

Council rejects plan for city hens

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After months of intense debate, discussion, pleading and organizing, pro-chicken activists were dealt a blow Monday when Salem City Council refused to allow chickens to roost inside city limits.

Council voted against advancing three proposed ordinances to a second reading for enactment.

"It's not dead. It will never be dead until chickens are allowed in the city of Salem," said Barbara Palermo, a Salem resident who led the effort that called for an end to the poultry ban in residential areas of the city.

"There are hundreds of people who want this, in this city and elsewhere," she said. "It's a reasonable request, and we're not going away."

Palermo and other members of the group, "Chickens in the City," packed council chambers Monday night, something they've done on numerous occasions. Like they've done before, several members argued their case in favor of chickens, laying out all of the pros of chicken-keeping.

But in the end, it was all for naught.

"I represent the people who live in the inner city," said Ward 1 City Councilor Chuck Bennett, who voted against the ordinances. "These are the people who will bear the brunt," he said. "What I'm concerned about is potential conflicts between neighbors."

Ward 8 City Councilor Dan Clem, who has been against the issue since it first came before the council in February, remained steadfast in his opposition to hens in the city.

Hours before the meeting, Clem was bombarded with phone calls and e-mails from constituents both for and against city chickens.

"In my seven years on the council, this is the most impassioned issue that we've ever dealt with," he said. "It's the most 50-50 divisive issue, too."

Council's decision means chickens will continue to be classified as "livestock," as currently



Statesman Journal file
Linda and Ron Hays raise chickens on their property in Marion County.

defined in city code.

For Ron Hays, the executive director of Marion-Polk Food Share, the decision was a prodigious defeat.

"Eggs would have been a good source of protein for people who are struggling and trying to survive," Hays said. "Having eggs would have given them a sound nutritional base for a diet. They also could have sold the eggs and had some money."

Chicken supporters have said the keeping of chickens would help teach their children and grandchildren about sustainable lifestyles and serve as an education resource.

Under City Council rules, the domestic fowl debate is dead, or at least cannot go forward for at least the next six months, unless "at least five members of the Council petition for earlier consideration."

Or proponents of the measures "could initiate a referendum, a petition to bring it to a vote," said Deputy City Manager Sean O'Day on Monday night. "It would have to begin with a staff recommendation or a council motion."

Another way is if one of the councilors who cast a "no" vote at Monday's meeting makes a motion at the next council meeting to reconsider the issue.

"The motion would have to be approved before it could go forward," O'Day said.

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