

City may outlaw feeding waterfowl to manage messy problem

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
Wednesday, 10 July 2013 17:46

<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/071113/birdSM.png>

Ban on handouts for ducks, geese could be first step in handling bird population at marina, coal dock

Feeding the ducks and geese along Port Washington's lakefront is a pastime for many families — one the city's Harbor Commission would like to see end.

The waterfowl attracted by the easy supply of food foul the water and beaches, and mess the marina docks and walkways, members said Monday.

They will also likely make a mess in Coal Dock Park, which is expected to open in the coming weeks, officials said.

"It's going to be a huge problem," City Administrator Grams predicted during an interview Tuesday.



"Before construction, there were times when you could barely see the ground because there were so many geese there. It was bad out there. There's no question it's going to be a problem."

That problem will be exacerbated if people feed the geese, he said.

Commission members on Monday asked the Common Council to adopt an ordinance prohibiting feeding ducks and geese.

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While there are many good reasons for the ban, they said, there is one overriding reason.

“It’s a public health hazard,” said commission member Dan Herlache.

Ald. Bill Driscoll, a member of the commission, said the biggest problem seems to be at the north end of the marina.

Although the city has posted a sign in that area asking people not to feed the birds, it doesn’t seem to have deterred many people, he said.

“Every day there are some guys there feeding the birds,” Driscoll said. “They stand right beside the sign and feed the ducks.

“If I were on pier five, I can assure you we would have a conversation about it.”

The blue-and-white sign notes that the area is a natural wildlife habitat area and asks “Please don’t feed the birds.”

The Department of Natural Resources is happy to see the waterfowl, Harbormaster Dennis Cherny said, adding, “They just don’t want them to be fed.”

Because there isn’t a city ordinance prohibiting people from feeding the birds, the city is powerless to do anything about it, Driscoll noted.

“If it was an ordinance, we wouldn’t say ‘Please,’” Ald. Dave Larson, a commission member, added.

Commission member Tony Matera noted that the sign currently in place at the north end of the marina most prominently announces the wildlife area. The request that people not feed the waterfowl isn’t as noticeable.

“My eyes would probably just catch the National Wildlife Area part of the sign,” he said. “It looks more like a historical marker than something telling me not to do something.”

Posting the sign was one of the things the city had to do when the marina adopted the Clean Marina initiative, Driscoll said.

There are a lot of reasons not to feed the ducks and geese, Driscoll noted.

“It’s bad for them (the birds) and it’s bad for people in the area,” he said. “It makes them more dependent on us. It spreads disease.”

The commission recommended the Common Council draft an ordinance prohibiting the feeding of ducks and geese, something that, if approved, would apply citywide, City Administrator Mark Grams said.

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That's not a bad thing, commission members said, noting the problems caused aren't limited to the marina.

"With the coal dock, there are going to be another three million birds that become dependent," Driscoll predicted.

There's a bird sanctuary on the south dock, he noted, but the birds don't stay there.

Many communities prohibit feeding geese, officials said, and many have taken measures to limit the population.

Grams predicted the city may have to consider some of these measures if the flock on the coal dock gets too large and makes too much of a mess.

"We may have to call out the dogs," he said.

The Common Council will be asked next week to draft an ordinance prohibiting the feeding of the ducks and geese.

If approved, police would enforce it, probably on a complaint basis, commission members said.

"It's not a revenue-producing thing," Matera said.

"I'm sure the police are not going to run down there and handcuff people for this," Larson said, noting warnings are more likely to be issued unless someone repeatedly violates the rule.

Image Information: STANDING IN FRONT of a sign asking people not to feed the birds, a family provided a snack for ducks and geese near the north end of the Port Washington marina in March. Press file photo