

Ann Arbor residents aren't rushing to bring chickens home to roost

Posted by [spepple](#) September 10, 2008 07:35AM



Leisa Thompson | The Ann Arbor News
Abby Richter, 7, proudly holds the first egg from one from her family's chickens as her dad and mom, Rick and Sandy, stand with her at their Ann Arbor home where they keep the birds.

Ann Arborites squawked for months to get City Council to allow chickens within city limits. But nearly five weeks after the ordinance took effect, just three permits have been granted.

That doesn't surprise 3rd Ward City Council Member Steve Kunselman, who spearheaded the passage of the ordinance.

"I didn't think there was a huge pent-up demand," said Kunselman, who plans to build a coop and buy four hens as soon as his schedule allows it.

He said the push to approve the ordinance was not driven by the idea that there would be a bunch of backyard chicken coops built by people who think it's a lot of fun.

Reporter Jo Collins Mathis can be reached at 734-994-6849 or jmathis@annarbornews.com.

"It was because the policy to criminalize people who want to raise their own food is a bad policy," he said, adding that the number of chicken owners will rise in time and fluctuate from year to year as people realize how much work is involved.

The new ordinance limits homeowners to a maximum of four birds, prohibits roosters and specifies setback requirements. It also requires city residents to get their neighbors' approval, a detail objectionable to some.



Leisa Thompson | The Ann Arbor News Kelly and Matt Grocoff hold

two of their four chickens they keep in this converted playhouse at their home in Ann Arbor. They welcomed their chickens into the neighborhood by inviting about 30 people over to watch "Chicken Run" on a screen in their backyard.

Matt and Kelly Grocoff have built a chicken coop in the back yard of their westside house that is the stylish two-story home of their latest pets: Josephine, Cosette, Henrietta and Mrs. Darcy, one of whom recently laid the first egg.

The Grocoffs are so enthralled by their new pets that they've arranged their lawn furniture to face the coop because in the evening, the chickens are allowed to roam the yard and garden, providing entertainment in what they call "the chicken auditorium." The Grocoffs are also convinced free-range chickens yield the healthiest eggs.

When the sun goes down, the couple enjoy the "chicken parade" to the coop, with Queen Josephine always the last to retire for the night.

The Grocoffs bought the hens for \$12 each from an 11-year-old Gregory girl, and they renovated the coop from an old playhouse given to them by friends.

In the morning, they check the feed and water supply, and fluff the litter with a rake. The process could take less than two minutes, but they enjoy the process and time they spend with the birds.

"These are the easiest pets I've ever had," said Kelly Grocoff.

"I've read as many chicken books as baby books," said her husband, who will become a father in December.

Every few days, someone brings a child over to see the chickens, and they've been surprised by how many adults have never seen a chicken up close.

Rick Richter, who lives on the city's northwest side, started a Web site - www.A2citychickens.com - for Ann Arborites eager to learn how to raise chickens. Richter wanted to be the first to get a permit, but got his

application in just behind a resident on Hatcher Crescent.

"I'm shocked more people haven't gotten on board with the chickens yet," said Richter. "But it's getting late in the year, and maybe they're waiting til spring. If not, it's their loss."

Richter has built a movable coop which is a coop and grazing pen in one portable package.

"Chicken waste is wonderful fertilizer," he said, explaining how he moves the coop from place to place in the lawn.

When one of their chickens laid an egg a couple weeks ago, the family didn't know which one to thank.

"No one was laying back smoking a cigarette," quipped Richter's wife, Sandy.

Since then, the hens have laid about two dozen brown eggs, all much tastier than those from the grocery store, the family said.

Sandy Richter said she likes the connection her daughter has to a food source, as well as the health, conservation, and animal husbandry aspects of raising chickens.

The chickens have become a conversation piece, with many neighbors stopping by to see them.

Jeff Wolf echoes the sentiment of other neighbors: He's pro-chicken, and wouldn't mind getting a fresh egg now and then.

"I had three beagles living next door to me for a while," he said, "so this should be a lot quieter."

"I'm all for it. As long as I don't have to chicken-sit for them when they go out of town."

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Comments

beewoman says...

How nice to see that some people have taken advantage of the new regulation to teach their children about where their food actually comes from. How many children today think that water comes from a bottle and that chicken buggets grow on trees?

How nice it is to know that these families will be eating eggs from chickens that are not filled up with steroids and antibiotics that cause human viruses to become resistant to antibiotics?

How nice it is to know that the children of these families will have a better understanding of and respect for all living things and will be even more appreciative of the food on thier tables after working hard to care for their flocks.

How to apply

- Residents applying for a permit for up to four backyard chickens (hens only) should submit the permit application with \$20 to the City Clerk, 100 N. Fifth Avenue, Ann Arbor, MI 48104. Applications can also be made in person.
- Applications must include the Adjacent Neighbor Consent Form and a drawing of the property showing distances to neighboring structures and the proposed location(s) of all enclosures that will be used to keep backyard chickens.
- For information, call 734-994-2725.

We could learn a lot from children if we saw the world thru their eyes. It is our responsibility to help them open their eyes to the living world around them.

How nice it is to know there is a community in Michigan that allows its residents to choose the lifestyle they want, not the cookie-cutter lifestyle others may think they must have for show!

Posted on 09/10/08 at 9:54AM

hunnh says...

looks like only 3 so far have decided to get a permit...

doesn't mean there's only 3 raising chickens w/in the city limits.

as for chickens, or anything for that matter, being filled up w/antibiotics that cause human viruses to become resistant...antibiotics fight bacteria, not viruses.

Posted on 09/10/08 at 10:34AM

Jafo04 says...

Hmmm, chicken...

Posted on 09/10/08 at 12:37PM

beewoman says...

Just to clarify the antibiotic resistance issue.

Humans are running out of antibiotics that work because the "overuse" of antibiotics has caused the microorganisms that cause illness in humans to become "resistant" to the antibiotics.

Many people do not realise that modern farming practice is to use antibiotics - not to cure sick animals - but as a growth stimulant to the animals to get the animals to market size faster.

Humans eat the animal meat which is not supposed to contain these antibiotics, however, only limited testing is done on US meat to check for antibiotics (and even less testing is done on imported meats).

This over-use of antibiotics has caused antibiotic resistance diseases.

Here are some sources of information on antibiotic resistance:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/7608167.stm>

Pew Commission: "The use of low doses of antibiotics as food additives facilitates the rapid evolution and proliferation of antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria."

<http://www.ncifap.org/images/PCIFAPFin.pdf>

I have not consumed US beef for several years because of these additives, and I limit the amounts of other factory farmed meats and fishes to protect my family's health. The extra cost for family farmed and wild caught meats is worth the peace of mind alone!

Posted on 09/10/08 at 1:27PM

garrisondyer says...

It's a shame some people live in neighborhoods where their Homeowner's Covenant still prevents them from keeping chickens in their yard, even though the city ordinance has been passed. I know of two people who would love to apply for some chickens but can't.

Posted on 09/10/08 at 5:58PM

KJMClark says...

No one should be surprised that there have only been three permits so far. The ordinance didn't go into effect until late summer. That's a pretty lousy time to get hens. First you have to go through the permitting process, including going around to neighbors who are probably out on vacation. I didn't have to do any of that for our bee hives, or the garden, or the fruit trees, or even our two kittens.

Then you have to find the time to build a coop when your kids are starting school and it's harvest time. We have cub scouts, cross country, PTO, etc. to deal with right now. We're pulling two or three bushels of peaches out of our trees, several pecks of grapes, apples, pears, and the constant harvest from our garden as well.

Besides, even if we went out and bought a coop, we would be getting hens just before winter hits. So several months of buying expensive feed and running a light every day when the hens are naturally less productive anyway. That doesn't make a whole lot of sense. Better to wait until next spring.

Posted on 09/11/08 at 8:29AM

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