Conclusions and recommendations of Tom Frain as a member of the Deer Management Task Force

I would like to thank the Town Council for the opportunity to serve on this Task Force. It was a pleasure to get to meet and share ideas with neighbors that I had not yet met and others I have known for decades. Al Johnson structured the meetings so that discussion was allowed without anyone dominating and directing the conversation in a negative direction.
The Task Force was charged with a variety of topics to research and draw conclusions on. I have brief comments on most with emphasis on item 2C.

Assess and interpret the data on the number of deer in Ogden Dunes based upon a flyover deer count.

2. Research:

A. Optimal numbers of deer relative to community size, geography, and description.
Relationship between mice, ticks, deer and Lyme Disease, including tracking the incidence of Lyme Disease in Ogden Dunes, neighboring communities, the region & nationally.
Relationship between deer and destruction of vegetation, including tracking the impact of deer on vegetation and undergrowth in Ogden Dunes.
Available methods for controlling mice & ticks, including costs & results achieved.
Available methods for controlling deer, including costs, advantages/disadvantages, permitting required, results achieved, and public safety issues.
Do nothing
Birth control
Trap and relocate
Cull by rifle or bow and arrow
Other? Hunting? Fencing in town?
National Park Service deer management plans for National Lakeshore and Inland Marsh

3. Community Education:

A. Personal and community tick control & management.
B. Lyme Disease mitigation.

Item1

The aerial infrared deer count report performed on 2-12-2012 shows an Ogden Dunes deer population of approximately fifty with an additional fifty just outside the town limits. It is unreasonable and contrary to the understood behavior of deer to believe that all of the approximately one hundred deer do not migrate into and forage within the town limits of Ogden Dunes at some time during the year.

Item 2A

The optimal numbers of deer relative to our community size, geography, and description depends on the evidence of negative factors that can be attributed to the deer population.
The answer to this question should be determined after considering the incidence of disease (Lyme…etc.) affecting the town residents, the level of damage to the native and non-native vegetation. The prevalence of soil erosion from deer foraging and the total number of deer that will reasonably migrate in and out of Ogden Dunes to forage. An honest assessment of these factors can only conclude that the deer population is currently too high. We have been calculating the area of our town to be about one square mile. Practically, this is overestimation. While a deer population in the range of 10-15 per square mile is optimal. The area available for deer to forage in the town of Ogden Dunes needs to be calculated by subtracting from the whole, all the streets and developed residential lots. This is a realistic measure of the size and therefore the carrying capacity of Ogden Dunes for deer.

Item 2B

Research shows the difficulty of eradicating Lyme disease. To reduce the incidence of Lyme disease the population of the primary reservoir host, white-footed mice must be reduced. The deer are an essential and

preferred link in the life cycle of the deer tick, which transfers Lyme disease. Deer are the preferred provider of the crucial third "blood meal" for the adult tick before it lays eggs and begins the lifecycle again. Other sources of this blood meal such as people, pets, raccoons, fox etc. are not preferred sources simply because they have the ability or habit of checking and cleaning themselves of parasites like ticks. Logically reducing the number of deer will reduce the available food the ticks need to regenerate therefore reducing the tick population and reducing the potential spread of Lyme disease.

Item 2C

The relationship between deer and destruction of vegetation is well known to the gardeners and landscapers in Ogden Dunes. The overpopulation of deer and their overgrazing is causing the fragile and unique native vegetation of Ogden Dunes to decline or disappear completely. Ecologist, John Ervin of Valparaiso Indiana prepared a document on 11-18-2011 titled "A Snapshot Assessment of the Vegetation of the town of Ogden Dunes". I suggest this research is used as a baseline of information as we move to conserve the native vegetation as well as the non-native vegetation of individual property owners. This type of research should be performed annually and be expanded to include more detail about the success or failure of our deer management efforts.

A June 2008 report compiled by Thomas J. Rawinski documents the present conditions, future problems and solutions to deer overpopulation similar to those in our community. Many valuable ideas are contained in this report and ought to be adopted in practice and in understanding. One idea is the use of "exclosures" to demonstrate visually and tangibly to our community the loss of forest diversity we have already suffered due to deer overpopulation.

"We think we know our forests. But in Pennsylvania and many other parts of the Northeast, deer overabundance has changed our forests so much and for so long that we truly don't know how our forests would look without too many deer. I walk inside a fence that's been up for three or four years in the springtime, and I am amazed at the wildflowers and seedlings I find."
The young oaks pictured below clearly illustrate
Dr. Stout's point.

Oak seedlings and young saplings thrive within a deer "exclosure".
Orange County, NY, (Photo by Matt Paul, New
York Department of Environmental Conservation)

The current deer overpopulation problem is causing problems on many fronts in our community. The undeveloped woodlands in town are not regenerating and a unique and diverse ecosystem is being transformed into a collection of invasive species and other plants the deer will not eat, yet. Private property is being damaged and feces is being left behind by the foraging deer in areas that children play and adults garden. Parasites are being allowed to increase and spread disease. Civil discourse among neighbors has been strained. Finances have been wasted. Organizations have been formed and fundraisers have taken place for neighbors to bring legal action against neighbors. Shortsightedly we have failed to heed a simple truth that a house divided against it cannot stand. Closing our minds and defiantly refusing to accept and implement a cull to help resolve the deer problem hinders the usefulness of all the methods that will be needed to solve this problem. A holistic approach that is well coordinated and supported by all the residents of our community is the solution to our town's deer problem. A visionary and directly applicable statement was made by a man that has studied deer impacts for decades.

"The current density is producing devastating and long-term effects on forests. Foraging deer "vacuum up" the seedlings of highly preferred species, reducing plant diversity and in the extreme, creating near mono-cultures. It could take decades or even hundreds of years to restore forests. . . . Deer have the capacity of changing forest ecology, by changing the direction of forest vegetation development. It doesn't matter what forest values you want to preserve or enhance—whether deer hunting, animal rights, timber, recreation, or ecological integrity—deer are having dramatic, negative effects on all the values everyone holds dear."

Forest Service Researcher Stephen Horsley (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service 2004)

The complete report can be found online using the following link:
HYPERLINK "http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/special_interests/white_tailed_deer.pdf" http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/special_interests/white_tailed_deer.pdf

Item 2D

Our discussion leads me to think the best method for controlling mice and ticks is to control their habitat. Very good suggestions are to expand the town leaf pickup program and discourage the practice of putting leaves and branches in the woods. Begin a controlled burn program inside the town limits and implement a long term management plan of the woodland areas under the control of the ODHA, the Ogden Dunes Park Department and the Town of Ogden Dunes.

Item 2E

There is only one affordable and humane method to reduce the deer population and that is to cull a select number of deer using sharpshooters and rifles.
Some residents intentionally and unintentionally feed the deer which will make methods of controlling the deer such as fencing and repellents more difficult to implement.

Item 2F

The National Park Service deer management plans for National Lakeshore and Inland Marsh was announced on May 4, 2012 and Alternative **D** approved, this was their preferred alternative which includes lethal means.

Conclusion

I have been known to state the obvious and at times it's helpful, hopefully this will be one of those times. Our town has a philosophical difference about what we should and should not do about the Deer issue. This issue must be resolved in an ethical manner using the evidence to determine what the right course of action is and what the wrong course of action is. This issue is about people. It's about the consequences that men, women, boys and girls experience due to a wildlife population that is carrying disease and has grown too large. Too few of us are willing to accept that in a town with a growing deer population and no controls on their population, other than starvation, we must step into the role of controlling their growth in a humane manner. To do otherwise would be irresponsible and the wrong course of action.
One side of the issue has an absolute objection to culling the deer herd. They argue from a quasi

theological position that implies a type of immorality is being committed if the deer herd is culled. Ambiguous proclamations like “we value all life” can mean anything from a mosquito is as valuable as a human to a political pro-life statement. What it seems to mean is that under no circumstance will they ever be in favor of managing the deer herd through a cull. The other side just wants the problems resolved in an efficient, thoughtful and effective manner. Many on this side think that reducing the deer herd alone will return us to the way life used to be here in the dunes before the deer population was out of control. While this may have been true a few years ago there is a new factor in the equation, Lyme disease. So in addition to lowering the deer population we must take cultural action to control the spread of this disease. Good ideas and solutions have been proposed by residents on both sides of the issue through the Deer Management Task Force.
The Task Force has also shown the detrimental ecological impact of the deer herd. I will go out on a limb and say that the dynamic environment of Ogden Dunes was a factor with most of us when we decided to live here. The ever growing deer herd is changing that environment for the worse and changing the way we interact with the environment.

A hundred years ago deer did not exist in Indiana. They were reintroduced as a game animal to feed a growing human population as more people settled in our state. This original intent of deer being managed and harvested for the benefit of people can be realized again today as a benefit from our large and ever growing deer herd. While the benefit in the past was food on the table, the benefit today is conservation of our environment and reduction in the spread of disease. History shows that the right course of action is to manage the deer herd and harvest a select few.

As residents of Ogden Dunes try to live with an ever growing deer herd we are noticing the conflict that it creates. We have tried for years to adapt the vegetation around our homes to the “taste” of the deer. The idea of installing “deer proof” plants has limited success because the “taste” of the deer changes. At one time plant species such as Yew, Arborvitae, English Ivy, Sedum and Rhododendron were installed by residents because they were thought to be “deer proof”. All these species of plants as well as others are now regularly being eaten by deer. It is not so much that the deer “taste” has changed but that the deer herd has not been managed, the population has grown so large that they must forage on non-desirable species in order to survive. If we do not manage the deer herd this trend will continue to the detriment of the deer and the frustration of the residents of Ogden Dunes. Practicality shows us that the right course of action is to manage the deer herd and harvest a select few.

All residents of Ogden Dunes have inherited a diverse and unique environment from the previous generation of homeowners. By design, Ogden Dunes is situated in zone 6 of the USDA plant hardiness map. This zone is only a couple miles wide along the lakeshore, begins near Gary and extends into Michigan. This zone doesn’t begin again until southern Indiana near Brown County. Because of our unique climate zone in the relatively far northern latitude a diverse eco-system has developed. This eco-system is being directly threatened by our large and ever growing deer herd. Fortunately, as nature gets out of balance and too many deer inhabit our small town, we can make use of the abundance. The deer cull last winter was a great example of some in our town showing their generosity and donating money to have the deer processed. They donated hundreds of pounds of deer meat to the local food pantry which was distributed to needy families. Anyone who has donated to or worked at the food pantry knows what a blessing this was and could be again. For future residents and the conservation of our dynamic and beautiful environment we must choose the right course of action and manage the deer herd and harvest a select few.