

February 20, 2021

To Mr. Mayor Fred Eisenberger and Ward Three City Councillor Nringer Nann,

I am writing to you as a resident of Hamilton Ontario, concerned about the future of our planet and our city.

I have recently become aware of food security challenges in our city and I am asking that you seek to amend the Responsible Animal Ownership by-law to allow citizens to own and raise chickens in urban areas.

Urban populations in Hamilton have limited access to grocery stores and healthy, affordable local food. Many urban residents grow gardens for food, but self-sustainability is limited with the current Hamilton by-laws. There is a lack of knowledge around urban farming, its benefits, and how to do it.

Urban agriculture could explode in productivity if the circuit could become more complete with the introduction of chickens. Hens produce eggs, and potentially meat for residents, which increases their food security. Additionally, the fertilizer they produce makes excellent compost for vegetable and flower gardens.

In Hamilton, the current by-law states that residents cannot own chickens, ducks, turkeys, or other galliformes, except on lands zoned as rural or agricultural (City of Hamilton). There have been multiple attempts to change this, backed with robust research and information that provides reasonable responses and logical solutions to opposition, yet the rural and suburban council members continue to vote against it.

Three times, a pilot project to allow a limited number of homes in Hamilton urban neighbourhoods to own laying hens has been proposed, in 2012, 2018, and most recently in 2020 (Mann, 2020). In October 2020, the pilot project was overruled by a vote of 5-3. Arguments against this pilot project proposal in 2020 have been weak and unfounded. Councillor statements include “I don’t support chickens in an urban area”, “Chicken manure smell is the worst”, and “they do get all over the place and there are issues”. (Mann, 2020).

There are three primary reasons I believe that allowing people to own and raise hens in urban backyards is an important step towards sustainability and food security. Firstly, the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified poverty and food insecurity among Hamilton residents. It has become clear that it is crucial for the City to work to enable food resilience and improve access to

inexpensive and nutritious food within an accessible distance from people's homes (Mann, 2020). Urban hens provide inexpensive, nutritious food at an accessible distance.

Secondly, there are an abundance of benefits to be reaped from eggs. On average, one hen lays one egg per day. This provides food for low-income and middle-income families. It is an opportunity to teach children where their food comes from, which allows them to become responsible and knowledgeable consumers of food as they grow older. Additionally, eggs from hens raised on pasture contain more vitamin A, E, D, omega-3 fatty acids, beta carotene, and less saturated fat than factory farmed eggs (Hamilton Report, 2018) A Hamilton resident I interviewed who prefers to remain unnamed says that "owning chickens in the city has actually allowed us a really cool opportunity to get to know our neighbours. We give them eggs, we meet them and get to talk with them".

Thirdly, it has been proven successful. Many cities in Ontario allow for backyard hens and have had great success. Guelph, Caledon, Brampton, Kingston, Niagara Falls, Newmarket, and more allow for backyard hens under specific regulations, requirements, and applications. Guelph has approximately 40 chickens per 40 000 households, and receives a handful of (average six) complaints each year. Comparatively, the city receives approximately 500 complaints about dogs. They have a system for handling complaints in which they send an inspector to the residence to ensure quality and cleanliness of the site (Hamilton Report, 2018)

There are a plethora of other reasons as to why urban hens are a good idea. For example, they keep the pest and tick populations low, they eat kitchen scraps and keep the food waste away from landfills, they produce excellent compost and improve soil quality, etc (Hamilton Report, 2018).

The City of Kingston has received feedback from stakeholders in their pilot project which include a number of benefits, including;

"Fosters responsibility within the family dynamics (creates potential growth, responsibility, teamwork and leadership from parents to children), promotes community local food source sharing, health and wellness benefits which include an excellent source of protein and vitamins A, D, E and Vitamin B12, education and awareness"  
(Hamilton City Council escribe meeting, 2018)

The main counter arguments for this action include odour, chickens escaping the coop and running free, noise, and appearance. There have been thoughtful responses provided for each of these challenges that makes them virtually indistinguishable as "challenges", but nonetheless I will respond. Mike Bozzo, a Hamilton resident who spoke to the committee in fall 2020 says that 30 hens would create odour problems, but in limited numbers as proposed such as four to six,

with monthly pen cleaning, will create no unwelcome smell at all (Mann, 2020). Very rarely do chickens actually pose significant problems or threats by escaping the coop, and if there are no roosters allowed, the noise will not be a problem. By having people complete applications in order to have a chicken coop and uphold certain cleanliness and quantity standards, it is ensured that neighbours should not be concerned about the viability of this.

To conclude, I will offer this quote from Yuki Hayashi;

“There’s something wrong with a system where tainted food outbreaks, pollution and cruelty to animals are accepted, and humanely and hygienically raising three hens is not. Where cramming multiple hens whose beaks have been cut off with a red-hot blade are stuffed into a cage that’s too small for them to move around in, where they’ll live their short lives covered in fecal matter from the cages stacked above theirs, with oozing sores and eye infections, is acceptable, but letting them bask in the sun in a fully fenced urban backyard, or dust-bathe under a dogwood tree while their owner hand-feeds them is not.

Our food system, and food values, are broken. When local governments take notice, will it be before or after a global food crisis has already struck at the heart of Canadian food security?”

I am asking the City to amend its Prohibited Animals by-law to allow for the ownership of chickens in urban areas for the purpose of increasing urban food security and sustainability by integrating ecosystems.

Thank you for your time. If you would like to contact me you can reach me at

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Alyssa Zilney

## References

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