



ADVOCACY GUIDE

Backyard Chickens in the City: Effective Policy Solutions for North Carolina Municipalities

TIPS

Establish backyard chicken ordinances based on community and council interest. It is advantageous if there is a desire from city officials and citizens to introduce backyard chickens into a municipality.

Identify the Demand: Understand Interests, Concerns, and Benefits

Identify issue(s) and prioritize. The first step entails researching the interests and attitudes of the city council and community toward backyard chickens. Concerns revolve around public nuisance and chicken and public health and safety issues. Alleviating these concerns involves educating the community on the benefits chickens provide and putting the correct legislation in place. Social benefits include education, self-sufficiency, access to nutritious food, and companionship as family pets. Economic benefits include cheap food and fertilizer.¹ Also, identify champions who can advocate in your community. If champions are difficult to find, identify allies to advocate with you.

Utilize Data

Use compelling data when lobbying your city council. Present them with your municipality's food security concerns and information on similar cities that allow backyard chickens. For example, 93% of the major cities in the United States already allow backyard chickens.² Furthermore, use data to negate concerns. For example, a common concern is that chickens are noisy, but in reality, they have the same noise level as humans (65 decibels) and are far quieter than a dog's bark (90 decibels).³

Frame Your Pitch

Frame your pitch by using the community's demand, backyard chicken benefits, and mitigations of common concerns to persuade the municipality. Provide information about how chickens are the similar to other pets, and therefore, will not be any more of a nuisance or risk to public health or safety than other animals. Focus on the benefits people receive from chickens and how they can increase equality by reducing costs for families that have little access to fresh food.

Plan for Long Term Success

Create a strategic advocacy plan to increase the likelihood that your work will have a lasting impact and achieve the desired outcome: <https://toolkit.communityfoodstrategies.com/create/>. It is important to remain willing to compromise to increase the likelihood of passing legislature in favor of backyard chickens.

CONCERNS, RESPONSES & FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Nuisance Concern: Chickens can and have become a nuisance in terms of noise and odor. Therefore, neighbors may not want other neighbors to have chickens. A council member or policy maker may have had prior negative experiences with backyard chickens or other animals.⁴

Response: Municipal standards and ordinances that alleviate noise, odor, and various public nuisance concerns are important when considering backyard chickens.⁵ (*Refer to policy brief for specific information*). Also, backyard chickens are similar to other pets, and good ordinances implemented and enforced well are important for success.

- i. Consider that people may keep chickens illegally if there are no ordinances, so it is safer and less of a public nuisance risk for people to raise them with regulations.

- ii. Recognize that the same enforcement methods used for other pets can be used for backyard chickens, ensuring minimal change, if any, in enforcement costs.

Sample Ordinance Language: Reference numbers I, II, IV, V, and VI, below.

...

Chicken Health and Safety Concern: Some perceive that backyard chickens will be used for chicken fights, will be abused by their owners, or predators will attack them.

Response: Animal cruelty is illegal nationally and statewide, so it is no different from enforcing other animal cruelty laws. Also, specific municipal ordinances can have their own chicken health and safety laws, in addition to national and statewide laws. Furthermore, correctly constructed chicken enclosures will keep away any predators.

Sample Ordinance Language: Reference numbers II, III, IV, V, and VI, below.

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Public Health and Safety Concern: The right knowledge and resources are required to raise chickens. People can get sick if they are in contact with poorly kept chickens, which can worry a municipality. Chicken coops can become dirty and create odor, sanitation, waste, and public health problems if not kept properly, leaving the city partially responsible.⁶

Response: Backyard chickens are generally healthy animals and can contribute to human health. Data shows that humans are at minimal risk for getting sick from backyard chickens.⁷ Furthermore, children receive many vital nutrients by consuming a single egg each day.⁸

Sample Ordinance Language: Reference numbers II, IV, V, and VI, below.

SAMPLE ORDINANCE LANGUAGE

Below are examples from other cities' poultry ordinances to utilize in drafting an amendment or ordinance that covers key concerns that stem from allowing backyard chickens.

(I) Nuisance clause example from Winston-Salem, NC's ordinance:

"It shall be unlawful for any owner or custodian to permit his or her animal, or an animal in his or her care, to create a public nuisance."

(II) Proper shelter clause example from Charlotte, NC's ordinance:

"Such animals must be confined in a coop, fowl house or rabbit hutch not less than 18 inches in height. The fowl must be kept within the coop or fowl house and the rabbits in the hutch at all times. The coop or fowl house must be used for fowl only and the hutch for rabbits only, and both must be well ventilated. The coop, fowl house or hutch shall have a minimum of four square feet of floor area for each fowl or rabbit. The run must be well drained so there is no accumulation of moisture. The coop, fowl house or hutch shall be a minimum of 25 feet from any property line. No more than 20 such fowl or rabbits shall be kept or maintained per acre. The number of fowl or rabbits should be proportionate to the acreage."

(III) Animal safety and humane treatment clause examples from Nashville, TN's ordinance:

"No domesticated hens shall be used or trained for the purpose of fighting for amusement, sport, or financial gain."

(IV) Number of hens and rooster clause examples:

- i. "The maximum number of chickens or other fowl that can be kept on any residentially zoned property within the corporate limits of the city shall be five (5). All chickens shall be hens; no roosters are permitted." (Winston-Salem, NC)
- ii. "The Poultry limit is 15. No Person shall have more than one rooster in a Household." (Nashville, TN)

(V) Slaughtering clause example from Nashville, TN's ordinance:

“No slaughtering of domesticated hens may occur on the property.”

(VI) Permits, fees, and enforcement clause example from Charlotte, NC’s ordinance:

“It shall be unlawful for any person to own, keep, have, or maintain any equine animals, cloven-hoofed animals or other livestock or any chickens, turkeys, ducks, guineas, geese, pheasants, pigeons or other domestic fowl in the city without first receiving from the bureau a permit to do so or to continue to have any of such animals or fowl after a permit has been denied.”

RESOURCES

Jacob, Jacquie. “Developing Regulations for Keeping Urban Chickens.” *Extension*, May 5, 2015.
<http://articles.extension.org/pages/70001/developing-regulations-for-keeping-urban-chickens>.

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<https://mikethechickenvet.wordpress.com/2012/03/03/why-dont-cities-want-backyard-chickens/>.

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<http://www.sailzora.com/chickens.htm>.

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<https://www.livescience.com/50834-eggs-nutrition-facts.html>

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¹ Valerie Taylor, “Chickens for Montgomery,” *Scribd*, June 2009, 6-9.

² “Percentage of Major US Cities Allowing Urban Hens,” Billings Backyard Hen Initiative, last modified 2011,
<https://billingsbackyardhens.wordpress.com/2011/12/21/percentage-of-major-us-cities-allowing-urban-hens/>.

³ Patricia Foreman, “7 False Myths About Urban Chickens,” in *City Chicks* by Patricia Foreman, last modified 2017, http://www.chickensandyou.com/7_Myths.html.

⁴ Jacquie Jacob, “Developing Regulations for Keeping Urban Chickens,” *Extension*, May 5, 2015,
<http://articles.extension.org/pages/70001/developing-regulations-for-keeping-urban-chickens>.

⁵ Taylor, “Chickens for Montgomery,” 8.

⁶ Mike Petrik, “Why Don’t Cities Want Backyard Chickens,” *Word Press*, March 3, 2012,
<https://mikethechickenvet.wordpress.com/2012/03/03/why-dont-cities-want-backyard-chickens/>; Jacob, “Developing Regulations.”

⁷ Jacob, “Developing Regulations.”

⁸ Jessie Szalay, “Eggs: Health Benefits and Nutrition Facts,” *Live Science*, May 14, 2015,
<https://www.livescience.com/50834-eggs-nutrition-facts.html>