

DRAFT

Task Force Facilitator Cynnie Gaasch called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M.

ROLL CALL: Present - Cynnie Gaasch, Facilitator
Joseph Cantafio, Councilman
Jonathan Brotka
Sheri Courteau
Amanda Escobar
Robin Foster
Brittany Hernon
Peter Holdsworth

Absent - Mary Earsing
James Hinton

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

Ms. Gaasch asked if there were any questions or changes to the meeting minutes from February 16, 2022. There were none and the minutes were unanimously approved.

Review of first draft of Plan

Ms. Gaasch referred to the first draft of the management plan the task force will present to the Town Board and noted she edited the first draft of the Introduction and Background written by Mr. Holdsworth. Ms. Gaasch stated she has highlighted some items for the group to address and asked for input as they reviewed the document.

Mr. Holdsworth questioned if responsibilities should be assigned during this process, also. Ms. Gaasch agreed.

Ms. Gaasch confirmed the FAQ document is being prepared by Dr. Foster. Dr. Foster stated many pieces of information for "Attachment A" can be pulled from the FAQs. Mr. Holdsworth volunteered to work with Dr. Foster to prepare a table.

Ms. Gaasch asked the members for additional feedback about the Introduction and Background section; there were no comments.

Ms. Gaasch referred to the next section, Needs, and stated her approach was to address all the perspectives uncovered by their research and asked the members for their opinions. Ms. Escobar questioned if the word "evenly" should be used in the first sentence when referring to West Seneca being divided over the deer. Ms. Gaasch stated if "evenly" is omitted, some of the survey data should be shared. Dr. Foster questioned if the survey report will be attached as an appendix. Ms. Gaasch stated it would be attached to the plan. Dr. Foster stated they can site specific data from the finalized report. Dr. Foster referred to the last sentence in the section and asked if the group has evidence regarding "diseased" deer. Ms. Gaasch stated that she meant to use the word "deceased" but may remove the word "frequently." Mr. Holdsworth stated he sees this all the time. Dr. Foster stated it came up often on the write in sections of the survey but questioned if they should clarify deer – vehicle collisions or from natural occurrences. Mr. Holdsworth stated leaving the sentence as generally deceased covers everything.

Ms. Gaasch referred to the next section, Measures, and noted the highlighted line Insurance Companies annual data report was from the Amherst deer management plan they worked with AAA on. Mr. Brotka reached out to some insurance companies and was told that information was private; he will reach out to AAA and report back. This item may not be included in the plan if this data cannot be obtained.

Ms. Gaasch referred to the Annual Plant Life survey and noted Ms. Hernon would not accomplish this alone but be the point of contact for this. Ms. Hernon stated she knows of people that would have interest in participating and Mr. Holdsworth suggested groups such as the boy scouts.

Ms. Gaasch stated the task force should integrate the police reports into one and utilize GIS to identify high deer zones and asked Ms. Escobar if she is in contact with the Police Department. Ms. Escobar confirmed she is in contact with the Police Department and can follow up. Mr. Holdsworth questioned deer – vehicle collisions that occur on the 400; Ms. Escobar stated that would be through the NYS Sheriff and will follow up with them, also. Dr. Foster stated the NYSDEC would also have information. Ms. Gaasch wondered if the information would be overlapping. The DEC would provide other types of deer complaints, not collisions, and it may be necessary to FOIL it. Mr. Holdsworth will contact the DEC.

Ms. Gaasch asked Ms. Escobar to make a formal request for the Highway Department to provide regular reports.

Ms. Gaasch stated she envisions the goal for the Deer Task Force would be to meet every six months after the management plan is implemented (January 2023, June 2023, January 2024) to review the reports and measure the results of non-lethal methods before recommending a culling program.

Ms. Gaasch stated Dr. Foster is prepared to conduct an annual survey with the permission of the Town Board. Dr. Foster stated the most important aspect of West Seneca is the social capacity issues, and this is the measure that will be the most significant. Ms. Gaasch stated some of the data collection may fail, so having multiple data sources is necessary.

Ms. Gaasch stated the "Deer Management Options and Recommendations" section addresses the approach and noted she feels a town employee will need to be assigned to manage this information.

Mr. Holdsworth referred to the installation of "more" deer warning roadside reflectors and stated he is not aware of any in West Seneca. Dr. Foster reminded the group that the research on them is that they are not effective. Ms. Gaasch stated this was something Amherst included and did not realize it was not for traffic and removed this item.

Ms. Gaasch highlighted the item recommending the adoption of an ordinance allowing Police Officers to enforce NYS Environmental Conservation Law 11-0505 which prohibits feeding deer and stated it requires discussion by the Town Board. Dr. Foster agreed as well as the effectiveness of cutting back vegetation.

Ms. Gaasch referred to the topic of zoning and asked the members for feedback. Dr. Foster stated some comments from the survey mentioned fencing height restrictions being a concern.

Mr. Holdsworth referred to item number two under Damage to Private Property and questioned who defines the suggested thresholds. Ms. Gaasch stated it was included in the Amherst plan and asked the members for input. Dr. Foster stated the thresholds need to be defined from feedback from the survey or a monetary figure and

questioned how Amherst defined their thresholds. Ms. Gaasch stated the answer may be in the complete Amherst plan; but likes the idea of the threshold determined by survey results. Mr. Holdsworth agreed with this method. Dr. Foster suggested adding an address requirement for future surveys to obtain more location specific information.

There was a discussion about the law prohibiting the feeding of deer and Mr. Holdsworth will follow up on the wording for the current law.

Ms. Gaasch moved the discussion to Damage to Crops and reminded the group about the farmer that had spoken at a meeting and would like people who truly are doing agriculture to be aware of the DEC nuisance permits. Ms. Gaasch stated the second item, copied from Amherst's plan, was to evaluate and monitor the issuance and effectiveness of the nuisance permits but was not certain that was something the group could accomplish. Mr. Holdsworth agreed, and this item was removed.

Ms. Gaasch referred to the Table of Contents page and stated the group may want to reorganize the sections or use different words to fit the West Seneca plan.

The first step in the Deer Management Plan is Education.

Dr. Foster asked if signage was going to be added at parks. Ms. Gaasch added this to the plan. Mr. Holdsworth will follow up with the sign provider for examples of the design layout.

Ms. Gaasch edited the following section to read Deer Habitat Zones – Focused activities in problem zones.

Ms. Gaasch stated some reorganization of the items will be necessary and will continue to work on the document. One of the goals would be to have a copy of the plan available in the library.

Mr. Holdsworth stated he liked the idea of a video. Ms. Gaasch investigated the video Amherst's plan referred to and it is not available for current technology. Dr. Foster suggested utilizing a digital media arts major college student looking for experience. Mr. Holdsworth suggested the Cornell website. Ms. Gaasch asked Ms. Courteau if she would research videos, Ms. Courteau will follow up the looking into existing videos for sharing information about deer management.

Ms. Gaasch stated another element of the Amherst plan referred to was a GIS database and the town will need to identify a point person for the West Seneca Plan and Ms. Gaasch will consult Supervisor Dickson.

Ms. Gaasch moved to the Management Plan Strategy section. Mr. Holdsworth did not receive a response from Whitetails Unlimited regarding grants at this point. Ms. Gaasch believes some funds may be available through NYSDEC to support some of the management plan. Mr. Holdsworth volunteered to make a list of what the group would anticipate doing for the grant writer to then search for grants.

Ms. Gaasch referred to number six and stated the town does not have a Master Plan and the Comprehensive Plan is somewhat old; the wording will need to be changed to reflect this. Mr. Holdsworth stated the town would need to decide to identify deer habitat zones.

Ms. Gaasch referred to the Reduction Methods section and stated these are the actions that would result in a cull program. Mr. Holdsworth asked Dr. Foster if she could weigh in on the use of the word "cull" as it has a very

negative connotation. Dr. Foster explained that calling this a "hunt" or "controlled hunt" gives people the wrong impression of how these are conducted. Dr. Foster suggested researching the terms other communities like West Seneca have used. The group agreed that the NYSDEC would be consulted for this process.

Ms. Gaasch referred to the Data Management Section and stated the group will need to decide how much data can and should be managed. Dr. Foster stated the first part of number four would be somewhat easy to do and helpful, this is classifying what vegetation cover types are considered deer habitats.

Ms. Gaasch referred to the Next Steps section. Dr. Foster stated incorporating a timeline would be a good idea.

Dr. Foster shared the FAQ document and demonstrated the links for each of the questions. This document contains information with references. The group was extremely impressed and agree it will be very helpful for residents seeking information about this topic.

Ms. Escobar questioned where a reference to deer resistance plants should be added to this document or another spot in the plan. Dr. Foster stated she considered this but did not want the FAQ document to be the entire education effort. Mr. Holdsworth recalled the group discussing compiling a list of plants. Dr. Foster stated additional sections can be added to the FAQ document. The group will need to decide how to adapt this for a hard copy for the library.

Ms. Gaasch stated the group will need to set deadlines to complete the plan in preparation for presenting it to the town and asked Councilman Cantafio for direction about the recommendation of incorporating town staff. Councilman Cantafio recommended the group present the plan to the Town Board as planned and any decisions to budget for staff will need to be incorporated into the budget. The budget meetings are held in November and December and Department Heads can weigh in on the proposed responsibilities. Ms. Gaasch stated the group should be ready to do another revision to the plan at the April meeting, share a draft with the Town Board and invite them to attend to the May meeting. Councilman Cantafio also suggested the group could provide the plan to the Town Board and then attend a Town Board meeting.

Ms. Gaasch polled the members regarding meeting format and members preferred Zoom. Ms. Gaasch stated conducting the April meeting via Zoom would be helpful as it is more effective working on documents. Councilman Cantafio stated he has been overwhelmed with requests that the meetings be held in person. Councilman Cantafio stated the way the meeting is run is different as they are all volunteers, and they are making a recommendation and not going any vote that would violate Open Meetings Laws, if some members would like to be linked in by Zoom from the in person meeting, they could; the recommendation by the Town Attorney is that it is has to be a public meeting because it is a town committee. Ms. Gaasch stated in her experience having both in person and Zoom does not work and much of the meeting is wasted as there are sound issues. Councilman Cantafio stated the group can utilize the big board available to display the documents. Ms. Escobar requested confirmation that the meeting is actually public via Zoom. Ms. Gaasch confirmed they are, and the Zoom call information is posted on the meetings webpage. Councilman Cantafio acknowledged the amount of work the group has accomplished and understands they want to use their time as efficiently as possible, but Town meetings are now generally in person and again, the town attorney has indicated the meetings should be held publicly. Councilman Cantafio stated he anticipates questions from other Town Board members, also. Ms. Gaasch stated no one tried to attend and questioned if being in person was necessary and would like the April meeting to be over Zoom; people have many opportunities to participate and share ideas and concerns. Councilman Cantafio stated the task force is making a recommendation and have held public hearings; this is a true work session, and the public can provide feedback, but the recommendation is that the

meetings are in person, but he can relay that the task force feels strongly about the online format. Ms. Gaasch reiterated that the group could get much more work done and the group's purpose is to make recommendations, not a decision. Ms. Gaasch stated the task force could broadcast the meeting over Facebook if that would be preferable. Councilman Cantafio stated he will follow up with the Supervisor and Town Attorney. Ms. Gaasch referred to the conversation held at the February 14 Town Board meeting and that Councilman Piekarec was comfortable with the meeting being open to the public via Zoom; and the former Town Attorney had indicated the task force did not have to have any of the meetings be public at all. Ms. Gaasch reiterated that the group was trying to get work done to provide their recommendations to the Town Board. Councilman Cantafio stated he does not disagree with any of the arguments and will confer with Supervisor Dickson and Town Attorney Trapp. Ms. Gaasch stated the next meeting is scheduled for April 20, 2022, at 6:30 P.M. and it is on the website.

Margaret A. Martin, Deputy Town Clerk