

City of Mississauga
Corporate Report



<p>Date: October 13, 2023</p> <p>To: Chair and Members of General Committee</p>	<p>Originator's files:</p>
<p>From: Raj Sheth, P.Eng, Commissioner of Corporate Services</p>	<p>Meeting date: November 15, 2023</p>

Subject

Urban Hen Public Consultation Report

Recommendation

1. That the Urban Hen Pilot Program be concluded and that hens remain a prohibited species under Schedule "A" of the Animal Care and Control By-law 0098 2004 as outlined in the report from the Commissioner of Corporate Services, dated October 13, 2023 and entitled "Urban Hen Public Consultation Report".
2. That the Urban Hen Pilot participants be permitted to keep their current hens in the locations approved by the City in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Pilot Program, until the end of their natural lifespan.

Executive Summary

- Following a feasibility report in April 2021, staff were directed to pursue a public consultation to determine resident interest in an urban hen program.
- Between July 12 and August 8, 2021, public consultations were conducted, and a survey of 1,858 respondents indicated slightly favourable support for an Urban Hen Program (53.9%), in addition to resident concerns with pest and wildlife attraction, noise, odour, and animal welfare.
- Between May 5, 2021 and May 5, 2023 a 24-month Urban Hen Pilot Program was conducted and received minimal uptake.
- Staff recommend against establishing a permanent City-wide Urban Hen program and support permitting Pilot participants to keep their existing hens in the locations approved by the City and in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Pilot, until the end of their natural life span. Animal Services will periodically re-inspect the former Pilot properties for standards of care and status of hen numbers.

Background

At the April 28, 2021 General Committee meeting, the Urban Hen Review [report](#), which reviewed the feasibility of an Urban Hen program in Mississauga, was received. The report concluded that such an Urban Hen program would be feasible with a number of outlined regulations. At the meeting, staff were directed to conduct a full public consultation on urban hens and to report back in the fall of 2021.

At the May 5, 2021 Council meeting, a motion for a 24-month Urban Hen Pilot was approved. This included up to 10 net new participants in Wards 5 and 6, and an existing household in Ward 3. Staff were directed to report back on findings of the 24-month Pilot in addition to the results from the comprehensive public consultation on the matter of urban hens following the completion of the Pilot in 2023. As part of this review staff conducted a scan of comparable jurisdictions to review their urban hen programs (Appendix 1: Jurisdictional Scan).

Present Status

Public Consultation

Comprehensive public consultation was conducted on the topic of urban hens through the support of an external consultancy firm, Hoffman Hayes and Community Services.

- The consultation process ran from July 12 to August 8, 2021, and included a public education session, a public engagement session, and an online survey.
- Results of the survey and public engagement sessions were consistent and offered insights into the perspectives of Mississauga residents on urban hens.

Urban Hen Pilot

Since approval of the 24-month Urban Hen Pilot on May 5, 2021, staff and members of Council from Wards 3, 5 and 6 have supported resident participation in the Pilot. Any households identified through complaint for keeping hens in Wards 5 & 6, which met the basic requirements of the minimum property set-backs, the number of hens (maximum of four), and had no existing violations of the Animal Care and Control By-law 0098 2004, were invited to participate in the Pilot Program.

Comments

Public Consultation

A total of 49 people attended a virtual public education session on July 12, 2021 and 23 people attended a virtual public engagement session on July 28, 2021.

The online survey received 1,858 responses which are summarized below. The full responses can be found in Appendix 2: Urban Hens Public Engagement:

- A slight majority of respondents (53.9%) support residents being allowed to keep hens, a minority (41.93%) were not in support of urban hen keeping and 4.20% were not sure.
- 34.8% of respondents reported interest in keeping hens themselves.

- Most common concerns from residents interested in keeping hens was attracting predators, disapproval from neighbours, odour and mess and not knowing how to care for hens.
- Most common concerns from residents not wanting to keep hens was attracting predators, noise/odour, health, sanitation and animal welfare.

The public consultation process identified that given the level of interest and concern in Mississauga, it is likely that there would need to be a continued investment in public education and communication of any proposed Urban Hen Program.

Urban Hen Pilot Analysis

Over the course of the Pilot period, there was limited resident participation in the Pilot approved wards. Ultimately, all interested households which met the Pilot requirements were approved, resulting in the total participation of six households out of the eleven available slots for the Pilot. Five households within Wards 4 and 5 were approved for their participation in the Pilot, in addition to one household from Ward 3. The Ward 3 participating household was approved as part of the motion by Council and was exempt from meeting the set-back requirements and the maximum number of hens.

Information on participating households is summarized below:

- Five of the six participants only became involved in the Pilot after Animal Services received complaints about their hen keeping. This included the household in Ward 3.
- Two of the six households voluntarily withdrew from the Pilot and rehomed their hens in January 2022 and February 2023 respectively, citing difficulty in caring for the hens.

Challenges that emerged with participating households are summarized below:

- Two of the households had roosters at the time of initial investigations and they had to be rehomed to qualify for the Pilot.
- Three households initially had more than four hens which had to be rehomed to meet the limit on number of hens for the Pilot.

Pilot Surveys and Site Inspections

Staff undertook an inspection of the four remaining Hen Pilot households in April 2023 and provided a survey for residents to complete to provide further qualitative feedback. The site inspection was conducted to ensure that Pilot participants were in compliance with the requirements and standards. In the first inspection, three out of four participants passed the inspection, and one participant initially failed due to a violation of the number of hens and the coop conditions.

Staff also surveyed the four participating households and the results are provided in Appendix 3: Urban Hen Pilot Surveys and Inspections:

- Survey respondents highlighted challenges to hen keeping, including, maintaining hen wellness, accessing food resources, and winter insulation.

- Respondents also reported benefits of hen keeping, such as therapeutic family time, educational opportunities, providing organic fertilizer, and as a source of fresh eggs.
- Residents neighbouring the Pilot participants were surveyed and a majority of respondents (66.6%) reported negative consequences with odour, noise, stray hens, and the attraction of unwanted wildlife and rodents.

Access to Veterinary Services

Access to veterinary services and emergency care is a challenge for hen keepers in the City.

- There is a limited supply of veterinarians who provide hen care for non-commercial clients due to the costs and barriers of obtaining the appropriate accreditation required by the College of Veterinarians of Ontario to care for urban farm animals.
 - As of August 2023, only three veterinary practices in the Greater Toronto Area have this accreditation. To access emergency care, urban hen keepers have to travel, use mobile clinics, or forgo veterinary services.

Avian Influenza

Avian Influenza is a contagious viral disease that can quickly devastate bird and wildlife populations. Avian Influenza has been confirmed in Mississauga and poses a public safety risk according to Peel health.

- The risk of transmission is high among wild or domestic birds like turkeys and chickens, and in some cases, pets like birds, cats and dogs can contract it.
- Residents that raise backyard chickens, own pet birds or maintain other flocks, have been instructed to monitor signs and symptoms and follow preventive actions recommended by the Province and Government of Canada.
 - These actions include keeping a closed flock, limiting visitors, and avoiding introducing new birds. While Pilot participants have been instructed to adhere to these restrictions, they cannot fully mitigate the risks.
- The risks posed by Avian Influenza are compounded by the lack of access to veterinary care for hens in the City.

Recommended Approach

Staff recommend against establishing a permanent City-wide Urban Hen Program.

- This recommendation is informed by the low demand and uptake in the Pilot, significant resident concerns regarding the consequences of urban hen keeping, and the health and safety concerns due to limited access to veterinary care and the risk of Avian Influenza.
- Urban Hen Pilot participants will be permitted to keep their current hens in the locations approved by the City in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Pilot Program, until the end of their natural lifespan.
- Animal Services will periodically re-inspect these properties for standards of care and status of hen numbers. Staff will also continue to respond to complaints and enforce compliance with the Animal Care and Control By-law 0098-2004, as amended.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts resulting from the recommendations in this report.

Conclusion

In 2021, staff conducted a public consultation on the topic of urban hens. The public survey concluded that support for an Urban Hen Program in Mississauga is not definitive (53.9%), and there remains significant concern around the program (46.1% not in support or unsure).

In addition to the public consultation, an Urban Hen Pilot Program was conducted between May 2021 and May 2023. The Pilot experienced limited resident uptake, with a total of six participating households, and only four remaining households. Two of the six households withdrew and rehomed their hens due to difficulty caring for them. Additionally, the public consultation and Pilot surveys reflected resident concern around urban hens, regarding pest and wildlife attraction, noise and odour, and animal welfare. The Urban Hen Pilot also raises health and safety concerns due to limited access to veterinary care and the risk of transmitting the Avian Influenza. Ultimately, staff recommend against the creation of a City-wide Urban Hen Program due to low program demand and uptake, health and safety concerns, and resident concerns outlined in the consultation process.

Attachments

Appendix 1: Jurisdictional Scan

Appendix 2: Urban Hen Public Engagement

Appendix 3: Urban Hen Pilot Surveys and Inspections



Raj Sheth, P.Eng, Commissioner of Corporate Services

Prepared by: Jay Smith, Manager - Animal Services, Enforcement Division