

Memo



Date: April 8, 2010

File: 1250-01

To: City Manager

From: City Clerk

Subject: Urban Chickens

Report Prepared by: Deputy City Clerk

Recommendation:

THAT Council receives the report of the City Clerk on Urban Chickens, dated April 8, 2010 for information.

Purpose:

In the spring of 2009, Council directed staff to bring forward a report on the benefits and challenges of allowing up to four urban hens on lots smaller than one-half acre in the City of Kelowna. Since that time, staff has been in contact with Interior Health (IHA) and the BC Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BCSPCA); researched various municipalities; and been approached by interested members of the public.

Background:

Currently, the City of Kelowna allows up to ten hens on lots in the City with a minimum of one-half acre of land. Several municipalities in BC have, and continue to, consider proposals to allow chickens in urban areas, including the City of Kamloops, Vernon, Burnaby, and Vancouver. Some municipalities, including Richmond and Prince George, have similar regulations to the City of Kelowna, and permit hens on a minimum ½ acre lot. Others, including the City of Victoria and the City of Coquitlam, have no minimum requirement and allow a specific number of hens on any size lot.

Community Benefits:

Interior Health provided staff with a document for Council consideration (Appendix A) regarding potential health benefits and risks, and recommended protocols should Council consider allowing urban chickens. While supportive of the high nutritional value of free-range eggs and the learning experience for families, IHA did state concerns related to the level of care practiced, and minimum standards imposed, in order to safely house backyard chickens.

While there has been no formal public consultation process at this time, there have been various members of the public who have come forward to provide comments and supporting information that reflect the debates and considerations in other municipalities. Staff has identified the following common themes of interest that support the keeping of urban chickens:

1. Educational interest on food security and origins of food
2. Provide fresh, high-quality protein eggs

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be a stylized 'R' or similar character.

3. Reduce waste by consuming kitchen scraps
4. Free and nutrient-rich compost to fertilize gardens
5. Consume garden pests, bugs and weeds
6. Local food production narrows the carbon footprint

Community Challenges:

The importance of proper care and maintenance are themes that have been raised by both proponents and opponents regarding the keeping of urban chickens. Risks identified by IHA include the transmission of pathogens, improper disposal of waste, food safety and poor animal welfare practices. IHA feels the risks identified can be mitigated with an appropriate level of education on the keeping of urban chickens, and with appropriate regulation and ongoing monitoring and enforcement.

Key messages from the BCSPCA (Appendix B) are relatively similar to those identified by the IHA, with an emphasis on knowledge and experience related to the humane care of urban chickens. The BCSPCA also suggests the urban environment, with the “risk of attack from coyotes, raccoons, birds of prey and skunks,” is incompatible with the keeping of chickens.

A few members of the public have provided comments based on their own personal experience, and have identified concerns, including:

1. Enclosure specifications -number of hours of light required
2. Proper training similar to Food Safe or Serving it Right certifications
3. Full time care, 7 days a week
4. Transmission of disease - wild birds
5. Predators including feral cats, magpies, raccoons, skunks and coyotes
6. Disposal of hens both living (beyond egg-producing years) and deceased

Since 2002, there have been approximately eighteen bylaw complaints regarding the keeping of chickens, with half of these complaints related to legal-sized properties which permit the keeping of chickens under the current bylaw. The complaints vary from lot size (9), to noise (7), site of chicken coop (3), chickens-at-large (2) and odour (1).

Considerations:

Staff has held preliminary internal discussions on the necessary requirements for a policy framework to appropriately regulate backyard chickens, both for those who would participate and their neighbours. The following areas would require bylaw amendments addressing the following areas:

- Inclusion/exclusion of specific urban zones;
- establishment of a permitting system with appropriate building regulations;
- Urban Hen registry or permitting system
- humane treatment including minimum enclosure standards; adequate ventilation and light; shelter and protection; education
- environmental concerns, including odour, composting and soil impacts related to litter and manure;
- an appropriate mechanism for the disposal of waste; and
- end of (productive) life; including hens as pets; veterinarian-assisted euthanasia; local abattoir services.

General discussions to date regarding regulation and enforcement indicate that appropriate resources and training may be required, along with coordination with other agencies, including the Ministry of Environment regarding appropriate waste management, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency regarding bio-security.

Conclusion:

In summary, staff acknowledges that there may be differing perspectives in the community regarding whether or not the City should allow individuals to raise and keep chickens in the urban environment. Resource impacts on staffing and budgets would depend upon the number of people who chose to keep urban chickens should the requirements for lot-size be relaxed. Staff is unsure of the level of interest in keeping urban hens in the City of Kelowna. The financial and resourcing impact rely in large part in how many individuals in urban areas would take up raising chickens, should Council decide to permit this.

Internal Circulation:

Land Use Management
Development Services
Bylaw Services
Community and Media Relations
Utility Services

Financial/Budgetary Considerations:

A more detail review of costs is necessary as additional resources may be required to both administer and enforce a policy framework and amendments to the affected bylaws.

External Agency/Public Comments:

Interior Health Authority
BC Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BCSPCA)

Existing Policy:

Kelowna Noise and Disturbances Control Bylaw No. 6647
Residential Nuisance Bylaw No. 7782
Animal Poultry Regulation and Animal Pound Bylaw No. 5421
Zoning Bylaw No. 8000
Solid Waste Management Bylaw No. 10106
Ticket Information Utilization Bylaw No. 6550

Considerations not applicable to this report:

Communications Considerations:

Legal/Statutory Authority:

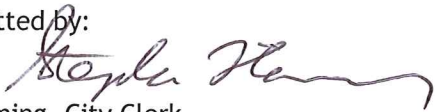
Legal/statutory Procedural Requirements:

Personnel Implications:

Technical Requirements:

Alternate Recommendation:

Submitted by:



S. Fleming, City Clerk

Approved for inclusion:



R. Mayne, Director Corporate Services

CC: Director, Land Use Management
Director, Community and Media Relations



Interior Health

Backyard Chickens in the Urban Environment

Interior Health's Public Health sector has prepared this document to guide your council's review of the health implications of community residents raising chickens in their backyards for egg production.

This document is for informational purposes. There is evidence to be found on both the positive and negative aspects of raising backyard chickens. However, the evidence does not strongly favour any one position.

There are some potential benefits to food security by allowing backyard chickens, as well as potential disease, food safety and nuisance issues to take into consideration. Disease transmission, food safety and nuisance issues can be mitigated with proper hygiene and controls related to handling of chickens and eggs and proper maintenance of the surrounding environment.

Thus, Interior Health neither supports, nor is opposed to, allowing backyard chickens within municipal boundaries, if appropriate protocols are in place and enforced.

Points for Consideration

The following are specific items that should be considered regarding the potential benefits and risks:

- Risk for pathogen transmission (e.g. Salmonella and Campylobacter) is present, but can be mitigated with proper housing and hygiene when handling chickens and eggs.
- The risk of avian influenza development is not appreciably increased by backyard hen. Urban hen keepers should be encouraged to follow the advice of *CFIA: Bird Health Basics - How to Prevent and Detect Disease in Backyard Flocks and Pet Birds*.
- Backyard chickens present a learning experience for families and neighbours and foster an understanding of where food comes from. Children learn first-hand about food, biology, geography and community.
- Concerns related to noise, odour and fecal waste disposal can be minimized if proper practices are followed. Where properly set up, composting of chicken manure and bedding is a possibility. It should be recognized that failure to control aesthetic concerns may increase opposition to urban agriculture and lead to land use conflicts.
- Having chickens allows families to know how the hens producing the eggs have been raised, fed and treated.
- Backyard chickens allow regular, convenient access to eggs that are of higher nutritional value than non-free range eggs.

Protocols

Should Kelowna City Council allow backyard chickens, Interior Health's Public Health sector encourages municipalities to introduce protocols as part of bylaws that permit backyard chickens. Protocols should:

- require mandatory chicken enclosures and construction standards
- limit the number of birds per household
- prohibit mixing of birds
- establish minimum feed control practices and enclosure cleaning practices
- outline safe disposal of waste (surplus eggs, feces and carcass)
- include rules to guide the appropriate keeping of chickens, including animal welfare, hygiene practices and transmission of chicken-related diseases
- establish limits on egg distribution (limit to personal use) and prohibition of sale of eggs
- prohibit home-based slaughter of chickens
- prohibit sale of chicken meat

Municipalities should also consider the implications for bylaw infrastructure related to the ongoing monitoring of the chicken bylaw (i.e. bylaw enforcement officers).

For Further Information

CFIA: Bird Health Basics - How to Prevent and Detect Disease in Backyard Flocks and Pet Birds
<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/animal/hasan/disemala/avflu/bacdoc/floeele.shtml>

University of Maine Poultry Facts - Tips for Egg Safety from Farm to Table For Small Poultry Flock Owners.
<http://www.umaine.edu/livestock/Publications/TipsForEggSafety.htm> Accessed April 15, 2009.

Harrison, John. *The Poultry Pages - Rats and Other Vermin around Chickens*.
http://www.poultry.allotment.org.uk/Chicken_a/chicken-rat-vermin.php. Accessed April 26, 2009.

Gov't of Alberta, Agriculture and Rural Development. *Checklist for Fly Control in Poultry Facilities*.
[http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$Department/deptdocs.nsf/all/epw12257/\\$FILE/poultry.pdf](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$Department/deptdocs.nsf/all/epw12257/$FILE/poultry.pdf). Accessed April 26, 2009.

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. *Factsheet: Odour Control on Livestock and Poultry Farms*. December 2003.
<http://www.omafr.gov.on.ca/english/engineer/facts/03-111.htm>. Accessed April 26, 2009.

Ohio State University. Ohio State University Extension Fact Sheet. *Veterinary Preventive Medicine: Predators of Poultry*.
<http://ohioline.osu.edu/vme-fact/0022.html>. Accessed April 26, 2009.

Mother Earth News *The Community Chicken Project*
<http://www.motherearthnews.com/eggs.aspx>

Pappas A.C. et al. Interspecies variation in yolk selenium concentrations among eggs of free-living birds: The effect of phylogeny.
Journal of Trace Elements in Medicine and Biology 20(3) 2006, 155-160. www.sciencedirect.com

BCSPCA Key Messages on Urban Chickens

March, 2009

The BC SPCA is supportive of urban consumers seeking alternatives to conventional eggs from hens housed in battery cages.

However, we do not feel that it is an acceptable alternative for individuals with little to no knowledge or experience about chicken care to keep them in their backyards in an urban environment for the reasons detailed below.

Instead, we encourage people to support SPCA Certified and other certified cage-free farmers who have professional expertise in the humane raising of chickens, by purchasing their eggs.

Our concerns regarding the keeping of urban chickens include the following:

1. As is an issue with exotic animals, potential owners may not have knowledge or skills necessary to provide adequate care. Examples include:
 - Ability to recognize common symptoms of disease, injury, and parasitic infection in chickens and knowledge of what to do to address them.
 - Ability to humanely euthanize a chicken, or access to someone who can.
2. Resources necessary for good health of these birds are not readily available in an urban environment. Examples include:
 - Access to veterinary care. Would any city vet allow a chicken into their practice?
 - Handling and transportation issues of chickens to veterinary facilities.
 - Access to suitable nutrition. Pet store bird feed may not meet the nutritional needs of these birds. Where will owners purchase adequate feed?
3. Aspects of the urban environment are not compatible with keeping backyard hens. Examples include:
 - Risk of attack from urban wildlife, such as coyotes, raccoons, birds of prey, and skunks.
 - Risk of attack from domesticated dogs or cats, which may have the unintended side-effect of encouraging aggressive behaviour in dogs.
 - Attraction of rats to feed on chicken feed, or to predate on chicks.
 - Lack of adequate disposal options for chicken waste and carcasses.
4. Vancouver's Animal Control facility and the BC SPCA's Vancouver Animal Shelter do not have suitable facilities to house chickens that will have to be seized by individuals who contravene sections of the bylaw or the BC Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.
5. There are risks associated with chickens contracting avian flu. Should there be an outbreak, pet birds may also be included in the cull of urban chickens.
6. Relating to the care of the birds, hens live 8-10 years, yet their productive egg-laying diminishes significantly after the first year. What will people do with birds that have gone beyond their egg-laying time-frame?