



## **PROPOSAL FOR A SASKATOON URBAN HEN PILOT PROJECT**

Saskatoon Bridge City Chickens (SBCC) is a coalition of Saskatoon citizens who share a common goal of enhancing local food security by increasing awareness, interest, and participation in local food production systems.

We are writing to request the opportunity to speak to Council at its next regular meeting to discuss the implementation of an 18-month urban hen pilot project. We respectfully submit this guideline with the hope that it may form the regulatory framework for the project.

### **BACKGROUND**

This guideline was drafted after researching urban hen-keeping bylaws and pilot study reports from 25 Canadian cities including Edmonton, Red Deer, Moncton, and Kitchener. We identified and consolidated best practices, communication plans, environmental outcomes, strategies for mitigating nuisance conditions, and potential health concerns. In addition, we've reviewed and incorporated provincial legislation and municipal bylaw requirements where applicable.

The guideline includes requirements for:

- Participant registration, site inspection, and enforcement procedures;
- Siting, designing, and maintaining a coop and outdoor enclosure;
- Handling and caring for healthy chickens.

Support for the project has been provided by the following institutions and individuals (see Appendix A for letters of support):

- Executive Director, Saskatoon SPCA
- Executive Director, CHEP
- Faculty in the University of Saskatchewan Western College of Veterinary Medicine, Department of Small Animal Clinical Sciences
- Faculty in the University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing
- Deputy Medical Health Officer, Population and Public Health, Saskatoon Health Region
- Seven Saskatoon community associations; all are open to participating in the initial pilot project

**Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.**

## **RATIONALE AND BENEFITS**

In September 2002, Saskatoon City Council adopted the Saskatoon Food Charter. The Charter outlines the commitment of the city and its citizens to food security and states in part that to “develop and promote food security in our city, Saskatoon City Council will encourage community gardens, urban agriculture and the recycling of organic materials that nurture soil fertility.” The charter also documents Saskatoon City Council’s commitment to meeting the goals of national food security and describes the role of citizens who participate directly in promoting food security measures at home, their work-places, and within their community.

In 2013, Saskatoon released its 10-year strategic plan that detailed its vision for ensuring Saskatoon is a “great place to live, where sustainable growth enables the community to invest for the benefit of all.” The plan was developed through direct and extensive consultations with citizens which resulted in the identification of seven strategic goals that will guide Saskatoon towards becoming a successful city of tomorrow.

Our proposal directly supports two of these strategic goals; environmental leadership and quality of life.

### **Environmental Leadership: Saskatoon grows in harmony with nature.**

*“We produce less garbage and we recycle or compost most of it. We grow more food in the city.”*

A very small flock of chickens can be quiet and sociable pets with significant environmental benefits. Homeowners can feed chickens food waste from their kitchen and compost the chicken manure which can then be used as a rich fertilizer for flower and vegetable beds. Chickens also provide natural pest control consuming ants, grasshoppers, grubs, beetles, ticks, and larvae.

Consider the following information compiled by the Winnipeg Urban Chickens Association:

- 1 hen consumes 3 kilograms of food waste per month
- 5 hens per household = 15 kilograms of food waste consumed per month
- 15 kilograms x 30 pilot participants = 450 kilograms of food waste consumed per month
- 450 kilograms consumed per month x 18 months = 8,100 kilograms of food waste consumed and diverted from the landfill

The municipal savings in not having to handle, transport, and store the food waste due to this pilot project is significant.

## **Quality of Life: Saskatoon is a warm, welcoming people place**

*“As a community, we find new and creative ways to showcase our city’s built, natural, and cultural heritage. People are actively engaged in the future and governance of their city”*

There are numerous physical and social, benefits to keeping backyard hens. Physically, hens encourage people to spend more time outdoors, and produce nutrient rich eggs. Socially, hens can encourage communication between neighbours and breakdown barriers. Natalie Carreiro, from the University of Manitoba, recently (2015) conducted a study and found four main reasons people wanted backyard hens: **a)** food-related, **b)** to create learning opportunities, **c)** as a leisure activity and as “pets with benefits,” and **d)** politically inspired reasons (i.e. to demonstrate disapproval with what they perceived as an unfair bylaw). She reported that study participants talked about feeling more connected to neighbours, describing the experience as “neighbour bonding,” because they are a conversation piece, and through the sharing of eggs or manure. Neighbours frequently wanted to learn about the chickens. Carreiro reported stories of how hens made neighbourhoods better:

*The neighbours all enjoy looking over the fence and asking me how the girls are doing, how are the eggs coming. It's a neighbourhood project, really. Everybody has got a little curiosity. They don't want chickens themselves, but it's an interesting thing . . . How are they doing? Are they happy? . . . We talk over the fence, kibbutz back and forth. We enjoy it.*

*I would know that people had been back there when I came home because there would be a sweater that wasn't mine that would be lying over the chair. And then a couple days later they would come back and get their sweater [laughing]. Yeah! Isn't that crazy?! . . . Like they would come over and they would sit there you know for an hour or whatever just to chill out in the backyard watching the chickens . . . They loved those darn chickens . . . It was shocking! I think that was good for our neighbourhood. Like, that wasn't, that wasn't the reason that I got them! But they made this neighbourhood better! . . . If I get chickens again people will be really, really happy.*

Chickens provide a good lesson in food production while entertaining the whole family.

## **PILOT TERMS**

To ensure the pilot project is manageable, it would be restricted to 30 households located within the neighbourhoods whose community associations have offered their support. This includes:

Caswell Hill, Holliston, Hudson Bay Park / Mayfair / Kelsey-Woodlawn  
King George, Mont Royal, Nutana, Riversdale

Please note that the accompanying letters of support from the respective community associations can be found in Appendix A.

As stated previously, the pilot project would last for an 18-month period after which the outcomes will be assessed and summarized in a report to council. Based on the results of the pilot, it is anticipated that Council would vote on permanently modifying the Animal Control Bylaw, 1999, No 7860 (<https://www.saskatoon.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-clerk/bylaws/7860.pdf>) to allow hen keeping within city limits.

## **MEASURING SUCCESS**

There have been few studies on benefits or challenges of keeping urban hens. As part of this pilot project, it would be important to track the expectations and experiences of participants. If the pilot is adopted by the City of Saskatoon, Dr. Martin would work with partners at the University of Saskatchewan and the Bridge City Chickens group to identify measurable indicators to better understand the return on investment of urban hens. This would include social indicators, food literacy, economic indicators (both on part of the hen owner and the City of Saskatoon), and the food environment. It would also be important to capture dissenting voices, as people who express concern can add alternative views that can strengthen the final bylaw changes should the pilot project be successful.

## **REGISTRATION PROCEDURE**

- The SPCA will conduct an initial inspection of the coop, hens, and site prior to initial site approval and license being granted from the City of Saskatoon.
- The licensee(s) must complete a two-hour urban hen-keeping course. This will be facilitated by Saskatoon Bridge City Hens (SBCH) in partnership with the SPCA. The licensee shall provide proof of completion of a training course recognized by Animal Control as comprehensive and specific to the Saskatchewan climate.
- Licences will be granted once licensees have completed the two-hour training course and have had their site and coop inspected by the SPCA.
- All hens on site must be licensed with the Animal Control. Given the short life span of chickens, only one licence is required for the small flock, (rather than a separate licence for each chicken.)
- The licensee must comply with all Provincial regulations around the keeping of hens. The Province of Saskatchewan requires all owners of poultry (including small urban flocks) to register their flocks into the provincial database and obtain a Premise Identification (PID) Number. The PID enables the province to keep track of livestock site locations in case of potential disease outbreak. The Province will maintain communication with site owners should any information or incidents occur that would require site owners to take action.
- Public information about the Pilot Project should be supplied by the City of Saskatoon, in partnership with the SBCC.

## TRAINING & MENTORSHIP

The SBCC is committed to taking an active role in the pilot project to ensure its success. This includes preparing and delivering orientation to project participants, periodic visits to the yards, and fielding questions that the City, project participants, or the public may have.

SBCC recommends that each site have support and assistance from a recognized mentor- supplied on a volunteer basis by SBCC members. Contact information for SBCC members will be available via a social media format.

## INSPECTIONS

The licensee(s) shall make themselves and the coops available for inspection on reasonable request from Animal Control Officers.

## ENFORCEMENT

- The Saskatoon SPCA Animal Protection Services investigates public complaints of animal abuse, cruelty and neglect in the City of Saskatoon. Animal Control Officers will respond to all complaints and initiate investigations when warranted. When enforcement or other animal husbandry issues arise, City administration will work with hen keepers, neighbours, and other external stakeholders to ensure they are addressed and resolved in a timely manner.
- All public complaints shall be directed through Animal Control at 306 374 7387; this reporting approach is consistent with the City of Saskatoon Bylaw complaint process.
- **Roosters are not permitted.** A rooster must be immediately removed to a farm or euthanized. SBCC can assist with re-homing roosters.
- Egg production is for self-consumption. No sale of meat is permitted.
- Failing to comply with the terms and conditions of an Urban Hen Keeping Licence may result in a fine of \$100, or a licence being revoked. Keeping hens without a licence will result in a \$100 fine.

## NUISANCE CONDITIONS

- The site and coop must be properly maintained to prevent negative impacts, including but not limited to: attracting nuisance animals and excessive smells or noise. P
- Feces in the contained run area should be hosed into the ground in the summer to discourage flies.
- Feces within the coop must be removed weekly and thoroughly composted, or disposed of within sealed bags weekly. Chicken manure can be used as valuable, high-nitrogen fertilizer. Unlike dog or cat poop, chicken manure can be combined with yard and leaf waste to create compost.

- Feed must be contained within a sealed, weather-proof container to discourage pests.
- Note that nuisance conditions due to excessive noise are not anticipated due to restrictions on flock sizing. At their loudest, laying hens make temporary clucking noises that are the same decibels (dB) level as human conversation (60 to 70 dB). A dog's bark can be as loud as 90 dB.

## **STANDARD OF CARE**

- Hen sites shall adhere to good management and husbandry practices, maintain hens in such a condition so as to prevent distress, disease, and welfare issues.
- Hens require appropriate food, grit, liquid (unfrozen) water, shelter, light, warmth, ventilation, veterinary care and opportunities for essential behaviours such as scratching, pecking, dust-bathing, laying and roosting, in order to be comfortable and healthy.
- Animal Control must be notified immediately of any disease or welfare issues that arise that may affect the public, and the steps taken to rectify the situation.

## **SITE REQUIREMENTS FOR HEN COOP AND RUN**

- An approved site may house only one coop (hen housing) and run (an enclosed area in which chicken may move about freely). Coops may only be located in backyards of properties that are completely fenced and secured.
- Coop site should place the coop in a backyard locations that would minimize impact to adjacent neighbours, (i.e., away from bedroom windows, furthest point from neighbours' homes etc).
- An approved site may house only one coop and run. The footprint cannot exceed 9.3 square meters (100 square feet).
- Coops must be insulated, leak-proof and designed so that regular cleaning can be easily and regularly conducted (i.e., at least once a week). Coops should have windows for light and air circulation.
- Coops must be insulated for winter conditions, (i.e., foam insulation must be covered in plastic to stop hens from consuming the insulation, or use an alternative insulation). There should be access to electrical outlets for the temporary use of heat lamps in extreme cold conditions. A temperature-controlled power outlet is recommended and heat lamps must be raised 45 cm above bedding. Oil-filled radiators may be used in extreme cold conditions.
- A minimum of 0.25 square meters (2 to 3 square feet) per hen is required for the coop, along with a minimum of 1 square meter (8 to 10 square feet) per hen for the exterior run. The run area must include a bare dirt area for hens to have access to dust baths (for their cleaning purposes).
- If hens are also temporarily allowed outside their contained run area, they must be contained by fence that is at least 1.8 meters (6 feet) tall within the licensee's backyard.
- All coops must contain sufficient perch locations 15 lateral cm per bird (6 inches). A laying box/area should be supplied for each bird.
- Bedding such as straw, wood chips, or other suitable materials must be available for chicken coop cleanliness and comfort.
- Coops and runs must be secure from potential predators such as skunks or dogs. The structures should be secured with predator and bird-resistant wire mesh. The coop door must be secured or locked daily after dusk.
- A backyard composter must be available on site for disposal of hen feces and organic bedding

such as straw, fall leaves or wood chips.

- Consultation with a Backyard Hen Mentor is recommended before purchasing or installing an accessory structure.

## **NUMBER OF HENS**

- Approved sites must keep a minimum of three hens and shall not exceed five hens per site. **Roosters are not permitted.**
- Hen breed and numbers shall be indicated through the application process. SBCH can recommend hen breeds that are quieter and more social, and better suited to an urban environment.
- If unsexed young hens (also called pullets) are purchased, provision must be made in advance for rehoming any chickens that are determined to be male. Again, no roosters are permitted within the City of Saskatoon limits. SBCH can recommend peri-urban farms where roosters can be rehomed.
- Licensees are responsible for also registering their flock with the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture's Premises Identification. PID allows you to be contacted if there is an animal disease outbreak or animal or public health emergency.

## **WASTE & DISPOSAL**

- Manure must be removed regularly (i.e., weekly) and properly composted to prevent nuisance orders. We do not recommend the 'deep bed' method practiced in rural hen houses (i.e., hens defecate on bedding, more bedding is added on top) as this can encourage flies and may smell. Feces should be removed promptly and mixed into an outdoor, enclosed composter along with some bedding and food scraps.
- Using water from a garden hose, feces in the outdoor run area can be washed into the ground to discourage flies in the summer.
- There is to be no on-site slaughter or euthanizing of hens within City limits. Removal methods include humane euthanasia by a veterinarian, relocation to a farm, or taking hens to a licensed abattoir.
- Deceased birds should be double-bagged and placed for garbage collection or taken to a veterinarian for disposal.

**Thank you again for considering this proposal.**

