

Supervisors approve advertising draft language to amend dangerous structures ordinance

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White Township supervisors on Wednesday unanimously approved advertising for a draft amendment to the township's dangerous structures ordinance that would incorporate new language to include a variety of additional structures.

After the July 29, 2021, death of a 5-year-old White Township resident who wandered from home and was found unresponsive in a swimming pool about a tenth of a mile from his residence, supervisors began drafting new language that would incorporate swimming pools, fences and other similar structures to the ordinance.

“(We) have an ordinance that has been prepared in draft form that would add terms to Chapter 175, nuisances, to include dangerous structures,” said township manager Chris Anderson, “which shall mean, but (is) not limited to, residences, dwellings, garages, sheds, barns, commercial/industrial buildings, wells, cisterns, tanks, swimming pools, hot tubs and fences.”

Before the amended language can officially get added to the ordinance, the township must advertise the drafted amendment for public input. Supervisor Sandi Gillette moved to advertise it, and supervisor Eugene Gemmell seconded the motion.

“This will be advertised for public comment ... probably within the next two weeks,” Anderson said. “It’ll probably be available on our website as well as advertised in the (Indiana) Gazette. It will be on the agenda for approval here in an upcoming supervisors meeting ... and I assume it (might) be ready by that first meeting in December.”

Also Wednesday, supervisors gave an update on deer hunting in White's Woods and discussed the future of the deer hunting initiative.

“I just wanted to let everybody know that the ‘no hunting’ signs have been posted around White’s Woods,” Anderson said. “We (posted) them at the main travel (areas).”

Township chairman George Lenz said he wants to keep deer hunting on future supervisor meeting agendas until the board resolves the issue.

“Vote it up, vote it down, vote it that there will never be hunting forever and ever, or vote that we’re going to move forward with the following calendar year,” Lenz said. “Whatever you want to do, but we’re going to bring it to conclusion.”

Lenz said he doesn’t want the board to table the matter and forget about it until it becomes an issue again. Gemmell, on the other hand, said the board already made a decision, which is to table the issue until the end of the license year, June 2023.

“Why don’t we between now and then come up with a plan that has public input, that is reasonable, that is acceptable and that is well-documented by all the people involved?” Lenz asked.

Supervisor Rich Gallo recommended delegating the hunting initiative, which supervisors pitched as a deer management plan to assist with the health of White’s Woods’ undergrowth, to the township’s Stewardship Committee, which was established in late August 2021 to develop a stewardship management plan for White’s Woods.

Lenz, however, did not want the Stewardship Committee to be involved with any deliberation involving deer hunting in White’s Woods despite the committee’s purpose, which is to create a stewardship plan to manage White’s Woods. The moment Gallo mentioned the Stewardship Committee, Lenz cut him off, claiming the committee should not be involved in any way.

“Alright, you want to shovel this off to another group and let them work on it, is that correct?” Lenz asked Gallo before he could finish his sentence. “There’s nothing wrong with this group, the five supervisors, taking an active role rather than shoveling it off.”

Lenz said deer hunting in White’s Woods wouldn’t fall under the Stewardship Committee’s mission. He also said because the township looked at hunting as a potential deer management plan prior to the Stewardship Committee’s inception, the committee should have no say.

“Well, hold on,” Anderson said. “I think there’s room for conversation here. I think what we did, or the board did, was have a Stewardship Committee that would look at amending or creating a stewardship management plan for management of White’s Woods. And if you consider that a management of White’s Woods, then yes, (the committee could be involved). If you don’t, then no.

“The deer management plan was looked at in December, prior to the creation of the Stewardship Committee. But I don’t know if that excludes it. It could go either way.”

For now, supervisors agreed it would be wise to continue gathering information and to keep hunting in White's Woods as an agenda item to receive citizen feedback during future supervisors meetings. The supervisors also agreed that when the board does come to a decision, the township will thoroughly advertise that decision to avoid confusion.