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## Wake Forest approves household chickens

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WAKE FOREST - Emily Cole can have her chickens.

The Wake Forest town Board of Commissioners last week voted 4 to 1 to let Cole and any other town resident keep up to 10 hens.

Cole spoke to the town board last month, asking them to change a rule that required prospective chicken owners to get all neighbors within 500 feet to approve their plans.

Only one family has successfully convinced their neighbors to let them have chickens.

Cole couldn't. Though many neighbors had no problem with her plans, a few disagreed.

So Cole started a petition asking the town to loosen its rules. She eventually gathered several hundred signatures.

In August, town board members said they agreed that the rules needed to be changed.

Earlier this month, they considered a draft ordinance that allowed up to five chickens. Last week, after a public hearing, board members agreed to increase that number to 10. Cole had originally hoped officials would allow as many as 20.

"I'm really happy with the outcome, and I'm really excited that it didn't take six months to do it," Cole said. "I'm also really happy that the Wake Forest commissioners are open-minded. I'm excited that they realize it's a good step forward for the town."

Across the country, more urban and suburban residents are keeping chickens amid fears of the safety of the food supply and a desire to buy local products.

Until now, only the Bissette family in Wake Forest was allowed to have chickens. They were awarded a permit earlier this year after all of their neighbors agreed to their plans.

Neighbors and families at Holding Park across the street often stop by to see their hens.

The new rules mean that the Bissettes no longer have to get their permit renewed each year.

Dave Bissette said he wasn't concerned about getting the permit renewed, but it was a hassle. The family would have had to canvass all their neighbors again.

"I'm glad, quite frankly, I don't have to deal with it anymore," said Bissette.

Nobody came forward to speak out against the new rules at the public hearing. Town commissioner Pete Thibodeau was the lone dissenting vote.

Commissioner Frank Drake said many Wake Forest homeowners who live in neighborhoods where homeowner association rules ban chickens won't be able to keep them, despite the law.

Drake, whose grandparents tended chickens in a neighborhood when he was a child, said most people who contacted him supported the measure.

"I really don't think this is going to be as prevalent as vegetable gardening," he said. "Nobody

seemed to have a problem with it once they realized that they lived in a neighborhood that had an HOA that forbade it."

Cole said last week that she wasn't sure when she will get her chickens, but it could be in the next week or so. Her husband has plans to build a miniature barn.

When Cole got home from last week's meeting, her husband and two young children were waiting to congratulate her with chicken drawings taped to the door.

They told her, the "chickens are coming."

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