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Ithaca, New York 14850  
December 15, 2010

Ms. Kate Supron, Mayor  
Village Offices  
836 Hanshaw Road  
Ithaca, New York 14850

Dear Mayor Supron,

We have several criticisms of the the Draft Proposal "The Cayuga Heights Deer Management Plan." There are no data relevant to the Village of Cayuga Heights (VCH) regarding its native habitat, its native plants and animals and if studies conducted in different environments regarding loss of habitat can be applied to the village. The Village of Cayuga Heights is a suburban development. It is not a native forest, not a wetlands, not a home for ground breeding birds nor a wild flower garden. There are some undisturbed wooded areas that, if fenced, could be restored to a somewhat native environment. The document notes that the impact of deer on these natural areas is unknown. Otherwise, it should be noted that the Village contains many non-native invasive plants such as non-native privet (*Ligustrum sp.*), European Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), and bush honeysuckle (*Lonicera maackii*) and that these plants were introduced by humans, not deer. It is well documented that these plants and others found in our community (*Euonymus alatus*, *Lythrum salicaria*, *Euonymus fortunei*, *Ailanthus altissima* and *Acer platanoides*) threaten native species. Removing deer will do little to improve plant and animal diversity unless these non-native invasives are removed.

There are no data to justify the estimated size of the herd within VCH. Estimates of herds sizes are generally based on the number of reported deer killed within a year. This method is being evaluated by the State of Pennsylvania. Hunters within NY legally took 222,798 deer in 2009, a number that is within the range for the number taken in the past 20 years.

The number of reported deer/vehicle incidents should come from law enforcement and not from a committee made up primarily of persons pre-disposed to favor killing deer (the Cayuga Heights Deer Remediation Advisory Committee). Giving a 5 year number based on an estimated single year (10 per year) is misleading.

As for water contamination, many residents use large amounts of herbicides and pesticides to maintain lawns and gardens. Run-off from these chemicals go directly into the source of the village drinking water. No one proposes to study that. The effect of run-off into Cayuga Lake from the village deer compared with run off from all the dairy farms that are within the watershed is not mentioned. The effect is misleading.

There are no data on the incidence of Lyme disease caused by ticks encountered within the Village.

Many of the "implications of the density of the existing deer herd in the VCH" are preceded by the word "likelihood." Without sufficient data, these implications can be seen as fear mongering, or at the least, such statements give rise to controversy because they invite counter-statements.

The Trustees who currently govern the village were elected by a large majority of of the people who voted. The village has information on exactly how many persons took part in the elections and the percentage of eligible voters who participated in the elections. The overwhelming majority of village residents did not vote in either election. For the sake of honesty, this fact should be in the document. The existing statement that the Village Board members "have been elected by an overwhelming majority of those voting in the largest election turnout in the history of the Village" is misleading.

In the section on "Community Viewpoints" it is noted that "community controversy is not criteria for determining significance," whatever that means. If the viewpoint of the community is of no relevance, why is it included? Culling deer within the village will cause significant pain and anguish to many villagers. To call that an "impact to the social conscience" misrepresents the feelings of many. It should be known to the Trustees who have listened to speakers at public meetings that these deer have been a part of village life for decades and many residence have a loving bond with these wild creatures despite the problems they cause. Another objection that is frequently voiced is that this proposal will bring violence to the village -- a violence that cannot be ignored and about which nothing can be done. If the killing of the deer includes the use of captive bolts it may attract activists from outside the community who have little regard for the safety and welfare of the rest of us.

There are NO studies that show that killing deer within a suburban community has contributed to a significant increase in the quality of life, biodiversity, or economic vitality. There are many confounding variables regarding deer/vehicle encounters. None are mentioned.

We believe there are no data to support the claims that deer within VCH are responsible for a significant amount of loss of biodiversity, vehicular accidents, and Lyme disease. Vehicular accidents, Lyme disease, and loss of biodiversity are not particular to VCH.

The Trustees have already stated that there will be no change in the existing fence ordinance and that 20 deer will be sterilized. The document makes reference to the use of fences and the sterilization of 20 to 60 deer. That should be changed to reflect current decisions by the Board.

The deer do eat things and they do leave droppings. These are the real reasons behind this proposal.

Both of us were brought up in households where "what's for dinner" was often raised and killed by our families. We are very aware of the sources of our food. We treasure the natural and the native. On our property we attempt to create an environment that nurtures birds, butterflies, bees, and native plants. The Cayuga Heights Deer Management Plan, as described, will cause great suffering to us and will do very little to protect us from Lyme disease and vehicular accidents, nor will it prevent our plants from being eaten by deer, ground hogs, moles, voles, mice, chipmunks, and rabbits. Nor will it promote increased biodiversity.

Deer management is an important issue for many people. To have it based on such an inadequate report is distressful. This document is faulty. It pretends to show the need to kill these deer, but it fails to prove anything. There are alternatives to reducing the deer population and with the help and support of interested groups, such as hunters and environmental groups, the Board should be able to find a solution. There are reasonable voices on both sides of this issue. Some accommodation should be possible.

Sincerely,

 

Ann Gray & Rebecca Davidson