From the Mayors Desk

Hunting Within City Limits: Understanding State Law, City Ordinances, and Responsible Deer Management

I did not arrive at this decision lightly. After much thought, reviewing multiple city ordinances, and attending meetings with the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources and legal counsel, I reached this decision with a sincere commitment to our community. I recognize that residents may have different views, and I approach this responsibility with humility and respect for those perspectives. The information below explains the rules governing hunting within Ripley and the concerns surrounding deer feeding.

Hunting is a cherished West Virginia tradition, but rules differ within incorporated municipalities. Ripley's regulations protect residents, businesses, visitors, and property owners where homes, schools, churches, parks, and public roads are close together.

State Law Establishes Important Safety Restrictions

West Virginia Code §20-2-58 makes it unlawful to discharge a firearm or archery across or in a public road and within 500 feet of a school, church, or occupied dwelling, except in limited circumstances. These provisions were enacted to promote public safety and reduce the risk of injury or property damage in populated areas.

Because Ripley is a developed municipality with residences, businesses, schools, churches, parks, and public infrastructure located throughout the city, maintaining the required safety distances is often difficult or impossible. For this reason, state law and local ordinances work together to protect the public.

Bow Hunting Is Also Subject to Local Regulations

Some residents have asked whether bow hunting or crossbow hunting is permitted within city limits because firearms are not involved.

The answer is no.

The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources provides for a Special Urban Deer Archery/Crossbow Season in certain municipalities. However, the applicable regulation specifically states that the season does not supersede local regulations or community prohibitions on hunting. Therefore, municipalities retain the authority to regulate or prohibit hunting activities within their corporate boundaries.

Ripley City Code Prohibits Hunting Within the City

The City of Ripley has exercised that authority through **Ripley City Code §505.25**, which prohibits hunting within the city limits. This ordinance is intended to safeguard residents and property while reducing risks associated with hunting activities in densely populated areas.

Whether the hunting method involves a firearm, bow, or crossbow, individuals must comply with both state law and City of Ripley ordinances. The existence of a state hunting season does not override local restrictions adopted for public safety.

Why Tranquilizing and Relocating Deer Is Not a Simple Solution

Tranquilizing deer and moving them elsewhere may seem like a compassionate way to reduce their numbers. However, it is not a simple or reliably humane solution. Published guidance from the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources describes chemical immobilization and relocation as extremely expensive, often ineffective, and typically impractical for managing deer populations.

Capturing, handling, and transporting deer can cause severe stress, injury, or death, even when the intent is to protect them. Deer released into unfamiliar surroundings may struggle to adapt, and moving live animals can spread disease to other wildlife populations. Suitable release locations are also limited; moving deer elsewhere can create problems for the receiving habitat and community. Relocation may not provide a lasting reduction because other deer can move into areas where food and shelter remain available.

These concerns explain why relocation is generally not a practical population-management solution, not that tranquilization is impossible in every circumstance. Whether a specific program could be authorized in Ripley would need to be confirmed with DNR and legal counsel. Any proposed approach must be evaluated for legality, animal welfare, cost, and long-term effectiveness.

Why Feeding Deer Creates Problems

Under **Article 1145 of our City Code - Feeding of Deer**, **Section 1145.02 - Prohibition of Feeding**, the code states:

> "The owner or the occupier of land within the City who shall intentionally feed, cause to be fed or provide or make available food or other substances for the consumption by deer within the City, either on private property or on public property is in violation of this article."

According to guidance from the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, deer concentrating around feeding locations can:

- Increase the transmission of disease among wildlife populations.
- Alter natural feeding and migration patterns.
- Cause deer to become dependent on human-provided food sources.
- Increase deer concentrations near neighborhoods and roadways.
- Increase the likelihood of vehicle collisions and property damage.

Deer are well adapted to finding natural food sources throughout the year, including mast crops, native vegetation, browse, and agricultural resources. Allowing deer to forage naturally promotes healthier wildlife populations and a more balanced ecosystem.

Working Together for Safety and Healthy Wildlife

The City of Ripley appreciates the community's commitment to wildlife conservation and public safety. Residents are encouraged to enjoy observing deer and other wildlife from a distance while respecting city ordinances and state regulations.

By following Ripley City Code §505.25, respecting West Virginia Code §20-2-58, and avoiding the feeding of deer, residents can help maintain a safe community while supporting healthy and sustainable wildlife populations for future generations.

May God Bless our City and the State of West Virginia