

September 24, 2014

Dear Councilman O'Neill,

I want to work with you to legalize backyard chickens in Philadelphia again.

There is citywide support for this change, including members of the coalition safeguarding community gardens that are now organized as Healthy Foods Green Spaces associated with the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia. This past year, an Eagle Scout from Boy Scout Troop 290 built a backyard chicken coop for a convent in your district. With the recent change to make the Office of Sustainability permanent, Philadelphia has clearly come a long way in the past decade towards recognizing citywide and individual sustainability.

You acknowledged there might be a need to amend your bill in recognition of responsible animal keepers when you said, "I had not heard about the air conditioning, but certainly had heard some really good stories about people that are good neighbors with their farm animals. And there's no intention here to affect that." Responsible, self-sustaining people are adversely affected by the current law's absolute forbiddance of backyard chickens.

Councilman Squilla told me that you mentioned noise, smell and dirt as reasons that Philadelphia is one of only two of the ten largest cities in the U.S not allowing chickens. Cats, dogs, horses and chickens that are not responsibly kept potentially create these problems. However, of these four animals, chickens create the least amount of each. Hens cluck at about 65 decibels, the level of conversation. Chickens tend only to make noise when they are laying an egg or a threat is present. They vocalize less often than most dogs. The droppings of chickens, known as fertilizer and retailing for \$0.50 per pound on amazon.com, are drier than that of mammals and easier to keep from smelling. Additionally, one dog creates about as much waste as six chickens.

Though chickens are quieter, less smelly and less dirty than cats, dogs or horses, we both know that some people are not clean about animals they keep on their property. And no one should have the enjoyment of their property decreased by a bad neighbor. Thus, Philadelphia has really good and adequate laws addressing noise [10-403(1)], smell and dirt [10-105(1), 10-114(1)(a)]. Opponents to backyard chickens raise the issue of property value with no supporting evidence that backyard chickens negatively impact property values. The article in Grid magazine provided two Philadelphia-based examples of citizens valuing the liberty to keep backyard chickens. One person, a young professional who had created displays at the Philadelphia Flower Show, left the city because he felt his chickens were threatened. The other example is a rental property where a resident built a coop that has become an attractant to tenants. The restriction against chickens is not needed for peaceful neighborhoods or sustained property values and only serves to prevent Philadelphians from enjoying fresh eggs.

When Philadelphia outlawed chickens they referenced Baltimore, which did not allow backyard chickens at that time. In 2007, Baltimore brought back their chickens. Time for Philadelphia to do the same.

Sincerely,

Maureen Breen
Community Outreach Coordinator
Philadelphia Backyard Chickens, an affiliate of Weavers Way Co-op