

Good morning,

My name is Mark Korchok and I am here today as a delegate in support of urban hens in Fonthill. As this is my first time meeting any of you I'll give a quick introduction of myself. I am a resident here in Fonthill but grew up in a rural setting in northern Ontario where my family owned a small farm which included horses, goats and chickens. While I do not currently own chickens I have owned small flocks at previous residences and am here in hopes that we may be able to come up with appropriate bylaws to allow for hens in an urban setting that will work for everyone.

In the first delegation last fall I was informed that many of the benefits of backyard hens were discussed, so today I will be focusing on the main concerns that have been voiced, specifically odour, noise, rodents, and avian flu.

First of all dealing with waste is a standard part of the care of any animal, just as it is with dog or cat waste. Coops, especially those with very small flocks as we are discussing today, are cleaned often enough that no significant odours should arise. However a license system which would include provisions for smell complaints could mitigate any problems as well as insure the owners are aware of their responsibilities.

A minimum distance from property lines would also address any possible issues, such as the bylaws of Kitchener where:

"Chicken coops must be:

2.5m away from side yard lot lines

1.2m away from rear lot lines

Or consent from neighbours"

The current 5m and 10m distances mentioned in the AG committee meeting minutes seem excessive. In addition the fact that this only covers rural zoned lots will insure that a large number of your constituents here in Fonthill will be excluded. I believe covering all zones under one bylaw would be the most efficient way to go about this.

Finally I would like to discuss the avian flu. My colleague Pam has done much of the research on this and has provided you with a supporting document that I will attempt to summarize in the time I have left.

In the last couple of years avian flu has been in the news with headlines citing millions of poultry deaths. However a large amount of these are commercial farms which can house tens of thousands, all of which must be culled when an outbreak occurs hence the astounding numbers. These numbers only state the high volume of birds commercial farms own, not the number of outbreaks in a year or season or why it occurred.

From the beginning of 2022 till present there have been 48 cases in Ontario and that number is currently trending downwards. In spring of 2022 there were 26, this spring there have only been 4. From the data over the last 15 years it seems some years are worse than others, so when outbreak numbers rise, as we saw in 2022, our provincial government steps in and issues a ban. There were Minister's orders in Spring and Fall of 2022, banning the "gathering" of poultry in Ontario. This shut down bird shows, sales and rehoming of poultry. Bans were not required in Summer and Winter months, because it is only the migration season of wild birds that seem to result in outbreaks. There were also no bans issued or recommendations against owning urban hens. Instead, our national, provincial, and regional governments recognise that many municipalities allow urban hens and as such, they all give recommendations for safe management of urban hens.

I'd like to quote Doctor David Waltner-Toews, a Veterinary Epidemiologist and professor at Guelph University. He has followed the avian flu for years and written books on epidemics, as well as cards for a small flock of 6 chickens.

“The risks of disease transmission from small backyard flocks to people are no higher (and probably lower) than those from pet dogs, cats, caged birds, pigeons, and urban wildlife. The general scientific consensus is that the most effective approach to managing the risks related to backyard hens and HPAI (highly pathogenic avian influenza) should be similar to that taken for those other (higher risk) pets.

The threat of avian influenza is serious, but can be managed. In my decades of research and practice, I have found no evidence that a small backyard flock is a danger to the planet or food security.

Waterfowl such as ducks and geese are the natural reservoir for influenza viruses, so an essential part of preventing the spread of avian influenza is to not let the backyard hens interact with them. My yard is nowhere near any waterways or lakes. During the seasonal migrations, I keep my hens fenced in and under a roof.

If there is one big lesson I’ve learned from my backyard flock, it’s the need to pay attention. At its best, keeping urban hens is a lesson in ecological mindfulness.”

So as long as chickens are not in contact from water that's been in contact with waterfowl and they do not share food, avian flu in urban hens should be no issue. As stated earlier coops must be pest proof (so no food sharing) and urban hens are not freerange (so no contact with water).

Dr. Waltner-Toews expert opinions are available in full in his articles and books that Pam has included in our supporting documents if you would like further reading.

Outside of Ontario and Canada urban hens are a common thing. We have a growing list of 16 cities that we have found in Ontario with bylaws allowing urban hens, and for good reason.

They turn food scraps into compost, give you free, delicious eggs that didn't come from a factory but most of all they are great company. To the owners of these small flocks they see their birds as pets, they love and dote on them the same as they would dogs or cats. Every chicken has it's own personality and quirks and we do everything we can to provide the best for them. For this reason we hope you'll consider adding Fonthill to that list.

Thank you