

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

ROLL CALL: Present - Cynnie Gaasch, Facilitator
Joseph Cantafio, Councilman
Jonathan Brotka
Sheri Courteau
Britney-Bay Croyle
Amanda Escobar
Robin Foster
David Lavango
Saundra Mercado
Charles Sardo

Absent - James Hinton

WELCOME

Task Force Facilitator Cynnie Gaasch recognized the Town Board for establishing this task force. In preparation for this meeting Ms. Gaasch spoke with Kristina Ferrare, who is based in Oneida County and works for the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Oneida County; Ms. Ferrare has assisted several communities and task forces regarding deer issues.

INTRODUCTIONS

Ms. Gaasch introduced herself and invited the members to follow.

Cynnie Gaasch, West Seneca resident for three years, aggressive gardening on property, enjoys the deer and wildlife, works for a variety of non-profits in Erie and Niagara Counties, member of the West Seneca Environmental Commission, has family members that used to hunt

Dr. Robin Foster, Professor at Canisius College, Wildlife Conservation Biologist, worked with reptiles and amphibians, background in wildlife management and last few years worked with deer and elk, currently on similar task force for Tiffit Nature Preserve and the outer harbor, interest in deer population management and human deer interactions, students working on research in the area

Jonathan Brotka, lifelong West Seneca resident, property has land with many deer, is a hunter, believes deer population is a problem, interested in participating in government

Amanda Escobar, West Seneca resident for six years in the Harlem Road and Seneca Street area, member of Amana Garden Club for three years, avid gardener for over fifteen years, familiar with deer issues, enjoys wildlife, not opposed to hunting, concerned about safety issues

Britney-Bay Croyle, originally from Niagara Falls, recently moved to Buffalo, graduated from University at Buffalo in January with a master's in environmental sustainability, background in environmental education and community service, serves on Board of Directors for a non-profit Be Well in Buffalo, received certification for wildlife rehabilitation and served at the West Seneca location as intern for wildlife center

David Lavango, West Seneca resident for fourteen years, works for the wildlife department for the City of Buffalo for thirty-two years, loves deer, is a hunter, would like a successful resolution for all parties

Charles Sardo, West Seneca resident for over thirty years, avid outdoorsmen, concerned about overabundance of deer and safety issues

Sheri Courteau, lifelong West Seneca resident, masters in school counseling, would like to learn about population control or relocation, deer ticks and deer waste are a real problem as is deer aggression

Councilman Joseph Cantafio, lifelong West Seneca resident, will bring committee recommendations to the Town Board

Molly Martin, West Seneca resident for nineteen years, with the Town Clerk's office for ten years, Secretary to the Deer Task Force

Amelia Greenan, Supervisor Dickson's Chief of Staff, assisting with a remote connection for James Hinton

REVIEW OF ASSIGNMENT

Ms. Gaasch, along with the task force members, read the attached resolution creating the task force and invited discussion. (See resolution attached.)

Sandra Mercado arrived at the meeting and introduced herself, from Williamsville, currently lives in Orchard Park, lived in South Korea for twenty-two years, NYS licensed wildlife rehabilitator, specializes in white tail deer, interest is conservation and medical status of the herds, animal behavioralist and private dog trainer

Mr. Lavango questioned the goal of the task force. Ms. Gaasch referred to Section 2 of the resolution and stated it will be to provide a recommendation to the Town Board after listening to problems and solutions while also considering costs, as it will be an ongoing issue. Ms. Escobar asked if there is a predetermined budget. Ms. Gaasch stated there is not and the Town Board may need to provide direction at some point.

Ms. Gaasch has reviewed the results from the deer surveys conducted by the town and the Police Department and would also like data regarding accident reports and the number of deer carcasses removed by the town. Ms. Mercado stated there are approximately 150 – 180 deer vehicle accidents each year and can provide the FOIAs reports from the last three years. Ms. Courteau questioned the possibility of going back further than three years. Ms. Mercado can make the request, but the number has remained consistent; further, new development encroaches on natural food sources for the deer and encourages them to search for new sources. Dr. Foster would like to look at the data spatially to identify any hot spots that may exist. Ms. Mercado can provide data on hot spots for calls she responds to when deer are hit.

Ms. Escobar requested data on the number of deer being culled in the town. Ms. Mercado believes the police officers will only kill a deer that cannot be rehabilitated.

Ms. Croyle referred to a statement regarding the lack of community knowledge and questioned if any outreach or education programs have been conducted. No one responded. Ms. Croyle is looking forward to using education to address the problems. Ms. Mercado has recently provided information to the Sun newspaper about the birthing

season currently underway and volunteered to prepare an informational presentation. Ms. Gaasch agrees that education is a good possible solution. Ms. Croyle mentioned the success the NYSDEC has experienced using brochures to generate public interest and awareness. Ms. Gaasch said the West Seneca Environmental Commission could pursue this avenue as well.

DISCUSSION OF METHODS FOR REVIEW OF ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

Ms. Gaasch opened the floor to the task force members to propose strategies to accomplish their task. Ms. Mercado offered to prepare presentations. Ms. Gaasch would like to assign points from the resolution to the task force members to research and present to the group. The purpose of the task force is ultimately making a recommendation to the Town Board whether it is a group consensus or majority consensus. Going forward Ms. Gaasch suggested using email to determine the assignments among the task force members.

The June meeting will be held in the smaller conference room due to Board of Elections using the large room for early voting. Ms. Gaasch has invited Kristina Ferrare to speak to the group on similar task forces she has been involved with to provide background information on the issue. Additionally, Ms. Gaasch asked if Ms. Mercado and Dr. Foster would be able to address the first two points of the resolution at this meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Comments and questions received by members of the public:

- ✓ Human encroachment has caused the gradual erosion of continuous forests/green space
- ✓ Zoning Boards are pressured to approve new development – need to protect more areas for wildlife
- ✓ Apex predators are missing – coyote season is 180 days per year – leading to spread of wildlife diseases
- ✓ The large number of deer and their waste, ticks, and destruction is overwhelming, what is the timeframe for the recommendation – Ms. Gaasch reiterated the one year timeframe per the resolution and the expert from Oneida County indicated it often takes longer than a year
- ✓ Believes if the deer are culled it must be done in the winter, would prolong the issues – Ms. Mercado stated public education can be accomplished before the recommendation is given
- ✓ Former Amherst resident stated the police culled the deer herd and it seemed to have a positive outcome
- ✓ There are coyotes in his neighborhood, but his neighbors are feeding the deer

ACTION ITEMS AND ASSIGNMENTS SET FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Ms. Couteau would like more information on surrounding municipalities that have culled the herd. Ms. Gaasch understands that Amherst, Cheektowaga, and Lackawanna have bait and kill programs and asked Ms. Courteau to research this to present to the task force. Ms. Mercado added that Amherst utilized reflective signs to dissuade the deer from the highways.

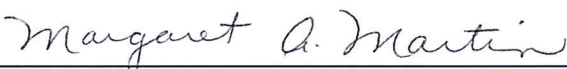
Ms. Escobar inquired about existing town laws for development near wetlands and preservation of natural habitat areas. Ms. Escobar also noted the plants deer find appealing will vary by location and any edible plants for humans will always appeal to the deer as well and an element of education should include deer resistant plants for West Seneca.

Ms. Mercado would like to present information on the long term consequences of different solutions, for example culling the herd. While initially the herd size is lowered, as the food source becomes more plentiful the number of fawns born will increase and the herd will become even larger. A more effective and quicker solution would be for people to stop actively feeding the deer. Additionally, zoning laws should be reviewed to protect wildlife habitat. Dr. Foster agreed that the long term effects of any recommendation must be considered as deer herds move and new deer move in- the vacuum effect- along with the possibility of diseases.

Ms. Greenan announced the email address for the task force for the public to reach out at any time: wsdeertaskforce@twsny.org

Mr. Sardo does not believe there will be any easy fix, it will be long term, and the task force will need to look at funding.

Ms. Gaasch thanked the task force members and the public for their interest and will follow up with through email to assign the points each member will address. There will be three presentations at the June meeting: Kristina Ferrare, Ms. Mercado, and Dr. Foster.



Margaret A. Martin, Deputy Town Clerk