

**NORTH RIDGEVILLE CITY COUNCIL
SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS – 6:00 p.m.
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2024**

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Chair Holly Swenk called the Safety Committee meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL:

Members present were Chairwoman Holly Swenk and Councilwoman Georgia Awig.

Councilman Martin DeVries was excused.

Also present: Mayor Kevin Corcoran, President Jason Jacobs, Councilman Bruce Abens, Councilman Clifford Winkel, Councilman Eric Shaffer, Police Chief Mike Freeman, and Assistant Clerk of Council.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Chair Holly Swenk asked if there were any corrections to the Safety Committee Meeting Minutes dated September 9, 2024. No discussion was offered. The meeting minutes stand approved as submitted.

New Business:

2025-121 An Ordinance Amending N.R.C.O. Section 618.16.1. – *Deer Hunting By Longbow Or Crossbow.*
(Introduced by Mayor Corcoran; First Reading on 09-02-2025)

The Mayor explained that the ordinance originated from discussions with the Chief of Police.

Chief Freeman described the current process as an administrative burden. One major improvement would be the creation of an online map, which would significantly reduce the time spent on administrative tasks. The current notification process requires mailing notices to adjacent landowners. He noted that large farm fields often bordered residential areas, resulting in the need to send 35 to 50 individual notifications. This involved manually addressing envelopes and customizing letters. The proposed change would allow for universal notification via an online map, enabling all residents—adjacent or not—to see if hunting was occurring nearby. This would enhance safety by ensuring broader awareness.

Chair Swenk shared that the Administrative Assistant at the Police Department had reported that 664 letters were sent out last year, each requiring individual customization. At a cost of \$0.78 per letter, the total expense amounted to \$517.92.

Chief Freeman added that the second signature adds a layer of review, reducing potential bias. If he denied a request, the Mayor would have the opportunity to reassess it, ensuring fairness and accountability.

Chair Swenk observed that certain parcels included limitations such as prohibiting hunting in specific corners. She believed an interactive map was a good interactive tool because throwing away mail is a possibility. Mrs. Swenk asked if sending out notification letters in the event of new applicants would be helpful.

Chief Freeman added that the online notification would only display parcel numbers on the city map. It would not include homeowner names, addresses, or any personal information about hunters. This approach would ensure privacy while still providing public safety information.

Councilwoman Awig agreed that the proposed changes would save time and money. She noted that many people no longer pay attention to their mail. She mentioned that in one community, new applicants were required to seek permission from adjacent property owners.

Chief Freeman expressed concern that such a requirement could be problematic, especially if neighbors opposed hunting. The Ordinance should be managed by the city government rather than relying on individual opinions.

Councilwoman Awig agreed with Chief Freeman. She asked about the Ordinance's vague wording on proximity to buildings, schools, and areas, and inquired if there was a specific distance requirement.

Chief Freeman responded that proximity was considered when applying restrictions. For example, if a school were nearby, hunting might be restricted to weekends. If the park was close by, hunting might be limited to late winter months like January and February when the park is less occupied. He clarified that restrictions were based more on timing and context than on fixed distances. If applicants were unwilling to comply with the restrictions, permits would not be signed, as the goal was to promote safety.

Councilwoman Awig then asked when hunting season began.

Chief Freeman confirmed that the hunting season begins on September 27, 2025, and mentioned that while this date can vary, the time of year remains consistent each year.

Councilwoman Awig inquired about the phrase "other reasonably identifiable health or safety concerns."

Chief Freeman explained that the language was open-ended, allowing for common-sense decisions on the use of properties to promote safety. For example, it was standard practice to ensure that elevated blinds in a residential neighborhood faced away from neighboring properties, and this could be dictated. If authorities visited a property and found violations, they could revoke permits based on these safety concerns.

Councilwoman Awig asked whether specific health conditions of adjacent property owners could be considered.

Chief Freeman clarified that while no particular health conditions are specified, the City responded to residents' concerns related to special needs. The goal was to balance the rights of landowners with the safety of the surrounding community. He noted that there have been no objections to a permit since he became the Police Chief.

Mayor Corcran explained the original intent behind the Ordinance. Years ago, the city experienced a high number of deer-related vehicle accidents, which caused property damage and raised safety concerns. The Ordinance was introduced to help control the deer population. The use of bows and crossbows was chosen for safety reasons, and elevated hunting positions were required to ensure arrows were aimed downward, reducing the risk of entering neighboring properties.

Councilwoman Awig acknowledged that the program was beneficial, especially compared to other cities that paid to cull deer populations. In North Ridgeville, the city benefited from hunters managing the population at no cost.

Chief Freeman clarified that the presence of a map did not imply public access to hunt on the parcels shown. He added that individuals still needed to be invited guests of the landowner and must carry written permission along with a valid hunting license. The map was not an open invitation for the public to hunt on private property.

Chair Swenk raised the question of what would happen if a housing development were built on a parcel after a permit had been issued.

Chief Freeman explained that permits were renewed annually, made permanent, and each application was reviewed every year. If a property became problematic, it would not be renewed, and the department would monitor it during hunting season.

Chair Swenk asked if any council members in the audience had questions.

Council President Jacobs expressed that while he was not opposed to deer hunting and supported the use of the map, he had concerns about removing individual notifications to surrounding parcels. He shared a personal experience from 13 years earlier when he saw someone in camouflage gear and what appeared to be a gun behind his house, and, not knowing the city allowed hunting. He called the police out of concern. He added that residents in large residential communities might be alarmed by such sightings without prior notice. President Jacobs suggested that even if the City moved to digital notifications, a final round of mailed letters could include a note informing residents that future notifications would be available online.

Chief Freeman confirmed that such a paragraph had been added to the letters sent during the previous hunting season, explaining the potential transition to computerized notifications due to the time-consuming nature of the task. He added that the City was stretched thin and hoped to use platforms like the Fire Department's Facebook page, the City's Facebook page, and the One Call system to spread awareness. The goal was not to reduce safety, but to modernize communication methods. He noted that public understanding would grow over time. The map would allow residents to self-check such information. He pointed out that while adjacent parcels received notifications, children playing just a few houses down might be unaware of hunting activity, which the map could help address.

Councilman Shaffer asked whether registering a parcel on the seasonal hunting map required residents to create an online account with passwords and authentication.

Chief Freeman assured him that the City handled all aspects of the registration process.

Chair Swenk and Chief Freeman added that residents needed to submit a form to the Police Department. The staff would verify that the land met requirements and that the applicant had no prior issues. A click on a parcel on the interactive map would reveal its number and location.

Councilman Shaffer asked whether the Ordinance might eventually allow for black powder hunting.

Chief Freeman responded that it would not, explaining that the current program was strictly limited to bow hunting.

Chair Swenk asked if other council members or the public had questions or concerns.

Chair Swenk acknowledged the tedious nature of the notification process, but suggested that for new applicants, the City should still mail notices to adjacent parcel owners. She asked how many new applicants typically applied each year.

Chief Freeman responded that there were only about four or five new applicants. He agreed that this could be considered but noted that hunting season was set to begin on September 27, 2025, and time was of the essence.

Councilwoman Awig noted that while the idea has merit, it might not be necessary. She pointed out that new residents moving near hunting parcels might not get notice if the previous owner renews the permit, and she suggested that the website should be the main source of information.

Councilman Winkel added that if the number of notifications were small and limited to the first year, it wouldn't be a major issue. He supported transitioning residents into the new system and suggested that the language in the Ordinance could be amended either in Committee or on the Council floor. Mr. Winkel also asked whether the City planned to use text message alerts to notify residents when the map was updated.

Chief Freeman confirmed that the City would use the One Call system to alert residents when the hunting map was live, along with posts on the Fire Department's Facebook page, the Police Department's page, and the City website.

Mayor Corcoran reminded everyone that any changes made during the meeting would not affect the current hunting season, as it would start before the next council meeting. The existing Ordinance would remain in effect for this season. He noted that while the City had not yet sent out notifications, staff had been waiting to see if the Ordinance would be amended. The earliest the revised ordinance could be adopted would be at the October council meeting.

Councilwoman Awig pointed out that last year's notification letters had included a paragraph stating that future notifications would be available via the City's website. She believed a letter notification may not be needed.

Chief Freeman noted what was said in last year's notification letter by mail: This will likely be the last year we will be sending a notification letter by mail. Next year, a map with registered properties will be on the City's website, www.nridgeville.org. This message had been sent to approximately 700 adjacent property owners.

Chair Swenk asked if anyone had further comments or questions.

Council President Jacobs noted that City Council had the option to suspend the bylaws and place the Ordinance on the agenda. Doing so would require adopting an emergency clause to ensure the Ordinance took effect before September 27, 2025, the start of hunting season.

Moved by Awig and seconded by Swenk to send Ordinance 2025-121 back to City Council for further consideration.

A voice vote was taken, and the motion carried.

Yes – 2 No – 0

No further business.

Adjournment:

Chair Swenk adjourned the meeting at 6:26 p.m.

Date Approved:

Fijabi Gallam, MMC
Assistant Clerk of Council