



City of Vancouver DRAFT GUIDELINES KEEPING OF BACKYARD HENS

On March 5, 2009, Council directed staff to develop guidelines for the keeping of backyard hens. The guidelines were to both protect public health and welfare, and ensure humane treatment of hens. This document outlines the draft guidelines that staff recommends, as well as the rationale behind each recommendation. The proposed guidelines would be implemented through changes to the Zoning and Development and Animal Control by-laws. Actual by-law language may differ from the guideline descriptions below.

I. Changes to Zoning and Development By-Law No. 3575

Existing by-law provisions:

- Bird and animal enclosures, are defined as accessory structures (Section 10.18) and must be no closer than 9.1 m (30 ft) from any dwellings and 18.3 m (60 ft) from the front property line.
- Accessory structures, and the keeping of birds and animals, do not require development permits (Section 5).
- Keeping of birds and animals is not a defined use, and is not prohibited in any zones under the Zoning and Development By-law.

Recommended changes:

Add the following standards for the size and location of hen enclosures:

- maximum of 9.2 m² (100 ft²) in total floor area,
- maximum 3 m (10 ft) in height
- located a minimum of 3 m (10 ft) from any dwelling.
- located in any portion of the rear yard, but may not be located in front or side yards.

Rationale: The recommended setback reduction will allow a greater number of residents to construct coops on lots constrained by their width and existing zoning restrictions, and will allow greater options for orienting and designing coops and enclosures. Reduced setbacks will also make use of moveable coops ("chicken tractors"), which provide a number of benefits for both chickens and keepers, more

viable. The height restriction is recommended to minimize visual impacts, and the floor area restriction allows the coop to be exempt from Floor Area Ratio (FAR) limits.

II. Changes to Animal Control By-Law No. 9150

Existing by-law provisions:

- Keeping of chickens is prohibited under Section 7.2.
- Regulations for keeping, impoundment, and disposal of "other animals," as well as related charges, fees, and enforcement provisions, are found in Sections 7, 8, 9, and 10.

Recommended changes:

- Remove the restriction on keeping of hens. (Section 7.2)
- Clarify that hens are subject to existing By-law provisions for "other animals," including impoundment, enforcement, and other regulations. (Sections 7, 8, 9, 10)
- Revise the By-law to include the following standards:

Number and type allowed:

A maximum of four (4) hens may be kept. "Hen" means a female domesticated chicken over the age of four months. Roosters, chicks under four months of age, and other domestic fowl are not allowed.

Rationale: Limiting the maximum number of hens is necessary to reduce potential nuisance conditions and overcrowding. Four hens would produce approximately 21 eggs per week, a sufficient number for most families' needs. Roosters are unacceptable due to early morning crowing. Prohibiting chicks under four months of age is necessary to ensure that chickens are more easily identifiable as hens, not roosters, and also to reduce impulse purchasing of chicks and subsequent abandonment of adult hens. Other fowl, such as geese and ducks, are excluded because they require different housing and management, more space in many cases, and are more likely to raise nuisance and/or public health and safety issues.

Registration:

City of Vancouver residents must register their hens through the City's on-line registry, and promptly update the registry when any change occurs.

Registry details (not to be included in the By-law):

The on-line registry will be accessed through the Animal Control website, with a link from the Food Policy website.

The on-line registration form will require the following information to be entered: name, address, and phone number.

The registration website will be available in several languages (Chinese, Punjabi, Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and English).

The website will require users to read the following information prior to accessing the registration form:

- by-law requirements
- best management practices (BMP) reference page
- humane considerations
- biosecurity procedures
- list of upcoming chicken-keeping workshops (with a message strongly encouraging registrants to attend)

The website will include links to other hen-related resources.

Hen keepers may also register by phoning 311, in which case the information materials found on the website will be sent to them by mail.

Rationale: A registry allows tracking of hens should a health emergency arise, but is less burdensome than a licensing or permitting process. Registration also is a vehicle for ensuring that registrants receive basic information on chicken care and maintenance.

The public is encouraged to attend chicken-keeping workshops, but it is not recommended that this be a by-law requirement. The administrative requirements this would involve, including reviewing, assessing and endorsing the appropriate courses, and providing proof of course completion, would be difficult. Also, many people that keep hens have prior experience and may not require courses to properly manage them.

Slaughtering:

Owners shall be responsible for the humane and sanitary disposal of hens. No backyard slaughtering of hens is allowed. Chicken carcasses may be taken to the Vancouver Animal Shelter for cremation, or disposed of in any other legal manner.

Rationale: Slaughtering of hens by untrained individuals can result in undue suffering, and may be offensive to neighbours. Options include taking hens to a farm or abattoir for slaughter, or to a veterinarian for euthanization.

Housing:

Each hen shall be provided a minimum of 0.37 m² (4 ft²) of coop space, and a minimum of 9.2 m² (10 ft²) of roofed outdoor enclosure. The floor of the outdoor enclosure shall consist of any combination of vegetated or bare earth. Coops shall include at least one perch and one nest box for each hen. Hens shall be kept in the enclosed area at all times.

Rationale: These space requirements are recommended by poultry care experts as necessary for the health and well-being of hens. Requiring hens to remain enclosed is necessary for biosecurity reasons, and to reduce nuisance issues, impoundment, and mortality resulting from hens roaming at large.

Basic care:

A person who keeps a hen must give the hen food, water, shelter, adequate light and ventilation, veterinary care, and opportunities for essential behaviours such as scratching, dust-bathing, and roosting, sufficient to maintain the hen in good health.

Rationale: These standards are recommended by poultry care experts as necessary for the health and well-being of hens.

Pest control and sanitation:

Hen enclosures shall be kept in good repair, maintained in a sanitary condition, free of vermin, obnoxious smells, and substances. Enclosures shall be constructed and maintained to prevent rodents from being harboured underneath, within, or within the walls of the enclosures, and to prevent entrance by any other bird or animal. Food and water containers shall be kept in the coop and the coop shall remain locked between sundown and sunrise. Leftover feed, trash, and manure shall be removed in a timely manner. All stored and/or composting manure shall be contained within a fully enclosed structure. No more than 1 m³ (3 ft³) of manure shall be stored or composted. All other manure shall be disposed of in a legal manner.

Rationale: These standards are recommended to prevent predation on hens and the proliferation of pests such as rodents.

Biosecurity requirements:

Biosecurity procedures, as recommended by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), shall be followed. These include:

- Preventing contact with wild birds and other animals
- Cleaning enclosures and equipment routinely and thoroughly
- Cleaning clothes, hands, and footwear before and after handling birds
- Spotting the signs of disease and reporting disease early
- Limiting visitor access to birds
- Requiring visitors to practice biosecurity measures
- Segregating new hens for at least 30 days
- Segregating hens that have been at shows for at least two weeks
- Obtaining hens from reputable suppliers

Rationale: Biosecurity procedures are recommended by poultry care experts as necessary to prevent the spread of avian flu and other diseases among chickens and their caregivers. A link to the biosecurity procedures will be included on the registration website.

Non-commercial use only:

Hens shall be kept for personal use only; no person shall sell eggs, manure, or other chicken products.

Rationale: Council's intent is that backyard hens would be kept to produce eggs for personal consumption, not for commercial use.