

Appendix A

Victoria Urban Food Table: Chicken and Bee Bylaw Referral

About Victoria Urban Food Table

The primary purpose of the Victoria Urban Food Table (UFT) is to bring together organizations, groups, and individuals who wish to work together to support increased urban food production as an important part of developing a healthy, ecological and sustainable food system in the City of Victoria. The Table brings together our knowledge, expertise, and connections to share information, to align our efforts, and to support the City of Victoria with the development of supportive policy and programs.

Victoria City Council Referral

On February 22nd and March 8th, the City of Victoria Mayor and Council proposed Animal Control Bylaw amendments. Within the amendments, Mayor and Council requested that staff “refer the BCSPCA animal responsibility bylaw section on urban hens and urban bees to the Urban Food Table and to the Capital City Beekeeping, indicating that Council has taken no position on these provisions at this time and add as an appendix, the bylaws from the City of Vancouver and Duncan”. On March 22nd, the UFT held a meeting with members to respond to Council’s referral, and through unanimous decision of all members present at the meeting there was agreement on the below recommendations and rationale. As due diligence and to follow the process described in the UFT Terms of Reference, this report has been circulated to the listserv of UFT members for feedback and signatures of support.

Urban Hens and Bee Keeping in Victoria

The City of Victoria is a pioneer among Canadian cities in urban food production. Other municipalities across Canada have looked and continue to look to the City of Victoria as a leader in urban food production and policy. Policies that allow chickens and other poultry to be responsibly kept in urban environments help to build food literacy and increase food security. This document uses the words “hen” and “chicken” interchangeably, and recommends that the keeping of poultry (not just chickens, but also ducks, quails and turkeys to name a few) with no age limitation should continue to be allowed in the City of Victoria.

Recommendations and Rationale

1. UFT reviewed the BCSPCA Animal Responsibility Bylaws and recommends that Council not adopt these bylaws, with exception of:

4.17: secure all hen food that is stored outdoors from wildlife.

4.18 ensure the timely removal of leftover food, debris and manure from each coop and pen.

Rationale:

The BCSPCA bylaws are designed to address issues that are currently not problematic in Victoria, where the key concern is potential mismanagement and proper care of hens. Concerns and complaints about hens typically focus on increased rodent issues. Proper care of hens, specifically the good practice of feeding hens with both compost scrap and hen feed, and ensuring food is appropriately enclosed and removed in a timely manner, will mitigate rodent issues.

Furthermore, some of the bylaws are not applicable to or compatible with the urban context. For example, bylaw 4.13 calls for coops/pens and hives to have electric fencing. Electric fences keep bears out. Bears are not an issue in Victoria and electric fences are a safety hazard.

Finally, the definition of hen is limiting, as residents care for poultry beyond hens. Therefore, the keeping of poultry (not just chickens, but also ducks, quails and turkeys to name a few) with no age limitation should continue to be allowed in the City of Victoria

2. UFT reviewed this proposed bylaw: “No person shall keep, or allow keeping on a Lot: e. More than twelve (12) hens”.

Recommendation:

The UFT recommends that the City not limit the number of allowed hens to 12, and that instead an application process be developed for residents wanting to keep more than 30 hens. This application process would assess/consider: 1) the available space, 2) feed storage, 3) manure storage or composting, and 4) demonstrated consultation with and support from immediate neighbours. The visibility of hens from neighbouring yards may also be considered an aspect of the application process.

The UFT recommends that City of Victoria staff explore the space requirements to safely care for hens. Staff should review the Organic Farming Guidelines and compare them to bylaw 4.7 of the BCSPCA Animal Responsibility Bylaws to determine a minimum available space per hen and to allow hens to share nesting boxes.

Rationale:

Specific circumstances can allow for the safe, humane, and neighbourly keeping of more than 30 hens. The UFT recommendation balances maintaining maximum flexibility for hen keepers with ensuring that neighbours are minimally impacted and hens are safely and humanely kept.

3. UFT reviewed this proposed bylaw: “Keeping of Urban Hens: 4.1 Be a resident of the property where the hens are kept.”

Recommendation:

The UFT recommends that the City not require that the owner of the hen reside on the property.

Rationale:

This requirement would exclude alternative types of hen-keeping practices (i.e. Rent-a-Chicken operations, schools, community gardens). Rent-a-Chicken operations allow residents to rent a hen and coop for a limited amount of time in order to decide if they are interested in owning their own hens. This type of program allows residents to learn about chicken care from the organizations in a safe manner. The City of Victoria has had chicken share programs in the past, which allow neighbourhoods to come together to take care of their chickens and benefit from egg production. Furthermore, there are school programs where students get to hatch and take care of their own chickens. Reynolds Secondary school has had a program where students hatch and raise chickens, build coops and then sell the chickens with the coops as a school fundraiser.

4. The UFT recommends that more information and resources be made available on the benefits of urban hens and on good hen keeping practices, by the City or a third party.

Conclusion:

Urban poultry is a vital part of a healthy food system and vibrant city; chickens and other poultry allow residents to have a regular supply of healthy free run eggs, and help connect urban city dwellers to their food. The UFT appreciates the opportunity to work with the City to support urban food production. The UFT believes that the above recommendations and rationale support healthy, safe and humane care of chickens, without erecting unnecessary barriers to existing and future chicken ownership among residents.

The below signatures are from members of the Victoria Urban Food Table who support this referral feedback:

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