

Town law would allow chickens in residential areas

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Board considers ordinance change providing permits for hens to be raised outside agricultural districts

As a rural community with its fair share of farms, the Town of Grafton has always permitted chickens and other domestic fowl in agricultural areas.

But town officials are now poised to amend an animal-regulation ordinance to allow chickens to be kept in residential areas, as well.

The proposed law, which would permit as many as six chickens to be raised in a coop or similar structure, will be discussed at a public hearing next month.

Town Chairman Lester Bartel said the amendment, which was written in response to a resident's petition, is modeled after similar ordinances in other communities, including the Village of Fredonia.

Although chickens and other fowl are nothing new in the town, the amendment would further clarify accepted agricultural practices in residential areas, including subdivisions, he said.

"We've had some requests for this, and there has been more and more interest from people asking about raising their own chickens," Bartel said. "I bet we've gotten 15 calls at the Town Hall about it."

Efforts to raise chickens in urban settings have sparked debates in other local communities, including the City of Port Washington, where this week the council declined to take action on a request to allow hens in residential districts.

Under the Town of Grafton's proposed law, residents living outside agricultural districts could apply for an annual permit to raise up to six chickens in an enclosed structure such as a coop, building or pen.

Only hens would be allowed. All other fowl — including ducks, quail, pheasant, geese, turkeys, guinea hens, peacocks, pheasant, emus and ostriches — would be prohibited.

Before receiving a permit, the applicant would have to notify all abutting property owners of the plan. Proof of notification would be required along with payment of a yet-undetermined fee.

Permits would be granted by the Plan Commission after it considers the application, including coop plans, as well as possible feedback from neighbors.

Under the new law, coops could be no closer than 10 feet to lot lines and would have to be at least 25 feet from an abutting residence. Chickens would have to be confined to the coop at all times.

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Roosters or male chickens older than 10 weeks would be prohibited.

In addition to six adult chickens, newly hatched chicks living in a brooder could be kept in a residence or outbuilding up to the age of three weeks.

Chickens would not be allowed in mobile home parks, condominiums or vacant lots.

Bartel said there may be objections from residents due to noise or odor concerns, but he doesn't expect a major dispute over the proposal.

"We're not trying to reinvent the wheel here," he said. "A lot of this is common sense.

"We've always had chickens and other livestock in the town, but with residential areas there have been some changes."

A major impetus behind the ordinance change is an increased interest in raising chickens for eggs and meat outside agricultural areas. Bartel said the proposed regulations are designed to allow the fowl for personal consumption, not sale.

"It's not for people to start running their own business, but I'm sure we couldn't stop them from selling eggs to their neighbors or friends," he said.

Bartel said the new law would be adopted on a trial basis, with the town expected to review its effectiveness after one year.

"We would have a sunset provision to see how it went and could make changes after that," he said.

A public hearing on the proposed ordinance change will be held at the 7 p.m. Town Board meeting Wednesday, April 10. The board may take action on the proposal the same night, Bartel said.