

**MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM & CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER
MARCH 24, 2025 – 5:30PM**

The study session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Rich at 5:30pm.

Council Members Present: Aldred, Boleware, Bridges, Bruce, Dwyer, Knol and Rich

Council Members Absent: None

Others Present: City Manager Mekjian, Assistant City Manager Mondora, City Clerk Lindahl, and City Attorney Joppich

**CLOSED SESSION ITEM (COMMUNITY ROOM – 5:30PM):
CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL TO ENTER INTO A CLOSED SESSION TO DISCUSS AN EMPLOYEE
REQUESTED REVIEW FOR GARY MEKJIAN, CITY MANAGER. (NOTE: COUNCIL WILL RETURN TO OPEN
SESSION AT 6:00PM IN THE CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER).**

MOTION by Bridges, support by Aldred, that the City Council of Farmington Hills hereby approves entering into a closed session to discuss an employee requested review for Gary Mekjian, City Manager.

Roll Call Vote:

Yeas: ALDRED, BRIDGES, BRUCE, DWYER, KNOL, AND RICH

Nays: NONE

Absent: BOLEWARE

Abstentions: NONE

MOTION CARRIED 6-0.

Council entered closed session at 5:32pm

**STUDY SESSION ITEMS (CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER – 6:00PM):
PRESENTATION ON URBAN DEER MANAGEMENT**

Council re-entered Open Session at 6:00pm in City Council Chamber.

Council received a presentation on Urban Deer Management from Deputy Director of Special Services Brian Farmer, Deer Management Specialist Chad Fedewa from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Professor Mike Kost from the University of Michigan, and graduate students from U of M's School for Environment and Sustainability (SEAS) George Ackerman, Lauren Jones, Tristan Compton, Andy Metz, Chelsea Yang, and Zach Cavanaugh.

Overview

- Deer management in Farmington Hills started in 2015 when the City began conducting research, collecting data, and working with the DNR, leading to the establishment of the Statewide Urban Deer Management Plan for Communities.

- Review of trends in deer-vehicle collisions in Oakland County and Farmington Hills specifically.
- Concerns from residents include deer-vehicle collisions, ticks and tick-borne diseases, damage to landscaping, damage to ecosystems and native species, decline in deer health, and aggressive deer.
- Ecological impacts include damage to forest succession and structure, decline in bird abundance, overbrowsing of many flowering plants leading to a decline in pollinators, and over competition for food with other species.
- Ecological plan goals include
 - a. Promote diversity through oak regeneration
 - b. Curtail the spread of invasive species
 - c. Protection and restoration of herbaceous groundcover, flowering plants, and biodiversity
- Working with the DNR to develop and support a regional deer management approach
- Examples of success stories
 - Meridian Township, which initiated a deer management plan in 2010
 - East Lansing, which initiated a deer management plan in 2021
 - Huron-Clinton Metroparks, which began culls in 1998
 - Oakland County Parks, with deer culls in 2024 and 2025
 - City of Jackson, began culls in 2016
 - Michigan DNR, with late season deer management (urban archery) Jan. 1 – 31 every year

Culls – Defining the process

- USDA or private company will determine where culls take place, set up those areas, and perform the cull
- Typically in February or March every year
- Costs: average cost of cull \$20,000 annually
- Very specific process followed with collaboration between city and state, appropriate permitting, and includes process for donating meat to food banks
- Post-cull evaluation

Timeline – Need for long term management planning and commitment

Long term commitment is needed, most scenarios require 5 years before significant density decreases

Regional approach

- a. Southeast Michigan Urban Deer Coalition
- b. First proposed regional cull – Farmington Hills and Southfield
- c. Future expansion of regional cull with more communities

Draft Resolution highlights:

- Perform culls annually beginning 2026
- Highly regulated organized hunts (bow and crossbow) beginning 2027
- Temporarily suspend firearm ordinances during times of culls and regulated hunts
- Deer Management Report provided annually to Mayor/Council
- Deer Management ongoing with review to occur every 5 years as part of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Mayor Rich explained that there would not be public comment during the Study Session, but public comment would be allowed at the regular council meeting which would immediately follow this meeting.

Council Member Bruce

- Council Member Bruce asked about the sequencing of the deer culling process, questioning whether both firearms and archery would occur at the same time.
- Deputy Director Farmer explained that, as proposed, the program would involve a highly organized hunt – using bows and/or crossbows performed by licensed recreational hunters, followed by an organized deer cull.
 - The example presented this evening suggested using bows or crossbows for hunters during specific, designated hours in Heritage Park, with no public hiking allowed during those times.
 - Archery hunters would need prior approval from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), as well as training to ensure safety and efficiency.
 - In the case of a large deer harvest goal, such as 300 deer, archery might account for a portion, followed by a USDA cull using sharpshooters to reach the remaining target. Any sharpshooting would take place at night using height, thermal imaging, and suppressors.
 - Any deer taken via a USDA cull would be processed for donation to food banks, specifically CARES.
- Council Member Bruce asked whether hunting would be restricted to areas far from residential zones.
- Deputy Director Farmer confirmed that initial hunting activities would be conducted in areas far from homes, gradually expanding over time to somewhat closer areas as the program progressed and as residents became more comfortable with the process.
 - The goal is to provide hunting opportunities in a controlled manner, with minimal disturbance to residents.
 - Over time, the use of hunting could become more widespread, offering a more cost-effective means of managing deer populations.

Legal and Ordinance Considerations

City Attorney Schultz clarified the process for modifying city ordinances to allow hunting within city limits.

- A resolution would be passed to create an exception, allowing hunting with specific restrictions.
- A potential amendment to the city ordinance governing the discharge of firearms may be necessary for long-term implementation of the program.

Council Member Dwyer

- Council Member Dwyer expressed concern about the long timeline for addressing deer issues and asked what could be done in the short term to alleviate residents' concerns.
- Deputy Director Farmer said that sharpshooting (USDA cull), if approved, could quickly address deer densities in specific areas of the city. However, not all parts of the city would experience the same level of impact immediately.
 - Deer management efforts would likely focus first on the most affected areas, with a gradual expansion of efforts.

- Homeowners could reduce deer attraction by avoiding feeding them and changing landscaping to less deer-attractive plants. While fences could also be constructed, this was an expensive option that often did not work and must comply with ordinance regulations and subdivision deed restrictions.

Council Member Bridges

- Council Member Bridges asked about enforcement of the city's existing ordinance prohibiting residents from feeding deer.
- Deputy Director Farmer stated that the zoning department had not issued tickets because they typically handled violations by educating residents after receiving complaints.
- Council Member Bridges raised concerns regarding the overall enforcement and management of urban deer issues in Farmington Hills. He questioned the credibility and scope of complaint data and emphasized the need for reliable reporting mechanisms:
 - 180 deer-related complaints had been logged over a seven-year period, which he calculated as approximately two per month. Deputy Director Farmer clarified that the complaints were not evenly distributed throughout the year, with some weeks seeing as many as 30 calls due to seasonal fluctuations in deer activity.
 - Has Lyme disease had been reported in Farmington Hills? Deputy Director Farmer responded that while he is not a medical professional, there have been resident-reported cases. Other diseases, including EHD (Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease) and CWD (Chronic Wasting Disease), are also a concern.
 - Deputy Director Farmer referenced a February aerial deer count estimating approximately 1,500 deer in Farmington Hills and Southfield. He noted, however, that the DNR has moved away from population counts and now focuses on community impacts when evaluating deer management strategies.
 - Council Member Bridges asked DNR Representative Fedewa about the relationship between the City's ecological management plans and deer control. Mr. Fedewa said that he was not familiar with Farmington Hills-specific ecological practices and thus could not comment on the impact.
 - Council Member Bridges referenced sterilization efforts in Ann Arbor and Rochester Hills. Deputy Director Farmer reported that sterilization in Ann Arbor was ultimately unsuccessful. He was not familiar with Rochester Hills' efforts. The lack of information regarding outcomes led to concerns about the effectiveness and replicability of such programs.
 - Council Member Bridges expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of Farmington Hills' strategy given limited regional cooperation. Only Southfield appeared to be actively participating. Deputy Director Farmer clarified that Livonia, Novi, West Bloomfield, and others were part of a broader regional coalition and were monitoring progress. Although resolutions had not yet been passed by these municipalities, interest had been expressed, and Farmington Hills' efforts could serve as a starting point for broader participation.
- In response to further questions from Council Member Bridges, Deputy Director Farmer that the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) serves as the lead agency for deer management and must approve any local plans. Council Member Bridges also referenced a survey showing that local governments were perceived as the least credible source for accurate information about deer management. Deputy Director Farmer attributed this to the lack of biological experts on staff in most municipalities.

Council Member Knol

- Council Member Knol pointed out that enforcement depends on neighbors filing complaints, which some are reluctant to do. Enforcement alone does not equate to a comprehensive wildlife management strategy.
- Council Member Knol said that Southfield had previously passed a ballot measure in support of a deer cull and is waiting for Farmington Hills to move forward with the regional effort. The City of Farmington and Livonia have also acknowledged the issue. Livonia has held packed public meetings on the topic.
- Council Member Knol asked why March was being considered instead of the typical hunting season in November or December. She also asked why sterilization, relocation, and contraception were not used.
- In response, Deputy Director Farmer explained that:
 - Urban culls and hunts are typically scheduled after the standard hunting seasons to avoid conflicts with licensed recreational hunting opportunities. March is often chosen for this reason.
 - While both antlered and antlerless deer would likely be removed during a cull, focusing on antlerless (female) deer is key to controlling population growth due to their reproductive capacity. Many does in Farmington Hills are having two to three fawns annually.
 - To maintain a stable deer population, 35–40% of the herd must be removed each year. To reduce an overpopulated herd, the percentage must begin even higher, often over 50%. Population control must be viewed as a long-term process rather than a one-year fix.
- Regarding alternative methods:
 - Sterilization and contraception have been proven ineffective in wild populations.
 - Relocation is also not viable due to high stress on the animals, low survival rates, and the risk of spreading diseases, such as Chronic Wasting Disease and EHD. From a biological standpoint, moving deer simply transfers the problem to other parts of the state that are already overpopulated.

Council Member Aldred

Council Member Aldred acknowledged the seriousness of the deer issue and expressed appreciation for the informative presentation. He pointed to the fivefold increase in deer carcasses found on roadsides over the past decade as a clear sign of the growing problem, characterizing these incidents as an involuntary “cull” caused by vehicle collisions.

Council Member Aldred summarized the two main strategies for deer management:

1. Culling via Sharpshooters (USDA or private company)
 - Conducted at night using elevated platforms and infrared technology.
 - Typically performed in restricted-access areas such as Heritage Park.
 - Considered safe and effective based on experience in other communities.
 - The City pays for this type of cull.
2. Highly Regulated Recreational Hunting (Archery/Crossbow):
 - Involves vetted volunteers undergoing proficiency testing.
 - Hunters are assigned specific blinds and follow strict rules under supervision.
 - Deer are tracked, recovered, and processed, with options for donation to food banks.
 - This approach can be sustainable and cost-effective.

Deputy Director Farmer elaborated on how communities such as Meridian Township have successfully implemented regulated hunting programs, including with firearms. Over time, these programs expanded to include more parks and even private properties, with vetted hunters maintaining strong community support. The volunteer hunters can shoot two deer – one to take the meat home for their own consumption, and one to donate.

Mayor Rich

Mayor Rich thanked all presenters and expressed appreciation for the perspective given from various disciplines. She emphasized the need for action and discouraged further delay, framing the issue primarily as a public safety concern. While supportive of a USDA cull using sharpshooters, she expressed hesitation about the recreational hunting component; she needed to learn more about this option before supporting it.

Mayor Rich asked for more data on deer counts and patterns, expressing interest in understanding deer migration and where management efforts would be most effective.

Deputy Director Farmer responded by advising caution when interpreting exact population figures. While one aerial count had suggested approximately 1,500 deer, he stressed that management decisions should be based on impacts rather than precise numbers, which can vary seasonally and geographically.

- He confirmed that a cull targeting about 30% of the population would help stabilize the herd.
- Heritage Park was cited as an example location, but not the sole option. The USDA would assist in identifying additional high-traffic areas based on ecological data and deer corridors.

Further, Deputy Director Farmer recommended a balanced approach:

- A combined strategy provides flexibility to reach annual harvest targets.
- Hunting maintains traditional recreational opportunities for licensed residents and helps engage the community.
- The USDA would still conduct removals to meet annual goals if hunting yields are low.

Council Member Knol noted there were other sites beyond Heritage Park, such as Woodland Park, Glen Oaks (a county park), the dog park, and Oakland Community College.

Mayor Rich said that there appeared to be consensus to move forward and indicated the matter would return for Council deliberation at the April 28 meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

The Study Session meeting was adjourned at 7:28pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk