

Information Item

Date: April 8, 2019

To: The City Manager

From: Tasha Logan Ford, Assistant City Manager

Subject:

Request from Smith Reynolds Airport to Allow the use of Rifles for Wildlife Control on Airport Grounds.

Strategic Focus Area: Safe and Secure Community

Strategic Objective: No

Strategic Plan Action Item: No

Key Work Item: No



Smith Reynolds Airport (the "Airport") presented Mayor Pro Tempore Burke with a request (letter attached) that the City consider amending City Code Sec. 38-10 to allow representatives of the United States Department of Agriculture (the "USDA") to use rifles with silencers for purposes of wildlife control on Airport property.

In its letter, the Airport indicated that the deer and turkey population at the Airport has been increasing over the past couple of years, and that this is creating safety concerns for the Airport. The Airport indicated that an airplane attempting to take off from a runway in late 2018 hit a deer and had to abort the takeoff. As a result of these concerns, Forsyth County has been in communication with James Capps, a wildlife biologist in the Raleigh USDA office. Mr. Capps has recommended to the County that it consider allowing USDA representatives to use lethal techniques not currently allowed under City Code Sec. 38-10 to manage the deer population. Specifically, Mr. Capps is recommending that USDA representatives be allowed to use rifles with silencers for eliminating the deer population. City Code Sec. 38-10 already provides an exception to the prohibition against the discharging of firearms within the City limits, allowing State or Federal wildlife officers to discharge shotguns at least 800 feet from any point on the Airport's boundary line. However, this Code section specifically prohibits the use of handguns or rifles as a means of removing wildlife hazards.

In a discussion with the City Attorney's Office, Mr. Capps advised that the operation being considered would be a one-time elimination of the excess deer population on Airport grounds. It appears that this operation could be repeated as deemed necessary. Mr. Capps estimated that there are currently 10-12 deer inside the perimeter fencing at the Airport. He further advised that his understanding was that airplanes have hit deer at the Airport on three (3) occasions within the last six (6) to eight (8) years, and that these collisions have caused substantial damage to the airplanes involved.

Mr. Capps advised that the USDA is the lead agency in managing human-wildlife conflicts at airports and that, under an existing agreement between the USDA and the North Carolina Department of Transportation, USDA representatives have performed operations such as the one recommended here numerous times across the State and that these operations have been very successful.

The operation would involve use of a three-person team: a driver, a spotter and a shooter. The operation would take place after dark, with the team using an infrared device and night-vision equipment. The use of this equipment along with silencers on the rifles would reduce the use of artificial lighting and noise, respectively. The operation would likely take a few to several nights to accomplish.

Mr. Capps advised that all meat collected as a result of the operation would be sent to designated processors and then donated through the hunters for the Hungry program. The USDA would also collect disease samples from the deer to assist in their research.

Mr. Capps was asked about alternative measures for eliminating the deer population on Airport grounds, and advised that there are such measures but there are costs involved in those operations (such as bait and tranquilizing drugs) while the USDA does not charge any fee for this service due to its contract with NCDOT.

This item recounts only preliminary discussions and information as to this request from the County. Mr. Mark Davidson, Airport Director, will give a presentation and answer questions at the April 8, 2019 Public Safety Committee meeting.