



BACKYARD CHICKENS

Photo: Lindsay Holmwood



MARC NIELSEN
Legislative Director
marc.nielsen@dc.gov



TIPS



Overheard in D.C.: Urban Chickens

BY ANDREW WISEMAN IN NEWS ON MAY 12, 2017 4:40 PM



Photo by [JavaJanie](#)

Welcome back to Overheard in D.C., DCist's weekly column of funny, strange, and poignant things that our readers and staff overhear and send in. We've been doing it [since 2006](#), and check out the archives [here](#).

There's been a lot of news about a [maybe or maybe not chicken ban](#) in the city. There are some strong feelings about the issue. This may not be the best argument, though.

Overheard of the Week

At the city chicken hearing in front of DC Council's Committee on Health:

Man, testifying: "Chickens are pets with benefits."

After the jump, looking out for each other, meeting neighbors, and more.

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Backyard chickens blamed for salmonella outbreaks. Do not snuggle with them, CDC says.

By Karin Brulliard June 5 at 1:03 PM [Email](#)



A backyard chicken in Arlington, Va. (Maddie Meyer/The Washington Post)

America's love affair with backyard chickens is a tad too intimate, and it's making some of us sick.

Just this year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says, eight separate salmonella outbreaks linked to contact with pet poultry have taken place in the United States, sickening more than 370 people in 47 states and hospitalizing 71.

No one has died in 2017 — yet. In 2016, a record 895 people who consorted with fowl came down with the nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps and fever that characterize this infection, and three of them did not survive.

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CURRENT REQUIREMENTS

24 DCMR § 902

902 FOWL

902.1 No person shall harbor, keep, or cause to be kept any live fowl within the District in a manner that is contrary to the provisions of this section, without a permit from the Mayor.

902.2 A permit to keep live fowl shall be issued only upon the approval of the Director of the Department of Human Services, upon compliance with all terms and conditions of this section.

902.3 Permits shall be dated and shall expire at the end of one (1) year. Permits may be reissued annually after the first year under the same conditions of original approval.

902.4 An application for the renewal of a permit shall be filed within thirty (30) days prior to the expiration of the existing permit. In cases where no violation of these regulations is recorded in the Department of Human Services during the preceding year, permits may be renewed for one (1) year by endorsement by the Director of Human Services.

902.5 Applications for permits shall be furnished by the Director of the Department of Human Services, and shall include the following:

- (a) The name and address of the applicant;
- (b) The proposed location where the fowl will be kept;
- (c) An accurate description of the kind and number of fowl, or the progeny of the fowl; and
- (d) Any other information required.

902.6 Each application shall be accompanied by a plat prepared by the District Surveyor that shows accurately the location of the enclosure for the fowl as the enclosure will be placed on the applicant's property, and the respective distance of the enclosure to adjoining property lines.

902.7 Approval by the Director of the Department of Human Services shall be based upon investigation and a report that the following conditions are met:

- (a) The proposed location is not within fifty feet (50 ft.) of any building used for human habitation;
- (b) The proposed location is not within two hundred and fifty feet (250 ft.) of any property line or, if this is not the case, the applicant has furnished to the Director with the written consents of all householders and owners of property located within one hundred feet (100 ft.) of the boundaries of the premises upon which fowl are to be kept, and within the same square; and
- (c) Adequate coops, pens, cotes, runways, and other enclosures will be provided, subject to approval by the Director upon issuance of the permit.

902.8 No fowl shall be kept or permitted to run, fly, or stray within fifty feet (50 ft.) of any building used for human habitation, or onto property other than the enclosure designated in the application for permit, except where a permit has been approved by the Mayor and issued under §902.9.

902.9 Notwithstanding the limitations set forth in this section, a permit may be issued to a public vocational school if the Mayor approves the issuance of a permit based on a finding that the keeping of fowl at the school will not affect adversely the health, comfort, and quiet of the neighborhood.

902.10 All coops, pens, cotes, runways, and other enclosures shall be kept clean, dry, and sanitary at all times.

902.11 All droppings shall be composted with twelve inches (12 in.) of earth cover, or stored in water-tight metal containers with tight-fitting covers.

902.12 Coops, pens, cotes, runways, other enclosures, and the premises shall be free of rats, places where rats can harbor or obtain food, and conditions conducive to the breeding of flies.

902.13 All buildings or structures on any premise where fowl are kept shall be protected against the ingress of rodents.

902.14 Nothing in this section shall apply to properly licensed commercial fowl establishments keeping, killing, or selling fowl.

SOURCE: Article 18, §§9-11 of the Police Regulations (May 1981).

CURRENT REQUIREMENTS

24 DCMR § 902

902.1 – Must have a permit.

902.7(a) – Enclosure not within 50 ft. of any building used for human habitation.

902.7(b) – Enclosure must be 250 ft. from any property line or must obtain written consent of all households within 100 ft. of the boundaries of the enclosure.

902.7(c) – Must have adequate coops, pens, cotes, runways, and other enclosures approved with the permit.

SOURCE: Article 18, §§9-11 of the Police Regulations (May 1981).

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BACKYARD CHICKEN REQUIREMENTS

IN OTHER CITIES

NUMBER OF CHICKENS

Rockville, MD – Up to 5 on residential property

New York, NY – No limitation

Portland, OR – Up to 3 (No permit needed)

San Francisco, CA - Up to 4 (No permit needed)

Seattle, WA - Up to 8 (No permit needed)

REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

Rockville, MD – Permit required; must show on your site plan where your coop will be kept.

New York, NY – None. Neighborhood complaints are basis for enforcement action.

Portland, OR – Required for 3+ hens.

San Francisco, CA - Required for 4+ hens & commercial purposes

Seattle, WA - Up to 8 (No permit needed)

SETBACKS

Rockville, MD – Coops or cages housing chickens must be located at 5 feet from the property line and at least 40 feet from the primary residential structure. Coops and cages shall not be located in a front yard or side yard.

Portland, OR – At least 15 feet from any building used or capable of being used for human habitation, not including the applicant's own dwelling.

San Francisco, CA - Coops and enclosures must be 20 feet from any door, window, or human habitat. Animal keeping may not be for commercial purposes in residential districts. In industrial and commercial districts, small animals may not be kept for commercial purposes unless a proper permit is secured from the Department of Public Health.

Seattle, WA - Structures must be located at least 10 feet away from any structure that includes a dwelling unit on an adjacent lot.

NEIGHBOR NOTICE & CONSENT

Rockville, MD – Must provide written notice (includes email) of their intent to maintain chickens to all abutting neighbors prior to the chickens being brought onto the property.

Portland, OR – Notification to all property owners and residents within 150 feet of your property lines. If the Director determines by inspection that the specified animal facility is not being maintained in compliance with the issuance criteria, the specified animal facility permit shall no longer be valid and shall be revoked.

ENCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS

Rockville, MD – Covered, predator-proof coop or cage that is well ventilated and designed to be easily accessed for cleaning.

Portland, OR – In good repair, capable of being maintained in a clean and in a sanitary condition, free of vermin, obnoxious smells and substances.

San Francisco, CA - Rodent-proof, all openings properly fly-screened, and adequate provision must be made for the elimination of all odors.

RODENT PREVENTION

Portland, OR – In good repair, capable of being maintained in a clean and in a sanitary condition, free of vermin, obnoxious smells and substances.

San Francisco, CA - The premises shall be rodent-proof, all openings properly fly-screened, and adequate provision must be made for the elimination of all odors.

WASTE DISPOSAL

Rockville, MD – Waste must be disposed of at least once each day and in such manner to prevent unsanitary conditions and the cause of a nuisance such as odor or unsightly matter.

Portland, OR – In good repair, capable of being maintained in a clean and in a sanitary condition, free of vermin, obnoxious smells and substances.



FOOD (CONTINUED)

Goal 2: Ensure universal access to secure, nutritious, and affordable food supplies.

Target: By 2032, ensure 75% of DC residents live within ¼ mile of a community garden, farmers' market or healthy corner store.

2.1 Expand the DC Healthy Corner Store initiative.

2.2 Introduce fresh food circulators and mobile vendors in neighborhoods with poor access to fresh foods.

2.3 Expand the Double Dollars program to farmers' markets and corner stores citywide.

2.4 Incorporate best practices in healthy and local menus in all DC Public Schools.

2.5 Increase transparency about the nutritional content of food.

2.6 Develop cooperative food purchasing systems.

Goal 3: Develop the food industry into a strong and viable economic sector.

Target: By 2032, produce or obtain 25% of food within a 100-mile radius.

3.1 Complete a comprehensive study of DC food supply systems.

3.2 Create a Local Food Hub for consolidation and distribution of local produce.

3.3 Develop small business food processing incubator center in DC.

3.4 Permit incidental sales of food from community gardens.

3.5 Designate staff to actively participate in a new Food Policy Council.

3.6 Increase government and institutional procurement of local foods.



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PLAN PROGRESS

Keep tabs on plan progress with our annual progress report. The 2017 Progress Report was released April 19, 2017!

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Sign up for monthly newsletters, volunteer events, community meetings, and other ways to get involved in Sustainable DC!

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