that it is time for the group shift into more active outreach. Rhoads has been meeting with Fiorini to discuss connecting with community groups for maximal feedback. As was communicated among Task Force members earlier, all seem to agree that it makes more sense to engage in outreach and education *before* issuing a public opinion survey. The question is how to implement the educational component.

In the interest of an integrated communication strategy, Rhoads has drafted a *possible* outline. It is just a proposal, subject to Task Force approval. The draft outlines seven steps:

Step 1 – Build out/maximize web page

- FAQs
- Links to further reading
- Griffy
- Deer-resistant plants

Step 2 – Media (radio, print, seasonal tips, etc.)

Step 3 – Neighborhood Meetings (*purpose: to get geographic-specific feedback; share information with neighborhoods*)

Step 4 – Public Opinion Survey (web-based, preceded by press release)

Step 5 – Issue Draft Recommendations

Step 6 – Solicit Public Feedback on Recommendations

Step 7 – Revise and issue final advisory recommendations

The “Neighborhood Meetings” component of this draft plan is new and is the product of a handful of discussions among and between Fiorini, Rhoads and Rollo re: ways to most meaningfully reach out to the community. As the group has discussed previously, the experience of many other communities make it clear that given the nature of the issue, the approach that works best is one in which the community is given full information and given the opportunity to meaningfully participate. Fiorini is an anthropologist who has studied human-deer interactions in Scotland. He pointed out that when it comes to such interactions/conflicts, sharing of information between community members and decision makers is key.

We know that different areas of the City experience deer differently. By holding neighborhood-based meetings, the group would be able to make a short presentation on what it knows, solicit feedback from the neighborhood and answer questions. This provides the Task Force with an opportunity to more closely reach out to neighborhoods and to get a more complete geographic picture of regions before sending out a public opinion survey. If the group likes this idea, the Task Force must develop of manageable list of meetings. Obviously, adding this step will require at least a few Task Force members to volunteer to present to these neighborhoods and will require someone to develop a standard powerpoint presentation.

Another possible advantage of setting up these meetings is that it might off-set some of the problems with issuing a public opinion survey. As the group has discussed previously, if we

post a survey on the web, we will get responses from people who feel strongly about the issue; this will not be scientific, nor representative.

IX. Cultural and Social Dimensions of Deer – Presentation by Fiorini

Based on his previous research in Scotland, Fiorini gave a presentation on the cultural and social dimensions of deer. Entitled, *Facilitating People-Deer Interactions*.

Fiorini said that while the group discusses “social carrying capacity” a lot, there are challenges in defining this capacity because meanings are always changing. Culturally, deer are “multivalenced” – they have many meanings and values based on how people interact with them. Because of multiple and changing meanings, agreeing on ways to address deer can be problematic. A process called “adaptive co-management” attempts to build bridges and trust between people with different interpretations of deer.

The Task Force is charged with building co-management between different stakeholders. At this juncture, a public opinion survey may be effective at discerning public sentiment, but meeting with neighborhood groups would be a more effective way of both soliciting feedback, building trust and giving people an opportunity to be involved beyond just attending meetings, sending the group e-mails, etc. Such outreach would enhance the group’s role and likely increase the community’s acceptance of any recommendations. After such meetings, a public opinion survey will complement the Task Force’s effort to discern how different regions of the City and County experience deer and what approaches might be acceptable.

Fiorini’s full presentation is posted on the Task Force website:

www.bloomington.in.gov/deertaskforce

X. IDNR Rule Changes

Because of the lack of time Griffin will discuss IDNR rule changes as they apply to deer hunting regulations and deer management in more detail during the next meeting. The Natural resources community will vote on these pending rule changes.

XI. Public Comment

Dave Parkhurst asked Griffin about the prevalence of deer in the early 1900s. Griffin responded that during that time deer were rare in Indiana, but they were never entirely eliminated. We do not know what the “natural” or “pristine” deer populations were before European settlement.

XII. Next Meeting

Thursday, 31 March 2011, 5:30pm, McCloskey Room

XIII. Adjourn

The Committee adjourned at 7:26 PM