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## Majority on Council back chicken law

By Brian Meyer  
News Staff Reporter  
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The Common Council is poised to pass a law that would allow people to raise chickens in Buffalo.

Six of nine lawmakers told The Buffalo News today they will likely support the legislation when it is put to vote next Tuesday.

Their comments came following an hour-long hearing that attracted a few dozen supporters -- and only a couple of opponents.

Allowing backyard chickens would help "connect" people with their food, said Diane Picard, executive director of the Massachusetts Avenue Project.

"So many of us don't know where our food comes from, especially young people," she said.

Monique Watts, who was forced to move her hens to Allegany County after learning that city laws didn't allow her to keep chickens in a coop in her West Side backyard, said the proposed law has many safeguards built into it. For example, no roosters would be allowed, and no more than five hens would be permitted per property. Chickens are fairly quiet except when they're laying eggs, Watts said. And even then, she added, their clucking can have a "calming" effect.

Buffalo resident Ellen Goldstein said she thinks chickens could be a marketing tool that highlights progressive thinking -- a signal that could dispel the notion that Buffalo lacks vision.

"Maybe it's time for Chicken Little to see that the sky isn't falling," Goldstein told the Council's Legislation Committee.

Nearly 40 people turned out for today's hearing, and the vast majority raised their hands in support of a law being sponsored by Niagara Council Member David A. Rivera. Only two speakers voiced opposition. John Szczepaniec

of North Buffalo doubts that the city will be able to enforce some of the ordinance's restrictions. He is worried about odors and other neighborhood nuisances.

"If you want chickens, live in the country," Szczepaniec told a reporter as he left the hearing.

His wife, Katherine, said the city can't even effectively enforce laws that require people to mow their lawns.

Other restrictions in the bill would require chicken coops to be kept certain distances from property lines, windows and entrances. The hens would also have to be kept inside coops in fenced yards, and feed would have to be stored in rat-proof containers.

People would have to pay a onetime \$25 fee for a license, with the fee paying for a mandatory inspection of all coops. Before any licenses are issued, immediate neighbors would be notified and given a chance to comment. If chicken owners fail to comply with restrictions, their license would be yanked, Rivera said.

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