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Backyard chickens home to roost in WV

Maria Spitale-Leisk / North Shore News

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Seven year later the hens have come home to roost in West Vancouver.

The municipality's ban on backyard chickens has been rescinded with council voting unanimously on Monday in favour of the fowls.

Some feathers were ruffled in 2008 when West Vancouver banished the chickens, after a century of allowing residents to keep them, because of concerns they were attracting large wildlife to backyards.

Council started reconsidering the chicken coops last November after hearing from a group of residents that included plucky 11-year-old Gleneagles elementary student Kaylee Whittaker, who spoke about her dream to raise backyard chickens.

The youth engagement factor weighed heavily in the councillors' decision to reverse the chicken ban Monday night. "It's educational, not only that - you know, I'd rather have a kid playing with the chicken than a cellphone quite frankly," said Coun. Bill Soprovich. Coun. Craig Cameron, adding to Soprovich's sentiments about the benefits of introducing children to urban chicken cultivation, said there were youngsters willingly waiting for an hour to see some small barnyard animals at PumpkinFest last weekend. "And why was that so popular? Because kids really enjoy ... connecting with animals ... and watching them and interacting with them," said Cameron.

West Vancouver undertook a public consultation this past spring, to gauge interest in backyard chicken coops, that included an online survey and open house. There were 142 surveys completed. Asked if personally they would be interested in keeping backyard chickens, 49.6 per cent of survey respondents, or 69 people, said yes. Meanwhile, 60 per cent of West Vancouver residents polled said they are in favour of having chicken coops in their neighbourhood.

Food security and environmental sustainability topped the list of backyard chickens

benefits that respondents were polled on.

The potential to attract wildlife and rodents were the biggest concerns to respondents. Last year the North Shore Black Bear Network reversed its stance on backyard chicken coops attracting the burly animals.

West Vancouver staff also looked at urban chicken husbandry models in neighbouring municipalities.

Since the chickens came home to roost in North Vancouver city in 2012, five coops have been spotted. North Vancouver district, however, does not allow the keeping of chickens.

In the City of Vancouver, where there are 600,000 residents, a total of 218 households have registered hens.

Extrapolating those statistics, Coun. Nora Gambioli abated any fears about chickens ruling the roost in West Vancouver, while reiterating no roosters would be allowed due to noise concerns.

"So we're not talking about everyone getting chickens, we are actually talking about a handful of people who would be allowed to have hens essentially as pets and benefit from their egg production," said Gambioli.

As the motion reads, staff will report back to council with drafted bylaws to regulate the keeping of chickens in a "safe, humane and sanitary manner that is sensitive to the needs of neighbouring properties."

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West Vancouver ponders plumed pets

Council to gauge residents' interest in backyard chickens

Chris Slater / North Shore News

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West Vancouver SPCA staffer Ashley Lane in April with a chicken found pecking around a yard in West Vancouver. The chicken was later claimed by its owner. File photo Cindy Goodman

[Following interests expressed by a few District of West Vancouver residents \(http://www.nsnews.com/news/plucky-tween-cries-fowl-at-west-vancouver-chicken-bylaw-1.1635544\)](http://www.nsnews.com/news/plucky-tween-cries-fowl-at-west-vancouver-chicken-bylaw-1.1635544), district council decided to bring the idea of changing its bylaws to allow for backyard chicken keeping to a public consultation process.

As interests in keeping plumed pets has grown in the Lower Mainland in recent years, the district, which currently bans the keeping of backyard chickens, called for a staff report last November to look into the potential of allowing backyard chickens.

One concern raised by the North Shore Black Bear Society in the recently completed report, was the potential chickens could have on attracting bears, something Coun. Michael Lewis had concerns with as well.

"We really do have to make sure that there are no public health or safety concerns that are insurmountable. I have not yet been convinced that a wildlife attractant being encouraged to be dispersed amongst the residential areas in the community is a good idea," said Lewis, who cited recent cougar sightings in the district as a reason for his concern as well.

However, Coun. Mary-Ann Booth, who said she grew up on a farm, said she never experienced chickens being an attractant to bears. Booth did admit though that changing the bylaw is a big question to consider going into the public consultation process.

Coun. Nora Gambioli attested bears were not a problem for her family either who kept chickens in West Vancouver when she was a child and for many years afterwards. She did, however, want to know what percentage of the population in other municipalities that allow backyard coops actually take up the opportunity, as well as whether or not those municipalities require electric fences to deter potential wildlife as recommended in the report by the North Shore Black Bear Society and WildSafeBC.

Gambioli also took issue with use of the term "chicken" when the bylaw, as in other municipalities, would only allow for the keeping of hens. "I really think we should change the terminology to 'backyard hens' which is what most of the other municipalities use to my knowledge."

In the end, council voted unanimously in favour of bringing the motion to a public consultation process.

A public survey will be available online at westvancouver.ca/westvancouverITE (<http://westvancouver.ca/westvancouverITE/>), as well as a planned open house to gather resident views in the next 30 days. Staff will then report back to council to recommend the next steps to take.

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