

City Council – Action Request Form

Date: June 14, 2021

To: Mayor, Mayor Pro Tempore, and Members of the City Council

From: Damon Dequenne, Assistant City Manager
Lori Sykes, Assistant City Attorney

Council Action Requested:

Ordinance Amending Chapter 38, Article I, Section 38-10(i) Entitled "Possession and Discharge of Firearms" of the Code of the City of Winston-Salem to allow State and/or Federal Wildlife Officers to Discharge Rifles for the Purpose of Eliminating Deer and Wild Turkeys Within the Boundaries of Smith Reynolds Airport until August 19, 2022

Strategic Focus Area: Safe and Secure Community

Strategic Objective: No

Strategic Plan Action Item: No

Key Work Item: No



Summary of Information:

Smith Reynolds Airport ("Airport") made a presentation at the April 8, 2019 Public Safety Committee meeting regarding its proposal for the use of rifles with suppressors/silencers to control the deer population inside the boundaries of the Airport. At the time, City Code Sec. 38-10(i) only allowed the use of shotguns to control wildlife on Airport property and required, as a safety measure, that use of shotguns was limited to areas at least 800 feet away from any point on the boundary line. City Code Sec. 38-10(i) also prohibited the use of handguns or rifles for this purpose, so the Airport was specifically requesting that this Code section be amended to allow for the use of rifles.

Committee Action:

Committee	<u>Public Safety 6/14/21</u>	Action	<u>Approval</u>
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For	<u>Unanimous</u>	Against	<u></u>
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Remarks:

Airport Director Mark Davidson indicated in his presentation that the presence of wildlife, and particularly deer, inside the boundary fencing and in the runway area presents a threat to the health and safety of those using the Airport's services and that in 2012, the Airport partnered with USDA Wildlife Officers to assess and address this issue. Mr. Davidson displayed a graph of wildlife concentration on airport property for the previous three months and photographs of wildlife found on the property.

A representative of USDA Wildlife, Wildlife Biologist James Capps, advised that Smith Reynolds Airport has seen as many wildlife strikes as Charlotte Douglas International, which is a much larger facility. Mr. Capps noted that deer have been found to be the most hazardous of wildlife for airport services and that strikes can result in not only damage to an aircraft, but also loss of human life.

Mr. Capps advised that his office has recommended and successfully utilized the proposed methodology - using rifles to remove deer populations from airport property - in many other locations and that the officers who would carry out this activity are experienced and skilled. Mr. Capps also advised that his agency would be able to carry out this project at no cost and that deer meat from the project could be donated to persons in need. Mr. Capps confirmed this would not be an ongoing operation where gunshots would be consistently heard in the area, but that it should only take a few outings to eliminate this problem. He also advised that work would be conducted at night, using suppressed rifles to minimize noise from the operations and would not be shining bright lighting in the area. Asked about dense population near the airport, Mr. Capps stated that his office has completed this work in many highly populated areas in the past, including both military and traditional airports, as part of its mission to minimize human-wildlife conflict.

This item was approved by Council with the condition that residents living in the immediate area of the airport would be provided notification of the proposed change to the ordinance. That notification was given and additional notification measures were taken through local media and the Airport's website. The Airport advised, at the time, that it had been contacted by nine (9) citizens in response to the notifications. CityLink received one call from a citizen expressing safety concerns about the proposed ordinance amendment. Final approval of the ordinance change was then granted with a sunset provision of one (1) year, or until August 2020.

The Airport made an additional presentation on the removal program in August of 2020, reporting that in the preceding twelve months, USDA wildlife officials made five (5) visits to the Airport and were able to eliminate twenty-seven (27) deer whose meat was processed and donated to charity. The Airport also reported that wild turkeys continued to pose a threat to runway operations and asked that the USDA program be expanded during this next year to allow wildlife officials to harvest wild turkeys in the runway area. The requests to continue the removal program and to add wild turkeys to the removal program were granted, with a new sunset date of August 19, 2021.

For the second year of the program, the Airport is reporting that USDA officials were able to remove one (1) deer and three (3) wild turkeys from the Airport grounds. Notification of

upcoming removal was made prior to the actions being taken, and the Airport has not received any complaints from residents of the area about the removal actions. City Link reported that no citizen calls had been received regarding this operation in the past year.

The Airport is now requesting that the changes made to City Code Section 38-10(i) remain in place for an additional one-year period so as to allow the continued use of rifles and the removal of wild turkey as well as deer to continue at the Airport for such additional period. The new sunset date for this provision would thus be August 19, 2022. The Airport will continue to provide notification of upcoming activity by USDA officers to area residents.