



CORPORATION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF ESQUIMALT

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REQUEST FOR DIRECTION

DATE: February 10, 2016 Report No. CSS-16-002
TO: Laurie Hurst, Chief Administrative Officer
FROM: Blair McDonald, Director, Community Safety Services
SUBJECT:

Urban Deer

ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

What direction does Council wish to take in relation to Urban Deer within the Township?

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Committee of the Whole: receive Staff Report CSS-16-002 for information, provide any additional direction to staff as the COTW considers advisable, and direct staff to prepare a report for Council's consideration.

BACKGROUND:

In preparing this report, staff conducted significant research with Provincial Biologists, Department of National Defense (DND), Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC), Urban Wildlife Stewardship Society (UWSS), and the Capital Regional District (CRD). In addition, surrounding municipalities and other BC municipalities were consulted; best practices from some municipalities in the United States were also examined. The British Columbia Urban Ungulate Conflict Analysis was

also reviewed.

In discussing urban deer (and other wild life) there are three generally accepted measurements of animals in the urban environment. They can go by different names; however the concepts are the same.

1. Biological Carrying Capacity (BCC)

Biological Carrying Capacity is defined as the number of animals in good health that an area of land can support over an extended period. BCC is related to the amount of food in a given area and the suitability of the habitat. Deer in habitats that provide good quality and quantity of food tend to have higher reproductive rates. If reproductive rates are not balanced by mortality (through predation or other means) the BCC of any given area can be exceeded. As deer numbers approach or exceed the BCC, there is a noted loss of local plant species and the physical condition of the deer declines. With the decline in the physical condition of the deer, the likelihood of deer mortality due to various causes increases.

2. Cultural Carrying Capacity (CCC)

Cultural Carrying Capacity is defined as the maximum number of animals that can coexist in a predominantly human environment. CCC is measured by the amount of tolerance displayed by the population of people to the presence of the deer. It is generally much lower than the BCC of the land area. The sensitivity of people to deer depends on many factors and directly relates to CCC. High numbers of motor vehicle collisions with deer, home owner complaints about deer damaging gardens etc. and reports of aggressive deer tend to indicate that the CCC has been reached or exceeded.

3. Wildlife Acceptance Capacity (WAC)

Wildlife Acceptance Capacity is generally defined as the tolerance of the human population to animals in the environment. There are generally several WAC's in a community.

Gardeners/homeowners without any deer mitigation strategies in place will likely have a lower WAC than wildlife enthusiasts.

The key to addressing Deer Management in Esquimalt is to determine where we are as a community in relation to urban deer.

Esquimalt's BCC

The actual BCC of Esquimalt is not known. There have never been any studies conducted in Esquimalt to determine the condition of the deer that are present. Casual observation would lead one to believe that the deer that are present appear to be in reasonably good health, appear to have sufficient food and shelter from poor weather, and do not often appear to suffer from predation or other accidental means of death. DND have conducted studies in relation to deer on their lands, including trapping and marking deer in both 2002 and 2004/05. (They also administered SpayVac contraceptive to several does during this time period.) The deer that were captured by DND showed overall good health. The does had birthed twins, which is a good indication of ample food sources. The deer did have a significant infestation of lice and other parasites (excluding ticks) that appeared to be causing them irritation, but were otherwise healthy. It is reasonable to conclude, given Esquimalt's proximity to DND lands, that the deer in the Township of Esquimalt would be in similar physical condition. While it can't be said with scientific certainty, it appears as though urban deer in Esquimalt have not exceeded the BCC of the area.

Esquimalt's CCC

Council has received individual reports from some residents about deer being in yards and gardens. Certainly, a public attitude towards deer is the key component of a community's CCC. A statistically valid survey of the attitudes of the residents of Esquimalt has never been conducted. Additionally, ICBC states that from 2009 to 2013 there were 12 collisions between deer and motor vehicles in Esquimalt. Further, they break down the numbers as: 2011 - 3 deer collisions, 2012 - 4 deer collisions and 2013 - 1 deer collision. (There are no collision statistics available beyond 2013 at this time.) The reasons for the low number of vehicle/deer collisions can be quite varied. Certainly, numbers of deer in the community plays into this low number of collisions, but also meriting consideration is the fact that there are no high speed roads in the Township's jurisdiction. Lower overall average vehicle speed is a significant factor in reducing deer/vehicle collisions. Victoria Animal Control Services advises that they do occasionally receive complaints about deer. They do not track these but refer them to the British Columbia Conservation Service. The nature of these complaints usually refers to some sort of animal welfare matter (IE: deer with Christmas lights caught in its antlers and so on). While the BC Conservation Service did not provide any statistics relating to deer complaints within the Township, it is safe to say that there are not a significant number of deer/human or deer/animal conflicts. Additionally, other Township departments advise that they do not receive complaints about deer. Without conducting a survey of the attitudes of residents in relation to deer, it is difficult to know whether the CCC has been reached. Certainly for some people (those with a lower WAC), it may well be reached; however the statistics thus far seem to indicate that Esquimalt's overall CCC has not been reached.

Department of National Defence

As previously mentioned, DND conducted studies in 2002 and 2004/05 that led to trapping and tagging and also in some cases, administering Spay/Vac contraceptive to some does. In addition, the deer were examined to determine their overall health. Once trapped, all deer were tagged and some were fitted with radio collars. The research showed that the does tended to remain in the same area (most remained within a 400 metre radius of where they were trapped), whereas the males were more wide ranging. The deer were, overall, found to be in good health with the problem of parasites as described previously. Follow up by DND beyond these studies did not occur, therefore it is impossible to discuss the efficacy of the contraceptive that was administered.

Currently, DND intends to conduct deer counts in the future to determine the number of deer on DND lands. At present, the potential is there for DND to conduct counts for the next three years. DND plans to pilot a deer count system in the spring and then do the actual counts in the fall of 2016 and the following two years. The majority of the work being done on DND lands is being conducted by a co-op student. Should the Township wish to conduct deer counts, it would be beneficial to conduct them at the same time as DND so that single animals are not being "double counted" leading to inaccurate count numbers for the area.

The Province of British Columbia

In January 2015, the Province of British Columbia published a Fact Sheet called Urban deer management in B.C. (link: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/factsheets/factsheet-urban-deer-management-in-bc>). The Fact Sheet advises that "Local governments experiencing urban deer issues are encouraged to develop detailed community management plans that include resident opinion surveys, deer population estimates, "no-feeding" bylaws and educational initiatives outlining various conflict reduction strategies."

The Province of British Columbia has made some funds available to Local Governments to help

manage deer that have been deemed a problem by the communities. Below are excerpts from the “Interim Provincial Urban Deer Operational Cost-Share Program: A Program and Application Guide”:

“Since the provincial government’s announcement in September of 2015 that it would make \$100,000/yr. available to help fund urban deer management projects, the Fish and Wildlife Branch has been working with the UBCM to shape a new program.”

“In order to be eligible for funding, the proposals must fall into ‘operational’ or ‘research’ categories. They must also meet all of the criteria that are identified and must comply with the funding formulas and/or caps that are in place for either of the two categories. The Provincial Urban Deer Operational Cost-Share Program will fund projects that meet all of the following criteria:

- are pursuing objectives that have been developed through a community-based planning process,
- have a resolution of support from the local government’s council or board,
- are compliant with all applicable laws and by-laws,
- will undertake works in accordance with an approved permit issued under the Wildlife Act,
- are technically sound and scientifically rigorous,
- commit to monitoring and reporting, and
- provide matching, local government funds.”

Urban Wildlife Stewardship Society

UWSS has presented to Council in the past and has sought Council’s support in conducting a SpayVac trial within Esquimalt. Further discussions with representatives of this group have indicated a support for a survey/deer count. UWSS has prepared a report to Oak Bay Council on deer management strategies. That report is attached for Council’s information. The report contains various strategies for deer management and approximate costs associated to them. The strategies range from advertising and signage to trapping and administering contraceptives. In order to conduct any trapping and contraceptive use, The Township would need to seek a permit from the Province to authorize that activity. Prior to issuing a permit for trapping, the Province will seek to ensure that other deer mitigation strategies have been utilized, such as signage and public education to encourage home owners to plant deer resistant plants, the building of appropriate fencing and so forth.

ISSUES:

First and foremost, does the Township of Esquimalt have an urban deer problem, such that requires intervention from the municipality, and if so, to what level? Research thus far (granted, most of it being anecdotal) indicates that there is not a strong opposition to urban deer in Esquimalt. There certainly are some residents who object to deer in their yards and gardens, but many seem to feel that urban deer do not represent a problem. Deer/vehicle collisions are quite rare within the Township, likely due to both low numbers of deer and slow speed roadways.

Any urban deer intervention strategy, including a survey, to be done properly will have an associated cost. Although there is funding available from the Province to assist in managing deer, the funding must be applied for, and there is no guarantee the Township will receive any of those funds.

Additionally, if any funding is received from the Province, the Township will be required to match those funds. The issue of how much funding the Township is prepared to spend on deer management strategies is at Council's discretion.

Deer management is an emotional issue for many people. There will be strong opinions and concerns voiced regardless of which options Council chooses.

In light of all the research conducted, it is reasonable to first find out what the community's attitudes are to deer in Esquimalt by conducting a survey of residents. Council and staff can then review the results of the survey and determine a strategy going forward based on the public's perceptions and attitudes.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. That the COTW receive Staff Report CSS-16-002 for information, provide any additional direction to staff as the COTW considers advisable, and direct staff to prepare a report for Council's consideration.
2. That the COTW provide alternative direction to staff.
3. That the COTW request further information from staff.