

City says 'no' to controlled deer hunt

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MUSKEGON -- Deer will be free to roam the west end of the city after Muskegon city commissioners this week declined to explore a controlled hunt.

A group of 30 residents in the Beachwood Neighborhood petitioned the city to do something about the growing number of deer in areas from Kruse Park to Pere Marquette Park along the city's Lake Michigan shoreline. The deer reportedly have been destroying gardens and landscaping.

City staff investigated deer herd control options with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and found that available options are costly and not effective. And city staff and commissioners didn't want to pursue the controversial option of a controlled hunt.

"I wouldn't be in favor of using firearms in a residential area," Director of Public Safety Tony Kleibecker told commissioners at their work session this week. "It would have to be a bow hunt. But we are told that has not been that successful."

Two options outlined by a DNR wildlife biologist would be to "translocate" the deer by trapping and transporting them outside of the city or by feeding the deer contraceptive-laced foods to keep birthrates low. In both cases, the costs are high and the effectiveness low, Kleibecker said of the opinions of DNR officials.

"We live in an area of the state that deer are present and they have no real predators other than automobiles," the police chief said. Kleibecker said he found no evidence of increased deer-auto accidents in the city this year.

An informal poll of commissioners found none wanting to pursue a controlled hunt nor any other deer-herd containment program.

The deer hunt option was pursued by officials in Grand Haven. The long-term effects on the deer herd are not yet known. In the meantime, the controlled hunts in Grand Haven resulted in public protests by those not wanting to harm the deer.

Mayor Steve Warmington told commissioners that since the Beachwood group petitioned the city in June about the possibility of a controlled bow hunt in the neighborhood, many west-end residents have told him they enjoy having deer around.

"I love the deer but we just want to control them," said Gail Funk, a Knollwood Court resident who told commissioners she has lost \$200 worth of plants eaten by the neighborhood deer. "We can't control the herd if it's impossible. I'm not going to fight city hall on this."

Warmington said that city staff are making two suggestions for residents having problems with deer on their property. DNR officials suggest either using high fencing that is designed to keep deer away from flowers and gardens or the use of commercially sold deer repellent products.

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