

Subject: Urban hen letter for council

From: Scott Mclaughlin

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To: clerk@hamilton.ca

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First, I'd like to thank the city of Hamilton, my fellow citizens who elected all of you, and you as members of council for the opportunity to speak here today.

Second, I'd like to voice my disappointment in a few of you for:

For the condescending and unbecoming replies that have been penned in request and concerns sent by email to you, in regards to looking further into or adopting an urban hen program within Hamilton.

For your resistance and for the misinformation you have spread among your peers and within local and on national media.

Finally I am most disappointed in your inability to set your bias or past and dated experiences aside.

When we have members of council, past or present, who have sat on a committee representing a farming alliance who's ten year action plan includes – word for word – one that:

“Strives to establish the GHAC as a globally renowned vibrant food and farming cluster, characterized by profitable farming operations”

I ask myself – would supporting back yard egg production risk the seat the member holds on that committee. Is the monetary gains of commercial farming more important than parents and their children having the ability to choose where their own food comes from?”

“What's next?” – a term so many of you like to use when comparing 3 pound chickens to 750 pound cattle.

For multiple years this council has heard this motion, fielded this request and heard the same and some new arguments in support of citizens petitions to raise backyard hens....one of you just recently even compared it to 'groundhog' day. – I offer you this advice:

Rather than consider this a roundabout debate....ask yourself 'why'? Why does this topic continue to arise? Could it be the initial bylaw – like so many have been - is now outdated, that times have evolved? Or that people are more aware and more responsible? Could veterinary medicine be better than when the original bylaw was adopted? Do any of you actually know why and when the current bylaw was adopted and the practice banned?

Could Hamilton have been one of the initial and pioneering cities in embracing change rather than the last, as cities and townships all around us are doing so.

For years, citizens have submitted true, justifiable and passionate reasons in support of the program. Within council and planning meetings there have been hours upon hours of multiple debate and still not one opposing councilor has been able to challenge any of those points with legitimate data. Dismiss them yes, often with personal and decade old stories of times growing up on "stinky poultry farms", where "livestock" is deprived, manipulated with artificial light and fed

pellet food. The very farms many of us don't want to obtain our eggs from. The very farms it seems that some of you are trying to protect.

I've been a firefighter and training officer for 22 years. Many things have changed since I began my career. The first step of evolving and improving as an organization (or city?) has always been listening and acknowledging the needs of our people.

You've shared with us and each other misinformation and no facts. No numbers, just 'lots of complaints' and hood winkle about neighborhoods that have never had raccoons.

On that note, when I first moved to Hamilton, I had a skunk problem. My house was on Hess Street, near restaurants and apartment buildings with large dumpsters. The animals were so frequent, often spraying my dog and I was forced to call pest control. Here's what I learned from a professional. Not my personal experience or a story I heard from a friend of a friend. Not the internet. A professional working in the field.

Pest, all pest including vermin, skunk, raccoon, possum, coyote and predatory birds are on the move and looking for three things, either food, water or shelter. If you, your neighbors or their neighbors and so on, supply any of these three things. You will have pest at some point or another. This includes composters, bird feeders, raised decks, pooling water. They are already here and already established.

I now ask you this. A chicken coop, not unlike any pet requires an initial investment. Why would any reasonable person – because I like to think that those are who we are considering here – reasonable people. Not the people that have been mentioned so often in these discussions by those opposing the motion. The ones that don't cut their grass, the person that wants a pet goat after the chicken. The reasonable person, the one that will build and maintain a safe coop, use the correct building material and care for and protect their animals. Why would this person want to feed the skunks, lose their investment to a raccoon and break their child's heart? They wouldn't....so that's another moot point.

I would be talking far longer than appropriate if I was to refute all of the false claims and the untruths that some of you continue to voice. But here are some of the main ones.

Yes you can buy sexed chickens, you can even purchase laying hens. From business and farmers right here in Hamilton.

Most chickens lay for around 7 years (Mr. Ferguson, birds that lay for 11 months are tricked into having 2 sunrises in 24 hours, obviously taking a toll on their health) again misinformation.

Four birds don't smell so bad your eyes will water, typically a 10 x 10 coop needs to be cleaned once a month and even then the odor is nominal. 4 birds produce half the excrement of a medium size dog in a day.

Over many years this Council has denied the divide between the urban and rural areas of Hamilton and between the upper and lower mountain....you've struggled to find opportunities to unite city and country folks. I feel keeping birds in the rural backyards, and in the poultry farms and denying the urban citizens the privilege contributes to that. Whereas it could offer unity.

I ask that you be open minded and set your bias and past experiences aside and at the very least invest the time into exploring the subject further with a pilot. There are tens of thousands of birds cooped up in milk crate spaces and dying in battery farms everyday throughout the region. If some of them can be replaced by birds in the rural areas, if communities can learn something new and find appreciation in something that is very common practice all across the world, is that such a bad thing?

Please consider voting yes to investigating further and adopting an urban hen program in the city of Hamilton.

Thank you,
Scott McLaughlin