

Fairfield County Deer Management Alliance

Meeting dated ~~December 12, 2011~~

MARCH 19, 2012

Wilton Town Hall

Minutes

(LAB)

In attendance:

David Streit, President, Redding
Erin McKenna, Stamford
Denise Savageau, Greenwich
Tom McGrath, Darien
Laurie McGrath, Darien
William Duff, Bethel
Russell Cornelius, Brookfield
Dave Shugarts, Newtown
Colin Kelly, Westport
Patricia Sesto, Wilton

Observers:

Alan Eugley, Westport
Peter Knight, Westport
Susan Pike, Westport
Mike Gorfinkle, Redding
Peter Hood, Fairfield

and others

Welcome. The meeting was opened at 10.30 a.m. by David Streit, President, who welcomed town representatives including representatives of Westport's newly formed Deer Committee. David noted that Kent Haydock of Darien had elected to retire from the Alliance and paid tribute to his untiring efforts over many years to educate the people of our towns by providing as wide an audience as possible to newspaper articles on the issue of deer overpopulation. He expressed the Alliance's admiration for Kent's persistence in the face of adversity. Mike Gorfinkle, a Redding resident who was in attendance as an observer, disrupted the meeting at this point and started yelling in the middle of David's comments. When Mike would not calm down, David requested that the police be called in to have him removed from the meeting. Fortunately, Pat Sesto was able to settle him down and she received Mr Gorfinkle's assurance that he would not disrupt the meeting again and the meeting finally continued.

Approval of Minutes. The Minutes of the meeting of 12/12/11, having been circulated previously, were approved unanimously.

Treasurer's report Pat Sesto confirmed that there had been no special expenses. The cost of the PO Box had been reimbursed. She would investigate when the contract for the website would need to be renewed.

Town reports

Darien. The deer committee had been dissolved and it was planned to reconfigure it to tie in with the town's Health and Safety Departments. There was a need to figure out the committee's role that was susceptible to newspaper attacks. The town's government needed to become more proactive.

Bethel. Russ Cornelius talked about efforts to get an assessment of deer numbers under way. They were considering asking the DEEP for assistance in developing a plan. Working with HEFCO was also under consideration to include regional government. A tick borne committee dedicated to educating children on Lyme and ticks was an objective. While good people were involved in the effort, Russ Cornelius emphasized that it took years to drive home the message that the tick borne problem and the deer problem were one and the same.

Greenwich. Denise Savageau advised that, if information on the Greenwich cull was of interest, there was a link to a pdf file on the Alliance website. There was a resurgence of vegetation on town land following the cull and she

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estimated a cull should take place every 5-7 years. Unfortunately, Greenwich had identified a PCB threat on school property, the clean-up of which would tie up a significant amount of Town funds and impact other programs.

In answer to questions, Denise advised that Greenwich's town property comprised about 14% of total property. Effective hunting occurred on private land in three large neighborhood associations where land was divided into 2-4 acre lots. She studied tracts that led through Greenwich including the Mianus corridor. In conjunction with Howard Kilpatrick of DEEP, the question was raised: How far (in deer management) could hunting take us? The hunting population was ageing and in decline.

Newtown. Dave Shugarts reported that the Town's deer committee had voted 11-0 back in October in favor of asking the DEEP for assistance in developing a program. However, certain members had backtracked and were now asking the DEEP to explain their methodology, motives and general approach to the town Board of Selectmen. Some minority members of the committee were redirecting their focus to the Japanese barberry as the new enemy in tick control – and to distributing owl boxes to control the mice population.

Brookfield – Russ Cornelius said that his efforts were largely focused on political leaders. He had given advice to assist with an infectious disease study being undertaken by Yale University that aimed to spray areas and assess the results. The deer issue required endless repetition (like water on a stone) and the need was to control areas frequented by deer. Every area of every property could not be sprayed.

Redding – Dave Streit said that the DEEP hoped to have its plan ready by June although there might be some slippage. He reported that a book on Lyme was in preparation that would address the DEEP standing, including the current regulations that (1) addressed recreational hunting and not the reduction of deer numbers (2) were designed to protect the deer, not people (infectious disease risk) and (3) needed to focus on private land as the first priority; it was ineffective to start with public land.

Stamford - Erin McKenna reported that there was no deer plan for Stamford but a new director of public health and safety had been appointed. She would try to meet with him to discuss his approach and views.

Westport – Colin Kelly reported that the newly formed deer committee had had three meetings and was working on establishing goals. The Westport News, in its leading article, had pointed out that on the one hand the RTM had recognized the need to control the town's deer population but on the other hand had affirmed the “no hunting” ordinance that included, according to the Town attorney, any form of cull or controlled hunt. The newspaper described this as a “Catch 22”. Alan Eugley noted that the committee was looking at “non lethal” means of population control. Dave Shugarts advised that all deer committees had looked at this and had concluded:

- Trap and transfer. Did not work because no State would take them and it was cruel in that a large number of the animals died during the trapping process or after release. Deer were not like cattle.
- Sterilization – worked but was very expensive. “Gonacon” was the product of choice but it assumed that animals would be marked to ensure they were identified and follow-up treatment was required. Given the deer life cycle, starting with high numbers, the effect was still to end up with too many. Contraception had only been successful in demonstrations in a study area organized by Alan Rutburg in Gateshead, Maryland where they had begun with a controlled population of 300 deer per square mile. A State permit to undertake contraception was required and the DEEP had said it would not issue one.

Wilton – hunting on private property had resulted in an average of 2 deer per property being taken. Recreational hunting did not reduce the population overall. After 5 years, it could be shown that hunting DID benefit those properties that were hunted but did not benefit the town as a whole.

Other matters.

There was an open discussion on the impact that bobcats and coyotes may be having on the deer population. This was also raised by the DEEP following their assessment last year of the fawn population which was surprisingly low.

Laurie McGrath enquired about culls and was informed that only Greenwich had conducted one to date. Recreational hunting was not the solution to the overpopulation problem – only one of the tools that should be viewed as a backup to a cull. Russ Cornelius commented that it was all part of a process.

Denise Savageau spoke of the forestry program being conducted at Yale. Some foresters were adamant on the subject; others felt it was "not their issue".

Comment was also made that the Wildlife and Forestry departments of the DEEP might be folded into the Department of Agriculture. Concern was expressed as to what the effect of this might be and what the Governor's position might be.

Public relations.

David Streit asked for comments on a draft letter he had prepared that was addressed to the DEEP. While generally supportive, comments included:

- Credit should be given in the letter to the DEEP (especially Howard Kilpatrick) for the efforts made that included visits to every town in Fairfield county.
- Was this a form letter that all should sign or just one letter to be signed by the Alliance president? There was some reluctance if the former.
- Representatives would review the letter and send their comments to David Streit.

Future meetings and Plans.

As previously agreed, future quarterly 2012 meetings would be held on the following dates:

June 11

September 10

December 10

There being no further business, on motion duly made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned.