

West Vancouver makes way for fowl play

Anna Dimoff / North Shore News

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West Van resident Kaylee Whittaker, pictured in 2013, urged council to redraft a bylaw that prohibits ownership of chickens. New regulations now allow backyard biddies. file photo Paul McGrath, North Shore News Photo Paul McGrath, North Shore News

Don't be surprised if you see chickens trying to cross the Upper Levels Highway – they're making their way to West Vancouver where new bylaws can offer them a permanent residence.

Council unanimously passed a new bylaw March 7 which allows a maximum of six chickens over four months old in single family zones and a coop size measuring no taller than two metres with a minimum floor space of 4.3 square feet per chicken. Enclosures must feature a coop as well as a run, both with solid roofs and be set back from property lines by approximately a metre and a half. Food must be kept indoors and enclosure areas must be well maintained with noise kept to a minimum. **No roosters are allowed and slaughtering is not permitted on an owner's property.**

District staff pulled from the guidelines in Squamish and the cities of Vancouver and North Vancouver, giving them a place to start.

"They took what they know about our geography and our residents and put the best set of regulations forward for what they think that we should have here in West Van," said Coun. Nora Gambioli, who has been a strong supporter since the idea was hatched.

A \$50 registration fee will be put in place, which Gambioli says should cover the cost of sending bylaw officers out to do inspections.

A cluck of caution came from Coun. Michael Lewis. He voted in favour, but warned new owners of the responsibility they'll be taking on.

"I would just caution anyone embarking upon keeping backyard chickens that they do their research. I don't think it's as romantic, and as easy and carefree as one might expect," Lewis said. He echoed concerns about the pets attracting wildlife and the lack of regulation around electric fencing to discourage larger predators from catching a quick lunch.

Responding to the debate over fencing, Gambioli said she wouldn't want to deter potential farmers from keeping chickens, as was the case in Squamish. The municipality's "draconian" bylaws requiring electric fences drove people to handle their business "under the coop" with few people, if any, registering their hens with the municipality, she said.

The City of North Vancouver has put together handbooks to advise owners with an overview of chicken facts and how to best care for feathered friends. Quality of life standards are outlined to give the fowls a comfortable area to roam and roost.

"I think our staff is planning on doing something like that, apparently it has worked quite well," Gambioli said. "At least we've paved the way for the North Vancouver District, now they don't have to reinvent the wheel, and they can copy our stuff if they want."

In 2013, West Vancouver resident, Kaylee Whittaker, pecked at the heartstrings of council by telling them about her lifelong dream to own a chicken as a pet. Her plea prompted West Van to redraft bylaws prohibiting ownership of chickens.

District staff have been plucking away since the beginning of the year, crafting new regulations to allow West Vancouver residents to own backyard chickens.