

Chicken proponents debate lot size limit

THELMA GUERRERO-HUSTON Statesman Journal
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It's going to be a while before Salem residents bent on keeping backyard hens will know whether a proposal they support will see the light of day.

Nearly 100 pro-chicken activists filled Council chambers to argue their case in favor of urban chickens during a City Council meeting Tuesday night.

Two people spoke against the idea.

Public testimony began around 7:30 p.m. and continued until close to 10 p.m.

The meeting continued past the Statesman Journal's press time.

Most of the public testimony concerned two of seven provisions recommended by city staffers to regulate chickens inside city limits.

Members of the group, Chickens in the Yard, or CITY, asked councilors to consider reducing a requirement that calls for residential lots to be 10,000 square feet in order to keep backyard hens.

CITY member Barbara Palermo told councilors that such a requirement would exclude most residents from keeping chickens on their property.

The typical lot size in Salem is between 4,000 and 5,500 square feet, said Vickie Hardin Woods, the city's community development director.

Lots at or greater than 10,000 square feet account for 21 percent of all residential lots in the city, Woods said.

CITY members also argued against requiring backyard chickens to be kept in coops with a minimum setback of 20 feet from any property line, asking councilors to reduce that setback to 10 feet.

But even if changes to the provisions are made, the matter would not be a done deal until sometime in the fall.

That's because staff would have to prepare a resolution that would include those changes and return it to the council for consideration June 22.

Should the council vote in favor of the document, it next would go to the city's planning commission for a public hearing, likely to take place sometime in August.

A positive recommendation by commission members would mean the first reading of a

Chicken keeping provisions:

- No roosters to be allowed;
- No more than three hens allowed on property;
- Minimum lot size to be 10,000 square feet;
- Chicken enclosures to be permitted in side and rear yards only, with a minimum setback of 20 feet to any property line;
- Chickens must remain in the enclosure;
- Chicken keeping as a Special Use in Residential Single-Family zones only;
- Chickens, their feed and waste, must be kept in a sanitary condition so as not to emit odors, attract rodents and flies, or endanger public health.

SOURCE: City of Salem

proposed ordinance during a Sept. 28 city council meeting.

During the council meeting's additional 30 minutes, a number of substitute motions were made by council members.

Some of those would completely do away with lot size requirements. Others reduced the minimum setback rule to 10 feet from 20 feet from a property line, applied permit fees to own chickens, and did away with all requirements for keeping chickens.

In the end, the council opted to move forward with the original plan for staff to return with a resolution to amend city code to allow keeping of chickens in the city with specific requirements.