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'Chicken underground' emerges in Indiana

By BOB SCOTT

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The "chicken underground" is on the march.

Gay-Ellen Stulp and Stephany Miskunas are lobbying the Lafayette City Council to allow them to keep pet chickens at their homes in the historic Highland Park neighborhood.



Gay-Ellen Stulp cradles Hazel, a chicken, on Monday at a farm off McCormick Road in West Lafayette. She is lobbying the Lafayette City Council to change its ordinance, allowing her to raise chickens in a coop behind her home in the historic Highland Park neighborhood. - JOHN TERHUNE / Journal & Courier

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Stulp said she wants city council members to amend the ordinance that forbids having chickens in the city. The city council's [Public Health & Welfare and Safety Committee](#) plans to consider the matter.

"It's been a blast," Stulp said of her quest. "I can't believe the discussions I've gotten as I go around with my petition.

"It's a little hobby. They are pets. I guess I'm now part of the chicken underground."

Melanie Lucroy, president of Highland Park Neighborhood Association, said the group hasn't taken an official stance on the issue.

"We are mostly a social organization interested in promoting the neighborhood," she said.

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"There are strong opinions on both sides."

Stulp said she has collected more than 200 signatures from Lafayette residents in favor of allowing pet chickens in Lafayette.

Urban chicken movement

Many cities allow urban chicken farming, including Indianapolis, St. Louis, San Francisco, Ann Arbor, Mich., and Madison, Wis.

Restrictions are placed on the chicken lovers in most of those cases, though. For example, in most cases, hens are allowed but not roosters, only three or four chickens are permitted at each household, and chickens must be kept from leaving the property.


The urban chicken movement has businesses that sell equipment and offer tips for raising the birds.

"There are even 'stealth' chicken coops that look like trash cans," Stulp said.

She said that the city's animal control department last May ordered her to part ways with her four hens. Miskunas had chickens in her backyard for a year and she said most neighbors knew it. But this summer, a young hen escaped into a neighborhood yard and authorities were called.

Several Highland Park neighbors declined to comment about the situation or about legalizing chickens in the city.

Miskunas had purchased a kids' playhouse and customized it into a coop. She winterized it, added a light bulb for heat and secured it from predators. She even added a flower bed.

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