

THE GLOBE AND MAIL 

Toronto councillor wants to get cracking on allowing backyard hens

From Friday's Globe and Mail

Published Thursday, Nov. 24, 2011 10:13PM EST

Last updated Thursday, Jan. 26, 2012 1:41AM EST

The chickens could soon be coming home to roost in a backyard near you.

Rookie councillor and local food advocate Mary-Margaret McMahan says it's time to let Toronto residents keep a few hens in their yards as a fresh source of eggs and a way to promote food security.

The move would legalize a practice that is already taking place in neighbourhoods across the city, she argues, and follow a trend that has taken root in major U.S. cities, such as Chicago.

“The biggest concern that I've heard is noise and smell,” Ms. McMahan said. “I'm saying your neighbour's dog is noisier and your green bin is smellier.”

The Beaches-East York councillor says she's discovered there are already people keeping hens on the sly in her ward. She also has toured one setup at an undisclosed location elsewhere in the city

and speculates that most people do not even realize it is there.

Public health staff are on board, Ms. McMahon said, noting that there would be limits on numbers and roosters would still be banned. Only hens would be allowed to be kept for their eggs.

Councillor Joe Mihevc, a long-time supporter of the change, says backyard hens are just another step in the local food movement, like community gardens and the 100-mile diet. “We have become alienated from our food,” he said.

If the rule change is successful, Mr. Mihevc said, he has already made arrangements with a farmer at his local market who will sell him a few hens in early spring and take them back when the weather gets cold. He said he is looking forward to cakes made with eggs from the backyard and notes that the poultry are “automatic composters,” who can go through nine pounds of green bin waste in a month.

The two councillors are asking for a report on allowing “a limited of number of hens,” to be presented at the February meeting of the licensing and standards committee. Their request goes to council next week, just as the city begins what are expected to be contentious budget talks.

Asked about the timing of the move, Mr. Mihevc said there is no need to wait until after the budget debate to bring up the matter. “It might seem like a silly issue at first glance,” he said, “but it’s a good thing.”