

Council again to consider hens in yards

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The issue of backyard hens in Salem drew a crowd to Monday's city council meeting.

Council heard about several options it had regarding urban chickens, and decided to have staff come back at a later date with an ordinance it can vote on and possibly modify the zoning code by removing the definition of the keeping of chickens as livestock.

The council also had the option to do nothing and allow existing code to continue with prohibiting hens inside city limits.

As he has done in the past, Councilor Dan Clem voiced his opinion against having backyard hens in Salem.

"I'm just not there yet," said Clem, West Salem's representative on the council.

"For me it's about neighbors getting along with neighbors, it's not about money," he said. "It's all about peace in the neighborhoods."

But later in the evening, he agreed with the seven councilors who were in attendance, and voted in favor taking a look at a new and proposed ordinance.

Like they've done before, members of the group, "Chickens in the Yard," were in attendance at the council meeting.

Barbara Palermo, the group's leader, argued the case in favor of chickens during public comment, laying out all of the pros of chicken-keeping.

"It's been a very long process," Palermo said. "It would be nice to have it all legal once and for all. I've been working on this for almost two years."

The urban chicken issue first reared its head in late February 2009.



Cara Pallone | Statesman Journal
The Salem City Council will craft a new ordinance regarding allowing hens in yards.

What's next

City staffers will bring back an ordinance to the City Council with additional information on regulations that could allow chickens to be raised in Salem.

Staffers are expected to return with a proposed ordinance for its first reading, and which the council could vote on, in September.

If approved, a public hearing would be required during the ordinance bill's second reading at a later date.

SOURCE: City of Salem

After months of intense debate, discussion, pleading and organizing, pro-chicken activists were dealt a blow last October when the council voted against allowing chickens to roost in the city.

Though the issue was put to bed, city council rules allow proponents to bring it back before the council at least six months after the "no" decision.

Initiating a referendum or having a councilor who initially voted against the agenda item, are other ways to resurrect an otherwise dead issue.

In this case, Ward 4 Councilor T.J. Sullivan submitted a motion that allows the council to revisit the topic.

"There are enough people that are interested in keeping chickens," Sullivan said about why he made the motion to bring back the chicken topic.

"We take enough away from citizens," he said, "and I think it's time that we give our residents something, for a change."

Palermo said she looks forward to the next council meeting that will revisit the issue.

"We're ready to get started on chicken coop tours, chicken raising classes, and coop building classes," she said. "It would be nice to concentrate on that finally."

In other business, the council:

- Made changes to a section of city code that addresses parking citations, allowing people who get ticketed to appear before court staff instead of a municipal judge;

- Approved a second 180-day extension agreement with Comcast Cable for cable services to Salem subscribers;

- Voted in favor of a grant agreement between the city and its Urban Renewal Agency in the amount of \$500,000 to provide funds to the Salem for capital improvements to the downtown parking garages.

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