

his is a new one for ANNE -- two opinion pieces for and against a change in County zoning to permit backyard poultry raising.

Randy

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First, the pro view:
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Urban Agriculture and Backyard Hens in Arlington?

“Local food” could soon take on a new meaning.

The Arlington County Board has tasked a group of residents to make recommendations to expand urban agriculture and increase access to local, healthful food. The group will report back to the Board in 2013.

Among other ideas, the Arlington Urban Agriculture Task Force will consider modifications to county ordinances so that Arlington neighborhood residents can keep small numbers of backyard hens.

Proponents point out that backyard hens can provide nutritious food, reduce dependence of environmentally harmful industrial farming, and help kids learn where food comes from.

Hundreds of urban communities including Charlottesville, Baltimore, Seattle, Madison, Minneapolis, New York, and Portland have embraced backyard hens. The Arlington Egg Project, a local advocacy group, says it’s time for Arlington to join their ranks and promote urban agriculture.

More than 1,000 Arlington residents have signed a petition to the County Board calling for the legalization of small-scale, sustainable backyard hen-keeping while prohibiting roosters and ensuring secure, humane, and proper housing for hens.

For more information visit

<http://www.arlingtonva.us/departments/Commissions/ParksRecreationCommissions/page85509.aspx> or ArlingtonEggProject.org.

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Now, the other side, by Jim Pebley =====

Rezoning for Backyard Poultry?

I'm providing this email to Civic Association leaders and newsletter editors to provide a counterpoint on the issue of easing restrictive zoning on backyard poultry. Arlington's Egg Project proponents have been advocating changes to the zoning ordinance that currently requires all livestock and poultry be kept 100 foot from property lines. While our well meaning friends at the Egg Project have visited a number of civic associations marketing the idea of fresh eggs from backyards, their audiences haven't been provided with both sides of the backyard egg story.

If the County Board should change the setback ordinance for poultry, the presence of backyard chickens will impact neighbors, add pollutants to storm runoff and introduce a new source of salmonella to our environment, while not offering the gains in sustainability being claimed. The County Board has created a taskforce to study "Urban Agriculture" and make recommendations to them. Since the Task Force didn't include a Civic Federation representative in this group, that's why I introduced a resolution at the last CivFed meeting opposing changing the residential zoning code - so the Civic Federation's collective civic voices will be heard clearly and early enough to affect the outcome.

This resolution comes before the Civic Federation this week for a vote. Your Civic Federation delegates need to be informed about both sides of this issue. First - to be fair, here's a link to the Arlington Egg Project. I'd urge you to read what they are advocating and why.

<http://arlingtoneggproject.org/>

Here's why many of us are concerned:

1. Fresh eggs? Admittedly, locally raised eggs may taste better. But isn't that why we have two, now three farmer's markets each week in Arlington so you can buy fresh eggs without buying the chickens, coops, feed, and deal with the waste byproducts?
2. Sustainability? It takes two pounds of feed to produce a pound of eggs (see Nutrition - <http://www.epa.gov/agriculture/ag101/printpoultry.html>) . That means twice the transportation energy costs. The alternative is to supplement chicken feed with food waste, available bugs and backyard grass. That means you'll have garbage lying in your back yard, fewer bugs for local birds, possums, and rodents to feed on and bare soil where the lawn used to be.
3. Home grown eggs are healthier? The Centers for Disease Control has published a report warning about the presence of Salmonella in residentially raised chickens. The chicks quite often arrive infected, the waste in the yard will contain Salmonella and your eggs will be coated with it. Unless you lace the chicken feed with antibiotics or you wash the eggs in detergent and bleach (they will lose that "fresh taste"), you will risk bacterial infections that CDC says are

dangerous to young children and seniors. Here's a link to the CDC article. It's fact, not fiction.
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/pdf/intown_flocks.pdf>http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/pdf/intown_flocks.pdf

4. Free fertilizer? Granted – chicken waste is rich in nitrates which in controlled amounts can help plants grow. But unlike the fertilizer you can buy, the waste also contains an overabundance of potassium and phosphates. If you put too much on your plants you will chemically burn them. If you own four chickens, they will produce about 140 lbs of manure per year (including straw bedding, feathers, etc.) You'd need about half of that for an average home's landscaping. The rest must be carefully disposed. Since you can't catch all the waste, some significant percentage will wash into your neighbor's yards or the storm drains and may reach the Chesapeake Bay, according David Luther, a George Mason biology professor (Arlington Connection, Thursday, April 19, 2012).

5. No impact on neighbors? Those us raised around chickens know better. You can't disguise smell of chicken waste that has saturated into the boards in chicken coops or into the soil (EPA, <<http://www.epa.gov/agriculture/ag101/printpoultry.html>><http://www.epa.gov/agriculture/ag101/printpoultry.html>). The presence of chicken waste, spilled feed, undiscovered eggs and "home food waste" will attract mice, rats, squirrels, possums, raccoons, and foxes. Even if you don't inadvertently purchase a rooster (Hint: Besides the noise, you can tell by a lack of egg production!), the presence of any of those uninvited creatures will raise a racket from the hen house at all hours.

6. Other governments permit chickens? Most of those listed have larger average lot sizes than Arlington. On the other hand, Baltimore has a 25 foot setback rule on chickens, but the average lot size there is about a quarter the size of an average Arlington R5 lot. Egg Project proponents indicated to the Planning and Zoning committee last year they would like to reduce the set-back for poultry in Arlington residential zoning from 100 feet to 10 feet. We need to ask County staffers how they will enforce setbacks, the no-rooster rule, mistreated animals and to ensure that owners aren't raising the chickens for slaughtering. Code Enforcement staff, Public Health staff and Animal Control have operated with severely constrained budgets and limited staffs for years. The Rat Task Force established 10 years ago is down by less than half the original staff. My Opinion: Backyard chicken regulations will be nearly unenforceable and meaningful enforcement will be unaffordable.

If you have more questions on these issues or would like a counterpoint speaker on backyard chickens, contact me at (<<mailto:jpebley@verizon.net>>jpebley@verizon.net

Sincerely, Jim Pebley

jimpebley@verizon.net

Former Civic Federation President (199-2002)

Former Planning Commission member (2005-2010)

Former chair, Planning Commission Zoning Ordinance Committee (2009)

Raised on a 16 acre ranch with a real hen house and egg producing chickens.

This message has been sent to the ANNE list.

ANNE is the Arlington Neighborhood News Exchange, where neighborhood newsletter editors swap their best articles and get articles from other sources. Ideally any events mentioned are at least six weeks away, to permit newsletter editors to get them into print and distributed. The list is fully moderated to eliminate spam. ANNE is a service of the Arlington County Civic Federation. To be added or removed from the list send an email to randy@civfed.org or just hit your Reply button and say "take me off."

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