

Backyard hens have been approved by Town Council

By Bill Rea

Chickens are going to be allowed in backyards throughout Caledon.

Town Council last week agreed to ratify the decision made previously at committee, although there were still some negative votes. The issues landed on Council's table in August, when Mono Mills resident Tammie Krick appeared, telling them they had been told by Town bylaw officers that there had been complaints about the hens they were keeping in their backyard.

She had told councillors her two young daughters, Cameron and Maia, had asked for chickens for Christmas last year. She checked with the Town, and was told there, shouldn't be an issue, provided the neighbours didn't complain. The girls received some of the equipment they needed to raise the birds, the family built a coop in the backyard and welcomed chicks into the family in April.

In July, they heard that neighbours had expressed concerns the birds were attracting wildlife. She pointed out their property backs onto Glen Haffy Conservation Area, where there's already lots of wildlife.

The matter was referred to Town staff, who came up with a plan to allow these birds in backyards, subject to conditions. They included not allowing these birds in multi-residential properties, allowing a maximum of four hens per lot, with the owner of the property living on the premises. Roosters will not be allowed in residential areas, and the hens must be at least four months old.

They will have to be kept in a coop or run at all times, and will be kept in the coop between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. There are also provisions governing the condition of the facilities they are to be kept in, as well as rules ensuring their well-being.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy said she had been approached by the father of a former firefighter, who related an incident in which an electric heating system in a coop set it on fire, and the flames spread to the house. She was concerned about possible fire hazards.

General Manager of Community Services Peggy Tollett told her she had talked to Fire Chief Darryl Bailey, and he had raised no concerns.

Shaughnessy wondered if the Chief had been aware of the incident she had been told of.

Councillor Annette Groves said she had heard concerns in her community, especially dealing with the size of backyards in Bolton.

This would be a better feature in rural areas, she argued.

She also wasn't too impressed with the regulations being put in place, arguing there are never enough bylaw officers to enforce them.

'I think we've talked about this too much,' Councillor Gord McClure said.

He's a chicken farmer and he said he and others are worried that the spread of diseases from these birds could damage their livelihood. He wondered what kind of inspections will take place.

'This is a disaster, as far as I'm concerned,' he declared.

But Councillor Nick deBoer said a couple of chickens are not going to represent a major increase in staff's workload. He added there are other communities, like Toronto, that permit backyard hens, and the Town will have the chance to look into any complaints that develop.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli agreed.

'It's not a big complaint issue,' he remarked, adding he didn't think there would be a massive number of people starting to keep hens at their homes, and that the regulations should keep things under control. 'I think staff have done a great job.'

Shaughnessy countered Toronto is allowing hens as part of the three-year pilot project.

She added she has heard about 12 complaints dealing with things like smells.

'I'm trying to make it better for neighbours,' she said.

Mayor Allan Thompson said coops and runs will have to be set back at least two metres from lot lines, and he was confident that should take care of the concerns.

Krick said she was pleased with the way things ended up.

'We're just very happy that the process works,' she said, adding there's benefit in being persistent and following the rules.

She added her daughters are very happy to have the birds back.

'We did take our chickens home just yesterday,' she said Friday. 'They've settled back into their coop, and the girls are over-the-moon happy.'

She added they have always been in compliance with all the regulations that have been passed, with one exception, involving setbacks. 'We rectified that one,' she said.