

Urban Hens Pilot Evaluation

Recommendation:

That the March 7, 2016, Community Services report CR_1621, be received for information.

Report Summary

This report provides the results of the Urban Hen Keeping Pilot Project.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the August 18, 2014, Community Services Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration work with the River City Chickens Collective in the development of the 2014-2015 Urban Hens Pilot Project, and provide a report to Community Services Committee on the implementation of the 2014-2015 Urban Hens Pilot Project, including appropriate policy and bylaw changes, in the fall of 2015.

Report

- In late 2014, Administration implemented an Urban Hen Keeping Pilot Project allowing a select number of Edmontonian's to participate in hen keeping in an urban environment. The goal of the pilot was to further understand the impacts of urban hens and to determine good husbandry principles within a City of Edmonton context. Additionally, the results of the pilot project were intended to gauge the viability and establish a framework for a potential Urban Hen Keeping Program.

Pilot Results

- Administration initially received 35 citizen requests to participate in the pilot. Expectations, guidelines, and requirements were communicated in advance of granting licences to pilot site owners. Processes for applications, approvals, site monitoring, and data collection were developed to determine appropriate sites, ensure adherence to established parameters and gather information for pilot review and evaluation.
- Nineteen sites were formally selected across the City; locations that offered differences in property size, neighbourhood density, geography and experience levels amongst the hen keepers. Each of the 19 pilot site owners were required to register provincially to meet identification requirements for the tracking of livestock. Additionally, all participants received consent from their adjacent neighbours as a requirement to the pilot project.
- Inspections were conducted at the beginning, midpoint, and conclusion of the pilot. The inspections focused on ensuring property owners met pilot guidelines,

- coops were constructed and situated appropriately, good husbandry practices were being maintained, and all hens were accounted for.
- The majority of sites were in compliance with the requirements at the initial inspection; however, further follow up inspections and additional work was required at several locations as some site requirements were not being met. One site had concerns related to the mandatory run enclosure requirement and subsequently withdrew from the pilot. All of the 18 remaining pilot sites were in compliance at pilot inception or became compliant over the duration of the pilot.
 - Animal Control responded to twelve citizen complaints at six of the pilot sites. All complaints were investigated promptly by Animal Control Peace Officers who worked to resolve complaints amicably between neighbours.
 - Five complaints focused on the sites attracting nuisance birds feeding on food sources and waste in the yard, four on hens being at large or off premises, two for excessive smell, and one for noise. Three of the sites received multiple complaints against them which may have resulted from lower experience levels with those particular hen keepers. No complaints were received relating to coyotes or other predatory wildlife sightings. No correlation was found between the size of the property or the proximity to neighbouring properties as the cause of any of these complaints.

Neighbour Consultation and Insight Survey Results

- Animal Control Peace Officers canvassed neighbouring properties surrounding the pilot site over the duration of the pilot. Neighbours directly abutting the pilot sites, along with random households within close proximity, were interviewed. The small sample size and relationship between some survey and pilot participants invalidates the statistical relevancy of this survey; however, this information does offer some insight from a community or neighbour perspective.
- From the relevant information collected, 85 percent of citizens surveyed indicated that they knew the hen sites were in their neighbourhood through the neighbour consent requirements or because they smelled, heard, or saw hens. The same number of respondents felt that they would support a bylaw change to allow hens, but they all felt strongly that there needs to be tight restrictions to deal with irresponsible site owners. Importantly, no survey participants witnessed any coyotes or other predatory wildlife in the area; however, six respondents commented on an increase in nuisance birds, roaming cats, and mice.
- Administration also conducted a survey through the Edmonton Insight Community to gauge citizens' feelings towards urban hen keeping. There were 1,797 responses received with the slight majority of respondents having a more favourable view on urban hen keeping in Edmonton. Fifty-seven percent of those surveyed indicated that they would support hens being raised near their property. Attachment 1 provides a summary of the survey results.

Discussions with Hen Pilot Participants and Cooperation with River City Chickens Collective

- The 19 pilot sites were managed by both experienced and inexperienced hen owners with a diverse type and number of hens for each site. Conversations between site managers and enforcement staff were generally very positive. When Officers provided direction to make adjustments to feeding locations, waste control methods, site plans, or other advice on good husbandry practices, the majority of participants responded quickly in making the necessary changes. Participants also provided good feedback for program improvements.
- The River City Chickens Collective provided support and guidance to pilot site owners and acted as a resource for Animal Control Peace Officers for the duration of the pilot. Ongoing consultation with River City Chickens Collective representatives has continued to increase Administration's technical ability to manage hens in an urban environment.

Bylaw and Policy Changes

- No bylaw amendments are required to the *Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw* to proceed with the formal creation of an Urban Hen Keeping Program. The Bylaw allows for Administration to issue licences for keeping poultry within the City of Edmonton. Licences are issued subject to any terms and conditions that are deemed to be necessary or are in the public interest.
- The *Zoning Bylaw* was recently amended creating a use class for urban outdoor farming. In addition to a licence, property owners would be required to obtain a development permit if an Urban Hen Keeping Program is supported by Committee. As a discretionary use, the permitting process includes area notifications and the right of appeal to the Subdivision & Development Appeal Board.
- The *Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw* includes an offence for failing to comply with the terms and conditions of a licence. This provides Officers with the ability to issue fines if a participant chooses to operate outside of established requirements. Licences can also be revoked if compliance cannot be achieved through the standard enforcement process.
- Administration will adopt a phased in approach to mitigate any future or unforeseen impacts on communities, on surrounding properties, or on enforcement resources. While the results of the pilot lean favourably towards supporting a program, several pilot outcomes cause some concern from an enforcement perspective.
- One-third of pilot sites were subject to citizen complaints, with three sites receiving multiple complaints over the course of the pilot. An Urban Hen Keeping Program with high participation levels of inexperienced hen keepers may generate unanticipated complaint volumes and unmanageable service requests. Additionally, increases in nuisance birds and mice, observed by pilot participants and neighbours, can be monitored further through phasing in a program.

- Administration will implement a cap of 50 hen keeping sites over the next two years to allow for further analysis. Administration will monitor the number of complaints, complaint types, and resourcing impacts, and can report back to Committee in the spring of 2018. This approach can be used to better gauge citizen interest in urban hen keeping and better manage complaint volumes within the existing budget.
- Attachment 2 outlines revised Administrative Procedures and Guidelines which will form the conditions of all licences if a program is implemented. These new conditions remove the neighbour consent requirement, add a requirement to have all hens banded for identification, and create a training requirement to have all program participants complete a hen keeping course or workshop, recognized by the City, before a licence is issued. This training requirement increases urban hen husbandry skill sets for an Alberta climate, helps property owners mitigate the impact on neighbours, and meets a number of other concerns identified by the Edmonton Food Council and River City Chickens Collective.
- Administration will conduct ongoing reviews of these procedures and guidelines over the next two years to ensure the program is aligned with the City's food and urban agriculture strategy and mitigate impacts on communities. These guidelines can be amended at any point to address individual site concerns or to improve overall program effectiveness.
- The River City Chickens Collective and City of Edmonton websites will be the primary sources of information to help citizens gain a greater understanding of hen practices and issues relating to the keeping of urban hens. Additional public education support through industry partners and associations can be leveraged to assist in raising awareness of urban hen keeping.

Public Consultation

- Administration consulted with the River City Chickens Collective and the Edmonton Food Council on the results of the pilot. Alignment to *'fresh'*, Edmonton's Food and Urban Agriculture Strategy, Bylaw resourcing challenges, neighbour consent requirements, and a potential public education and awareness strategy were discussed.

Budget/Financial Implications

- Funding requirements to carry out the pilot project were managed within the existing department budget. Ongoing budget impacts will vary based on parameters of the program and based on the number of participating sites. A temporary cap on the number of hen keeping sites will allow Administration to manage increases in citizen complaints with existing staff resources. Administration will monitor service requests and operational impacts and report back to Council if additional funding is required.

Attachments

1. Insight Survey Results
2. Keeping of Urban Hens Procedures & Guidelines

Others Reviewing this Report

- T. Burge, Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer, and General Manager, Financial and Corporate Services
- R. G. Klassen, General Manager, Sustainable Development