



Office of the Town Manager
Frank Cassidy

STAFF REPORT

Warrenton Town Council

Carter Nevill, Mayor
Roy Francis, Ward 1
William Semple, Ward 2
Larry Kovalik, Ward 3
Michele O'Halloran, Ward 4
Eric Gagnon, Ward 5
Paul Mooney, At Large
David McGuire, At Large

Town Council Meeting Date:	January 14, 2025
Agenda Title:	Request from Fauquier High School – Buzzard Dispersal
Requested Action:	Hold and Work Session and Make a Decision
Department / Agency Lead:	Community Development
Staff Lead:	Heather Jenkins, Zoning Administrator

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dr. David Ferguson, Principal of Fauquier High School, is requesting that the Town Council approve the School's use of hanging vulture carcasses in effigy so as to disperse vultures that perch on and around agricultural structures and harass farm animals that are housed at the School.

BACKGROUND

Fauquier High School, located at 705 Waterloo Road, includes an agricultural education area where various farm animals are housed. Vultures are congregating on and around the agricultural structures and pens, harassing farm animals and defecating on surfaces that students and staff contact. Vultures are known to harass farm animals; harassment by groups of vultures can lead to animal stress and even death due to pecking injuries to vulnerable organs like the eyes or infection in wounds. Vulture feces can contain bacteria, including coliform bacteria, as well as viruses like the Bird Flu; vulture droppings on the ground, surfaces and water sources can lead to human and animal illness. (Avery & Lowney, 2016)

Vultures are protected by the international Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, part of the U.S. Department of the Interior. As a protected species, vultures may not be killed, trapped or their nests disturbed unless specifically authorized by the federal government. The Wildlife Services division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services, allows for several non-lethal methods to deter or disperse vultures that roost or gather in large numbers so as to negatively impact farm animals, such as modifying roosting areas to be unattractive and using scare devices like sound, light, and effigies. These methods are detailed in the attached *Wildlife Damage Management Technical Series – Vultures*, provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. (Avery & Lowney, 2016)

Ms. Susan Hilleary of the Agriculture Department at Fauquier High School contacted the U.S. Department of Agriculture regarding the large number of vultures that gather at the agricultural area on School grounds, and discussed this issue with Mr. Daniel Dawson, Wildlife Specialist with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. The scare tactic of hanging vulture effigies around the agricultural area was chosen as the best method of dispersing the vultures, where the USDA biologist will supply and install the effigies on the School property.

Vulture effigies involve hanging real or fake vulture carcasses around the vulture roosting or gathering area; these effigies remain in place for several weeks until the effigy deteriorates through natural weathering

processes. Because the effigy is a passive method of dispersing vultures, no human action is required after normal operating hours for the School, such as nights or weekends, and generally shows positive results within several days. (Avery & Lowney, 2016)

At the direction of Dr. David Ferguson, Principal of Fauquier High School, Ms. Hilleary contacted staff to request the Town's approval for using effigies to disperse the vultures at the School agricultural area. Dr. Ferguson's letter of request and Ms. Hilleary's detailed justification are included with this staff report along with information about vulture dispersal and emails with the USDA biologist Mr. Dawson.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff requests that the Town Council hold a work session to discuss this matter, and then make a decision to approve or deny this request during Council's regular meeting. A Resolution to approve the request is included as an attachment to this staff report.

Service Level/Collaborative Impact

No impact on Town services will be generated by this request; the School will work directly with the USDA to install and monitor the effigies.

Policy Direction/Warrenton Plan 2040

This request will have no impact on achieving the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. However, deterring vultures from roosting on/around the agricultural area will help to ensure the health and safety of students and staff at Fauquier High School by preventing contact with bird droppings.

Fiscal Impact

No impact on Town finances will be generated by this request; the School will pay the associated cost for the USDA biologist to install the effigies.

Legal Impact

There is no known legal impact to the Town associated with approval of this request.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment A – Wildlife Damage Management Technical Series – Vultures
Avery, M. & Lowney, M. (2016) Vultures. Wildlife Damage Management Technical Series. USDA, APHIS, WS, National Wildlife Research Center, Gainesville, FL. 17p.
- Attachment B – Request Materials – Letter of Request, Justification, and Background Information by Dr. Ferguson and Ms. Hilleary.
- Attachment C – Resolution of Approval