

Halifax, NS | Fri, January 25th, 2008



Version For Persons With Vision Loss

A few clouds



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Running aowl of the law

What's a few chickens between neighbours, asks urban farmer who must give up her coop

By KRISTEN LIPSCOMBE Staff Reporter

Fri, Jan 25 - 1:54 PM



Louise Hanavan feeds her chickens in the backyard of her Edinburgh Street home in Halifax on Thursday. (TIM KROCHAK / Staff)



Louise Hanavan watches her three chickens peck through grass beneath a bench in the backyard of her Edinburgh Street home in Halifax on Thursday. She has been given 30 days by the city to get rid of the birds, which will have a new home in Bridgewater. (TIM KROCHAK / Staff)

offering up some fresh eggs.

"Rats have been a problem here but there are a lot of things in the city that attract rats," she said Thursday.

"We've been working to take care of the rat problem — we've caught a bunch."

Ms. Hanavan's main concern is food security — knowing that what she's eating comes straight from her own backyard.

"If we're going to try to be a food-secure city and buy less food from afar and have local food, then it means we need to be growing some of it in the city," she said.

Caring for her own chickens makes sense as their manure provides fertilizer for her garden, which in turn feeds her fowl, she said.

"It completes the cycle."

For now, Ms. Hanavan plans to send her \$15 hens to a friend's farm in the Bridgewater area to

REG HARPER hopes there are no hard (-boiled) feelings.

The west-end Halifax man called his city councillor this week to let her know his neighbours are keeping three chickens in their backyard.

As a result, Louise Hanavan and her common-law partner have to pack up their live poultry by the end of the month.

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Mr. Harper said he doesn't have anything against the hens, or the couple living across the street. He's just not a fan of rodents.

"I like chickens . . . (but) it's a known fact that if you put chicken feed out for them, the rats will come," the 74-year-old Edinburgh Street resident said Thursday.

"They're only a young couple and they probably just didn't know any better."

Ms. Hanavan, 25, said she's well aware that the feed attracts rats.

That's why she uses traps to control the rodent population, takes the food in at night and keeps the lines of communication open with her neighbours.

Sometimes, she said, keeping the peace is a matter of

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avoid a fine from Halifax Regional Municipality that could run anywhere from \$100 to \$1,000.

In the long run, she'd like to see a bylaw in Halifax similar to those now in place in some American cities such as Seattle, where she says residents are allowed to keep up to three chickens.

"It's a really popular thing to do," said Ms. Hanavan, who moved here from Bellingham, Wash., near Seattle, a year and a half ago.

"People in upscale neighbourhoods are building these chicken condos — it's sort of crazy."

Nevertheless, she's hoping to help Halifax change its thinking.

She said she's working with the Ecology Action Centre's food action committee to petition the city and is trying to persuade Coun. Sheila Fougere (Connaught-Quinpool) to take on her case.

But Ms. Fougere said she doesn't intend to fight for chickens in the city — at least until Ms. Hanavan garners much more support from residents.

"Right now, it's three hens in 10 years on one property," Ms. Fougere said Thursday.

"That's not something I'm willing to bring to council."

The city has received a number of complaints from Ms. Hanavan's neighbours about the chickens, the councillor said.

"When they are attracting pests to a neighbourhood in small urban areas, it's an issue," she said.

Ms. Fougere pointed out that many farms are within a half-hour drive of the city and "we have a wonderful farmers market, the oldest one in the country, that operates on a weekly basis."

Municipal spokesman John O'Brien said the former City of Halifax did not have any zoning that permitted keeping livestock, and that hasn't changed since amalgamation more than a decade ago.

"This one is in violation of the peninsular Halifax land-use bylaw," he said Thursday. "She has until Jan. 31 to have them removed."

Mr. O'Brien said bylaws are there for a reason.

"In this case, the lady said she enjoyed having fresh eggs so she had chickens, but what if somebody said, 'Well I'd like to have fresh milk' and you look out in the yard and somebody is keeping a cow?" he said.

But Marla MacLeod of the Ecology Action Centre said that in light of recent food scares, the city should be "encouraging anything that gives us a closer connection to our food."

"There are studies out there that are suggesting our food is travelling over 4,000 kilometres from farm to plate," Ms. MacLeod, co-ordinator of the centre's Food Miles Project, said Thursday.

Provincial Agriculture Minister Brooke Taylor said he has urged the city not to be too hard on Ms. Hanavan.

"We don't want to lose any farms in the province of Nova Scotia, whether they are in downtown Halifax or out in the Musquodoboit or Annapolis valleys," he told reporters after cabinet Thursday.

He pointed out that city dwellers are allowed to have exotic pets such as boa constrictors and pythons, so why not chickens?

Ms. Hanavan said she doesn't mind all the clucking over her chickens, as long as it helps highlight the importance of food security in the city.

"A good way to go forward would be to think about what a reasonable way to keep chickens in the city might be and make a bylaw that reflects whatever we think," she said.

With Amy Smith, staff reporter

(klipscombe@herald.ca)

COMMENTS

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beverleys wrote:

I think we should look at the positives here. 3 chickens in a backyard. They provide fresh eggs for this family, and as I read, a few of the neighbours as well. They keep the grass trimmed (even in the corners and those pesky areas where only a whipper snipper can get at. They are fertilizing the soil along the way. Rats are here, that's a fact. The city's working on controlling the farrel cat population. A cool alarm clock in the morning. I don't see a down side to this. Fertilized ground, trimmed grass, fresh eggs. Pesticide free, no need for a mower or a snipper! LET THE CHICKENS STAY and encourage them to have more friends.

Dak wrote:

This proves, yet again, that Council is a rudderless ship. It also proves that Sheila Fougere brings nothing new to the table. Her response? "Go to the Farmer's Market!" Well, d'uh! The point is to make food you don't have to buy or travel to buy. As far as the rats go, we are a port city; get over it! Rats are part of life in Halifax, and so far they haven't taken over. And while I am respectful of Mr. Harper's status as a senior citizen, I am sorry that he was unable to grasp the big picture. He was alive in an age when people were more self-sufficient and less wasteful, but unfortunately doesn't recognize the need to reclaim some of that ingenuity. I wish Ms. Hanavan well, but perhaps she should choose another city if she wants to experience anything remotely resembling progress.

DebbieL wrote:

How in the blazes are we to change social norms in an age of ozone trouble when we have people being petty and superficial. Three hens will not cause that much of an upset. The rats are just a scapegoat for having no other reason than being socially constipated. It is great for nature, great for being ecological conscious and great for maintaining good health. It seems to me that the only one with a bloody problem is the old man who caused such a commotion. It is people like that who keep the world in the dark ages. Shame on him for causing such a problem for the young couple.

buckup wrote:

Hey Reg-there are ticks in your area that can give you Lyme disease. Chickens eat ticks. They are about to become an important part of society. A couple of well kept chickens should not upset anyone. The benefits of enjoying fresh eggs, should not be restricted only to those who are able to get to a farmer's market or natural food store. Certainly a more sensible pet to keep than all the cute little yippy constant barking Fifi's in the city who crap on the sidewalks-rats love doggy doo doo Reg. Imagine how much a city bred child can learn from having access to a couple of chooks in the backyard. Fresh eggs& daily chores.

jvangurp wrote:

I'm all for urban chicken coops... I mean seriously, how many people will actually do this? Those who do will surely be interesting and caring community minded people. People have kept a couple of chickens in their yards for thousands of years in every community in the world. Here's a good test case for the City. The HRM decided in January that it will accept online petitions, so here we go. Sign the petition to seek amendment of HRM Bylaws to allow urban chicken coops.
<http://www.petitiononline.com/wje740/petition.html> Please join the Facebook group too:
<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=7740422940> John

HardRock wrote:

It's a city law. It's being broken. Get rid of the chickens.

RSUN wrote:

Once again this just proves the point that Halifax is turning into a retirement city full of old ideas and no room for new ones. Rats in the city wow that's nothing new. Hey council here's an idea maybe you should require rats to be licenced that way Mr. Harper can trap them and then he will actually be doing something positive for the city.

Chris L wrote:

I find nothing wrong with a few chickens in someones backyard. As far as it attracting rats, look at all the fast food restaurants, and corner pizza shops, they attract far more rats and pests than chickens ever could. I say let her keep them. I am sure the neighbours only complained after the poor woman wouldn't give away all her very fresh eggs.

broman wrote:

If you want to force three chickens out of the city because feeding them attracts rats, then any person who feeds birds or puts up bird feeders should be treated the same way. These bird feeders will also attract rats. Smarten up people and mind your own business and quit picking on the chickens, just to be fair for everyone.

Jack West wrote:

With every passing day, people become more and more disconnected from Nature, from the Earth the live on, the Earth the should live in harmony with. There is a proverb; Only after the last tree has been cut down Only after the last river has been poisoned Only after the last fish has been caught Only then you will find out that money cannot be eaten. Governments are taking away people's livelihood, rights and now there ability to feed themselves. It will only stop when we show them we have had enough.

Lisa77 wrote:

Urban agriculture has been practiced for a long time in the UK and several North American cities allow it as well. I seem to remember hearing an interview on CBC radio in which Ms.Hanavan says she researched the bylaws before getting the chickens and didn't find anything stating she couldn't have chickens. So is this a case of "If there's nothing about it in the bylaws then it's not allowed"? Or is there a specific law that we could be directed to? And I agree on the bird feeder comment, rats will be just as likely to prowl my backyard as hers.

bigfrank wrote:

Have you ever lived next door to cackling chickens or barking dogs. Easy to say Mr. Harper was being a old fuddy duddy but live in his place for a week and see how you like the smell noise and vermin. Why not keep her chickens in her house then she offends no one ?

fortmacguy wrote:

Chickens in the city?. There is lots of wide open country in Nova Scotia, maybe you could start a commune.

cre8tiv99 wrote:

A good solution to this problem would be to change the bylaws to allow a few chickens in backyards. It was quite common in the 1930's for people in a big city like Toronto to keep a few chickens in the yard - there were also horses delivering milk, ice etc. Why do we think that cities have no place for animals in them? In older homes alot of those ramshackle "garages" were originally stables for the family horse. Rats are a real problem and I don't think it is productive to berate neighbours for having concerns about them. Would dogs in the area solve the rat problem? Do the chicken owners have a dog or large cat? I must mention though that I have seen heavy rat infestations where no livestock or restaurants are found. Personally I would love to see a bylaw allowing chickens to be passed and I'll bet there are some seniors who would just love it too. I am really pleased that so many people feel the same way. However, you don't want neighbours getting into raising 100 chickens in a small shed where they are stacked ontop of one another so you have to draft it carefully. Someone worried about people wanting to keep a cow - well maybe not a cow, but I would have no objection to people keeping a fresh goat in a VERY well fenced backyard.

Country109Girl wrote:

Are you freakin' kidding me? Leave the woman and her three hens alone. People - Get a life! Are you folks that bored and unhappy with your own lives that you have to cause others hardship? There is NOTHING wrong with a few hens in the city. I think they could use more actually ! They are also great for eating all your scrap and that will keep your green bins from stinking ! Find something fun and productive to do and keep your nose out of others business !!! Jeepers!!!

Ashford wrote:

SAVE THE CHICKENS!!!, GET RID OF THE CLOWN COUNCIL!!!!

Carolyn wrote:

We live in a port city. Rats exist in a port city. They probably existed in the neighbourhood in question long before the chickens moved in and will no doubt exist long after the chickens are forced to leave. I sometimes have a hard time seeing the logic in the rules we are forced to abide by in this city. These egg-laying chickens provide countless benefits to Ms. Hanavan and many of her neighbours. I would love to live near this enterprising lady and be the recipient of some delicious, fresh eggs! Instead, I live beside several neighbours with wood stoves. The noxious thick smoke that emits from their chimnies makes the air in my neighbourhood unfit to breath at times. And according to the city, there is not a darn thing I can do about it! Where is the logic in this??

AllforOne wrote:

I am absolutely offended by our city council. First a cat "cash grab" bylaw. Now banning chickens... next will be the pot-belly pigs that people keep as pets. The council needs to wake up and start paying attention to the real issues or it's time for a new council.

ValleyGirl wrote:

I grew up in the Annapolis Valley, right next door to a chicken farm. There were countless more chickens then 3, and they had to constantly be fed. And, I can say from experience, that the rat problem in the city is far worse than any we had in an old farm house in the country next to a chicken farm. Something tells me that the rat problem is not exacerbated by a few fowl, and if rats really are that much of a problem, let cats hunt at night. Since that's been banned, I can only assume that a rat problem is only a scapegoat. I, personally, love chickens, and can't wait to move out of the city to raise a few myself

Maureen wrote:

Why are these people so special? If they want to have farm animals then they should move to a farm. What is next? Cows for a little bit of milk, pigs for a couple of sausages, and sheep to make mittens and hats. Oh yeah, a horse to travel around on. What happens if they get loose? Animal control has a enough on their hands trying to round up all the stray cats and dogs. I guess this is one way of lowering the property assessments. As for the rats, sure its a port city and all...blah, blah, blah. But until one gets into your house and your indoor cat catches it then brings it to you, then perhaps you won't feel so blaise about them. I guess I am just lucky that the dear little kitty loves me so much! I wonder if a chicken could be trained to do that?

countrymom wrote:

I have raised chickens in my own back yard. I have never had a rat! As long as you store your food and keep the the coop clean as in recycling the manure etc. And the end product is fresh eggs or chickens to eat. If you knew what you are buying in the stores you would raise your own. So thumbs down to city council! So much for recycling

OceanBlue wrote:

I don't get it. Are only useless animals permitted in cities. Cats, dogs, pot belly pigs (because they are not raised for their bacon), snakes, iguanas, lizards and dozens of other poop and noise producing animals are permitted, but quiet (unless disturbed by one of the above listed animals) egg-producing hens are banned. Excuse me, but I think I would fight this one. I'd rather have a few

hens clucking around eating all those bugs then a dog urinating in my flower bed and barking up a storm or a cat digging in vegetable garden. I suggest this lady name each chicken, buy a fancy winter sweater for each and a collar and walk them down the street with a pooper scooper in her hand and call them her pets. Everyone else does. Personally, I have owned chickens several times and my Mom has, too. In her golden years, she enjoys watching the hens peck around. It brings peace to her soul (just like many feel about their cats). Mom can't have cats or dogs because she is allergic to them, so chickens are a great option. And she has the added bonus of having the best tasting eggs right in the back yard. As far as rats go, they'll be there, chicken or no chicken. Did you know that chickens eat bugs and insects? Imagine how many mosquito larvae they eat before they make it out of a puddle of water, get infected with the West Nile Virus and suck your blood. Anyway that an individual can improve their diet and help the environment should be encouraged not banned. Get a life Halifax. No wonder no one wants to live there.

spaustin wrote:

Well Fougere is misinformed on this one. I grew up in the country and my family inherited 4 urban chickens from one of my father's employees when the city came knocking. There was no fuss and it happened quietly without press attention. I'm sure there have been other incidences that city staff have acted on and this isn't as isolated case as it may seem.

buckup wrote:

Maureen-my Mom had a chicken and that chicken followed my Mother everywhere. She jumped up to retrieve grubs and worms, she laid a little brown egg each day, she came when called, (her name was..Biddy, RIP Biddy old girl. That dear hen lived until she was fourteen and enriched my elderly mother's life. The grandchildren loved Biddy and so did the neighbours who lined up for one of those delicious eggs. I don't understand how anyone can love a useless declawed cat so do not judge those of us who love chickens. How dare any Council decide that a family or child should be denied a bit of the country that can fit happily into city life as an educational and healthy alternative to a traditional pet.

Billp wrote:

To the person who complained - get a grip and a cat

Concerned Citizen wrote:

Hmmmm... let me see.... There have been several complaints lodged by neighbours regarding the chickens; the chickens are attracting rats; and there is a by-law prohibiting chickens being kept on land in peninsular Halifax. It's all well and good that the chicken-people want to eat their own fresh eggs and to be able to use their own chicken doo-doo on their garden, but I'd say in this case The People have spoken, both in lodging direct complaints and in the pre-existence of the by-law, and The People have won. Case closed. Having said that, I'm still 100% in favor of people keeping chickens where by-laws don't prohibit it. I myself once chicken-sat two pet "chooks" (Australian for "chicken") while their owner was out of the country for a few months, and never before, and never since, have I tasted such eggs. But this was in a semi-suburban setting in Australia where chooks were permitted (and snakes took care of any poacher rats). Surely there are comparably-situated areas just outside the HRM where chickens are welcome. Maybe the young couple could move there with their brood. Charlotte Creamer, Halifax

Imcallister wrote:

We were enjoying an outing at Shubie park and saw a rat swim out from under the boardwalk in the duck pond area. I think we need to get rid of the ducks in Shubie, and ban all the people who are feeding them there in order to get rid of those rats. Sheesh...

J wrote:

Where's the problem in someone having a cow in their yard? It's the same as having large dog except that they give you milk and cut your grass.

Itsme wrote:

these neighbours are SNITCHESSSSSSSSSSSS!!!!.....I live in spryfield, there is a family out here with a few chickens and a rooster that run free on their property, they never leave the property. They live near the South Center mall, if they can have them, this family sure as heck should be allowed to.

Busymom wrote:

Just wanted to make the point that the #1 "new" cause of rats in the HRM are the HRM Green Bins! I live in the outskirts of the city, we never had rat problems until the green bins were delivered, and the dump was opened off the 103 highway...also a HRM initiative. We have complained to HRM officials who simply listen but do not act. Funny how they will react so quickly to this woman and her chickens. I'd welcome a neighbor with properly cared for chickens, my rat friends I could do without.

mama p wrote:

First I have to laugh at the comment made by Mr. Taylor the Agriculture MInister about not wanting to lose farms....where have you been, look at the pork industry or what's left of it! But I digress, maybe people have to be educated about avian flu. Living in a agricultural area, I see my farm neighbors following so many rules for biosecurity. Then someone is allowed to have a backyard flock! Why should the farmers have to spend money and time to keep our food safe, and the rest of us can just do what we want? I am glad there are rules for not allowing chickens in backyards in the "city", or any residential backyard. As for the guy who called in the complaint, good for you, we need more of you to keep all of us safe!

pet wrote:

Okay, I couldn't resist. Halifax has no by-law regulating the keeping of animals. Strange because most medium sized cities do. The only restriction that I can find comes from the land use by-laws which was cited in the Herald story as the basis for ordering the lady to get rid of her chickens. In the Land Use By Law (Halifax Peninsula) the R-1 zone is the most restrictive and limits use to home occupation (there are some exceptions but they are irrelevant to chickens). The by-law states that: Without restricting the generality of the foregoing, the preparation and sale of food, the keeping of animals, adult entertainment uses, and taxi stands, shall be deemed not to be home occupations; If keeping of animals were to be taken at face value, no one in an R-1 zone could have a cat or dog or pet of any kind. We currently have no by-law allowing the keeping of any animal except the dog by-law [the cat by-law isn't in force yet] which clearly contemplates the keeping of dogs but doesn't specifically over rule the land use by-law. In other words, it appears on a strict reading that in an R-1 zone, you can't keep any animals, in some other zones you could. It's pretty trite law that by-laws are to be strictly construed where they limit the rights of persons. I don't think that the City would realistically claim to ban all animals in an R-1 zone. So what is the basis for saying that chickens aren't allowed?

LMacLean wrote:

REG HARPER be truthfull to yourself at least will you please.....you stated you do not have anything against the chickens then in turn called your city councillor on your neighbor, now because of you Louise Hanavan and her common-law husband have to pack up their chickens by the end of the month-do you feel better now? Are they going to take the rodents with the chickens Reg? I don't get what all your complaining/interfering accomplished other than to make you look like a fuddy duddy and disrupt someone else's household. Mind your own business, expecially this day and age you do not know who your neighbors really are. If I were your neighbor I would go and buy a Boa Constrictor, he will get rid of the rodents you despise! Would you be happy with this, after all this is legal! With saying that, Nova Scotia needs to adjust with the times and peoples needs. Maybe when people start getting really sick or dying because you are eating the unknown and drug induced animals everyday then Nova Scotia will consider zoning more areas to allow chickens, farm animals for us to go back to what was done years ago without the whole HRM moving to the outskirts. Mr. Harper you stated this family didn't know any better, when in fact you are the one that accomplished nothing by getting the chickens removed and the rodents still remain. You obviously don't know any better here. I've read some comments and I totally agree with you Jack West. Hardrock, just because it is law does not make it right. You cannot go out an murder someone

either that's the law but people do it and get away with it everyday. I would rather hear a cluck, cluck than a gun shot.

Shell_B_98 wrote:

Hello, go behind ANY restaurant in the city (any city for that matter) and you'll find rats! I'd rather have 3 chickens next door than the dog that never shuts up down stairs!

bobmac wrote:

Where is Colonel Sanders when you need him?

EYE FOR A EYE wrote:

who cares fi they have chickens.As long as they stay in there own yard who cares. I thought that old people had better things to do besides watching what is in someone elses yard.If they not bothering you THEN MINE YOUR OWN BUSINESS OLD MAN

moose wrote:

As long as those BIRDS have had their FLU SHOTS I don't care.

petra wrote:

Come on, who wants chickens next door to them, the smell and noise!!! Have you ever lived on a farm? Gross!!! Come on people!

Resident of Halifax wrote:

I'm glad I'm not your neighbour!! If you want chickens then buy a house in the country!

MikeP wrote:

C'mon people - why does the argument always have to go from "Oh my God! If we allow one chicken, what's next? A corral full of cow? Cats and dogs living together! Dinosaurs for pets!!!!!" The escalation in silliness is ridiculous. I think there are some great points in here - the ecological impact (great); the return to nature (great); the cultivating of your own food (freaking fantastic!). We are so quickly and sadly becoming such a rigid and capitalistic society that we are forgetting that everyone has the right to feed themselves. Who are we to say that this woman must procure her food from a store? Shame on the complainers. If your quality of life was being significantly impacted, then sure - maybe you have a right to complain. But I SERIOUSLY doubt that the rat situation has gotten worse. I also seriously doubt that the hens make any more noise than a dog or a passing automobile - at their noisiest of times. The family seems responsible with how they are managing the situation. It's unfortunate that our City is so bent on oppression rather than PROgression. FYI - to all of you complaining about your Councillors - it's not them who is at the root of the problem here. They are doing the job you elected them to do, and they are responding to the request of one of their constituents. If nothing else, you should be praising them for being responsive. I'm sure they are in no way inclined to want to put themselves through a 'chicken debate.' Shame on us for being so serious and full of ourselves that we can't see beyond the reality of the situation. I'm glad Ms. Hanavan is complying with the laws, because it only shows how responsible she is. I'm saddened by the fact that someone has to find some sort of satisfaction in complaining about this situation.

Alexzandavie wrote:

Geeze, why send those chickens to a friends farm? Preheat to 350 degrees and bake for 45 mins.....mmm good

zippo2468 wrote:

good bye to the chickens,,,they want chickens move to a rural area. we have animals crapping all over the city now.

Vinnie Cappuccino wrote:

They only want you gettin' yer chicken from KFC!

Ledalee wrote:

It seems to me that this old man has nothing better to do than watch the neighbors.How much noise would three chickens make? Their "cluck" is a muted sound which you wouldn't even hear, a lot better than dogs barking or people fighting or as someone said a gun shot.Those involved in getting rid of these dangerous chickens must feel pretty darn important!

outofthecity wrote:

I agree with the idea of dressing up the chickens and walking them around as pets. These seem like decent people just trying to get closer to the food they eat. People can buy \$2000 dollar dog from a puppy mill that is no bigger than a chicken and let it poop all over their yard and bark 20 hours a day and yet council has a problem with the chickens. I currently spend nearly \$ 1200 monthly on groceries so my family of 4 can eat as healthy as possible and still cannot afford to buy everything organic. If groceries keep going up in price we may need all those big rats to feed ourselves.

wordsmith wrote:

you know, i am divided between agreeing with both. i adore being close to nature, that's why i adore visiting 3rd world countries whenever i've saved enough money to get to travel. there, in the homes i have visited to live as a guest, we pluck fruits from the trees in the garden, pick fresh eggs for breakfast, even have our water to bath heated in an outdoor fire. i love to have these here in my own apartment too, but i can grasp the dangers and inconvenience. be practical , yes, be environmental conscious, yes, but i also have to look at the place i chose to live ...i repeat...as you noticed i said, "the place i chose to live". i am not in malaya, or costa rica. even then, in costa rica, we couldn't have that "luxury" in kuala lumpur, or san pedro. we have to move way out into the country, some 4 hours bus ride to live like that. in a perfect world, we can have that. in an unperfect world, we have that too... like the super rich living next door to the sadly disenfranchised poor in their boxes and cardboard houses of the favelas in rio de janeiro. as i said, i am equally divided to agree with both sides. the fact is, this is the city, and there just nearby is the countryside. decide where and how you wish to live, and then move or stay. i know, the opponents will say, "we cannot afford to live in the country, we need to stay in the city to work". well, me too. that's why as they say, "when in rome, do as the romans." the city has bye-laws to prevent me from having an apartment full of cats, you from having goats and pigs and chicken in your coop. rats are everywhere. i see it even around my apartment block. tiny ones... mice. but i've seen rats the size of cats in india, even in costa rica where the chicken roam freely. the government has programs to control them, and my hosts have cats and dogs and even the iguanas and snakes to see they're discouraged from propagating. but my friends know that if they moved to san jose or san pedro, they will have to give up this life. it does not take someone with a harvard degree to realise the practicality and the choices we make. my dear friends in costa rica and brazil do not have even a harvard degree. they're normal folks like you and me. they know the difference. you should too. you, and me.

Countrytime Mama wrote:

I would think that council would be more concerned with rats gathering around the "green bins" and not with a few chickens that allow people to eat healthier. To save a few dollars by raising three chickens for fresh eggs should be not a concern of council or busy body old men who have nothing more to do with their time. I was born and raised in Halifax and grew up in the North End of Halifax by Pier 9 where rats were as big as cats!!! Rats are a part of the Port City and always have been for the 60 years of my life. Get over it! What are a few healthy chickens that are well cared for and a yard that is well groomed going to do to harm this part of the city. Get a life people and start trying to see the light at the end of a "ratty tunnel".

mayflower64 wrote:

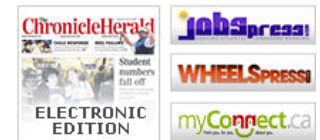
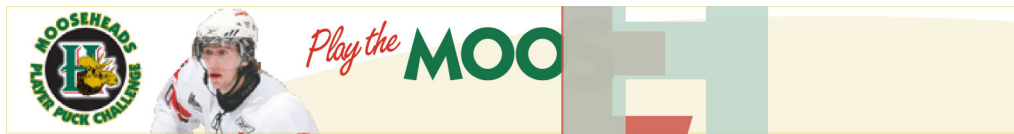
I feel that this law is ridiculous. Rats???? Try, how about Halifax Harbour as a sewage system. Rats have always been around and always will be.....that's life!!! I think that this couple should definitely be allowed to have the chickens. I for one eat organic foods, as everything we purchase is filled with chemicals. I say, "bring on the chickens." Some people have nothing better to do than complain....get a life!

anjo jabril wrote:

BE REALISTIC, people. My goodness, I love to have sheep in my backyard instead of using my lawnmower. I prefer fresh eggs, like I used to have when I visit tropical countries to live out of the city... far out from the capitals. I had a cottage in Quebec where we had water pumps by one of us each time we needed to take a bath. I adore sitting outside on my porch to have my breakfast of fresh eggs and green onions and potatoes from my garden. But I had to give all that up to live in the city. I came to the city to work in a business. I could have brought my lifestyle with me too, and being an articulate person with a lot of experience in writing I could raise a lot of support to convert my neighbourhood into a community of cackling hens and rooster crowing each dawn, with goats and sheep to control the weeds in my garden. oh , and a buck stove for heat. all in the name of ecology and self-dependency. But I am not a cabbage-head (excuse the pun). I know it's a bit eccentric to have my neighbours live the way I want . If I had my way , I would have a poultry farm right next to the sportsplex too, lol. Your opposers have the point here, I have to concede. If you like to live like you're still in the boondocks, and have your fantasy to live like Dr. Micheala, move to the country. You cannot have your cake and eat it too. Find out what you're life's priorities are, and then decide. Stay and live the city life, or move back where you come from. Sorry, I think you're all over the top for this one. No goats, no chickens, no cows, no pigs... in my neighbourhood. Let's keep it this way. Feral cats do not control the abundance of cat sized rats once the little rats of your neighbourhood get to indulge on your farm-fantasy. Believe me, you wouldn't want to confront a rat the size of your cat. Not even if you have a shovel or a shotgun. And I haven't even related to you the horrors of mosquitos and spiders the size of your nose, lol.

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Running aowl of the law

What's a few chickens between neighbours, asks urban farmer who must give up her coop

By KRISTEN LIPSCOMBE Staff Reporter

Fri, Jan 25 - 5:11 AM



Louise Hanavan feeds her chickens in the backyard of her Edinburgh Street home in Halifax on Thursday. (TIM KROCHAK / Staff)



Louise Hanavan watches her three chickens peck through grass beneath a bench in the backyard of her Edinburgh Street home in Halifax on Thursday. She has been given 30 days by the city to get rid of the birds, which will have a new home in Bridgewater. (TIM KROCHAK / Staff)

REG HARPER hopes there are no hard (-boiled) feelings.

The west-end Halifax man called his city councillor this week to let her know his neighbours are keeping three chickens in their backyard.

As a result, Louise Hanavan and her common-law partner have to pack up their live poultry by the end of the month.

Mr. Harper said he doesn't have anything against the hens, or the couple living across the street. He's just not a fan of rodents.

"I like chickens . . . (but) it's a known fact that if you put chicken feed out for them, the rats will come," the 74-year-old Edinburgh Street resident said Thursday.

"They're only a young couple and they probably just didn't know any better."

Ms. Hanavan, 25, said she's well aware that the feed attracts rats.

That's why she uses traps to control the rodent population, takes the food in at night and keeps the lines of communication open with her neighbours.

Sometimes, she said, keeping the peace is a matter of offering up some fresh eggs.

"Rats have been a problem here but there are a lot of things in the city that attract rats," she said Thursday.

"We've been working to take care of the rat problem — we've caught a bunch."

Ms. Hanavan's main concern is food security — knowing that what she's eating comes straight from her own backyard.

"If we're going to try to be a food-secure city and buy less food from afar and have local food, then it means we need to be growing some of it in the city," she said.

Caring for her own chickens makes sense as their manure provides fertilizer for her garden, which in turn feeds her fowl, she said.

"It completes the cycle."

For now, Ms. Hanavan plans to send her \$15 hens to a friend's farm in the Bridgewater area to avoid a fine from Halifax Regional Municipality that could run anywhere from \$100 to \$1,000.

In the long run, she'd like to see a bylaw in Halifax similar to those now in place in some American cities such as Seattle, where she says residents are allowed to keep up to three

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chickens.

"It's a really popular thing to do," said Ms. Hanavan, who moved here from Bellingham, Wash., near Seattle, a year and a half ago.

"People in upscale neighbourhoods are building these chicken condos — it's sort of crazy."

Nevertheless, she's hoping to help Halifax change its thinking.

She said she's working with the Ecology Action Centre's food action committee to petition the city and is trying to persuade Coun. Sheila Fougere (Connaught-Quinpool) to take on her case.

But Ms. Fougere said she doesn't intend to fight for chickens in the city — at least until Ms. Hanavan garners much more support from residents.

"Right now, it's three hens in 10 years on one property," Ms. Fougere said Thursday.

"That's not something I'm willing to bring to council."

The city has received a number of complaints from Ms. Hanavan's neighbours about the chickens, the councillor said.

"When they are attracting pests to a neighbourhood in small urban areas, it's an issue," she said.

Ms. Fougere pointed out that many farms are within a half-hour drive of the city and "we have a wonderful farmers market, the oldest one in the country, that operates on a weekly basis."

Municipal spokesman John O'Brien said the former City of Halifax did not have any zoning that permitted keeping livestock, and that hasn't changed since amalgamation more than a decade ago.

"This one is in violation of the peninsular Halifax land-use bylaw," he said Thursday. "She has until Jan. 31 to have them removed."

Mr. O'Brien said bylaws are there for a reason.

"In this case, the lady said she enjoyed having fresh eggs so she had chickens, but what if somebody said, 'Well I'd like to have fresh milk' and you look out in the yard and somebody is keeping a cow?" he said.

But Marla MacLeod of the Ecology Action Centre said that in light of recent food scares, the city should be "encouraging anything that gives us a closer connection to our food."

"There are studies out there that are suggesting our food is travelling over 4,000 kilometres from farm to plate," Ms. MacLeod, co-ordinator of the centre's Food Miles Project, said Thursday.

Provincial Agriculture Minister Brooke Taylor said he has urged the city not to be too hard on Ms. Hanavan.

"We don't want to lose any farms in the province of Nova Scotia, whether they are in downtown Halifax or out in the Musquodoboit or Annapolis valleys," he told reporters after cabinet Thursday.

He pointed out that city dwellers are allowed to have exotic pets such as boa constrictors and pythons, so why not chickens?

Ms. Hanavan said she doesn't mind all the clucking over her chickens, as long as it helps highlight the importance of food security in the city.

"A good way to go forward would be to think about what a reasonable way to keep chickens in the city might be and make a bylaw that reflects whatever we think," she said.

With Amy Smith, staff reporter

(klipscombe@herald.ca)

COMMENTS

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beverleys wrote:

I think we should look at the positives here. 3 chickens in a backyard. They provide fresh eggs for this family, and as I read, a few of the neighbours as well. They keep the grass trimmed (even in

the corners and those pesky areas where only a whipper snipper can get at. They are fertilizing the soil along the way. Rats are here, that's a fact. The city's working on controlling the farrel cat population. A cool alarm clock in the morning. I don't see a down side to this. Fertilized ground, trimmed grass, fresh eggs. Pesticide free, no need for a mower or a snipper! LET THE CHICKENS STAY and encourage them to have more friends.

Piscophile wrote:

If Reg Harper has nothing better to do than interfere with the peaceful enjoyment of others then I suggest he simply & quietly go inside his house, lock the doors and throw a stroke. I'd rather have three chickens on the planet than one Reg Harper.

Dak wrote:

This proves, yet again, that Council is a rudderless ship. It also proves that Sheila Fougere brings nothing new to the table. Her response? "Go to the Farmer's Market!" Well, d'uh! The point is to make food you don't have to buy or travel to buy. As far as the rats go, we are a port city; get over it! Rats are part of life in Halifax, and so far they haven't taken over. And while I am respectful of Mr. Harper's status as a senior citizen, I am sorry that he was unable to grasp the big picture. He was alive in an age when people were more self-sufficient and less wasteful, but unfortunately doesn't recognize the need to reclaim some of that ingenuity. I wish Ms. Hanavan well, but perhaps she should choose another city if she wants to experience anything remotely resembling progress.

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