

Waterloo outlaws backyard chickens

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In New York, they have them. They are allowed in Chicago and Seattle, Washington. In Canada, Niagara Falls has them, so does Victoria, and Vancouver is moving toward raising urban chickens.

Yet in Waterloo, residents won't be able to have backyard chicken coops, although residents who have them will be able to continue the practice.

Stephen Svenson, who has seven chickens in his backyard coop on Margaret Avenue North, said he was disappointed council voted against backyard chicken coops and now includes the birds on the city's list of restricted fowl.

"There is a lot of fear mongering and fear around property values," he said.

"I'm surprised that a community like Waterloo that prides itself as an intelligent community didn't pass this," Svenson said.

Councillors actively debated the issue last night, voting against the small-scale chicken raising because some residents were concerned with smell and noise and worried about chickens attracting skunks and rats in neighbourhoods.

Councillors also received a letter in favour of urban chickens from Dr. Liana Nolan, medical officer of health for the Waterloo Region. Some in the audience, including children, wore stickers, 'Some Pets Lay Eggs.'

Mayor Brenda Halloran said she heard from many residents against the coops because they were worried about chickens bringing rodents to their homes.

"How do we protect the interest of people who don't want to live beside people who have chickens" she said. "I'm concerned with their rights."

In a recorded vote, four councillors voted in favour of urban chickens: Mark Whaley, Angela Vieth, Diane Freeman and Jan d'Ailly. Voting against the move were Halloran, Karen Scian, Scott Witmer and Ian McLean. A tie vote means the motion is lost.

Instead, councillors voted to place chickens under a bylaw regulation covering fowl, pigeon and other like birds that are currently prohibited. Prior to last night, the city didn't have a bylaw on urban chicken coops and residents were not breaking a law if they set up a coop.

Scian said residents in her ward, which includes Claire Hills, Laurelwood and Columbia Forest did not support the move. Many of the properties in the northwest have small backyards and there are little trees for buffer, she said.

"I understand the benefits from a philosophical point of view, but practically I can't do it," said Scian.

Matthew Bailey-Dick of the Waterloo Hen Association said he was dumbfounded by the council's decision not to allow backyard chickens.

"Council went with a decision weighing the fears rather than the benefits," he said. "The voice of fear was heard very loudly."

"The proposed bylaw as it stood contained all the needed regulations," Bailey Dick said.

Vieth, who wholeheartedly support the updated bylaw, told councillors that as leaders in a community "we encourage citizens to grow veggies, hang their laundry and ride public transit. Why would we not allow a few hens in the backyard."

"In my opinion, this is a no brainer," she said.

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