
From: Mayor
Sent: Friday, October 13, 2023 1:33 PM
To: Lori Moller; Sarah Berg
Subject: FW: Proposed New Ordinance

Hi Sarah – Thank you. We'll add it to both the City Council Agenda packet and then assuming City Council votes to petition a text amendment to the P&Z Commission, we will include in their packet.

@Lori Moller Please include in CC packet.

Thank you!

Best regards,

Michael P. Kelly
Mayor
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From: Sarah Berg <sarahberg8@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, October 12, 2023 8:43 AM
To: Mayor <mayer@cityofharvard.org>
Subject: Proposed New Ordinance

(Please put in the Planning and Zoning Packet if possible. Thank you.)

Dear Mayor, Alderpersons, and Planning & Zoning members,

I write regarding your review and your upcoming votes of the proposed new ordinance. I wanted to forward an article regarding potential issues that will be raised by voting to approve the proposed ordinance to allow the pasturing of hens within our City limits. The article, "*The Case Against Allowing Urban Chickens, in Dekalb, IL*", illustrates many concerns that those of us against farm animals within City limits have already expressed at the Administration

meetings. It is written by William A. Oleckno, a retired distinguished teaching Professor in Public Health from Northern Illinois University.

It also provides some realistic expectations and potential issues the City will need to address if the proposed ordinance is past. For instance, even though Dekalb County has significantly large code enforcement capabilities and staff, the author still acknowledges that more staff will be needed to properly enforce the ordinance not only for the City, but could also impact the County Health Department should problems arise. Please see the link to the article posted below.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Sarah Berg

[THE CASE AGAINST ALLOWING URBAN CHICKENS IN DEKALB IL Article](#)

THE CASE AGAINST ALLOWING URBAN CHICKENS IN DEKALB, IL

William A. Oleckno*
DeKalb, Illinois

March 5, 2019

This is an updated and significantly expanded version of an earlier document by the author. This document attempts to provide a clear, objective, and evidence-based assessment of why the City of DeKalb should maintain its current ban on keeping livestock, including chickens, in the City. The document is presented in three major parts: (1) Background on the Issue, (2) Specific Reasons for Opposing Urban Chickens in DeKalb, and (3) Additional Considerations. These three parts are then followed by Concluding Remarks.

BACKGROUND ON THE ISSUE

In 2011, a proposal was brought before the City to overturn its ban on chickens in DeKalb (see City Code, Section 18.17). The possibility of allowing "backyard chickens" (more properly, "urban chickens")^{**} in DeKalb was discussed at length among the Citizens' Environmental Commission, the Planning and Zoning Commission, and the City Council without any consensus among these bodies. Finally, according to the official minutes of the Committee of the Whole (dated April 9, 2012), the Mayor "concurred with the majority [those against lifting the ban] and added he doesn't want to introduce something that could be a problem enforcing." **The proposal to lift the ban and allow urban chickens in DeKalb was thus rejected in 2012.**

More recently, a new proposal to allow urban chickens in DeKalb is being actively promoted by a group of individuals under the banner "Backyard Chickens DeKalb." This group and others are using many of the same arguments that were rejected by the City Council in 2012. Also, the Citizens' Environmental Commission, a voluntary advisory group for the City of DeKalb, voted in fall, 2018, to send to City staff a proposed ordinance that would allow urban chickens within City limits. Though the vote for the proposed ordinance was not unanimous, there appeared to be a sense of urgency on the part of many Commissioners to move the proposal forward as quickly as possible. Most likely this was because several years have now passed since the first proposal was rejected.

*Dr. Oleckno holds the title Distinguished Teaching Professor Emeritus in Public Health at Northern Illinois University. He is a long-time resident of DeKalb and a current member of the Citizens' Environmental Commission. He has served on the Commission for 10 years and chaired the Commission for four of those years. In his academic career he specialized in environmental health and epidemiology. He is the author of more than 50 publications, including two well regarded textbooks. He has also received numerous awards for teaching, research, and professional service.

**Backyard chickens is a common term often used interchangeably with urban chickens. Both terms denote chickens kept and raised in urban environments, such as cities, towns, and villages. Urban chickens is a more accurate term in that many ordinances, including the proposed ordinance for DeKalb, do not restrict chicken keeping to backyards.

A significant difference from the previous proposal in 2011-2012 was that chickens would not be restricted to backyards nor even to residential properties. Most notably, the proposed ordinance would allow establishments, such as churches, to maintain chicken flocks in addition to residential households. Also, the proposal makes no provisions for minimum lot sizes and does not specify whether houses must be owner occupied or whether they could be rented.

A Closer Look at the Perceived Advantages of Urban Chickens

In promoting urban chickens the proponents often cite perceived advantages, such as a steady and nutritious source of eggs and a plentiful supply of organic fertilizer from chicken wastes. Other perceived benefits cited in the literature include companionship, stress reduction, and even emotional therapy.

(<https://www.organiclifestylemagazine.com/the-benefits-of-backyard-chickens>)

These purported advantages are not well documented, however, and tend to be misleading. For example, scientists have demonstrated that eggs produced by urban chickens are no more nutritious than store-bought eggs or eggs that can be readily obtained from local farmers' markets or farm stands (citations available from author). One advantage of buying eggs commercially are federal and state rules and guidelines designed to protect consumers. Eggs, of course, can be a significant source of illness. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration:

"Fresh eggs, even those with clean, uncracked shells, may contain bacteria called *Salmonella* that can cause foodborne illness, often called 'food poisoning.' The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) estimates that 79,000 cases of foodborne illness and 30 deaths each year are caused by eating eggs contaminated with *Salmonella*. FDA has put regulations in place to help prevent contamination of eggs on the farm and during shipping and storage"

(<https://www.fda.gov/food/resourcesforyou/consumers/ucm077342.htm>)

As a result, commercial eggs are less likely to be contaminated with *Salmonella* or other infectious organisms compared to eggs obtained from chickens raised by individual households and establishments, such as churches. Another important point to keep in mind is that hens lay eggs reliably for only a few years. Thereafter, they are more likely to be seen as liabilities when egg production is the reason for keeping urban chickens.

Other often cited benefits of keeping urban chickens can be equally dubious. For example, some say that urban chickens can provide a plentiful supply of wastes that can be used as a source of fertilizer or combined with other materials to form compost. In theory, this sounds good, but in reality, few are willing to use chicken feces to make fertilizer or compost. Hence, chicken wastes will accumulate, producing strong odors and attracting flies and other vermin.

Furthermore, it should be noted that people who desire to raise chickens do so for a variety of reasons. For many it is simply a hobby; for others, it may be the result of an impulse buy, such as when children convince their parents to purchase cute live chicks at Farm and Fleet or another store. In either case, the long-term commitment to raising chickens responsibly is highly questionable and problematic as discussed later in this document. Of course, there are some potential chickens owners who will be responsible

and take chicken keeping seriously, but this does not eliminate the many others who will decide to raise chickens with far less commitment to the health, safety, and welfare of the chickens. Finally, as noted above, the literature cites other perceived benefits that include companionship, stress reduction, and therapy. Given the many problems urban chickens present, it may be that the neighbors of chicken owners are the ones who really need stress reduction or therapy. However, they prefer not to get it by raising chickens. Perhaps the Family Service Agency is a better alternative.

Hopefully, after reading the rest of this document you will see clearly that any perceived benefits of allowing urban chickens in DeKalb are seriously dwarfed by the potential drawbacks, which are many and which, unlike the the purported advantages, are well documented by credible sources. It should also be kept in mind that there are readily available alternatives for all of the supposed benefits of raising urban chickens. These alternatives also have the advantage of preserving the familiar urban-rural divide that has defined our country so well for the past 250 years or more.

SPECIFIC REASONS FOR OPPOSING URBAN CHICKENS IN DEKALB

Reason 1: There are very real and quantifiable risks to human health from keeping urban chickens but no increased risks from maintaining the current ban on chickens in DeKalb.

Chickens Transmit Diseases

Chickens, especially young chicks, can carry *Salmonella* pathogens, which can cause sometimes serious illnesses in humans. According the the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

"Live poultry might have *Salmonella* germs in their droppings and on their bodies (feathers, feet, and beaks), even when they appear healthy and clean. The germs can get on cages, coops, feed and water dishes, hay, plants, and soil in the area where the birds live and roam. Germs also can get on the hands, shoes, and clothes of people who handle or care for the birds."

"People become infected with *Salmonella* germs when they put their hands or equipment that has been in contact with live poultry in or around their mouth[s]. Young children are more likely to get sick because their immune systems are still developing and they are more likely to put their fingers or pacifiers and other items into their mouths."

"People who have contact with items, like coops or water dishes, in the area where poultry live can get sick without actually touching one of the birds. Germs on your hands can spread easily to other people or surfaces...." (see <https://www.cdc.gov/features/salmonellapoultry/index.html>)

Statistics from the CDC reveal that for the six-month period from February 15 to August 10, 2018, there were a reported 334 people in 47 states infected with *Salmonella* from backyard poultry flocks. The outbreaks led to 51 hospitalizations, and of those stricken, 21% were under the age of 5. In 2017, the CDC reported the largest number of human cases of salmonellosis ever recorded due to contact urban poultry flocks. Urban chickens are also potential sources of *campylobacteriosis*, *histoplasmosis*, urinary tract infections due to *Enterococcus faecalis*, and other potentially serious diseases. Consider, for example, the case of Luke Gabriele that was reported in the *Toronto Star*:

"Luke Gabriele was a healthy 14-year old football player in Pennsylvania when he began to feel soreness in his chest that grew increasingly painful. After his breathing became difficult, doctors detected a mass that appeared to be a tumour. For a week, Dan and DeAnna Gabriele thought their son was dying until tests identified the cause: not cancer, but chickens-- the ones he cared for at home. They had apparently infected him with salmonella that produced a severe abscess." (<https://www.thestar.com/news/world/2017/10/19/backyard-chicken-trend-leads-to-more-salmonella-infections-cdc.html>)

Urban Chickens Present Problems for Disease Control

It is conceivable that allowing urban chickens in DeKalb could place some of the liability for disease outbreaks on the City. In fact, the stated purpose of the City's Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) is to promote the "health, safety, and general welfare" of its residents. If urban chickens are allowed in DeKalb, achieving this objective will require potentially costly steps to assure adequate disease prevention, ongoing surveillance, and effective control measures. The Director of Health Protection at the DeKalb County Health Department recently stated in an interview that the department's resources are already stretched, and it cannot assume responsibility for monitoring chicken health in the City without new regulations giving it adequate authority and additional funding to carry out such a mandate. It should also be reemphasized that without detailed records of all urban chicken owners and a complete inventory of their flocks, including vaccination status, recent medical treatments and prescriptions, purchase dates and locations, etc., it would be extremely difficult for local health professionals to identify the source, trace, or control an outbreak regardless of its type or origin. A recent study of urban chicken ordinances for 100 municipalities throughout Colorado, and serving almost 42,000 households, revealed that the majority of the ordinances inadequately addressed human health risks and presented concerns for the adequacy of monitoring and intervening in public health crises. (Brinkley, C.; Scarlett Kingsley, J.; and Mench, J. (2018). A Method for Guarding Animal Welfare and Public Health: Tracking the Rise of Backyard Poultry Ordinances. *Journal of Community Health*, 43(4): 639-646.)

Finally, one should keep in mind that diseases like salmonellosis can also be spread easily by contaminated eggs, which are often shared with others at work or school and with friends and family members. These cases can also be difficult to follow up unless health officials have first-hand knowledge of how and to whom the eggs were distributed.

Reason 2: Experts warn that chicken enthusiasts typically do not recognize the serious threats to animal welfare and other problems that can result from raising chickens in urban environments.

Chickens Develop Numerous Health Problems

Few aspiring chicken owners are aware of, or prepared for, the many health and other challenges that urban chickens often present. Many of these problems are difficult to deal with, and medical support is often lacking or too expensive to pursue on a regular basis. Some veterinarians, for example, are untrained in chicken health or refuse to accept chickens in their practices. Chickens are known to be susceptible to a number of health problems such as *fowl pox*, a viral disease causing nodular lesions on the body and in the throat; *infectious bronchitis*; *internal and external parasites*, including ticks, mites, and lice; *coccidiosis*, a protozoal gastrointestinal disease; and *Marek's disease*, a

highly contagious neoplastic disease causing weight loss, paralyzation, and difficulty breathing. These and related health issues are not uncommon among chicken flocks and often go unrecognized by their owners, especially in the early stages. These problems cause great suffering to the affected chickens, and unfortunately, when sick chickens do become obvious, they are often slaughtered or abandoned to avoid the costs of treatment. Since many chicken owners consider sick chickens to have no value, their welfare is of little concern. **In these cases, raising urban chickens is cruel and inhumane and should be considered unethical.**

Urban Chickens Demand Attention and Care

What most new owners of urban chickens eventually find out is that raising chickens responsibly is not easy and requires a daily commitment involving feeding and watering chickens, cleaning their coops and premises, picking up their eggs, and retrieving the chickens at night to lock them up in their coops. There is never a day off, and chickens are not always as cooperative as owners expect. In addition, there are a myriad of problems that chicken owners face, including chicken health issues, predator infestation, and what to do with flocks when the temperatures hit extremes as they did this winter. Also, the costs of owning chickens is not trivial. Initial costs for coops, supplies, heating and cooling units, fencing, cameras, and other needs can average \$2000 to \$3000, and annual supplies for feed, bedding, utilities, etc. can run about \$300. Veterinarian care, if available, can increase total costs substantially.

(see <http://www.chickenrunrescue.org/Municipal-Regulation>)

One city dweller remarked that after adding up all his expenses he was afraid to tell his wife that the eggs produced by their urban chicken flock cost about \$40.00 a dozen. **Few aspiring chicken owners are aware of what it takes to raise chickens, and this is a serious concern because it is likely to lead to chicken abandonment or neglect as has been reported in many communities that allow urban chickens.** A noted veterinarian specializing in chickens recently stated, "The biggest risk ... to keeping urban chickens is the general ignorance people have of chickens."

(<https://mikethechickenvet.wordpress.com/2012/03/03/why-dont-cities-want-backyard-chickens/>)

It is worth noting at this point that the proposed ordinance would allow establishments like churches to raise urban chickens. This begs the question, who will be responsible for caring for them? Most likely, they will be volunteers. This, of course, raises a host of other issues regarding continuity of care and who takes responsibility when care is haphazard, intermittent, or absent entirely. Furthermore, who is ultimately responsible for the chickens? Is it the church pastor, the congregation, or the church governing body? **Allowing establishments to raise chickens hardly seems like it will benefit the health, welfare, or safety of urban chickens.**

Chicken Abandonment and Other Welfare Issues are Real

It is a scientific fact, that in addition to health problems, chickens are susceptible to a

host of nutritional deficiencies and reproductive issues that can result in egg binding¹ as well as problems like frostbite, freezing, bullying, and cannibalism. Chickens are easily stressed animals, which can accentuate these and other problems. First-time owners facing these or other issues sometimes consider abandoning their chickens. Frequently, they do this illegally in wooded areas, along roadsides, or in open fields. Animal shelters and farmers have reported being overburdened with abandoned chickens in areas where urban chickens are allowed. Many of these abandoned chickens have untreated health problems or other issues that must be dealt with. Examples include lost feet due to frostbite or reproductive cancers associated with constant egg laying.

One second generation farming family in DeKalb County with over 50 years of experience raising all types of farm animals, including chickens, and with more than 10 years of experience with the 4-H as poultry superintendents, stated that they have been the recipients of more than 75 "orphaned" chickens from city dwellers and schools that undertook raising urban chickens enthusiastically but then found that they no longer embraced the hobby when issues developed. **When asked if they thought allowing urban chickens in DeKalb was a good idea, they stated emphatically "100% No!" and added "You have no idea what you would be bringing on yourselves."**

United Poultry Concerns is a well known coalition of animal sanctuaries that are involved in the care of unwanted chickens. This organization drafted a collective position statement on backyard poultry due to their shelters "being inundated with calls to take in unwanted chickens," a result of the increasing trend of allowing urban chickens. The organization cites numerous animal welfare issues associated with urban chicken flocks. Some of these are worth highlighting since most chicken enthusiasts and communities considering allowing urban chickens are unaware of these startling facts:

"Hatcheries are like puppy mills: When animals are reduced to commodities, their interests are pushed aside in favor of profit. Hatcheries that produce chicks for backyard flocks treat chickens and their offspring the way puppy mills treat breeding dogs and their puppies. As there are no legal requirements dictating how breeding hens and roosters are housed, they're most likely crammed into small cages or sheds without outdoor access."

"Shipping day-old chicks is cruel: Most chickens purchased are bought from hatcheries [or from stores that obtain their chickens from hatcheries]. Hatcheries ship day-old birds through the postal service without any legal oversight. Young chickens are deprived of food and water for up to 72 hours and exposed to extreme temperatures."

"Chicken sexing is more art than science: Using data collected from sanctuaries and rescues that field calls daily about unwanted chickens, we estimate between 20-50% of purchased 'hens' are actually roosters. Depending on breed, visually identifying a rooster can take weeks to months."

¹"Egg binding is a life-threatening condition that must be addressed quickly, preferably by an experienced poultry veterinarian. If the egg is not passed within 24-48 hours, the hen is likely to perish. Absent access to a [qualified] vet, backyard chicken-keepers may have to take matters into their own hands in order to save the hen's life."

(<https://the-chicken-chick.com/chicken-egg-binding-causes-symptoms/>)

"Roosters may be unwanted and are often illegal: Male chickens are generally unwanted for two reasons: They don't produce eggs and they are rarely legal in urban or suburban settings. Hatcheries may use rooster chicks as packing material, regardless of whether they were ordered. ... Unwanted roosters may be abandoned to the streets, slaughtered, or end up in a municipal shelter to be killed. Very few find their way into a permanent home or sanctuary."

"Lack of professional medical care: Avian medicine has made progress but there are few vets specialized in the treatment and care of birds. Veterinarians who do treat poultry are often expensive, with a veterinary visit sometimes starting at a minimum of \$100."
(http://www.upc-online.org/backyard/backyard_poultry.html)

There are More Chicken Welfare Issues

Chicken Run Rescue, a home-based shelter program located in Minneapolis, cautions potential urban chicken owners of the serious animal welfare issues created by owning chickens in urban environments. Its founder, Mary Britton Clouse, cites several problems created by raising urban chickens:

"The challenge is to insure that people who think they are creating a more 'sustainable' world understand the ugly realities of how much their eggs cost the birds:
-Daily egg laying is biologically unnatural and unsustainable. By the age of 2 years, hens begin to develop reproductive problems and cancers from incessant egg laying which is completely unnatural and it ultimately kills them. ... Because of the constant wear on her system [sic], hens develop enlarged livers ... and/or tumors. Often, the oviduct ... disintegrates and the egg material ruptures into the body cavity and rots ... and slowly poisons her."
(<http://www.chickenrunrescue.org/Backyard-or-Battery>)

Clouse goes on to say, "Urban animal 'farming' is an extension of, not an 'humane alternative' to, the institutionalized cruelty of mass production...." She adds, "Purchased by mail order, 'poultry swaps' or from backyard breeders or feedstores, the birds ultimately wind up in the hands of people with no experience with animals, much less birds who required specialized care."
(<http://www.chickenrunrescue.org/Backyard-or-Battery>)

In summary, very few potential urban chicken owners or the governing bodies of communities that allow urban chickens are aware of the very significant effects this practice has on chicken welfare. When chickens are treated simply as a ready source of eggs or for the selfish interests of their owners, serious health and welfare problems can, and likely, will develop. In short, raising hens in back and side yards is an unnatural practice, and in some cases, it is only marginally more humane than the methods used to raise chickens for mass food production. Both practices can severely compromise the health and well being of the chickens. By contrast, country farmers who raise free range chicken flocks that include roosters are placing their chickens in a much more natural environment since roosters are a natural part of the chicken social structure and perform many critical functions, including protecting hens from predators and acting as peacekeepers when chickens quarrel. **Thus, excluding roosters from urban chicken flocks is an unnatural act. That is just one reason why chicken flocks belong in the country and not in the city.**