

It is my understanding that there is a proposal coming to council to allow chickens in residential areas. In my opinion, the majority of people currently living in areas zoned residential would disagree with this idea. There would be concerns with public health, odours, property values, and the attraction of vermin associated with backyard flocks in an urban setting. Chickens and other agricultural animals should be restricted to those zones where they are currently permitted.

I have serious concerns based on my experience as an inspector with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Poultry can have a number of diseases which are zoonotic, transmissible to humans such as salmonella and avian influenza. The incidence is admittedly low but should not be ignored. In 2019, the CDC reported 19 outbreaks of salmonella related to backyard chickens. There were 1134 cases with 2 deaths. Children under 5 years of age represented 21% of cases where information was provided and hospitalization was required in 30% of cases where information was provided.

Avian influenza is much less likely to occur but the impact on the agricultural sector can be extreme. Countries have closed their borders to Canadian poultry due to outbreaks of high pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). Commercial flocks and other backyard chickens in close proximity to a backyard flock with HPAI will be depopulated. There is a repository of avian influenza in wild birds in Canada with a greater chance of occurrence during migratory seasons. Vermin have been identified as a potential transmission route to domestic poultry so the handling of feed and bio waste as well as secure housing for the birds is important. In the event of an HPAI outbreak, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency will impose movement restrictions and inspection staff will attempt to identify all poultry within the area of concern to be euthanized or quarantined. During the 2004 HPAI outbreak in British Columbia, CFIA inspection staff went door to door in some residential neighbourhoods to locate backyard flocks within the quarantine zone. It would be helpful to the CFIA to have an accurate listing of all backyard chicken flocks so a licensing system similar to dogs and cats would be appreciated.

Public health agencies discourage keeping chickens indoors due to the salmonella dangers. Considering Canada's weather, the housing for the birds will need to be sufficient to protect them from the elements during the winter. Roosting boxes should be considered for the summer months. If chickens in residential areas are approved, there should be standards for housing materials and population density. Building permits should be required. The proximity to neighbours should be considered when housing is being constructed. Feces from chickens can contain salmonella which can be eliminated using compost. If raw bio waste is going into garbage bags, there is a health risk to municipal service workers. A number of municipalities have allowed chickens in residential areas in recent years and their experiences could be considered when considering what standards to be required in Clarington.

Allowing chickens in Clarington is not the same as allowing chickens in major urban areas such as Toronto due to the presence of commercial poultry operations. If a homeowner discovered that 2 of their 4 birds had suddenly died, they are not likely to submit the carcasses for pathology to determine the cause of death. In the event that HPAI was responsible, there could be a possibility that the disease would spread to a poultry farm 2 kilometres away which could result in a major economic loss.

I understand that there are a number of individuals who will advocate for chickens in residential areas. While I disagree with their position, I respect their right to bring the matter before council. I expect that they will reference the desirability of fresh eggs over store bought eggs and I can appreciate the difference. I would comment that there are numerous local farmers who offer on farm sales of eggs and council has advocated that Clarington residents buy local.

I believe that the matter be referred to staff who should consult with other municipalities, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and the Durham Region Health Unit. After input from those organizations, staff could bring back their report to council for discussion.