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Hens may soon be allowed in Caledon back yards

By Bill Rea

It won't be long now before Caledon residents will be able to keep hens in their back yards, although there will be conditions.

The Town hosted an open house session last week to outline the conditions that are being proposed.

The issue was raised earlier this year when a Mono Mills family was told they would have to get rid of the chickens they were keeping.

Tammie Krick appeared before Town Council in August, promoting numerous benefits to raising hens in back yards, while trying to argue against myths.

The birds are seen as pets, and she added rasing them has been an educational experience for her two young daughters. As well, the eggs they lay is a source of food for the family.

But there were also concerns raised at the time of the possible spread of disease. Councillor Gord McClure was particularly concerned about that.

Allowing hens on residential properties will require an amendment to the Town's Animal Control Bylaw.

Town staff reported at last week's session that there have been several examples of hens being raised in residential areas with very few problems.

The proposed regulations include establishing a maximum of four hens per property. Roosters will not be allowed, and the hens will have to be at least four months old. They will also have to be kept in a coop or run at all times. The coops and runs combined will take up less than 10 square metres, and they will have to be at least two metres from any lot line.

Some people attending the session had some problems

Alloa area resident Tom Dolson thought the setbacks should be greater.

?I have no issue with somebody on a two-to-five-acre lot having chickens, but there but there should be a reasonable setback,? he said, suggesting 500 feet might be appropriate. ?The risk factors are just too great.?

He also said the Town will have to hire more bylaw enforcement staff to make sure the regulations are being followed.

?We're opening up a can of worms here,? he said.

Krick saw no problems with the proposed regulations. The operation her family had been running complied with everything proposed, with the exception of setbacks, but they can make the necessary changes.

She also said the family's hens have been staying on a farm while the regulations have been prepared.

?The girls will be happy to have them back,? she said.

Patrick Trafford of the Town's Legislative Services, said the regulations are common in other places where hens are permitted. Not allowing roosters is a common provision, and he added they are not required for hens to lay eggs.

He added hens can live as long as eight to 10 years, but they only can lay eggs for about two years, depending on how they're fed and the standard of care they receive.

The age provisions are common as well, he said. Hens will start laying at about 20 weeks, and Trafford said the want to discourage people from buying baby chicks, then getting tired of the process once they start to grow.

?It's really an animal welfare issue in this respect,? he said.

Trafford said staff will be sending a report on the matter to Council. He added that should be by the end of the year, and possibly sometime in November.