

Vancouver hatches plan for backyard chickens

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Currently, Vancouver residents can raise chickens in their backyards if they own a minimum one-acre property. (CBC)

The City of Vancouver has moved one step closer to allowing urban chicken coops in residential backyards.

Councillors voted unanimously on Thursday night to direct staff to study the issue and draft a bylaw amendment.

City staff will take a few months to look at issues such as the prospect of an avian influenza outbreak, noise complaints and a possible rise in predators before presenting the draft amendment to the council for a vote.

But animal activists, such as Leanne McConnachie, the director of farm animal programs with the Vancouver Humane Society, told the councillors backyard chickens are a bad idea.

"My concern is that when the general public has the ability to bring them into their backyard and they think this is a great way for their children to have their own Easter eggs ... that we will have the same situation that we now have with cats and dogs in terms of neglect, abandonment, lack of knowledge," said McConnachie.

The BCSPCA voiced similar concerns at the council meeting, but several people spoke out to support the idea.

Heather Havens moved to the Lower Mainland a year ago from Portland, Ore., where backyard flocks have been allowed for years.

"Everyone and their brother has chickens.... Everybody's gotten along. The shelters haven't filled up with chicken complaints," said Havens.

The chickens are so popular there is even a tour for those who want to build their own backyard roosts, she said.

"It's the home of the Tour de Coops. It's beautiful.... It's a tour of all of the chicken coops in the city," said Havens.

Currently, Vancouver residents can only raise chickens in their backyards if they own a minimum one-acre property.

Dave Chauvel told the council he has kept chickens illegally at his Kitsilano home on and off for the last decade, and he believes it's about time the bylaw was amended.

"As it now stands, the City of Vancouver allows the keeping of 12 exotic birds, and exotic birds is not well defined, and I think you could keep 12 ostriches in your backyard according to the bylaw," he said.