

Council seeks ways to allow chickens in city yards

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Salem City Council on Monday dismissed a recommendation by the city's Planning Commission to not allow the keeping of chickens in residential areas, deciding instead to work toward hatching a plan that could allow hens to reside in city limits.

In a 5-3 vote in favor of a substitute motion made by Ward 7 City Councilor Bob Cannon, councilors directed staffers to draft two separate ordinances regarding chickens and return the proposals to the council at a later meeting.

One ordinance would seek to amend the current city code's definition of chickens as "livestock."

If approved, the second ordinance would define chickens as pets.

"This way, it gets the issue out of land use, where it takes 45 or more days to get anything done," said Ward 3 City Councilor Brad Nanke.

The chicken keeping topic first reared its head Feb. 23, when pro-chicken activists argued their case before city councilors.

Since then, the issue has been mulled on and off at Salem City Council meetings.

On June 22, the council approved a resolution seeking to amend city code concerning the keeping of chickens in backyards and to remove the regulation regarding city chickens from the zoning code.

In keeping with code procedures, the proposed amendment was forwarded to the city's Planning Commission.

After giving notice to neighborhood associations, and the boards of Commissioners for Marion and Polk counties, the commission then held a public hearing about the issue Aug. 18.

Afterward, the commission voted against modifying the code.

In its response to the council, the commission wrote that public testimony showed that pets already allowed as domestic animals cause problems between neighbors.

"The addition of chickens, which are not generally accepted as urban pets, will infringe on those neighbors who are not as supportive of the keeping of chickens ... resulting in potential impacts to quality of life contrary to the intent and purpose of the zoning code," the commission wrote.

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