

### Councilwoman urges change on chicken rule

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AURORA | A chicken-loving city official and some of her constituents want to hatch out a plan to allow hens in the city for egg production.

Aurora City Councilwoman Melissa Miller is pushing for an ordinance that allows hens for residents who are interested in producing natural eggs in their own backyard.

“There are so many different reasons why I think urban chickens make sense,” Miller said at a Neighborhood Services Committee meeting on March 17.

Her request for backyard chickens comes in the wake of a failed attempt to pass an urban chicken ordinance in Aurora in 2009.

Currently, chickens are only allowed in agricultural areas within the city.

Miller says she’s been approached by several constituents who are interested in raising chickens for egg production in their backyards.

Because of spiking food prices and the booming trends toward sustainability and urban farming, Miller says it’s time to revisit the chicken ordinance.

“I think if anything, it puts the city out there in trying to be proactive in supporting the city’s residents,” Miller said at the meeting.

If an ordinance were written to allow hens for egg production in people’s backyards, it would allow at most six hens and prohibit the slaughtering of hens.

If the owner wants to do away with a hen, hen owners would have the choice of keeping them as pets, euthanizing them or delivering them to a local slaughterhouse.

Miller said residents should be able to hone the common practice of urban farming in their own backyards if they want.

“It’s America, it’s private property, you’re not asking for a whole farm flock to be in someone’s backyard,” she said at the committee meeting.

But she was met with some resistance.

Councilman Bob Roth said residents who are interested in farming hens probably wouldn’t save money because of chicken upkeep costs.

“If we’re looking at this as a cost savings for food purchase for a family, I don’t see that with all the output they’d have to have to set up their coop,” Roth said.

Pre-made chicken coops cost between \$80 and \$500 on various online retailers.

Raising chickens in the third-largest city in Colorado isn’t practical, said Councilman Bob Broom, who said he grew up in a small farm town where “every fourth house” had chickens.

“It’s just not compatible with an urban area in my view,” Broom said.

Roth, Broom and Councilman Brad Pierce, chairmen of the Neighborhood Services Committee, opposed the issue.

But Miller isn’t chicken-hearted. She plans to bring the issue before all city council members at a future study session meeting.

Some of her constituents are so hopeful that Miller will get a chicken ordinance passed, they’ve already begun taking hen-raising classes.

Susana Kirk, who lives near old Aurora, says she completed classes in Denver that taught her all about feeding and sheltering the animals.

Kirk, who lives alone, uses 18 eggs per week primarily for baking, so she says raising her own chickens would be a boon.

“You’re getting a better quality egg,” she said. “You know where it’s coming from.”

She normally spends between \$3 and \$5 per carton on free-range

eggs. But she isn't sure that she would save money raising her own hens.

"I don't know if it's cheaper," she said. "I think of it as an investment in the chicken."

She's willing to spend more money for fresh eggs though, and she hopes this year will be the year of the chicken ordinance.

"If we want chickens, we should be able to get them," Kirk said.

"Not everybody's going to want them; for other people, it's a hobby, and if you have space for it, I think it should be OK."

Backyard chickens have become a national trend.

In Denver, citizens in residential areas can keep chickens if they get a permit from the city, which costs about \$50 annually and must be approved by the Zoning and Animal Control departments. In Commerce City, city ordinances prohibit roosters, but there are no restrictions on chickens. In Boulder, residents can own chickens, but must follow the same rules as domestic pets in terms of a proper shelter, clean living conditions and the provision of proper food and water for the animals.

When chicken ordinance discussions came up in 2009, city staff cited several drawbacks to raising hens.

They said German Shepherds are known to go after chickens so barking problems would increase, the chickens would attract wild animals, and more complaints would ensue from neighbors.

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