The Urban Agriculture Task Force was established as a Task Force of Sustainable Peterborough’s Food and Farming Working Group. Our mandate is to support Sustainable Peterborough’s goal of: *Feeding Ourselves Sustainably with Local, Healthy Foods.* By examining local food issues from an urban lens and supporting policy, by-laws and other strategies to support and encourage urban agriculture locally we hope to engage a greater number of citizens in sustainable food production and act as an advisory and networking group.

## As referred to in the letter, our report *Encouraging Urban Agriculture in Greater Peterborough: Priorities for the Near Future* will be release this Fall. Here is the DRAFT excerpt related to Backyard Chickens for reference:

## Backyard Chickens

In recent years, residents of cities have become increasingly interested in raising backyard chickens. Some reasons include:

* desire to produce sustainable local food for ones self and family.
* a desire to sustainably reduce household organic waste by feeding it to the birds;
* production of organic matter to add nutrients to home-gardens; and
* a desire to reconnect with where our food comes from.

There has been a variety of approaches to urban hens in cities with some cities passing by-laws support backyard flocks, while others have banned urban chickens. This has been great debate in some cities, including the City of Toronto, where chickens continue to be listed as a prohibited/restricted animal under the City of Toronto Municipal code (City of Toronto, 2013). Canadian cities that have created regulations allowing residents to keep backyard chickens include the Cities of Brampton, Guelph, Kingston, and Vancouver ([Vancouver:](http://vancouver.ca/people-programs/backyard-chickens.aspx) Rules and Guidelines for Backyard Chickens)

There has been resistance to the idea of keeping chickens in many urban areas because raising chickens is viewed as a type of "agricultural" activity or use belonging in rural areas. Concerns regarding avian influenza have been noted as a concern, mainly in larger commercial flocks but also in backyard flocks. There is a risk of infection from handling waste, along with spread of reportable diseases, as defined by Health Protection and Promotion Act, such as salmonella and campylobacter from handling chicken waste, chickens themselves or eggs. If contact is properly managed, along with good hand hygiene practice, risks could be minimized.

### Where are we now?

In the City of Peterborough, Chapter 180 of the City's Municipal Code is the Animal Regulation By-law (City of Peterborough, 1991). Schedules laid out in the by-law have caused confusion in interpretation regarding chickens. Chickens are not listed as "Prohibited Animals or "Restricted Animals" in Schedules A and B, but are listed under "Not Permitted Animals" in Schedule C. By-law 1984-138 is a zoning by-law that has been generally interpreted by Planning Staff as permitting a person to keep a small number of chickens as an accessory use of a residence. This by-law requires a chicken coop to be located at least 100 feet from a food preparation area, unless granted permission by the Medical Officer of Health The regulation also mention that no one can keep an animal for agricultural use (i.e. used to produce food), except in an agricultural zone.

As has been seen in other jurisdictions, planning for urban hens is not as simple as allowing hens to be reared. Considerations that must be discussed and addressed to ensure success include:

* number of hens to be permitted (and not allowing roosters as per other jurisdictions);
* education for those interested and delivery costs for programs (i.e. animal care, feeding, hand washing, hygiene;
* waste management/animal husbandry requirements/best practices;
* predation issues;
* space requirements;
* licensing, use of eggs/meat (cannot be sold unless through an inspected food premise through public health and meeting other specific legislation i.e., egg grading);
* renegotiation of contracts with Peterborough Humane Society (Animal Services/OPSCA) in order to manage by-law enforcement; and,
* budget to support the development, implementation and evaluation of the by-law

There is interest and support locally among urban residents for moving forward on the issue both within the City of Peterborough and in small population centres in the County. Barriers and concerns must be addressed however including costs that would result from the development and enforcement of a by-law or licensing system.

### Goals

1. To allow the raising of hens within the City of Peterborough and in urban settlements in the County of Peterborough.
2. To create reasonable restrictions on the raising of chickens in the City of Peterborough and in urban settlements in the County of Peterborough.

### How are we going to get there?

Peterborough can follow the example of many other Canadian municipalities. The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs notes that some issues municipalities should consider before developing by-laws around keeping poultry include: animal health and public health, animal care, predators, food safety and other production considerations ([OMAFRA, 2016b](http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/urbanagricul.html%29.)).

Most areas that allow urban chickens forbid roosters, limit the number of hens and have specific space and housing requirements. It is important to include restrictions on the placement and design of the coop in order to protect human health.

There is also the need to educate about the waste produced by the chickens. OMAFRA notes that chicken manure "must be disposed of in a safe and environmentally responsible manner" (OMAFRA, 2016). Manure can contain harmful bacteria (i.e. E.coli, salmonella) so health risks must be considered (i.e. proper composting if planning to use as source of organic matter in gardens).

Chickens need sufficient space, as well as a perch and a nest box. Predators are also a major concern and coops need to be designed to protect the chickens. Care for birds in cold weather also needs to be considered in Peterborough. There is an abundance of free information, including information from the [Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)](http://www.inspection.gc.ca/animals/terrestrial-animals/diseases/bird-health-basics/eng/1323643634523/1323644740109) and [Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA)](http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/urbanagricul.html) that municipal websites could link to on the proper care of urban chickens. Some jurisdictions have funded education sessions for those interested in backyard flocks. This should be considered in by-law development.

It appears to be common practice to forbid slaughtering on residential properties (e.g., Surrey, British Columbia and Seattle, Washington). Any by-laws permitting urban hens should consider the means for dealing with chickens that are past their prime laying age. A number of options would need to be explored and education regarding these options is critical. Consideration could include an urban abattoir, mobile slaughter units, and sending them to rural areas (which is not recommended for biosecurity and spread of diseases). Animal control implications must also be considered including cost of housing for birds that have been released.

Some cities (i.e., Vancouver, Surrey) require that all backyard chickens be registered with the city (City of Surrey, 2015; City of Vancouver, 2013b). The City of Vancouver also provides a step by step guide starting with the by-laws, information on proper care of chickens and how to design a proper coop (City of Vancouver, 2013b). The animal control by-law is easily accessed online and is easy to understand, information on the rules related to keeping chickens can be found in sections 7.15 and 7.16 (City of Vancouver, 2015).

Peterborough area municipalities could consider reviewing existing regulations to determine the best way to meet community members' interest in backyard chickens and personal egg production while also supporting the education and information needs of people interested in keeping urban hens.

Further Resources:

<http://justfood.ca/hens-in-urban-areas/>

<http://www.foodinpeterborough.ca/city-of-peterborough-comprehensive-animal-by-law/>