



## MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Howard S. Lazarus, City Administrator

DATE: October 2, 2017

SUBJECT: **Winter 2018 Deer Management Planning Efforts**

REFERENCES: 2018 Deer Management Objectives

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**PURPOSE:** This memorandum provides an update for the development of the City's 2018 Deer Management Plan. Staff's intent with this plan is to be inclusive and transparent in the hope that a community supported plan is developed and implemented. Inclusiveness is being sought by actively engaging with self-organized citizen groups, both for and against last year's program. Transparency is achieved by maintaining a dedicated page on the City's website ([www.a2gov.org/deermanagement](http://www.a2gov.org/deermanagement)) which tracks the status of and development of the plan. Full consensus on a plan is unlikely and should not be expected; however, acceptance of the plan, which contains elements desired by various parties, is desired.

**BACKGROUND:** The 2018 program will be the third year of a four year Council approved deer management plan. The program is operating under a "research" permit from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) and includes lethal removal (culling) and non-lethal sterilization. Without the research permit (to White Buffalo, Inc.), the MDNR would only permit lethal culling. Because of the research permit, the MDNR is permitting limited use of sterilization. The stakeholders group input into these plans, and their help in developing an educational program, has been instrumental in creating plans which incorporate each perspective.

Staff members assigned to this project remain the same as last year: Steve Schantz, Safety Manager, to act as lead on the lethal cull program, Derek Delacourt, Community Services Area Administrator, as lead on the sterilization and educational programs, and Tom Crawford, Chief Financial Officer, as project lead.

**GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:** The objectives for the 2018 program are not yet complete but the latest draft is attached for your reference.

This year an attempt was made to define long-term objectives as well as 2018 specific objectives. The attached document includes an overview of how the deer management program is recommended to work in the long-term. The on-going process commits to meet with residents at least once each year to review

and discuss the latest data involving deer impacts in the City. It's important to note that the spectrum of opinions and feelings on this topic have not changed and while the stakeholder groups provided input to staff, it's safe to say no group agreed with all the objectives.

**IMPLEMENTATION:** The implementation plan is still being developed. There have been a number of developments since last year that affect the planning for this year's plan. It's anticipated a detailed implementation plan won't be completed until mid-to-late November, in time to publicize prior to actual implementation which at the earliest would be in late December. Some of the key developments are noted below:

Education program - the educational program development has gained momentum and is delivering some of its objectives. Specifically, a revised deer management page website which provides materials about deer management, signage along some key hot spots alerting drivers to deer crossing areas, as well as a GIS/web based tool which maps some of the relevant deer information ([www.a2gov.org/annarbordeerapp](http://www.a2gov.org/annarbordeerapp)) will all be available in the next few weeks. Signage is particularly important in October and November when deer are most active.

Culling - Elimination of the 450 foot buffer zone from an occupied structure (with owner's permission) - Earlier this year, the State legislature modified existing statute to clarify that for professional culling, the previous 450 foot buffer zone surrounding occupied structures is not required. This safety zone was originally established for "hunting", which is not the same as professionals performing a cull. In past two years, the MDNR included this restriction in Ann Arbor's permit since the legislative language was not clear. Now that the language has been clarified, the MDNR does not anticipate requiring a 450 foot buffer zone this year for White Buffalo's amended permit. It's important to note that both the MDNR and White Buffalo have indicated that professional sharpshooters utilize other significant factors besides a horizontal buffer zone when determining where to safely shoot. For example, the nature of the terrain, the angle of shooting, and clearance can all be factors affecting a safe place to shoot without a 450 foot horizontal distance restriction. White Buffalo has operated without the 450 foot zone in many cities over the past two decades without incident.

Culling - Use of Selected Private Property - Last year Council authorized the selected use of private property to supplement use of public land; however, as it turned out it was not necessary to meet last year's objectives.

In recent discussions with Dr. DeNicola (CEO of White Buffalo), he's indicated that in order to meet the draft objectives, it will be necessary to utilize private property. Preliminary conversations with Dr. DeNicola have indicated 250-350 deer need to be removed from Wards 1 & 2. Removing this many deer will *not eliminate* the deer population, but is anticipated to reduce the browse impacts and deer-vehicle crashes to the levels described in the attached objectives. Any use of private property requires continued permission via the MDNR permit and prior written consent from the private property owner. Staff anticipates using selected private properties (with the owner's prior written consent) in this year's program. It has been pointed out in the stakeholder meetings that in order to cull the fewest number of deer over time, the plan should cull a significant number of front since the deer population increases otherwise. This along with the educational efforts get the deer browse impact to a desired level sooner and results in the least number culled over multiple years. Staff has not finalized the number of deer to be culled this year pending further discussion with the Dr. DeNicola, the stakeholders group, and the MDNR.

It's worth noting that with the density of property in Ann Arbor, deer migrate across numerous private properties so, like sterilization, any operation on private property would be done to affect the broader community, not for the sole benefit of an individual parcel owner.

To assess the feasibility of accessing private property, staff is contacting selected property owners to determine their interest. Staff is *not* looking for unsolicited volunteers. Parcels are selected based on discussions with White Buffalo and their determination of what's appropriate for their potential use.

At a later date when staff is requesting written permission, residents will be asked to contact their abutting neighbors to notify them of their intent to give permission to White Buffalo for use of their property for culling. The City will follow-up with a written notification to each abutting property.

Sterilization - There are more discussions to be had on sterilization, but staff anticipates requesting the State to at least continue sterilization in the two study zones used last year, which would equate to about 20-25 deer to sterilize. The southern zone requires some clean-up to achieve the desired level of sterilization, while the northern zone, which only had six sterilized last year, will likely see additional attention.

In the original permit request to the State, a large third zone in the east side of the City was anticipated for year two. Based on recent discussions with the MDNR, they presently desire to only permit sterilization in the two original zones. The MDNR has indicated a willingness to consider an additional zone if it is well supported that sterilization is necessary to address the management of deer, but they may still not approve it since sterilization, outside of research purposes, is not permitted in Michigan. To assess the need for a third area, it's necessary to evaluate the accessibility of private property and evaluate further where culling cannot be done successfully. A final determination on whether to request a third zone will likely not occur until late October when more information is known.

**NEXT STEPS:** The successful development of the Winter 2018 deer management plan is dependent upon the execution of the following tasks:

- ***Complete objectives for 2018 program - including estimate of the number of deer to be removed (culled) and sterilized (targeted for 10/12/17):*** Additional vetting and discussions need to be completed prior to finalizing the 2018 program objectives, which is necessary for amendment to the research permit.
- ***Seek Council Approval of Budget and White Buffalo Contract Amendment (targeted for 10/16/2017 council meeting):*** Council's regularly scheduled meetings are October 16, 2017 and November 9, 2017. To support the amended permit request to the MDNR, staff will request additional funding for the 2018 program year. Since the MDNR is requesting the amendment be submitted by mid-late October, staff will project anticipated financial needs and request them at the October 16th council meeting.
- ***Submission of Permit Request to MDNR (targeted for mid-October):*** The MDNR has requested the permit amendment be submitted mid-late October. While staff continues to develop the details necessary for the permit amendment, they won't be known until later in the month of October.
- ***Develop Implementation Plan (targeted completion 11/30/2017):*** The implementation plan will be developed in collaboration with the vendor, resident groups and staff.

- **Communicate the Implementation Plan (targeted completion 12/31/2017):** After receipt of the permit, staff will implement a communication plan with residents to maximize community awareness.

**COORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION:** Tom Crawford is the primary point of contact for this action, and can be reached at 734-794-6110 x45100 or at [tcrawford@a2gov.org](mailto:tcrawford@a2gov.org). Mr. Crawford is supported by a number of other employees who will be focused on certain aspects of the plan.

1 Attachment

1 – Deer Management Plan Objectives