

SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES

June 20, 2006

The Safety Committee meeting was held on June 20, 2006 at North Royalton City Hall, 13834 Ridge Road. The meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Lisa Uffman-Kirsch at 6:30 p. m.

Present: Lisa Uffman-Kirsch, Committee members Denise Bobulsky and Robert Stefanik; Fire Chief Michael Fabish, Police Chief Paul Bican, Donald Willey (arrived late); Residents: Alan and Gayle Clapp, Megan Rowe, David Blank, Elena Wilson, Teresa Balosz, James Rymut, Margaret Mathers; Sun Star Reporter Joanne DuMound.

Motion and second to approve the minutes of May 16, 2006. 3 Ayes/0 nays. Minutes approved.

Call for additional New Business on the agenda. None.

Call for Open Resident Discussion on items other than those on the agenda. None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. Deer Hunting Permits

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch gave a summary of where the issue stands—as of last month, Mr. Stefanik had wanted to keep the subject on the agenda for another month so he could look at other city ordinances. Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch opened the discussion up to resident input.

Elena Wilson did not feel that we should be teaching our children that we're the only beings on the planet; so, that if they get in our way, we just kill them. She also felt that even bow hunting, is a serious safety issue for the children and residents. She doesn't think it belongs in North Royalton. She knows people are saying a lot about overpopulation of deer, but she grew up in this area and, strange as it sounds, it is overpopulation of people. She feels we're just building too much, and there is nothing much for any other beings except human beings, and that's a shame. She feels it's a nice thing to have children see animals other than just human beings, and she just thinks it's appalling.

Teresa Balosz wholeheartedly agreed with Elena. She also grew up in this area and noticed some people saying that the deer are coming into backyards and ruining crops, etc., but when she was little, they would on occasion see a deer in the back, but they never came in the garden. They had apple trees. She really thinks that we are totally pushing them out. She would like to see some land saved in our area so that they have places to go and have some sort of program to be able to feed and take care of them, because she agrees with Elena that we shouldn't kill them. She understands some people have businesses, and they are destroying their property, but when it comes to just killing them, she agrees that the message we are sending is not a good one.

Mr. Rymut said that he wanted to take the stand that he doesn't necessarily like killing them. That's why he's for hunting them; because people who want to hunt them and who enjoy the sport of hunting have an opportunity to hunt. It has to be managed. We have a problem here. He has been here for almost thirty years, and we didn't have many deer back then. We didn't have many in the state, but you can't stop deer from breeding, and that's the problem. If we want to feed them and take care of them, that's nice, but they just keep breeding and get overpopulated. Anything in nature has to have a balance. They are even recommending culling the herd here because it is too much, and there is a lot of damage. He suffers thousands of dollars worth of damage every year on his property, and something has to be done. Whether we want to do something about it is up to us, but he's going to do something about it one way or another. He doesn't want to really kill them. He doesn't get joy out of killing, but somebody wants it. There are youth hunts at Boy Scout camps. Crossbows are very safe. For statistics where we have crossbow accidents he'll show more statistics where we have people drowning. So, are we going to ban swimming next? Or are we going to ban boating? Hunting was banned, and that is probably one of the reasons we have this overpopulation, because years ago when we were young, people were hunting these animals. They are a problem, and he hopes something is done about it.

David Blank thinks that we need to look at this from a more practical view. Someone said that perhaps ten people have applied for hunting licenses which is not an overwhelming amount, and he thinks that if we allowed hunting and it became much more publicized, it really would pit neighbor against neighbor. Then we would get enforcement issues, management issues, which can be overtaking on a community of this size that is already burdened. He thinks the most expedient and easiest thing to do is to keep it "No Hunting."

Alan Clapp agreed with Dr. Blank. He feels that the deer population will manage itself given the time without interference by humans. He thinks hunting is cruel, and doesn't think it is effective in the long term or the short term. He thinks we should remain a no hunting community with no exceptions.

Chief Bican said his take on this has changed a little in the last couple months in light of the different things that have happened. He has never been opposed to hunting; he's not a hunter himself. But in light of our manpower circumstances, he really doesn't want to manage another problem in town if he doesn't have to.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch asked for a summary on the manpower for those who may not be aware.

Chief Bican said last year five guys retired and, due to financial considerations, they have not been replaced. His department had the lowest ratio of police to population in the southern part of the county before that. Now it's even worse. If we did start issuing permits and had to inspect properties, to determine definitions, to measure acreage and things like that, it would take manpower. Quite frankly, this is not the time for us to have to start doing something like that. At this point, he recommended that we leave the "No Hunting" the way it is...

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch asked if he meant with no ODNR permits as well. Chief Bican said that was correct.

Mr. Stefanik said he talked to a couple of property owners outside of North Royalton with large tracts of land where they have hunted, and their thought is that the few deer that they do kill isn't a huge impact, and there are always more to come from other areas. He can see both sides of the dilemma. He hopes one day we don't end up like Solon where we have no choice but to take out five or six hundred. He said that's something we might have to consider in the future. He hopes we don't get to that point, but if it came, we would have to decide whether or not to do that. At this point, he also would be in favor of just outlawing it completely and moving on.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch asked if the property owners he talked to grew anything or just had a lot of acreage because she wondered if their opinion would be different if they were growing crops.

Mr. Stefanik said they had wide open spaces and were not growing crops.

Chief Bican wanted to state for the record that bow hunting is safe. There are a lot less hunting accidents than there are car accidents and other things, but we need to keep in mind that the city is getting more and more populated—people with little kids are going to be nervous if the guy next door is out with his bow and arrow; he can see their point. The way our city is going, how populous we have become, and his departmental issues, are his overriding concerns. He thinks it would be a bad thing to change at this point.

Chief Fabish said that his intention is not to disregard the plight of the property owners as having property damage, he was the one who suggested that we use professional bow hunters—although we couldn't find that--and hunt on those commercial properties that are sustaining the damage. He doesn't think that general hunting permits are a good proposition for our community for safety reasons. He thinks, though, that at some point because we are moving the deer because of construction, which is natural as humans have to work in inhabited areas, the deer are going to become more visible than they are. This year, they had two fawns brought into the Fire Station asking them to care for them because they picked them up. The ODNR had a publication just a few weeks ago in The Plain Dealer saying, "Don't pick up the deer. Leave them go. The moms are leaving them there during the day so that they can develop strength to fend for themselves," and good-hearted people are taking them from their habitat and wanting someone to care for them. They need just deer milk nourishment from the mother to be able to survive. We're part of the problem in what is happening with the deer.

Unfortunately, in Solon there were so many and they were a safety hazard to the humans in car accidents. If you have ever been in a car accident when a deer has come through a windshield, it's a pretty horrific thing. A good-sized deer can weigh 160 pounds, and as it comes through the window, it is like a human coming through the window. This is a problem he thinks we will address in the future. He agrees that right now is not the time to open up the hunting, but he thinks they will be an issue where we will have to consider culling or whatever if we have safety issues involved. He would be in favor of not allowing generalized hunting at this time.

Mrs. Bobulsky said she is also in favor of prohibiting the hunting as it stands right now. She thinks at this point it would be too difficult to manage the restrictions that would be necessary to make hunting safe for all the residents involved, whether it is trespassing on property or finding carcasses on the property or other. She does think we need to take a look at our code to make sure that it is adequate in terms of what we need for ODNR, and should we be more specific and state, "prohibit deer hunting"?

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch said she agrees with Mrs. Bobulsky on that.

Teresa Balosz said she thinks part of the problem is that we are squeezing them in. Could we consider that we not develop as much or put some parameters on that so that they won't be a big issue in the future?

Mr. Clapp said that from reading past minutes, it sounds like exceptions were made, even though we had a no hunting code, with certain people who were allowed to do that. Based on the direction we are going, will that continue or will that be stopped?

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch explained that the Ohio Department of Natural Resources can issue a hunting permit, within some parameters related to damaged property; so, even though we had a no hunting code, if the Mayor's office signed off on the permit issued by the ODNR, they were allowed to hunt. What we're talking about now would be enforcing our code "as is" with no exceptions. We would tell the Ohio Department of Natural Resources that permits would not be allowed.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch addressed Teresa's comment about no development or reduced development. That is a sentiment shared by a lot of people in the community. The challenge we have is that the only two ways we can do that is either by owning it or through our zoning to reduce the density of it. The community has attempted to work on this through reduction of the number of homes that we have through the residential zoning that was passed years ago and then the expansion of that zoning a couple of years ago, but we can't outright say "no more" because there are property rights for people involved. There is a caveat to this because one community in the area has done something where they allow only so many building permits per year. I will be looking into this further because they look at the impact of development on their community in many ways: financial, traffic, roads, garbage--all kinds of things. But as far as just saying "no more," we can't do that.

As far as culling in the future, we do have the Metroparks that go through here. Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch said her personal opinion is in opposition to culling in the Metroparks; but that is her personal opinion, which is irrelevant to what happens here. She feels that if supported by tax dollars, then the people should vote on the issue, but that's not how it works. We have a culling process that happens in the community periodically in the Metroparks when they feel it needs to be done.

As far as preserving the land, Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch said that's actually something that was called for in the Master Plan adopted by the community...to look at an interconnecting system of parks and trail ways that can also serve as "green corridors" for animals so they have the ability to travel from place to place and to move throughout a community. There is a residents' group called North Royalton Greenways that is actually working on a plan for that right now. It would be a system for parks and trail ways. Obviously, that would be something that would happen over many, many years, because it takes money or donations of land to do that. But it is something that is called for in the Master Plan.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch wanted to commend Mr. Rymut his courage in being the only person who has consistently come on the pro-culling side. She said we appreciate hearing from him and for his continuing to come. She thinks he brought up a good point regarding fences, because they would have to be at least eight feet high in order to stop a deer. She said we may need to look at that in the Codes as it relates to rear yards for the ability of fencing off an area. It seems that we should not be that restrictive. She said she would pull out that code and bring it into committee. She said Mr. Rymut should contact her, and she would let him know where and when that will be so that he can give his views.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch said she also agrees, for all the reasons that were already said, we should stick with no hunting at all with no exceptions. She agrees with Mrs. Bobulsky that we need to look at the code, she believes it is 618.12. She asked Chief Bican if that was the only appropriate section relative to hunting. Chief Bican confirmed.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch read the way the Code is right now: "The hunting of animals or fowl within the municipality is prohibited. No person shall hunt, kill, or attempt to kill any animal or fowl by the use of firearms or any other means; however, nothing in this Section shall be deemed to prohibit the killing of rats and other undesirable rodents authorized to be killed by the Chief of Police using means for such killing which are also authorized by the Chief." Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch asked the Chief if he had a pamphlet that he gives out on the means of killing these undesirable rodents. (Humor) Chief Bican responded no.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch stated one of the things she would like to do is add trapping in there because that also concerns her.

Chief Bican stated that we have a Code Book. We already have an ordinance about traps.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch asked if we already have a code, can we just reiterate it in the title here.

Chief Bican stated that he didn't think we had to do anything.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch asked if we already have one somewhere else.

Chief Bican said he thought we were good to go without taking any action on the ordinance as it is.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch asked if he felt it needed to be clarified about the ODNR permits.

Chief Bican said he felt it is about as clear as we can get. We signed off on it. We signed off on no hunting. He didn't think we needed to change it.

Mr. Stefanik stated that if "shall not" is in there, if you have "shall," then it doesn't matter who you are if you're not going to sign off on it.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch stated that it currently says, "The hunting of animals or fowl within the municipality is prohibited," but there were exceptions; so, she wondered if it should be extended to say, "including the issuance of nuisance permits..."

Mr. Stefanik stated "hunting shall not be permitted..."

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch responded that's what it says now, but it's been done by signing off.

Chief Bican said he personally didn't think it needed to be changed. He would just make the intentions known that that's the way it is going to be enforced, and that is it. He would contact ODNR and say, "sorry, don't issue any; that we're not going to sign off on them."

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch stated she's thinking that since there has been an administrative process to override the code; perhaps we should have the code override the administrative process.

Mr. Stefanik suggested sending it off to the Law Director and let him decide on the wording.

Mrs. Bobulsky said she thinks we need to add just a little something about those nuisance permits, because it's not always going to be the same people in these seats.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch suggested we draft something and send it on to the Law Director to see what he feels about the drafted language, including the ODNR, and then bring it back to Committee and distribute it to see what everyone thinks.

Mr. Stefanik agreed that would be fine.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch said she doesn't think we need to vote. We all said our views on this; the committee has decided that we want to have no hunting at all. We are going to work on the code a little bit, and then we'll come back next month to see what it is going to look like.

2. Traffic Signal Timing — Status Update

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch said last month we were talking about the status of some of the different lights and she turned it over to Chief Bican, referencing the minutes of the May 16, 2006, meeting, Page 6, second-to-last paragraph, for the list.

Chief Bican reported that West 130th and Albion is running fine. They changed it and have been monitoring it at rush hour, and it seems like it is working. Ridge and Royalwood: they got a compliment tonight; they were told it seems to be working since they changed the signs for the limited turn on red. Sprague and York is corrected. That was due to the construction at Walgreen's. They were parking trucks on the loops. Abbey and 82: They can't find anything wrong here. The only thing they suspect to be the problem is people not pulling all the way up on the pad triggering the lights. State and Bunker: This will be corrected when the new light is activated.

There was a broken loop. We don't want to spend the money to repair the loop, because there was a new loop cut in right around it which hasn't been hooked up yet. As soon as the new light is activated, it will correct itself.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch stated that since she's never had an issue with the light timing, and since we have been talking about this she has been trying to figure out where these loop things are that are being talked about.

Chief Bican explained that where there is new pavement, you can't see them. Otherwise, you will see a square cut in the pavement with sealer going around it. That's the loop. It's a magnetic loop that senses a car and triggers the light.

Chief Fabish questioned about stop bars.

Chief Bican stated that the stop bar should be over and a little bit back in the loop and, when you hit the stop bar, it triggers the light. He said we sometimes have a problem when motorcycles stop in the middle of the loop.

Chief Bican reported that the new lights are coming online. Several were turned on today.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch asked if the committee agreed this item could be removed from the agenda. All agreed. Item removed.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Police Department Staffing

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch put this on the agenda because she would like to hear from the chief in person about how many people they are down, and what that means on a day-to-day basis.

Chief Bican explained that while they are down five, they had forty-two at one point, and they are at their lowest numbers since 1994 right now as far as police officers, and we have probably 10,000 more people than we did in 1996. They are down from 42 to 37. They have managed so far by cutting one out of the traffic unit; one out of the detective bureau; and everybody knows the DARE program is cut. They restructured the patrol. There used to be two sergeants on days, two on afternoons, and one on midnights. They changed that to be two on afternoons, two on midnights, one on days, figuring the other administrative people would be here during the day. People have been moved around a little bit.

All training has been cut. If there is overtime involved, no one gets trained. For Homecoming, there are going to be reserves, no regular officers. At the Relay for Life, there were no regular policemen there this year. He's attempting to organize changing the Mayor's Court bailiff from being a regular to a reserve officer. He's having a little problem because most have regular fulltime day jobs. He just reduced the minimum number of dispatchers to one, where there used to be two, to avoid overtime.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch asked if there is just one dispatcher on duty.

Chief Bican explained that there are two scheduled, but if one calls in sick, they're down to one and they can't replace. They're trying to cut overtime.

They also changed some of the duties around from traffic officers' jobs to jailers' jobs. Officer Maloney was the traffic light guy. He saved us a lot by not having to schedule service calls. With him gone, we'll have to call someone to come out and work on the lights.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch asked if she was correct that we would now have to pay for that.

Chief Bican responded yes. They're also trying to adjust the traffic officers' hours to schedule meetings. They have to work with contracts, and have to give seven days' notice; so they're jockeying around people's hours to accommodate different meetings and things rather than pay overtime.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch asked if there were any other known retirements coming up.

Chief Bican responded not that he knows of.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch stated that she would like to leave these two departments on the agenda for a regular status update. The Committee agreed.

Chief Fabish reported that, like the Police Department, their department has traditionally been understaffed. The way they manage to do the things they do has always been through the use of overtime. It was always cheaper and more effective management to have overtime than it was to hire more people. As our city began to grow, the department began to grow in preparation for another station. Last year, they did hire people on June 22nd. They have always gone through a year's probation where they weren't counted as staff. He changed that this year until the end of May. He bumped it up another month because vacations are picked in November, so they could budget for when they were not going to have enough people, they were going to use overtime. The budget crunch hit early this year, and he projected how much that was going to impact us. The biggest bulk of the overtime was up until June, because those guys weren't considered part of the staff, and now they are. They still have a small amount of shift overtime if someone calls in sick, because they have a minimum staff they have to maintain because they have a contract they have to honor and are obligated to.

The training has been really diminished, and this has been the most difficult element because we encourage people to participate in different programs. The Fire Department has become like the Emergency Response Division, where if it were Homeland Security or the technical rescue or the hazmat or now the CERT teams, they spearhead that. That was pretty much done on overtime. They have diminished that, but can't completely cut that off because they have to participate in the Southwest Emergency Response Team. Karen Fegan, Finance Director, just sent a memo that they were at about 65 percent of their overtime budget. They're about 20 percent over where they should be at this time; however, that was not accounting for the new guys working stepping in. But that is not going to solve all of their issues. He knew that when he made his budget projections. He anticipated cutting the budget and did in the initial budget request. Then it was cut a little more.

Chief Fabish said it's being watched very closely. He finds it very difficult to cold turkey stop all of the programs. They do so many things within the community that are not necessarily seen as an emergency response. They have been diminishing some of the CERT classes and car seat inspections, and cut all that nearly in half. They're still trying to maintain a presence to do that, but don't do it as frequently as before. They're asked to go to Safety Fairs to participate—Parlatown sent a letter just the other day asking them to participate on some regional teams, but they can't this year. Anything that they're going to do public will be reserved for our own community. That's the priority, but even that is diminished. Safety Town—they used to have several people involved. There is a schedule, and if the guys are out on a call, they couldn't be there. Tours came to the station today. He had brought both stations up to Station 1 today, which is something he really doesn't want to do, but it is a way for them to keep people here without having overtime. The guys who were down at the other station came up to this station, so when calls come in, there is still somebody here to meet the Safety Towners. They always like to squirt the hose and do all the things they do when they come to the fire station. That was one way they tried to manage that, but that defeated shortening the emergency response time for that district. They're trying to be creative, while still trying to provide services. Chief Fabish thinks the next three months will give a good indication of how the last quarter is going to go. This is the heaviest vacation period, and they don't have a lot of shift fill overtime scheduled, only for Lieutenants. There are only two Lieutenants on a shift. They go down to one Lieutenant, but sometimes there were days when the two guys had to take those days off. So, there are a couple of shifts of shift fill overtime for Lieutenants. They don't have an Assistant Chief. They don't have a Captain. He has asked for administrative officers. They keep taking other duties on, but they can't keep doing that, because there are not enough of them to go around. They keep doing things, expanding what they are providing to the community, but it is getting harder. The next three months will pretty much tell how they are going to fare for the rest of the year and what the percentages will be in view of overtime. It will be close with no room to spare. Chief Fabish always believed they try to do the very best they can, but they have made adjustments.

Mrs. Uffman-Kirsch asked if anyone had anything else they wanted to talk about. With no further business, she asked for a motion to adjourn. Motion made and seconded. 3 Yeas/0 Nays. Meeting adjourned at 7:11 p.m.