

Fairfield County Deer Management Alliance

Minutes

March 9, 2015

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TOWN CLERK

In attendance: Dave Streit, Chairman, Redding; Colin Kelly, Westport; Tom Lombardo, Stamford; Patricia Sesto, Wilton; David McConnaughey, New Canaan; Theresa Gallagher, Shelton

Chairman Streit called the meeting to order at 10:35 a.m.

- I. Chairman Streit called for comments or questions on the minutes. None were offered and the minutes were accepted as drafted.
- II. Members identified themselves and welcomed Stamford's new representative, Tom Lombardo. Tom is taking the place of Erin McKenna.
- III. Treasurer's Report:
Patricia Sesto stated the account has a little more than \$5,700 presently

Chairman Streit briefed members on a FOIA complaint lodged by Peter Hood some 5 months ago. The complaint was against the Alliance for failing to post one month's minutes with the Redding Town Clerk. Pursuant to an inquiry by Mr. Hood, the Town Clerk noted the deficiency and contacted Streit who forwarded the minutes to the Clerk and Mr. Hood directly within roughly 15 minutes of the request. Regardless, Mr. Hood lodged a complaint and notice of the hearing went to the Alliance P.O. Box rather than Streit's home, where it had been sent on prior occasions.

Consequently, Chairman Streit was not in attendance for the hearing, which led to the initiation of a civil action. Chairman Streit was permitted to petition to reopen the hearing, citing the problems with notification. Once reopened, the civil case was dropped and no penalties were imposed for the failure to post the minutes. The hearing official did offer FOI training for the Alliance, which Chairman Streit welcomed and will schedule.

The fiscal consequence of this complaint and notification issue was a \$2,000 bill from the attorney hired to defend Chairman Streit and the Alliance.

At Chairman Streit's request, Sesto reviewed the procedure regarding authorization prior to expending or committing to expend funds in excess of \$500. The situation and estimate from the attorney should have been presented to the members at the onset of the complaint.

The topic of reimbursement will be placed on the next agenda when Chairman Streit will have the attorney's invoice to share and discuss.

IV. Member Town Activities

a. Westport

Colin Kelley indicated nothing has changed in Westport. The final report of the deer committee recommends public education and contraception, neither of which is meaningful.

Chairman Streit suggested working with the Westport News or other media outlet to continue encouraging hunting. Kelley responded pessimistically, indicating it is a waste of time.

b. Stamford

Tom Lombardo spoke to his 47 years with Stamford's Police Department. His home is in northern Stamford and surrounded by the Coleman Estate. The Coleman's do not allow hunting on their 200 acres parcel.

The Bartlett Arboretum has an established hunting program; the only one on public land. Lombardo further described sightings of deer and fox in the urban areas of Stamford, such as Scalzi Park.

c. Redding

Chairman Streit described 3-year, CDC study in Redding. They are now through the third year. The study encountered strong resistance from local hunters and that resistance led to efforts by the hunters as well as anti-hunters to disrupt the program. The effort went beyond thwarting field work, and included lobbying to reduce the Ag Station budget, putting the head of the project, Scott Williams' job in jeopardy.

Despite the trouble, aerial surveys conducted by the Ag Station indicate the number of deer in Topstone open space was down to two.

d. Wilton

Sesto recapped the 2014 season. Hunters and landowners are sent surveys to help the committee understand how to improve the program. Homeowner complaints, when they existed, focused on weak communications between the homeowner and the hunter. Each year there have been 25-40 homeowners contacting town hall for a hunter.

Teresa Gallagher asked about exposing the town to law suits by facilitating the hunter/landowner match. Sesto said the program went through the town attorneys and

was approved. The town will always be subject to litigation regardless of the law or circumstances.

e. New Canaan

David McConnaughey described the reformation of the Deer Committee. He has met with the president of the New Canaan Land Trust and is working to persuade the NCLT to join the effort. They recently acquired four Audubon parcels that were previously hunted and McConnaughey wants to ensure the hunting continues.

No hunting takes place on town owned land and the committee will investigate the feasibility of changing this. Also, the landowner connection program of years ago is being rebuilt. New Canaan was the first in the area with this type of program.

Discussion began regarding Lyme disease and members suggested McConnaughey contact former member Georgina Scholl, as she is a very strong resource in this area. It was further recommended McConnaughey reach out to Doug Hartline, Redding DPH, Miley Bull, CT Audubon, Steve Patton, TNC, Devil's Den, and Audubon in Greenwich to help him understand their reasons for supporting hunting. This will likely give McConnaughey the needed information to work more productively with NCLT.

f. Shelton

Theresa Gallagher reported the completion of the deer study committee's final report. The outcomes are quite similar to other towns'. Gallagher included vegetation surveys to more clearly make the point regarding the damage to the forests. The comparative numbers of species density and diversity between the plots within the 1 acre deer enclosure and the plots outside are striking.

Shelton officials are hesitant to create a deer committee to implement the report's recommendations, leaving that task to staff. Sesto cautioned there can be a great deal of work associated with promoting and managing town programs. Wilton's committee has been essential to get done all of the tasks. Sesto will forward a brief explanation of Wilton Deer Committee's work to Gallagher.

With the final report came an online poll questioning people's opinion on hunting town land. The poll showed an 80-85% approval rating.

g. Newtown

Members took note of the recent passing of Dave Shugarts, acknowledging the tremendous value he brought to the Alliance through his comprehensive review of literature and astute summaries of their content.

Streit conveyed the observation of John Moran, Newtown's manager of their landowner match program, saying Mr. Moran estimates the harvest was down by 25%.

V. Update on Projects

Chairman Streit raised the discussion on a "Be Safe Merritt"-type program, where the Alliance would champion efforts to engage landowners in close proximity to the Merritt to allow hunting. This would be a great public safety program, one that could be easily supported by town governing bodies. Streit asked if attendees knew how deer strike statistics could be found, as well as other relevant information. Lombardo offered to help obtain the deer strike information and the miles of Merritt per town.

Sesto asked Streit to explain his vision, how it would be implemented, and how it fits into the Alliance mission. In response, Streit said the program would clearly comply with the mission by increasing education and promoting public safety. The Alliance would work with towns to promote their participation. Sesto questioned moving from a policy/education entity to an implementing entity and further questioned the manpower needed to do this, expressing skepticism due to the number of non-Alliance towns involved. The group continued discussion to work through defining how Be Safe Merritt could operate. Generally, the towns already part of the Alliance could focus their efforts on the neighborhoods in the vicinity of the Merritt. This could then open dialogue in other towns to take on similar work.

Chairman Streit stated more can be done at the DEEP level to assist in raising the harvest and he will communicate the following points to the DEEP.

- PA 03192 needs expand qualifying properties eligible for participation
- Sale of wild venison needs to be pursued
- Hunting fees in Deer Management Zones 11& 12 should be dropped to encourage more hunting in these stressed areas
- The firearms season should be expanded to cover the entire hunting season
- Sound reducers should be legalized to help diminish disruptions to neighboring properties
- Deer checking should be eliminated

VI. Public Comment

There was no public in attendance.

The meeting adjourned at 12:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,