MANAGING THE POPULATION

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Yarmouth Town Councillor Gil Dares chairs the town's Deer Management Working Group, which recently held an information session to update the public on its work. **TINA COMEAU**

Oh deer! What to do?

Deer are here, there and everywhere in the Town of Yarmouth

Everyone agrees there are a lot of deer in the Town of Yarmouth. But not everyone is on the same page as to what should be done about it.

The town's Deer Management Working Group recently held a public information session to share options being explored.

No decisions have been made.

"Some people have their own idea of what we should do. There are a lot of people who don't want to see the deer killed so they're suggesting things that may or may not be practical," said Councillor Gil Dares, who chairs the group.

"This was an opportunity for people to come out and to listen to what we've considered, and the pros and cons. I think it's a vivid awakening to some people," he said.

Asked what has been the biggest awakening for him, Dares said, "The mere fact it is such an emotional issue."

That emotion can be seen in the responses the working group received in a survey it carried out. Responses ranged from carrying out a cull and donating the deer meat – similar to what's been done in Truro – to leaving the deer alone.

While many people are concerned over landscaping destruction on their properties, the introduction of ticks and Lyme disease, and the potential for motor vehicle accidents, others don't want to see the deer killed. A couple of respondents even suggested turning their presence into a tourism attraction.

DEER ARE EVERYWHERE

Of the 389 survey respondents, 358 respondents said they see deer daily in the town with 328 saying they've seen deer on their properties.

The number of deer ranges from one or two to 10 or more at any given time.

Asked if the deer population requires management from the town, 214 respondents (60.5 per cent) strongly agreed it does while 64 agreed. Twenty-one disagreed, 32 strongly disagreed and 23 took a neutral stance.

While only 33 respondents said they've been involved in a motor vehicle collision with deer in the past three years, 254 said they've had near misses.

Garnet Horton, who attended the info session, tends to see six to 10 deer a day near his Argyle Street home and sees a lot of near misses with vehicles.

"There's well over 100 deer just around Argyle Street alone," he suggested. "I'm worried one will come flying through my picture window because it's so close to the street."

He feels the only solution is a cull.

"They're not going to tranquilize them to displace them because it costs too much money," he said, noting deer are everywhere.

Another person who attended is involved with the area's garden club.

"Every meeting that we have there is often some discussion about how are we going to have flourishing gardens without investing a great deal of money in fencing, sprays, relocating our gardens?" she said. "They're trying different kinds of so-called deer-resistant plants, which never really seem to work. They are deer resistant until the deer realize they can eat them."

Brian Power lives in Sandford but when he's in town he encounters deer a lot.

"When you're driving the deer come right across the road. They seem to be so bold. We see deer in our backyard but it's nothing like in town."

> **"I just want to know, is there a plan? The deer stand in the middle of the road. They don't move. Some have been hit on my street. I'm worried about my grandson playing outside because I don't trust them."**
> **Linda Gallagher**
> Town resident

Having viewed options presented during the info session and asked if any struck him as being particularly good, Power said, "I haven't made up my mind yet."

And neither has the working group.

NO DECISIONS YET

"We are looking at various options," said group member Freeman Libby, who has counted up to 20 deer in his backyard at times.

Asked what attendees were curious about, he said, "Some are asking about the costs. Others are talking about humane options. Some people don't like the idea of the deer being killed so they're asking about sterilization, pros and cons.

"Everybody has pretty much agreed there's a problem, it's just how to address it."

Options being studied include a managed bow hunt; capture and release; capture and euthanasia; and sterilization. All come with pros and cons.

Town resident Linda Gallagher is curious about what direction the town will take.

"I just want to know, is there a plan?" she said. "The deer stand in the middle of the road. They don't move. Some have been hit on my street. I'm worried about my grandson playing outside because I don't trust them."

She's seen increases in the amount of deer year after year. She said about a recent deer that was struck and killed on her street, "There was a school bus coming in 10 minutes with a busload of elementary kids and a dead deer at the end of my driveway."

AN INVOLVED PROCESS

The Department of Natural Resources and Renewables (DNRR) was at the session and is part of the working group. The town says DNRR must sign off on whatever decision it makes.

Emma Vost was one of the department representatives fielding questions. She said most people asked about how the department measures the deer population. It's done through a pellet inventory.

"Which is measuring deer poop," Vost said. "It's the standard that's used in jurisdictions similar to ours."

But it's not a perfect science.

"The population can move in and out. Although the urban deer tend to stay within the urban area we do know that they go out to the outskirts," Vost said. "So it's hard to measure a free-ranging population with absolute certainty."

Still, the department has data going back 40 years in the province to help draw comparisons.

The town's working group has no set timeframe but eventually something will have to be decided. There will be more public consultation at that phase.

"The best way to put the timeframe is we want to do it as quickly as possible but we want to cover all avenues and make sure we do it right," said Libby. "We've learned a lot from the Truro experience. We want to make sure we cover all of our angles. Then we'll come up with some decisions."

Dares added since the process requires DNRR approval, getting to the decision stage can't be rushed.

"The department has said in no uncertain terms they need the data. They can't just willy nilly authorize any kind of action without data," Dares said, noting the process in the Town of Truro took around seven years.

"That's a long time," said Dares, hoping things don't take as long to materialize here. "We're really hopeful that the department realizes the extent of the problem."

More information about the deer management issue can be found on the town's Get Involved Yarmouth website.

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