

Stoughton City Briefing

Considering Backyard Chickens in Stoughton

compiled by *Chickens in Stoughton?!*, July 5, 2010

Last Update: July 20, 2010

Chickens in Stoughton?! is a loosely-organized group of families and individuals that are requesting the city revise its laws to enable small micro-flocks of up to four female chickens (hens) to be kept within the city limits, with reasonable restrictions. We feel that the raising of chickens provides both children and adults an education in local, sustainable food practices, provides food security, promotes green living, expands our local food supply and provides an opportunity to learn responsibility and compassion towards animals.

In Stoughton, the potential keeping of chickens within the city limits impacts both the Municipal Code and the Zoning Ordinance. This document attempts to provide background on these changes.

Current Procedural Status

Public Safety: April 28, 2010, voted 3-0 to direct staff to draft ordinance changes
Public Safety: May 26, continued to next agenda
Planning Commission: June 7, voted 3-2 to move item forward to a public hearing
Public Safety: June 23, voted 2-0 to recommend to council after public hearing
Planning Commission: July 12, held public hearing, all speakers and registrants were in favor of proposed ordinance change; Commission amended the proposed ordinance to allow hens in TR-6 district (duplexes); voted 6-0 to recommend amended proposal to council

Why Chickens?

Cities all across the nation are reconsidering bans on backyard poultry that were enacted from the 1950s population migration from farm to urban environment. Recently, cities like Portland, Boise, Madison, Denver, Seattle, and Fort Collins have relaxed their laws and have begun allowing residents to keep a few backyard hens. According to Newsweek magazine, more than 65% of major cities now have chicken-keeping ordinances.

A list of comparable cities within Wisconsin that allow hens to be kept within the city limits includes: Fort Atkinson (pop. 11,895), Jefferson (pop. 7,822), Madison (pop. 231,916), Neenah (pop. 25,060), New Berlin (pop. 38,649), and Sheboygan (pop. 47,895). Each cities' ordinance features are included in the Appendix of this document.

While everyone has their own reasons for embracing the idea of raising chickens for eggs in their own backyards, the recent interest in the last decade has accelerated due to the following factors:

1. Increased awareness of individual impacts on the environment (e.g., local food and "green living")
2. Increased suspicion regarding the safety of food produced by large factories
3. Increased awareness of the possible need to access alternative food sources in case of emergency.

Why Not?

Those who are opposed to a chicken ordinance often object because they are not knowledgeable about chickens and are unfamiliar with the concept of urban hen-keeping. For example, they frequently do not understand that roosters are not needed for hens to lay eggs, or that chickens eat bugs, weeds, and lawn clippings, or that hens are quiet and harmless. They are surprised to learn that hens are fun and entertaining and make great pets because they have never been around them. Because they are unfamiliar, their opinions are based on fear, not facts, and they believe many of the myths that surround urban chickens.

Some people object to a chicken ordinance because their experience with chickens stems from rural farms or commercial poultry operations where chickens are raised by the hundreds or thousands, and where many spend their entire lives in less space than a sheet of paper. In these operations, odor and environmental impact often take a backseat to production levels and profit.

Micro-flocks of chickens kept in an urban environment are as dissimilar to the above as a family dog is to a large puppy mill. With attractive coops that are smaller than the typical child's playset and that blend in with the surrounding neighborhood, backyard chickens are the "spoiled cousins" of the typical farmyard or production hen. Much like their keepers, a clean and comfortable habitat is the norm for city chickens.

And then some object based on the threat of disease, without placing the threat in the context of risks already accepted within our city. For example, the over 300 tons of solid waste Stoughton dogs and cats produce annually is far more dangerous than the 3 tons of projected chicken waste. Dog and cat waste, which is a biohazard, cannot be safely applied to vegetable crops, even after composting, as it harbors many human pathogens. Chicken waste carries no such elevated threat and is readily compostable.

Frequently, bird flu and salmonella are raised as threats that could increase with the presence of backyard chickens. Yet, H5N1 avian influenza, or "bird flu," is not present in the United States, despite a population of over 1.5 billion chickens. While it would be a huge threat to poultry should it reach our shores, bird-to-human transmission is very rare, and subsequent human-to-human transmission is even rarer. Since it presents such a risk to the poultry industry, it is one of the most closely monitored diseases in Wisconsin, as well as the United States.

Likewise, the threat of salmonella is already present in our environment. Most animals carry salmonella in their intestines. The vast majority of salmonella illness in humans comes from improperly prepared food, purchased from commercial sources. As we have learned, proper personal hygiene and prudent food preparation prevents most salmonella transmission.

Estimated Population of Hens in Stoughton

Before continuing it is important to have some idea as to the magnitude of the proposal. Our current estimate of the number of Stoughton residents that will choose to keep hens in their backyards is fifty. If each kept the maximum proposed of four, that would equal a total of 200 hens in Stoughton.

Several factors went into our estimate, but in the end it is simply an educated guess:

- Madison, a city of 15 times our population (with UW students excluded), issues approximately 75 permits annually. However, rumor is that some do not obtain a permit. So we doubled the number to 150 chicken keeping households in Madison. That would represent about 600 hens.
- There are approximately 55 people on ***Chickens in Stoughton?!'***s email list, 65 on our petition, 100 followers on Facebook, and 25 that attended our first meeting. While we have received substantial interest since the Courier-Hub article was published and the WISC-TV interview was aired, the membership numbers have plateaued. (Note that many on these lists represent couples and are double counted)
- Most cities have more people interested in keeping hens than are actually keeping hens.

So, using Madison ratios, we would have 10 Stoughton households keeping hens, representing a total of 40 hens. We feel that number is too low.

Using our "membership" numbers, taking out non-Stoughton residents and eliminating double counting for couples, we would estimate 40 households keeping hens, for a total of 160 hens. We feel that is about right, but added 25% more to arrive at our estimate of 200 hens.

Consider that many of the newer neighborhoods in Stoughton have deed restrictions on outbuildings and animals. This will lower the number of potential chicken keeping residences.

To place our estimate in context, consider that approximately 37% of Stoughton households own at least one dog, and 32% at least one cat (using national averages). Most households keeping dogs and cats have more than one (1.7 for dogs; 2.2 for cats). With 4,700 households in Stoughton, there are well over 2,000 dogs and an equal number of cats currently residing in the city. For simplicity, a population of 2,000 dogs and 2,000 cats are used in this document, which are low conservative estimates.

Concerns of Communities Considering Urban Chickens

In general, communities considering chickens in an urban environment have to satisfy concerns in three areas:

1. Structural
 - a. How big are the coops and runs?
 - b. How will the animals be contained?
 - c. What zoning districts are they permitted?
 - d. Where on the lot can the coops and runs be placed?
 - e. Do they need building permits?
2. Environmental
 - a. How will noise be controlled?
 - b. How will odors be controlled?
 - c. Will there be an increase in predators?
 - d. Will there be an increase in scavengers?
 - e. Will there be an increased risk for human-transmittable disease?
3. Enforcement
 - a. Will licensing be required?
 - b. How will violations be handled?
 - c. What additional effort is required to enforce these standards?

Establishing reasonable restrictions and guidelines in these areas makes for rules that are fair to residents and easy to enforce.

Proposed Ordinance Changes

To address these concerns, the following changes are proposed and are before you today:

In the Municipal Code

- Maximum of 4 hens allowed, no roosters
- No butchering within the city limits
- Hens contained at all times in coop, run or fenced enclosure
- Annual city license application with fee of \$15
- Wisconsin Department of Agricultural premise registration required
- Existing fowl noise ordinance applies (Sec. 6-5)
- Existing noxious odor ordinance applies (Sec. 58-8)
- Police enforcement of at-large animals handled as with dogs and cats

In the Zoning Code

- Keeping of a maximum of 4 hens allowed as an accessory land use by right on single and two-family lots in districts ER-1, SR-3, SR-4, SR-5, SR-6 and TR-6
- Annual city license required
- Coop/runs must be in rear yard only
- Coop and run must be at least 25' from all residential structures on adjacent lots
- All zoning requirements related to accessory structures are exempt for coops and runs less than 65 square feet in size
- Electrical work requires a permit

It is important to note that these rules do not override any deed restrictions that run with the land on outbuildings and animals. **These deed restrictions are common in newer subdivisions in Stoughton.**

Concerns Addressed

Revisiting the list of concerns, here is how the proposed ordinance changes will address them:

1. Structural

- a. How big are the coops and runs? A typical setup for 4 hens would have a footprint of less than 65 square feet, or less than a child's playset or trampoline. The urban coop is attractive and blends well with neighborhood aesthetics. (Note that general upkeep is covered as for other outbuildings in Stoughton).
- b. How will the animals be contained? Hens are required to be contained at all times. Unlike dogs and outdoor cats, hens have relatively small real estate requirements. Commercial poultry are usually provided 1-2 square feet for the entire life—urban chickens can use 30 times as much and still fit comfortably in a neighborhood.
- c. What zoning districts are they permitted in? Although many cities allow hens to be raised in multi-family lots, the proposed changes for Stoughton are restricting them to single and two-family lots only. Note that any lot with deed restrictions that do not allow outbuildings will similarly be prevented from erecting a coop.
- d. Where on the lot can the coops and runs be placed? The proposed changes allow coops and runs in the rear yard only, which is at or behind the rear plane of the residential building. They also must be located at least 4' within the lot line and at least 25' from residential structures on adjacent lots.
- e. Do they need building permits? After discussions with the Planning Department and a review of other outbuilding requirements, they recommended that coops and runs less than 65 square feet be exempt from zoning requirements related to accessory structures like swingsets and playsets.

2. Environmental

- a. How will noise be controlled? Enforced by existing ord. Sec. 6-5 and Zoning Code Sec. 78-709. The prohibition of roosters eliminates 99% of the noise issue. Normally, hen sounds are virtually inaudible at 25'. After laying an egg, hens will squawk for a few minutes at a measured level of approximately 65 decibels, the sound of a conversation.
- b. How will odors be controlled? Enforced by existing ord. Sec 58-8(8) and Zoning Code Sec. 78-711. Hens themselves do not smell, their solid waste does. To a large extent, the control of odor from animal waste is the responsibility of the owner, and all animal waste smells. Each hen will produce about 1.5 ounces of solid waste each day, half of which is eliminated at night in the coop, versus 12 ounces for the average dog. Daily output from Stoughton hens is projected to be less than 20 pounds, versus 1,500 pounds from dogs.

Solid waste from hens is compostable and is safe to apply to vegetable gardens, whereas dog and cat waste is a bio-hazard and cannot be utilized on food plants, even after composting.

- c. Will there be an increase in predators? With the large population of wild song birds, geese, ducks, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, mice, voles, etc. already in Stoughton, the addition of 200 hens is an insignificant increase in attractive elements. The predators of these animals, primarily raccoons, hawks, owls and illegally roaming domestic cats, are already among us. Backyard hens are contained at all times in secure enclosures and runs, which wild animals are not. (FYI, a cat would not take on a full size hen, and it would take a large hawk to carry off a 7 pound hen).

- d. Will there be an increase in scavengers? Scavengers such as mice, rats and crows are attracted to food, not the animals themselves. Given that there are approximately 6,000 garbage cans, 2,000 bags of dog food, 2,000 bags of cat food, and countless bags of wild bird seed and outdoor feeders in Stoughton already, the addition of 50 bags of chicken feed is an insignificant increase. Proper storage in a covered container eliminates all possibility of unwanted rodents.
- e. Will there be an increased risk for human-transmittable disease? While there are many diseases to choose from, not only with hens but other domestic animals, commonly singled out for concern with hens are salmonella and avian influenza ("bird flu"):
- Salmonella is a bacterium that generally causes mild symptoms in humans, although it can be serious in some. It lives in the intestinal tracks of most animals, and is usually transmitted to humans by eating foods contaminated with feces, either directly or through cross-contamination.

The same set of guidelines used to control exposure to salmonella in commercially available food should be followed when handling backyard hens and eggs: Wash hands and surfaces often, don't cross-contaminate, cook eggs to safe temperatures, and refrigerate promptly.

- Avian Influenza is a very dangerous disease to poultry. The version of most concern is designated "H5N1", and it comes in two forms: low-pathogenic and high-pathogenic. The "low-path" type generally causes mild symptoms in chickens, lowering egg production and slowing growth. The "high-path" version generally is fatal to poultry, and can sweep through large populations of closely confined chickens in a matter of hours.

Like all influenza, H5N1 is caused by a virus. In rare cases it has mutated to a form that can be transmitted from birds to humans—approximately 500 known cases worldwide. Subsequent transmission from human to human is even more rare, if it has occurred at all. With over 50 billion chickens worldwide, H5N1 is one of the most closely monitored viruses in the world. It is not present in the United States, nor the whole Western Hemisphere, at this time.

Transmission of H5N1 is possible only with contact of infected bird mucous and feces. Since the virus is not present in Wisconsin, and backyard flocks are fully contained and do not have access to wild birds, the risk is minimal.

The USDA publishes a brochure that outlines a six-step process to safeguard backyard flocks from common transmittable poultry diseases.

3. Enforcement

- a. Will licensing be required? An annual license fee of \$15 per household will be required. Unlike dog licensing, of which Stoughton retains less than 30%, 100% of these fees will be retained by the city.
- b. How will violations be handled? SPD would handle all at-large, bites and noise complaints with hens just as they do with dogs and cats. The Zoning Administrator would handle all coop/run location issues as they do with all outbuildings. The Clerk's office would handle all licensing application, renewal and revocation actions.

- c. What additional SPD effort is required to enforce these standards? It is estimated that adding 200 hens to the Stoughton animal population will amount to an increase of less than 3% in SPD animal enforcement calls, and only a 0.1% increase in overall calls. This number is calculated as follows:

Estimated population of dogs and cats in Stoughton = 4,000+

Percentage increase of 200 hens to 4,000 dogs and cats = 5%

Annual animal control calls for dogs, cats and other animals = 454 (2008)

5% of all animal calls by SPD = 23 additional calls per year

Reduce calls by half because of hen nighttime silence, non-aggressiveness = 12 calls

12 additional calls out of 11,100 total SPD calls per year (2008) = 0.1%

It is felt that all common concerns are handled by these ordinance changes. However, there are many myths regarding the keeping of hens that are not directly addressed herein. Please refer to the Appendix *Backyard Chicken FAQ*, for further information.

Conclusion

The net effect of these regulations may seem onerous to some potential chicken keepers. However, by and large most communities have willingly accepted them as being a reasonable compromise required to address both the concerns of residents and the humane treatment of chickens within the city limits.

The experience of other cities has demonstrated that the keeping of a few hens is compatible with an urban environment. Cities of all sizes have allowed keeping of hens without incident. Few have reported any significant increase in noise, odor, or visual complaints, and have reported relatively minor increases in enforcement effort. We have provided a sampling of responses from other cities regarding enforcement at the end of this document.

We feel that the unique properties of hens make them the “greenest” animal capable of being kept in an urban environment. They are fully compatible with society’s blossoming recognition that we must all consider environmental impacts when evaluating our daily activities, and that becoming more local and sustainable in our food choices is one manner in which to accomplish this. Chickens fit completely with the objective of backyard vegetable gardening and Stoughton’s recent commitment to a community garden at Lowell Park.

The benefits of small micro-flocks of hens far outweighs the minor impacts on city services and residential living. We feel that the time has come for Stoughton to allow backyard hens.

Appendices

Other Cities Allowing Urban Chickens

The following is a partial list of cities that allow chickens to be kept in their city limits: Concord NH, New Haven CT, San Francisco CA, Minneapolis MN, Boston MA, Phoenix AZ, Chicago IL, New York City, Syracuse NY, Anaheim CA, Mobile AL, New Orleans LA, Buffalo NY, Hartford CT, Baltimore MD, Portland OR, Houston TX, Miami FL, San Jose CA, Las Vegas NV, Vallejo CA, Topeka KS, Santa Rosa CA, Santa Fe NM, Little Rock AK, Burlington VT, Richmond VA, San Antonio TX, Albuquerque NM, Bakersfield CA, Des Moines IA, Winston-Salem NC, Greensboro NC, Lafayette CA, Seattle WA, Oakland CA, Denver CO, Dallas TX, Laredo TX, Salt Lake City UT, St. Louis MO, Berkeley CA, Spokane WA, Indianapolis IN, Lexington KY and Louisville KY.

A focused list on comparable cities within Wisconsin and their ordinance attributes:

- Madison, population 231,916
 - up to 4 hens allowed on a lot with up to 4 dwelling units, no roosters, \$10 permit required, no slaughtering in city, coop/run at least 25' from structures on adjacent lots, hens contained in covered or fenced enclosure at all times
- New Berlin, population 38,649
 - up to 4 hens or ducks allowed per single-family dwelling, no roosters, no slaughtering, coop/run at least 5' within lot line and 25' from structures on adjacent lots, kept within a secure enclosure
- Fort Atkinson, population 11,895
 - up to 6 chickens allowed, not to exceed 6 animals total, proper care required
- Neenah, population 25,060
 - up to 4 hens per single-family dwelling, no roosters, city registration required, no slaughtering in city, coop/run at least 25' from residential structures on adjacent lots, covered enclosure required, hens contained in covered enclosure or fenced enclosure at all times, clean and sanitary conditions required
- Jefferson, population 7,822
 - up to 4 hens per single-family dwelling, no roosters, no slaughtering in the city, coop/run at least 15' within lot line, covered enclosure required, hens contained in covered enclosure or fenced enclosure at all times
- Sheboygan, population 47,895
 - no limit on hens, coop/run must be kept at a distance from dwellings so as to not cause a nuisance, must be kept in sanitary condition, must not cause a rubbish problem

The Uniqueness of Hens

A common concern of those not familiar with chickens is that once a community lets chickens in, the (barn) door is opened for all other “farm” animals (e.g., sheep, goats, pigs, horses, cows, emus, etc.) to be kept in the city as well. This fear is unfounded.

It is not by chance that only female chickens (hens) are getting the attention for backyard keeping in residential neighborhoods. Hens are ideally suited for small, urban lots due to several unique characteristics not possessed by other animals:

- They are small and have low space requirements
- They are quiet
- They are easy to contain and manage
- Their solid waste can be used in vegetable gardens
- They provide food (eggs) without being slaughtered
- They are relatively cheap to raise
- They are useful in controlling insects and other pests
- They can't fly well or far, and a painless wing clipping keeps them from flying at all
- They stay close to home if they should happen to get loose
- They go to sleep in the same place every day at sundown
- They don't require specialized or hard-to-learn skills to keep
- They are readily available

Other animals fail in one or more of these areas. Even ducks, which would be the closest in characteristics, fail due to their relative noisiness and outstanding flight ability.

An urban environment would simply not be humane or practical for the keeping of any other “farm” animal.

Backyard Coop Examples

Below is an example of a combined coop and run. The footprint is approximately 4' x 8'. As you can see, these are attractive structures that blend in with an urban environment.



The one below is slightly larger than needed for 4 hens, but demonstrates the general aesthetics of a backyard coop and run.



Experience of Others Regarding Urban Hens

Enforcement

10/22/2009, Madison Animal Control was asked via phone if chicken calls were frequent:

“...I was told that these calls were “few and far between” and that they have had “very few problems” and that most of their calls come in regarding cats and dog: vicious dogs, noise, stray, cat “pooped” in the neighbor's flowers, etc.”

10/28/2009, Matt Tucker, Madison Zoning Administrator wrote in a letter that asked about "chicken" enforcement practices:

“...Generally, we receive less than 10 complaints in a typical calendar year. The majority...relate to roosters being on site, too many chickens on site, or coops/shelters/enclosures that are placed too close”

“...the enforcement burden of managing this ordinance is fairly minimal”

12/10/2009, Police Chief Tony Brus of Fort Atkinson, responded via email when asked about how many animal control calls they get on average that are chicken related:

“Rarely, but when they start in a neighborhood there are usually many related that follow.”

[Has the]...Police Department...been overburdened with the inclusion of chickens?

“Not normally, but as I said above, when one neighbor starts complaining, usually several others do too.”

6/8/2010, Matt Trebatoski, City Clerk/Treasurer of the City of Fort Atkinson, WI, responded via email when asked about any issues they have seen with chickens:

“I talked with the Humane Society and they have not encountered any issues in the City. I also spoke with our Police Department and they could only remember one complaint about three years ago where the person thought it was illegal for their neighbor to have a chicken in the City...”

“I would have to say we are indifferent on the keeping of chickens in the City...”

2/2010, DePaul University Professor Hugh Bartling's *Green Urban Policy* class interviewed staff members from over 20 municipalities throughout the country, and published this in their 8 page report:

In response to a questions regarding enforcement, chickens getting loose or being abandoned, *“Seventeen indicated that...it [at-large chickens] has not been a problem. The remaining 3 reported isolated incidences.”*

“...enforcement has not been a major problem in any of the cities that we surveyed.”

In response to a question on whether or not the adoption of a chicken ordinance has been an overall positive or negative for their city, *“15 [of 21] reported that the ordinance has been positive. Six reported that the ordinance has been neutral. No cities reported a negative experience.”*

Disease

5/4/2010, Ron Kean, UW Extension Poultry Specialist, wrote in a letter responding to concerns about the threat of human disease transmission from poultry:

“...the risks are really quite minimal. With any animal, there are possible issues, but a list of possible threats from a dog or cat would be at least as long, and probably longer.”

1/26/2009, James C. Hermes, PhD, Oregon State University Extension Poultry Specialist, wrote in a letter when asked about concerns of backyard chickens:

“Chickens are relatively healthy animals...While there are potential disease problems with all animals major problems [with chickens] are rare and “bird flu” of the type noted in the media has not been diagnosed in the whole of the Western Hemisphere and may not ever find its way here.”

Property Values

6/2010, Deborah Bicksler and Mary Ellan Silbaugh of The Bicksler Group Realty, wrote in a letter to *Chickens in Stoughton?!*:

“Over the course of selling Madison homes...we have not had a single conversation with any client in which the discussion centered around chickens negatively impacting the desirability of a neighborhood nor housing values.”

2/16/2010, Thomas E. Malone, Management Analyst to the City of Janesville, WI, wrote in a Memo to the Janesville City Council:

“...staff has been asked to look into the matter of whether raising chickens within city limits would impact property values. There has been no empirical evidence to suggest a positive or negative impact on home values and staff is unable to quantify the potential effect keeping chickens would have on adjacent properties.”

1/7/2009, Professor Joe Bowerson, Willamette University and Director of the Center for Sustainable Communities, wrote in a letter to Mayor Taylor, Salem Oregon, regarding backyard chickens:

“With proper regulation prohibiting the presence of roosters and mandating proper enclosures, these cities [in Oregon] have demonstrated that chickens can indeed be kept in urban and suburban environments and not adversely affect public health, livability or property values. In fact...allowing residents to raise chickens can improve the diet, pocketbook and sustainability of individual households.”

7/23/2009, Dave Cieslewicz, Mayor of Madison, Wisconsin, commented in his blog:

“We allowed chickens about four years ago with very few complaints and lots of happy chicken owners. I know not everybody likes the idea. But you can't make an omelet without cracking some eggs.”

Backyard Chicken FAQ

What are the basic chicken characteristics?

- **Average Weight:** 5-7 pounds, although bantam species are smaller at 2-3 pounds
- **Lifespan:** Average of 7-10 years, but some live to 20. After age 3-4 they don't lay as many eggs, if any at all.
- **Number of breeds:** Hundreds, with many color and variety combinations. Some are raised primarily for meat, some for eggs, and some are just for show.
- **Quantity of eggs produced by hens:** Varies by breed, but ranges from 100-300 eggs per year. They generally don't lay in the winter. The smaller Bantam breeds lay smaller eggs.
- **Diet:** Almost anything, but are usually fed commercial chicken feed or grains augmented with table scraps and any delicious bugs that they may find. Sometimes a small rodent.
- **Egg colors:** Different breeds lay different colors, ranging from white and brown to blue, green, and other variations. European breeds lay white eggs; American breeds brown eggs; Mediterranean breeds blue and green eggs. They are all of similar nutritional profile when raised in a similar manner.

Do you need a rooster present for hens to produce eggs?

No. A hen will lay eggs regardless of whether a rooster is present. They just won't be fertile eggs.

Are chickens noisy?

Any proposed ordinance would not allow roosters, which are by far the noisiest. Hens are rather quiet, although they tend to be quite proud and vocal after an egg is laid. The noise level during this 5 minute squawking period has been measured at around 63 decibels, or about the level of two people talking.

Other than their post-laying squawking, normal hen sounds are barely audible at 25 feet. And at night, chickens are absolutely silent. Overall, they are far quieter than a barking dog, lawn mower, leaf blower, passing truck, children playing and other common neighborhood sounds.

Are chicken droppings smelly?

Chickens themselves are not smelly. Yes, chicken waste can be smelly, but no more than dog and cat waste. The conscientiousness of the pet owner plays a large part in the smell and cleanliness of their animals.

Many people's objection to chickens comes from the smell given off by large commercial operations, where thousands of chickens are kept in close quarters. In these large facilities the buildup of ammonia from the sheer volume of solid waste creates a powerful smell, particularly on warm days. But comparing the keeping of a micro-flock of 4 hens to a large farm-based operation is like comparing the keeping of the family dog to a commercial puppy mill.

In a commercial farm-based operation, profitability is the primary motivating factor. Chickens are viewed as a commodity and are raised solely for meat and/or egg production. Many are kept

in a density that is substantially greater than that of a few hens in a backyard. The United Egg Producers' 2010 Animal Husbandry Guidelines recommends that each laying hen be given as little as 68 square inches of space to live their entire lives. Compacting hundreds or thousands of hens at this density leads to an ammonia buildup that is difficult to manage.

Contrast this with typical backyard hen guidelines, where each hen has 3 to 6 square feet of coop space, and are let out into an enclosed pen of 10 square feet per bird. Enjoying 30 times the space given to commercially-raised hens, ammonia build-up is virtually eliminated.

In addition, contrast the volume of waste produced by a chicken to that of the average dog. The average dog produces 12 ounces of solid waste and a 1.5 ounces of urine per day, whereas the average chicken produces 1.5 ounces of total waste per day (chickens do not produce a separate urine flow). Thus, the estimated 2,000 dogs in Stoughton produce over 1,500 pounds of solid waste each day. The 200 hens projected to be kept in Stoughton will produce less than 20 pounds of waste per day.

And by its very nature, chicken waste is less of a public health threat, and is safe to apply to gardens after composting. The solid waste that dogs produce is a bio-hazard and cannot be safely composted for use in vegetable gardens. Stoughton residents add over 180 tons of dog waste to garbage landfills each year, with an additional 120 tons being washed directly into our environment.

Will chickens attract predatory animals?

Typical predators of adult and baby chickens include hawks (common in Stoughton), foxes (uncommon), raccoons (common), skunks (uncommon) and opossum (common). This is the same list of animals that stalk our wild squirrels, ducks, geese, rabbits, song birds and chipmunks. Any predators that are attracted to chickens are already living among us.

Adding 200 fully contained hens to the total population of wild animals will have little if any measurable impact on predator interest.

In addition, unlike the wild squirrels, ducks, geese, rabbits, song birds and chipmunks, domestic backyard chickens roost at night in secure, dig-proof enclosures, preventing nocturnal animal raids. During the day they are always kept in a covered run or fenced enclosure. They are pets that owners responsibly protect.

The larger potential threat is posed by domestic dogs and cats illegally roaming the backyards of homes. Although most domestic cats would have a tough time with a full grown hen (most can defend themselves against cats), roaming dogs could harass chickens by chasing them, potentially even killing them. Of course, loose dogs are also a threat to children, adults, other dogs and vehicular traffic.

But since urban hens are confined at all times, and our existing laws prohibit at-large dogs and cats, we do not anticipate this to be a significant problem.

Will rodents be attracted to the chicken coops?

It is the chicken feed that attracts rodents, not the chickens themselves (FYI: adult chickens will kill and will eat small rodents).

There are currently thousands of bags of dog and cat food being stored throughout the city without problem. And each residence has at least one garbage container full of food scraps and waste that a rodent would love to eat. Much like anything else, chicken feed that is securely

contained will prevent rodents from being a problem.

Many of the same rodents that would eat chicken feed are also attracted to wild bird feed that is outside and unprotected in backyards.

Adding an additional 50 bags of chicken feed to our city is of little increased concern.

Are there any health concerns from having chickens in an urban environment?

Unlike cats and dogs which are prime vectors for rabies, parasites, and tick-borne diseases, backyard chickens actually make your yard somewhat safer by consuming ticks, mosquitoes and other pests.

However, a typical concern is about the possibility of spreading avian influenza ("bird flu") by backyard hens. Avian flu is spread through direct contact with the contaminated feces and secretions of sick migratory birds, and is currently only present in Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe (i.e., bird flu is not currently in the United States). Since the backyard chickens will be fully contained at all times and do not come in contact with migratory birds, the transmission path is not present.

Even if a backyard chicken should contract bird flu, the size of the flock and its lack of contact with other birds would limit the impact to the micro-flock. The United States Humane Society and the United Nations contend that large commercial poultry operations are accelerants of the spread of poultry diseases and that small flocks are the solution to limiting the impacts of avian influenza and other diseases.

Note that it is very rare that avian influenza be transmitted from bird to human (there have been approximately 500 cases worldwide), and it is even rarer to jump from human to human (if it has occurred at all). To place this number in context, there are approximately 40,000 deaths in the US from seasonal flu each year.

What type of enclosure do chickens need?

For 4 hens, a 4'x6' securable coop with a 40 sq. ft. covered run would make them very happy. Most ordinances have limits as to where the coop can be located in relation to neighboring yards. Chickens should never be allowed to run loose in a fenced yard without supervision, due to winged predators.

Most enclosures and runs are smaller than the average backyard shed, trampoline or child's playset.

Aren't chicken coops an eyesore?

The modern backyard chicken coop is a distant relative to the typical farm coop. Since they are located in backyards, most city coops are attractive, efficient structures that are well maintained.

Each hen needs about 3-6 square feet of coop space and 6-10 square feet of covered run. For 4 hens this would total about 64 square feet, or a structure 8' x 8'. Most garden sheds, trampolines and swing sets are larger than the average backyard coop and run.

Many areas of the city have deed restrictions that control what types of structures can be erected. Chicken coops and runs would fall under the control of these restrictions (i.e., the city

ordinance does not override deed restrictions).

Will the neighborhood cats and dogs attack chickens?

Generally speaking, a cat would have a tough time with a full grown chicken. Most can defend themselves very well. Dogs, being larger, are far more likely to harass chickens.

But since urban hens are confined at all times, and our existing laws prohibit at-large dogs and cats, we do not anticipate this to be a significant problem.

Do chickens fly?

Yes, but usually only for very, very short distances. The longest recorded flight of a chicken is 13 seconds. Because of this, full-sized breeds often do not need their wings clipped.

Note that bantam breeds have a little more flight ability, so their wings are usually clipped to keep them out of trees. Clipping wings is a simple, painless procedure.

What do chickens do in the winter?

Most breeds can be kept over the winter, even without heating the coop. Some breeds' large combs can get frostbite easily unless protected with Vaseline. Chickens tend to stay in their coops more during the winter.

Even so, there are certain breeds that tolerate cold better than others. There is even a Norwegian breed, the Norwegian Jaerhon, that may fit ideally in Stoughton

If the city allows chickens, what's next? Pigs, cows, emus?

It is not by chance that female chickens (hens) are getting all the attention for backyard keeping. Hens are ideally suited for small, urban lots due to several unique characteristics not possessed by other animals:

- They are small and have low space requirements
- They are quiet
- They are easy to contain and manage
- Their solid waste can be used in vegetable gardens
- They provide food (eggs) without being slaughtered
- They are relatively cheap to raise
- They are useful in controlling insects and other pests
- They can't fly well or far, and a painless wing clipping keeps them from flying at all
- They stay close to home if they should happen to get loose
- They go to sleep in the same place every day at sundown
- They don't require specialized or hard-to-learn skills to keep
- They are readily available

Other animals fail in one or more of these areas. Even ducks, which would be the closest in characteristics, fail due to their relative noisiness and outstanding flight ability.

Other animals fail in one or more of these areas. An urban environment would not be humane or practical for their keeping.

Are chickens a nuisance in an urban setting?

Like any animal, they are subject to their own whims and their owners' control. By and large, hens are quieter, cleaner and more easily managed than dogs, and certainly more so than outdoor cats. Their owners generally are appreciative of the eggs produced, and ensure that their hens have a clean, productive environment in which to live.

Even Martha Stewart, a long-time chicken owner herself, recognizes the benefits of backyard chicken keeping.

Won't the Stoughton Police Department have their hands full with chickens?

It is estimated that adding 200 hens to the Stoughton animal population will amount to an increase of less than 3% in SPD animal enforcement calls, and only a 0.1% increase in overall calls.

Shouldn't you live on a farm to raise chickens?

The same could be said about community gardens or even individual gardens within backyards throughout the city.

The definition of "pets" changes over time. For example, rabbits were once considered farm animals, raised only for meat. Dogs were kept only for their ability to herd and protect farms. Cats were raised solely to reduce the rodent population. Now all of these are considered pets and are allowed to be kept within the city limits.

Micro-flocks of backyard hens are treated more as pets than livestock, often "spoiled" and fawned over as much as a domestic dog or cat. Since most owners want to ensure nutritious egg production, they are generally kept in good health, given organic feed and kept clean and secure.

The raising of a few hens does not require the space, expense and management of a farm in the country. They are being successfully raised in the backyards of cities throughout the US. In Wisconsin, Madison, Jefferson, Fort Atkinson, New Berlin, Neenah and others allow micro-flocks in backyards.

But isn't it cruel to keep chickens in the city?

95% of commercial laying hens spend their entire life in individual cages less than the size of a sheet of paper, 67 to 86 square inches. "Cage free" hens are allocated 1 to 1.5 square feet of space, and never get to be outside of the building.

In stark contrast to the commercial hen, backyard hens will have 30 times the space or more to enjoy.

Do chickens really "come home to roost?"

Yes. At sunset, chickens will seek out the same place to sleep until daybreak. Not liking to sleep with their feet on the ground, they "roost" or perch on a horizontal pole the entire night.

At night, hens are absolutely silent.

Are brown eggs healthier than white eggs?

All egg colors have the same nutritional profile, although the type of feed and living conditions influence the nutritional quality of the egg. Chickens that are given free range to eat bugs and such will produce better tasting eggs than those that are raised in cages, as in commercial operations.

You can generally tell what color of egg a hen will lay by the color of their earlobe: White earlobe = white egg; Red earlobe = brown, blue or green egg.

Do hens get lonely?

Yes. Chickens are social animals and prefer to have some chicken friends. Because of this, a minimum of two chickens should be kept.

Are there chicken veterinarians?

Yes. Although it tends to be a specialty that many vets don't continue, here in the Madison area there are at least 2.

Won't the runoff from chicken waste pollute the Yahara River?

Issues of manure runoff from egg-producing chickens are associated with huge factory-style egg farms that generate tons of manure each day in a very concentrated area. Low-density backyard chicken keeping is the solution to runoff issues, not the problem. Gardeners using commercial organic fertilizers are very likely to already be using chicken-manure based products, and those keeping chickens will have less need for even these.

So keeping chickens will likely not increase the net amount of organic fertilizers used; most chicken-keeping gardeners will simply be producing it themselves rather than purchasing it.

However, runoff from dog waste laying on the ground is a current and significant problem. Studies have shown that on average 40% of owners do not pickup the solid waste from their dogs. In Stoughton, this amounts to an estimated 120 tons annually of dog waste being washed into our environment.