

# Vancouver latest municipality to allow urban chickens

BY CATHERINE ROLFSEN, VANCOUVER SUN MARCH 5, 2009



Dane Chauvel kept his chickens in his Kitsilano backyard for about a decade before he got in trouble for infringing on city bylaws. He says he will bring them back to their coop if the city moves to allow urban chickens, which it did Thursday.

**Photograph by:** Jenelle Schneider, Vancouver Sun

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VANCOUVER — Dane Chauvel's chickens can finally come home to roost.

Now living in exile in Langley, the two birds will soon be legally allowed back in their coop in Chauvel's Kitsilano backyard after Vancouver city council voted unanimously Thursday to change city bylaws to legalize the keeping of urban hens.

"I think they're probably dying to come home," Chauvel said.

He explained that his family had three birds in their Kitsilano backyard for about a decade, despite bylaws forbidding the keeping of chickens in the city.

"They were friendly, innocuous, they really didn't bother anybody, and they produced eggs," he said. "My kids at the time were six and eight, or eight and 10. They named the birds and they kind of bridged being pets and livestock."

But one day, a bylaw officer called and he ended up in court twice, fighting for his birds — two of which he argued weren't actually chickens at all but some sort of exotic bird breed.

"The first time I lost, the second time I won, but it was just becoming too much of a hassle for my

wife,” he said.

So the birds went out to pasture at a Langley farm. One has since died, but Chauvel says he’s eager to bring the other two home.

He’ll have to wait a few months, while city staff amend the city’s bylaws and draft guidelines on how to keep the birds safely and humanely.

With Thursday’s motion, moved by Coun. Andrea Reimer, Vancouver is the latest municipality to jump on the urban chicken bandwagon. New York City, Seattle, Portland, Victoria, Burnaby and Richmond all allow backyard hens in some way or another. Online resources and how-to books abound touting the joys of fresh and sustainable eggs.

But not everyone in B.C. is enthusiastic about the keeping of backyard hens. The BCSPCA and the Vancouver Humane Society both spoke against Thursday’s motion.

“While we sympathize with the interests of local people who want to keep these hens for the sustainability interests, we have concern that not everyone who is interested in keeping these chickens has the necessary knowledge or expertise to raise them humanely,” BCSPCA animal welfare coordinator Geoff Urton told The Vancouver Sun earlier Thursday.

Urton said he’s worried urban chickens could be easy targets for coyotes or raccoons and attract rats. What’s more, he’s not convinced that Vancouverites will be able to find a vet able to care for their birds or even know where to buy the right kind of feed.

BC Poultry Association president Ray Nickel called the motion “ridiculous” and said it flies in the face of food safety concerns.

“What if AI [avian influenza] started to happen with some of the flocks?” he asked, explaining that an urban outbreak could potentially affect export opportunities for his entire industry.

In Victoria, where backyard chickens have long been legal, the feathered fowl have caused some problems, but nothing major and no animal cruelty issues, said Ian Fraser, a senior animal control officer with Victoria Animal Control Service.

“When I get a call about it in Victoria, [usually] the chicken owner has made themselves a really cheap chicken coop,” Fraser said. “It’s usually noise, smell, flies, ‘Chickens are in my yard and they’re scratching up stuff.’”

Fraser said he gets about 12 poultry-related calls a year. But he said there’s no reason urban dwellers can’t successfully keep a few chickens, so long as there are some regulations.

Fraser has a few regulatory tips for the city staff tasked with drafting Vancouver’s guidelines: build a decent chicken coop, keep them in at night, ensure there is adequate yard space, and make sure city folk aren’t trying to sell eggs for profit or, worse, slaughtering their chickens themselves.

Chauvel said he expects the few Vancouverites who will get chickens will care for them exceptionally.

“If you were a chicken you would be imploring the animals rights activists and the city council to approve this bylaw, because it’s the best thing that can happen in terms of chicken welfare,” he said. “Any resident that has two to four chickens, that means two to four chickens less in a battery cage environment.”

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with a file from Mary Frances Hill and Larry Pynn

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