

City takes next step in fowl-feeding law

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Port council directs attorney to draw up ordinance that will make it illegal to feed ducks and geese

The Port Washington Common Council on Tuesday directed City Attorney Eric Eberhardt to draw up an ordinance making it illegal to feed ducks and geese in the city.

“I don’t think there’s any one of us who hasn’t fed the ducks and geese somewhere down the line and have fun doing it,” Ald. Bill Driscoll said.

“But the waste from the birds is causing all kinds of hazards, not only for people but for other birds. It’s a terrible breeding ground for parasites and bacteria.”

Birds that normally migrate become dependent on the food that people give them and don’t leave the area, Driscoll said.

“We come in and feed these birds and they ignore nature and stay here,” he said.

“If they move, the natural area has a chance to revive itself. But if they don’t leave, there is no chance for recovery.”

The problem of waterfowl is most acute near the marina, where the birds soil the docks and walkways, said Driscoll, a member of the Harbor Commission, which recommended the law.

And birds are likely to become a big problem at the coal dock, Ald. Dave Larson said. Before construction of Coal Dock Park began, he said, there were so many birds it was hard to see the ground.

That could get even worse if people visiting the new park feed the waterfowl, he said. Their waste could make it impossible to even sit on the grass.

“It would ruin everything we’ve done to beautify the coal dock and make it the gem we want it to be,” Larson said.

Ald. Mike Ehrlich questioned how effective an ordinance would be in stopping people, especially since they can be seen feeding the waterfowl while standing next to the “Please don’t feed the birds” sign on the north end of the marina.

“How do we really help the problem?” Ehrlich asked.

Driscoll said education is the key.

“It’s not just about making a law,” he said. “This isn’t a revenue-making thing. We don’t want the city to ticket 5-year-olds.”

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An ordinance would give police the power to inform people they can't feed the birds and tell them why, Larson added.

Mayor Tom Mlada said the city needs to take action now to prevent problems from occurring.

He and his children recently went to a park in another community that birds frequent, Mlada said, "and you literally cannot walk anywhere without stepping in it (waste). It's not fun.

"Anything you can do to keep the birds away and mitigate the issue is fine."