

City of North Vancouver

141 West 14th Street
North Vancouver, BC, V7M 1H9
Canada

February 2, 2012

Dear Mayor Mussatto and Councillors,

As a group of North Vancouver residents, the undersigned have an interest in sustainable living, urban green spaces and food security. We present to you our proposal for the amendment of the current by-laws that prohibit the keeping of backyard hens.

A growing list of major metropolitan cities across North America, such as Vancouver, Victoria, Saanich, Burnaby, New Westminster, Seattle, Portland and even New York City (to name but a few), have allowed urban backyard hens. In these communities, urban backyard hens have enhanced environmental sustainability, food security, education, animal welfare practices and overall community building. This proposal will examine each of these areas in detail to assist council members with any questions they might have.

This proposal was composed for both the City and The District of North Vancouver as the undersigned have individuals residing in both communities and will be presenting this proposal to both councils concurrently. We recognize each council as independent authorities and respect each will make decisions based on their communities' individual and unique considerations.

Being that Vancouver has been one of the latest cities to allow for backyard hens, and is also most similar to North Vancouver in environment and considerations, this proposal will draw heavily upon its by-laws, as well as the Vancouver city staff recommendations that went before the Vancouver City Council in order to create their current by-law. This proposal will speak to those recommendations, but also to the recommendations of this group, as some issues may present variances since both the City and District of North Vancouver are certainly distinct and unique communities. Some of these varied recommendations may be modeled on other communities' by-laws.

The major areas addressed in the proposal will be:

- Public health concerns such as Avian flu, salmonella, and pest and predator control
- Number of hens per property
- Setbacks from dwelling on lots and lot lines as well as size restrictions on hen enclosures
- Perceived nuisance issues such as noise & odor
- The humane treatment and care of hens including housing requirements

We, the undersigned citizens of North Vancouver, hope you will find this proposal helpful in your decision making process and we are sure the majority of stakeholders will find this a positive change for the community that will also reflect the City and District of North Vancouver's sustainable living and environmental mandates. Please do not hesitate to contact any of the undersigned with questions or concerns. We look forward to presenting at the April 2, 2012 council meeting.

Best regards,

The Undersigned members of *CLUCK (Canadian Liberated Urban Chicken Klub)*

This page contained the names and addresses of CLUCK members.

BACKYARD HEN PROPOSAL

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY TABLE

Subject	Proposed Provision
Zoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hen keeping will be allowed in all residential zones, including multi-family • Keepers of hens will reside on the lot containing the hen enclosure • Hen keeping will be prohibited in commercial, industrial, and comprehensive development zones • Hen facilities will be prohibited, for the time being, in public parks and community gardens • All zones be subject to same requirements
Number and Type of Chickens Allowed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum 6-8 hens per lot • Minimum of 2 hens per flock • Hens younger than four months prohibited (pullets only) • No roosters
Siting and Size Restrictions for Hen Enclosures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enclosures will be kept back 1 m (3.28 ft) from the property lines on all sides • Enclosures will be kept only in back and side yards • On grade level • 9.2 m² (100 ft²) floor area limit, and a 2 m (6.56 ft) height limit
Housing Enclosure Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hens need an enclosed run and house, with a locking door for safety insurance from potential predators (raccoons, skunks, bears) • Minimum space requirement of 0.37 m² (4 ft²) of coop space and 0.92 m² (10 ft²) of outdoor enclosure per hen • Minimum of one perch measuring at least 15 cm (6 in) per bird • at least one nest box • 1 cm (½ in) hardware cloth be used on outside runs; secured at the base or buried 30 cm under the ground all the way around the coop to insure protection from potential burrowing predators (rodents, raccoons, skunks) • at least one nest box • We strongly recommend a course on how to construct a secure coop; such as those offered by Duncan Martin or through Maplewood Farm • We have a website, www.chickensinnorthvancouver.com, that offers many links and resources such as instructional videos, documents and forums

<p>Basic Care and Humane Treatment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Humane treatment of farm animals is commonly defined by the “five freedoms,” as developed by the Farm Animal Welfare Council, an advisory body to the UK government. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition 2) Freedom from discomfort 3) Freedom from pain, injury and disease 4) Freedom to express normal behavior 5) Freedom from fear and distress ● We strongly recommend a course on chicken ownership; such as those offered by Duncan Martin or through Maplewood Farm ● A minimum of 2 hens per flock
<p>Sanitation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enclosure must be maintained in sanitary conditions free from unpleasant odor and substances ● Recommended that manure and scraps be removed at least weekly ● Manure may be flushed down the toilet or composted, not allowed in North Vancouver city or district disposal service at this time ● Storage of manure/compost must be within fully enclosed structure, such as the compost bins sold by the North Vancouver Recycling Program
<p>Other Regulations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Slaughtering or attempts at euthanasia prohibited by those who keep hens ● Chicken carcasses are not allowed in City or District garbage containers ● Voluntary registry ● Voluntary foster/adoption registry
<p>Reasonable Access</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● By-law needs to be open enough that hen ownership is possible and not too expensive ● Maplewood Farm course will be under \$50 ● Our website, www.chickensinnorthvancouver.com, which is free to use, offers many links and resources such as instructional videos, documents and forums

<p>Common Misconception</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Noise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hens only vocalize for approximately 5 minutes after laying an egg ○ Hens make less noise than dogs or even human conversations ○ Roosters will not be permitted ● Odour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A frequently cleaned coop has no odor that can be detected outside the immediate vicinity ○ Manure can be composted in compost bins in residents' yards ● Pest and Predator Attraction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A well-built coop will ensure predators cannot access chickens, feed or eggs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Solid henhouse construction as insurance from potential predators (raccoons, skunks, bears) ▪ Hardware cloth on the run, buried 30 cm under the ground all the way around the coop to insure protection from potential burrowing pests and predators ▪ Bulk feed stored indoors
<p>Public Health Concerns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Avian Influenza <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Avian Influenza is transmitted via direct contact bird droppings, feathers, and body fluids ○ The greatest risk of Avian Influenza infection for humans appears to be through the slaughtering of live infected poultry, which will not be legal ● Salmonella <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Salmonella is bacteria in the intestine of an infected animal. ○ Salmonella is spread through contact with fecal matter ○ Proper hand-washing and manure handling will eliminate Salmonella transmission
<p>Enforcement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No facilities would need to be built ● Confiscated chickens would spend 24-48 hours in a dog/cat kennel at the Animal Shelter and then be fostered or adopted by a willing urban chicken owner ● Registration for this voluntary program would be coordinated through our website

INTRODUCTION AND BENEFITS

Although prohibited, some backyard hens are kept in the City and District, and many more individuals have expressed interest in keeping them. Enthusiasm for urban chickens has grown throughout North America in the past few years, as increased attention is paid to issues of sustainability, food security, and consumption of locally grown food. During this time, many North American cities have enacted or updated by-laws to allow the keeping of chickens. A summary of by-laws in select North American cities, including Lower Mainland municipalities, has been provided with this package.

With a growing awareness of environmentally-friendly and sustainable living practices that include food security and concern for animal welfare, the trend of keeping backyard hens has been rapidly increasing throughout North America. Even before the so-called “free-range” or “organic eggs” in the grocery store hit \$4 a dozen (now upwards of an astonishing \$8 per dozen), thousands of people around the country were discovering the benefits of raising their own backyard hens.

Besides the obvious benefit of a regular supply of eggs, here are several benefits of keeping backyard hens¹.

- 1) **Eggs from well-tended backyard chickens are healthier.** Factory farmed chickens live their lives without ever touching the soil or being allowed to hunt and peck for bugs. They are fed an unnatural and unvaried diet. These environmental conditions are designed to produce eggs quickly and cheaply in the factory farm. But the result is an egg that is less nutritious than one produced by chickens allowed to exercise, peck for bugs and engage in their natural chicken-y behavior.

In contrast to factory farm eggs, eggs from backyard chickens have 25 percent more vitamin E, a third more vitamin A and 75 percent more beta carotene. They also have significantly more omega-3 fatty acids than factory farmed eggs.

- 2) **Eggs from backyard chickens are tastier.** Eggs purchased in the grocery store can be weeks—even months—old. As these eggs age, air seeps into the naturally porous eggshell, degrading not just the nutrition, but also the taste and affecting the consistency of the egg.

Fresh eggs from backyard chickens have firmer whites and bright orange yolks. (That’s the beta carotene). But the real difference is in the taste. Backyard chicken eggs have a more robust taste that is difficult to describe.

- 3) **Chickens are natural composters from start to finish.** Chickens love to eat table scraps and just about anything you were otherwise going to put in your compost. On the other end of things, chicken droppings are high in nitrogen. Added to the compost bin they add more nitrogen and improve your compost. Chicken manure is a highly regarded additive to soil for most gardeners and is sold in garden centers regularly.
- 4) **Chickens provide natural insect and weed control.** As they hunt and peck around the yard, chickens gobble up grubs, earwigs and other bugs, treating our garden pests as tasty, nutritious treats. They are also voracious weed eaters – dandelions being one of their favourites.

¹ Gardening Examiner, Robin Ripley. www.examiner.com/gardening

- 5) **Their scratching for bugs is good for the soil.** Chickens are enthusiastic foragers and will scratch around in the leaves and soil searching for the tastiest morsels. As they do, they aerate the soil and break down larger pieces of vegetation with their sharp talons, accelerating the decomposition process.
- 6) **Chickens are fun and interesting.** Every chicken has a personality—and lots of it. They aren't particularly smart, but when properly socialized, chickens can be very friendly and even do tricks.
- 7) **Backyard chickens provide lessons for children about responsibility and where food comes from.** Tending chickens is pleasurable and even easier than caring for a dog. There is no walking the chickens or even giving them a bath. But chickens do require daily food and fresh water. The coop must be cleaned and the chickens inspected regularly to ensure they are healthy. Children can participate in all of these chicken-related chores.

Of course, the eggs must also be collected daily. The average laying hen will produce about 300 eggs a year, but production depends much on the breed and the environment. The happier the hens, the more they will produce. A child's favorite chicken-related chore is bound to be collecting eggs.
- 8) **The keeping of backyard hens allows hens to live out their lives in humane conditions with caring and attentive owners.** The conditions most chickens are forced to exist in, large commercially run operations, are deplorable. Chickens are housed by the thousands, crammed three or four to a cage. As mentioned, most of these hens never see the light of day or touch the earth throughout their entire lives.
- 9) **The keeping of backyard hens fits into environmentally-sustainable living practices such as the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, the 100 Mile Diet, and food security.** It is also extremely cost-effective and requires very little start-up capital. It also educates the owners, their children and neighbours, on animal husbandry, farming techniques and food production. This contributes to a more aware community, and neighbourhood connection.
- 10) **The keeping of backyard hens builds community through the sharing of education and resources.** Our website, www.chickensinnorthvancouver.com, will create an automatic communication hub where people can come together to share advice, information, and even tools or eggs. All of this contributes to developing and sustaining community in North Vancouver.

OVERVIEW

As mentioned, this proposal draws heavily upon the recommendations put forth by the Vancouver City Staff and members to the Vancouver City Council to assist them in making their decision to create the by-laws that allow for the keeping of backyard hens. In considering the Vancouver City Council's mandate to allow the humane and sanitary keeping of backyard hens, we hope you will consider several by-law amendments that intend to meet three criteria:

- 1) protection of public health and welfare;
- 2) humane treatment of hens; and
- 3) reasonable access to hen keeping for residents.

1. Protection of Public Health and Welfare

Public health and welfare must be a primary concern when considering regulations for backyard hens. Many urban dwellers fear that they will bring disease, increased noise, unpleasant odours, and unwanted animals such as rodents to their neighbourhoods. This section examines some of the main health and nuisance concerns associated with backyard hens, and the measures proposed to address them. We are proposing the by-law address the following concerns:

- A. Proper and healthy siting of chicken coops and runs to reduce potential visual impact
- B. Address common misconceptions about noise, odor and pest and predator concerns
- C. Address public concerns about avian flu and salmonella

A. Siting of Chicken Coops

To minimize visual impact, we recommend that the chicken enclosures be kept back 1 m (3.28 ft) from the property lines on all sides, and only be kept in back and side yards. We also recommend that hen keeping be allowed in all residential zones, including multi-family, and that both of those zones be subject to the same requirements. Thus, a multi-family development could have 6 hens per lot, not 6 hens per unit, and hen facilities would have to be at grade level. Further, a chicken bylaw should require that keepers of hens reside on the lot containing the hen enclosure in order to ensure that hens receive appropriate care and supervision. Thus, under the proposed by-law provisions, an apartment dweller could maintain a flock of 6 hens in the yard of the apartment complex, but could not keep the hens on a balcony, because the chickens would not have access to soil for scratching. It would be the tenant's responsibility to obtain property owner approval for keeping hens.

We recommend that hen keeping be prohibited in commercial, industrial, and comprehensive development zones due to the lack of suitable physical environments and absence of supervision on many commercial and industrial sites, particularly after the closure of businesses. We also recommend that hen facilities be prohibited, for the time being, in public parks and community gardens, again due to the absence of consistent supervision, particularly at night, and the complexity of establishing responsibility for maintenance and care of hens. The latter recommendation could be revisited once basic hen keeping provisions are in place, and a more detailed review of communal hen keeping is possible.

We recommend some limits on the size and height of hen facilities, including a 9.2 m² (100 ft²) floor area limit, and a 2 m (6.56 ft) height limit. The height restriction is recommended to minimize visual impacts, and the floor area restriction exempts chicken owners from Floor Area Ratio (FAR) limits and building permit requirements.

B. Common Misconceptions

The main public concerns that we've encountered are that hens may be a nuisance because of their noise and odor, and because of the potential attraction of pests and predators that chickens and chicken feed may create. These concerns are very widespread and understandable; however, as many other cities that have legalized backyard hens have realized, the problems are negligible if proper care and maintenance standards are adhered to. Our proposed by-law addresses the three main concerns:

- a) Noise
- b) Odor
- c) Pest and Predator Attraction

a. Noise

Laying hens produce a variety of vocalizations, none of which are very loud. Perhaps the loudest noise is an approximately five-minute period of cackling or squawking that occurs when a hen lays an egg. In an investigation conducted by staff from the City of Pleasanton, California, noise readings of a “squawking” chicken registered at 63 dbA at two feet away, and would not register at 2.75 m (9 ft) away². For comparison, the average human conversation registers at about 60 dbA³, and a barking dog can be as loud as 100 dbA⁴.

City Noise Control By-law No. 5819 and District Noise Control By-law No. 7334 limits “continuous sound” levels in residential areas to 55 dbA in daytime and 45 dbA at night, measured from the point of reception. In addition, it prohibits the cries of animals or birds that unreasonably disturb the “quiet, peace, rest, enjoyment, comfort, or convenience” of that person. The same provision is applied to dog barking in the Animal Control By-law.

Given that noise from hens is relatively quiet and intermittent, it is unlikely to be a significant nuisance under the proposed guidelines, which provide setbacks and other management measures to ensure some separation between hen enclosures and neighbouring properties. Specifically, we recommend minimum setbacks of 1 m from all property lines. Given this separation, it is unlikely that hen sounds will be above allowable levels on neighbouring properties. The recommendation that hens be kept in their coops from sunset to sunrise, which is primarily to protect hens from predators, will reduce potential noise impacts at night.

Unlike hens, a crowing rooster can reach decibel levels of 85-90 dbA. For this reason, it is recommended that roosters be prohibited under the proposed by-law amendment. In this regard, it is also recommended that no chickens under the age of four months be allowed, as determining gender (and thus avoiding unexpected roosters) can be more difficult in young chickens.

b. Odour

Unpleasant odours from accumulation of manure and/or food scraps can result if chicken enclosures are infrequently cleaned and food is broadcast in the pens. Although chickens produce only a few tablespoons of manure per day, accumulations of manure can produce ammonia, which is both harmful for chickens and unpleasant for others. It is recommended that manure and scraps be removed at least weekly, and preferably daily. Manure can be flushed down the toilet or composted, but is not allowed in garbage cans in North Vancouver. Composted chicken manure is an excellent fertilizer. In order to address potential odour issues, we recommend that a provision requiring enclosures to be maintained in a sanitary condition, free of unpleasant smells and substances, be added to the Animal Control by-law. Recognizing the value of composted chicken

² City of Pleasanton www.ci.pleasanton.ca.us/pdf/pcsr-6f-prz30-ord.pdf

³ National Agricultural Safety Database <http://nasdonline.org/document/1144/d000933/hearing-protection-for-farmers.html>

⁴ Coppola, Crista L., Enns, R. Mark, Grandin, Temple. “Noise in the Animal Shelter Environment: Building Design and the Effects of Daily Noise Exposure,” *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 9(1), 1-7.

manure, as well the potential odour issues associated with manure accumulation, we recommend a by-law provision that allows storage of manure only if it is stored in a fully enclosed structure (such as a compost bin).

c. Pest and Predator Attraction

Hen enclosures can attract unwanted animals, including rodents seeking food scraps and larger animals, such as raccoons, foxes, skunks, bears and coyotes, seeking eggs or a chicken dinner. For this reason, it is vital that hen enclosures be secure from all other animals. In order to discourage rodents and predators, we recommend by-law language that requires hen enclosures to be constructed and maintained to prevent rodents from being harboured underneath, or within the walls of the coop and the run, and to prevent access to the enclosure by any other bird or animal.

Poultry require a dry, relatively draft-free henhouse. This can be accomplished by building a relatively draft free henhouse with windows and/or doors which can be opened for ventilation when necessary. The henhouse walls should be constructed of solid materials and leave no gaps for smaller rodents to get in. All windows must be fixed or covered in hardware cloth. Allowing an adequate level of space per bird also helps keep the humidity level in the coop to a minimum, which reduces the possibility of odour and illness. We further recommend that owners be required to keep hens, as well as their food and water, inside the coop between sunset and sunrise, and that they keep the coop locked during that time. Leftover feed should be removed in a timely manner to discourage rodent interest.

On the outside runs, 1 cm (½ in) hardware cloth must be used, as it is the only material impervious to all predators. The wire should be buried along the pen border at least 30 cm (1 ft) deep, and toeing the fence outward about 15 cm (6 in) to stop any digging predator.

The doors on the exterior of the coop and run needs to have a substantial lock – a good rule of thumb is if it is too difficult for a three-year old to open, it will be too difficult for a raccoon.

To prevent problems with hawks and owls, we recommend the by-law stipulate that people cover their outside runs with hardware cloth or put a Plexiglas or solid roof over the coop and run, which protects the chickens from the elements as well⁵.

The best deterrent for pests and potential predators such as raccoons, skunks and bears, is a clean, well-built and well-maintained coop. Just as with garbage, the feed must be kept in a house or lockable garage, never outside, in locked bins, carports or sheds. The eggs must be collected daily, to ensure they don't tempt predators.

Some of this information is covered in the Humane Treatment Section, as hens being harmed by pests is not just a nuisance but also inhumane. We will also cover this information, and more, in the course that we will be offering through Maplewood Farm. The curriculum and handouts will include strict guidelines on coop construction and material recommendations, similar to the attached documents by Heather Havens and Duncan Martin.

C. Public Health Concerns

The public has also expressed worries over the spreading of Avian Influenza (bird flu) and Salmonella. We have researched this topic and are confident that these concerns are unfounded.

⁵ Keeping Backyard Hens, Heather Haven. 2009

a. Avian Influenza

Chickens, like other birds, are susceptible to forms of Type A influenza that are collectively known as “avian influenza” (AI). The AI virus is widespread, particularly among wild birds, but most forms produce relatively mild or no symptoms. AI can mutate, after circulation in a concentrated poultry population, into highly pathogenic forms (HPAI) that produce severe symptoms, but this is less common⁶. AI is not an airborne disease, but is transmitted from infected to healthy birds via direct contact with birds and their droppings, feathers, and body fluids⁷.

AI has spread to humans in rare instances. Transmission from birds to humans remains difficult, usually involving prolonged and close contact, and human-to-human transmission has been suspected in only a handful of cases⁸. The greatest risk of infection for humans appears to be through the handling and slaughtering of live infected poultry. Public health concerns centre on the potential for the virus to mutate or combine with other influenza viruses to produce a form that could easily spread from person to person.

The British Columbia Center for Disease Control (BCCDC) conducted a literature review on the risks of infectious disease from backyard hens and found that:

Overall, the risk of pathogen transmission associated with backyard chicken keeping appears to be mild and does not present a greater threat to population health compared to other animals allowed by similar by-laws (reptiles, dogs, etc). Public adherence to proper hygiene will significantly mitigate the risk of any disease acquisition including pathogens commonly found in chickens⁹.

Our coop siting and waste removal recommendations are in alignment with Vancouver Coastal Health recommended guidelines and considers them to be protective of public health as explored by the City of Vancouver and in the development of their Urban Chicken By-law.

Similarly, Interior Health recently released a document entitled “Backyard Chickens in the Urban Environment,” which is intended as a guide for municipalities considering the health implications of backyard chicken keeping. The document states:

The risk of avian influenza development is not appreciably increased by backyard hens. 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.

Our recommendation requires hen keepers to follow the CFIA bio-security standards, and include the standards as a recommended reading on our website. These measures are intended to limit introduction of diseases from other domestic poultry and cross-contamination between humans and hens. We further recommend that owners be required to provide veterinary care for hens sufficient to keep them in good health.

⁶ World Health Organization (WHO) www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/avian_influenza/en/

⁷ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) www.fao.org/avianflu/en/ganda.html

⁸ World Health Organization (WHO) www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/Timeline_10_01_04.pdf

⁹ www.vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20100408/documents/penv3.pdf

Additionally, a prohibition on backyard slaughtering will reduce exposure to blood and other body fluids from diseased birds and requirements to keep enclosures sanitary and free from accumulated manure and waste, as detailed under the Humane Treatment section of this document.

b. Salmonella

Salmonella is another health concern associated with poultry and eggs. Salmonella bacteria lives in the intestines of infected chickens, and can be shed in large numbers in the droppings. Humans who handle the birds or clean their enclosures can then be exposed to the bacteria, which can cause severe gastrointestinal illness if ingested. Person-to-person transmission of salmonella occurs when an infected person's feces, unwashed from his or her hands, contaminates food during preparation or comes into direct contact with another person¹⁰. The guidelines recommended to reduce the risks of avian influenza will also help minimize the risk of Salmonella poisoning from contact with chickens. This risk is further reduced by the recommended prohibition of hens less than four months old, as chicks shed much more Salmonella than older birds.

With the recommended regulations in place, keeping of backyard hens should pose minimal risks to public health.

2. Humane Treatment

The humane treatment of the animals is a priority in the development of guidelines for keeping hens. Humane treatment of farm animals is commonly defined by the “five freedoms,” as developed by the Farm Animal Welfare Council, an advisory body to the UK government.

a. These 5 freedoms include:

- 1) Freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition –
by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
- 2) Freedom from discomfort -
by providing a suitable environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
- 3) Freedom from pain, injury and disease –
by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
- 4) Freedom to express normal behaviour -
by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animals own kind.
- 5) Freedom from fear and distress -
by ensuring conditions that avoid mental suffering¹¹.

To enjoy the Five Freedoms, hens need shelter, food, water, adequate space, environmental conditions (such as adequate ventilation and light) conducive to good health, and the opportunity to socialize and engage in fundamental behaviours, which for them include scratching (foraging by scraping the ground with their claws),

¹⁰ www.idph.state.il.us/public/hb/hbsam.htm

¹¹ Farm Animal Welfare Council www.fawc.org.uk/freedoms.htm

roosting (resting on a stick or branch), and dust-bathing (thrashing around in the dirt to clean feathers and remove parasites). These needs must be met under the recommended requirements for care of backyard hens.

We propose a maximum number of 8 hens per property. This provision maximizes public and animal health and welfare by both limiting the concentration of birds, and ensuring a number sufficient to supply eggs to an average family of 4.

In consideration of chickens' social nature and to ensure chickens have adequate social engagement, our recommendations stipulate not only a maximum of 8, but also a minimum number of 2 hens per flock.

For shelter and protection from predators, hens need an enclosed house, with a locking door. Coops should contain nest boxes, in which hens will lay their eggs, and one or more perches per bird. Hens also need access to the outdoors, either by free ranging or by use of an enclosed outdoor space that allows them ground on which to scratch and peck. For hens without access to bare earth, a dust bath, made of any combination of sand, soil, ash, food grade diatomaceous earth (to control parasites) or other similar material, should be provided.

Hens also require adequate space. Too little space can be a stressor for hens, who may respond with aggressive behaviours such as egg eating, pecking at each other, and cannibalism. Too much space in the coop can increase heating demands. Significant debate exists on the amount of space required to raise hens. While most large-scale commercial producers provide between 24 cm – 36 cm (0.8 ft² – 1.2 ft²) of space per hen, space requirements for smaller free range, organic, and humane-certified flocks are more generous. Recommended cage-free or free range indoor space requirements vary from 45.5 cm – 244 cm (1.5 ft² - 8 ft²) per hen, depending on the size of the hen and other factors.

Our recommendation includes a minimum space requirement of 0.37 m² (4 ft²) of coop space and 0.92 m² (10 ft²) of outdoor enclosure, reflecting the roomier standards. This liberal space allotment is appropriate, given that the hens will be continuously confined. Other housing requirements include at least one nest box, to accommodate the need for seclusion during egg-laying, and one perch measuring at least 15 cm (6 in) per bird, to allow hens to engage in roosting, an essential behaviour. Keeping hens in cages, which would prevent them from utilizing the full space allotment, and may cause injury, is not allowed in the proposed by-law amendment.

Our recommendation also prohibits slaughtering or attempts at euthanasia by those who keep hens, as slaughtering by untrained individuals can result in unnecessary suffering. Hens at the end of their lives may be euthanized by a veterinarian (at an estimated \$40 cost), or taken to a farm or abattoir for slaughtering. Chicken carcasses may be taken to the Vancouver Animal Shelter for cremation, or disposed of in any other legal manner (i.e. buried in a pet cemetery, or in any other area where burial is allowed under Ministry of Environment regulations, or composted on a farm). Chicken carcasses are not allowed in City garbage containers.

Along with regulations, education plays a vital role in promoting humane care. We therefore recommend that our website¹² be a vehicle for ensuring that owners receive basic information on chicken care and maintenance. Specifically, we will include information and links on best management practices, humane considerations, biosecurity protocols, educational resources, and by-law requirements, including a list of local workshops on hen keeping, with a strong encouragement for all registrants to attend.

¹² www.chickensinnorthvancouver.com

Maplewood Farm¹³ has come forward with the recommendation of a course put on by the Farm, in which all the basics of chicken ownership would be covered, from coop construction to proper care and maintenance of the coop and run, to basic health concerns with hens. We, the undersigned, considered requiring registrants to attend the workshop, but do not recommended that this be a by-law requirement. The administrative process this would involve, including reviewing, assessing and endorsing the appropriate courses, and providing proof of course completion, would be difficult and costly. In addition, many people that keep hens have prior experience and may not require courses to properly manage them. By forgoing the workshop requirement, we recognize that a balance must be maintained between providing adequate regulatory control and avoiding burdensome requirements.

3. Reasonable Access

A. Cost and Resources

In creating this by-law we want to ensure that we don't make it so restrictive or limiting that it is unreasonable for the average citizen to become a chicken owner. We believe that if the recommendations put forth are followed, and the cost of the Maplewood Farm course is kept below \$50, chicken ownership will not be out of reach for the average citizen.

We also want to ensure that citizens have access to the resources required to learn how to be responsible and well-informed urban chicken stewards. The website we have constructed will offer ample resources and information, as well as opportunities for owners to network and gather information from each other, or collaborate on orders of hay or feed. There would even be opportunities for shared labor on coop building – swapping weekends to build together.

B. Enforcement

Animal Control would enforce the recommended by-law provisions, using procedures currently authorized for control of “other animals.” These procedures, which are outlined in the Animal Control By-law, include measures for impoundment, seizure, detainment, and disposal of animals, as well as descriptions of fees and penalties. To ensure that these measures would be available, we recommend that the definition of “other animals” in the Animal Control by-law be clarified to include hens. Enforcement would be done on a complaint basis.

We recommend a foster program in the case of chickens impounded due to by-law infringement. There would be a voluntary registry for chicken owners, through which they would be able to offer their homes and coops to house the impounded birds. The birds could then be adopted out to new urban chicken owners, or those whose flocks are still below the legal number.

¹³ 405 Seymour River Place, North Vancouver, B.C. Canada V7H 1S6 Phone: (604) 929-5610

CONCLUSION

We feel that backyard hens provide many benefits and that existing by-laws can be altered to accommodate this positive step towards both environmental and food sustainability. The changes we have outlined encompass the necessary amendments to the current zoning by-laws, which would allow for the humane keeping of hens while addressing setbacks, floor area and height standards, which would alleviate the need for building permits and reduce visual impacts. We also recommend amendments to the Animal Control By-law, including repeal of the prohibition on keeping of hens, and addition of a new section providing limits on the number of chickens allowed, requirements for housing and care, prohibitions on backyard slaughtering and/or commercial use, and requirements for pest control, sanitation and biosecurity. A registration system should be at the discretion of the City and the District of North Vancouver, respectively. We recommend a “foster family” program to address hens in need. In total, our recommendations provide the framework for a system of regulations that will allow residents of the City and District of North Vancouver to safely and humanely enjoy the rewards that backyard hens provide.

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