

Vancouverites squawk over chicken bylaw

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Heather Jarvey holds Zilla, one of her backyard chickens.

Photograph by: Vancouver Sun, Vancouver Sun

VANCOUVER -- A Vancouver woman is petitioning the city to overturn a bylaw that makes it illegal to keep chickens as pets in residential areas.

Heather Jarvey has two chickens - Zilla and Cheeks - that she says are her pets, as she cradles one of them in her arms like a baby.

Jarvey says they are no different from her two dogs. "You get really attached to them" she said. "They're really fun."

The city only permits chickens on properties of at least an acre, which means Jarvey is breaking the law by keeping Zilla and Cheeks. It's why she's working with a number of local agricultural groups to change that law.

Earlier this month, Vancouver's food policy council, an independent body that advises city councillors on food and agricultural issues, voted to formally float the issue of allowing city dwellers to keep chickens in Vancouver.

South of the border, keeping chickens in urban environments as part of a movement toward sustainable living is an idea that's already taken flight.

Seattle, Chicago and New York are just some of the cities that permit the keeping of chickens as pets.

In Seattle, for example, residents may keep up to three chickens on an apartment patio.

All that matters is that your neighbours don't squawk.

The BC SPCA and the Vancouver Humane Society both oppose the idea. They're concerned people won't look after their chickens.

"People can't even take care of their dogs and cats properly," said Vancouver Humane Society spokesman Peter Fricker.

"We get calls every day from people who don't have the resources, the space, the knowledge or the temperament to take care of animals properly. We just think that if this became widespread and popular, it would be an animal-welfare nightmare."

The motion is expected to be discussed Tuesday in Vancouver.

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