



## **STAFF REPORT**

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**Meeting Date: November 12, 2024**

**Title: Deer Management Staff Report**

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**Department:** Building and Planning

**Report Number: Building & Planning-2024-025**

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### **Recommendation:**

THAT Council consider the viability of the options outlined within the Staff Report with the objective of effectively managing the urban deer population, whether on a trial or continual basis.

AND THAT Council provide direction to staff based on the information contained within the Staff Report.

### **Background:**

During the regular meeting of Council on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024, a motion was brought forward by Councilor Noel directing staff report to Council outlining the measures taken to date to address the urban deer population within City limits and to conduct further research into management of our urban deer population.

During the September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024 Regular Meeting of Council, discussion took place regarding the motion. Staff were then directed by Council to bring forward a report reviewing the 2017-2018 Study conducted by the City's Deer Committee and to provide recommendations on what could be done moving forward.

## **Discussion:**

In 2017, a Deer Committee was formed between City of Dryden, Dryden Police Service and Ministry of Natural Resources staff. A "Deer Survey" was conducted over a 1-month period, which garnered over 600 respondents.

- 76.1% of respondents indicated belief of an "Urban Deer problem" existing within the City.
- 72.91% supported deer population reduction in Dryden.
- Only 56.05% were aware that hunting was already permitted in certain areas of the City.
- 71.21% believed that addressing urban deer concerns was a responsibility of City Council.
- 65.64% indicated that they wanted the deer population removed from the City.
- 51.36% were in support of using tax dollars to address concerns.
- 59.76% of respondents were aware of other citizens that feed deer within City limits.
- Only 50.87% of respondents indicated willingness to report illegal feeding of deer. Furthermore, only 33.28% indicated a willingness to appear as a witness in court should a charge be brought in front of a Justice of the Peace.

The Deer Survey provided an overall conclusion that respondents believed there was a deer problem at that time, however, were marginally in support of utilizing taxpayer funds to support any potential management programs. Respondents were also marginally supportive of reporting infractions and appearing in court as witnesses when required.

Based on the results of the Deer Survey, three recommendations were brought forward to Council.

- 2019 Deer Education to be promoted in the City of Dryden (Resources to be provided by the Ministry of Natural Resources) to help with resident awareness of wildlife within the City of Dryden
- Feeding Wildlife By-Law Enforcement Blitz
- Pumpkin Drive (City of Dryden partnership with the Dryden Rotary Club)

## **Ongoing Efforts**

1. Education and enforcement of the Feeding of Wildlife By-law
  - a. From January 2022 to date, By-law Enforcement has responded to 19 complaints regarding intentional feeding of deer and laid 2 Part 1's under the POA.

## **Population Dynamics**

Deer populations, like many other wildlife species, fluctuate based on several factors. The key factors determining population increases or decreases are food availability, successful breeding rates and stressors such as predation, hunting and environmental factors.

Where deer experience low stress levels and predation, and have a high abundance of food, the number of offspring per year tends to typically become higher with very low mortality levels. Where population levels exceed sustainable limits, disease may become

rampant throughout the population, predator populations increase, and food availability decreases, deer may then search for other areas to meet their survival needs or otherwise experience high mortality rates until the population is brought back to a sustainable level.

Without public support when it comes to reporting infractions to enforcement staff, it is difficult for staff to address intentional feeding. There is also an abundance of natural food sources and gardens for deer to choose from within the City, which we do not have the ability to manage.

With an abundance of natural and human-provided food sources, low predation rates and other stressors, deer will likely continue to inhabit spaces within City limits and continue to increase in numbers. The efforts that followed the Deer Survey have proven to be insufficient to date, and by-law enforcement is currently the only remaining measure being taken to manage the population.

### **Management Options for Consideration**

There are several methods which have been researched and considered throughout Canada and the USA to manage urban deer populations. There is currently no cost-effective option that would not have potential negative impacts to the City's reputation.

Any option that Council wishes to explore will require submitting a proposal, MNR review and approval, as well as additional approval from their 'Animal Care Committee' for options 1 and 2 or for undertaking any population studies.

#### 1. Trap and Relocate outside of City limits

- Resource heavy
- Likely to have high financial implications unless MNR or OFAH is willing to spearhead the project
- Approval required from Province
- Can only be conducted by trained, qualified professionals
- Other deer may move in, replacing those which are relocated
- Relocated deer may simply return to the area

#### 2. Contraceptives/Sterilization

- Sedation and surgical sterilization of female deer
  - o Can only be performed by qualified veterinary professionals
  - o Only effective if all or a majority of females undergo surgery
- Oral contraceptives
  - o Not 100% effective
  - o Not currently approved for use, consideration for approval could likely be given on a case-by-case basis
  - o Requires an annual booster dose to remain effective

- Oral doses may be ingested by unintended targets (domestic pets, other wildlife, children, etc...)
- Likely to be costly, involving large amounts of time and resources.
- 3. Organized hunting – may be effective if only antlerless deer are harvested
  - Where properly planned and executed, this could be a viable option to reduce population numbers with less significant municipal costs beyond staff time.
  - May require a “maintenance” hunt every few years as numbers begin to rebound.
  - Conduct an organized hunt on one or more City-owned properties, which may include closures to the public during the hunt dates.
  - Oversight would be provided by City Staff and/or MNR Enforcement. Further discussion required to determine MNR willingness to be involved.
    - Requires adhering to Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act + Regulations.
    - Every hunter would require proper licensing, tags from Province.
  - The City could issue municipal licenses to facilitate the organized hunt, including choosing specific pre-determined sites where the hunter can hunt, require insurance coverages, harvest reporting, and further regulate as City determines necessary for safety purposes and effectiveness of any hunt.
  - May be most effective during the first two weeks of December, since most deer are still holding onto sex-identifying features and baiting deer to individual sites will be most effective during this time. Most forested public spaces would also likely see a reduction in recreational use during this time, meaning low impact to typical recreational users.
- 4. Reduce some firearms by-law restrictions to provide more opportunities for hunting with a bow, shotgun or rifle.
  - Currently each firearm type is restricted to the following property sizes within Zone 2:
    - Bow – 1 acre +
    - Shotgun – 30 acres +
    - Rifle – 60 acres +
  - Could consider reducing minimum acreage requirements dependent on type of firearm or ammunition being used.
    - For example, reduce minimum property size requirement to 5 or 10 acres if using buckshot rounds from a shotgun, which typically have a much lower effective range than a single, solid projectile such as a slug.
  - Reducing these restrictions would be unlikely to impact deer populations within Zone 1 and may ultimately result in more deer moving into the urban area from the rural area due to increased hunting pressures.

5. Request additional antlerless deer tags be issued by the MNR.

- We have the option to define a proposed specific area of the municipality that tags would be valid in. This could in turn promote hunting in 'Zone 2' if that is the area determined.
- MNR staff in Thunder Bay suggested that 50 additional antlerless tags could be issued upon Dryden's request, however, issuance is subject to Minister approval.

**Financial Implications: None at this time**

**Current Budget Allocation: N/A**

**Account #: N/A**

**Attachments (Reference Material):**

Deer Committee Presentation 2017

Firearms By-law