



Wednesday, May 28, 2008

Mayor and Councilors  
City of Castlegar  
460 Columbia Avenue  
CASTLEGAR, B.C.  
V1N 1G7

## Urban Chickens and Goats in Castlegar

The City of Castlegar has a clear intention to promote sustainability, in the lead up to the new revision to the Official Community Plan, an Integrated Community Sustainability Planning process<sup>1</sup> was undertaken. In this document it states, "Little to no planning has been undertaken for the Castlegar area on issues related to the maintenance of a healthy, nutritious and sustainable food supply". Mention is also made of a Sustainable Community Plan which acknowledges the desire for a sustainable community to be maintained in Castlegar. In addition to this, there is the Castlegar Reducing its Mark Program (CRIMP) which aims to reduce the impact of Castlegar on the environment and our world. All of these documents and programs mean that we as residents of Castlegar should be making proactive decisions to help people improve their own lives, the lives of their children, and those of future generations.

A high quality of life means being able to eat well and to provide for oneself and one's family. Access to organic, healthy food is becoming more and more difficult as food prices rise. I have estimated that up to 95% of the food consumed in the Kootenays is imported into the region. Only a few decades ago, the Kootenays was known as a net-exporter of food. As we are now a predominantly urban community, we may not see any means of addressing this issue directly, but there are some things we can do on a smaller scale. I have separated this into discussions on chickens and goats respectively as I see these as two examples of animals that can be introduced into a City such as Castlegar with minimal risk, and would be of virtually no financial or other cost to the City yet could potentially benefit many of its residents.

### Chickens

As it is currently written, the Animal Control Bylaw prevents people from having a few hens in their yard. While it may have been the intention of Council when passing this bylaw to protect this city's residence from the nuisance and hazards associated with keeping livestock within the city limits, including chickens generally in the list of prohibited livestock goes further than is necessary to achieve that objective while at the same time limits unnecessarily the ability of residents to provide for themselves. With four hens in an urban backyard, a family could provide themselves with healthy, organic, grain fed, free run eggs to sustain themselves, throughout the year. These hens could eat some of the residents' waste, (reducing the amount going to landfill), provide some organic, locally sourced fertilizer for a vegetable garden, and provide education for children about

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.castlegar.ca/pdfs/CastlegarICSPAAssessmentFinal.pdf>

their food and animals, while making little to no noise, or detriment to the urban landscape.

This is not a unique concept. There are many cities in the United States including New York, Portland, San Francisco, Houston, Chicago, Seattle, as well as Victoria BC that allow chickens.

There are four concerns which may be raised in opposition to this suggestion, namely noise, pests, nuisance and disease. I shall address each in turn.

1. With respect to noise, I suggest that roosters remain prohibited under the bylaw. Hens do not make noise. Roosters make noise. Allowing hens and prohibiting roosters would not create any additional noise in residential neighbourhoods.
2. The risk of attracting pests is minimal. Chickens are birds which eat a vegetarian diet which, in an urban setting, would consist of store-bought grains as well as some table scraps. This would not attract more pests than would the average vegetable garden or bird-feeder, less so because the chickens and their food would be contained by means adequate to keep the chickens in and thus most pests out. Furthermore, as long as food is kept in a plastic sealed container, there is no increased risk of attracting pests.
3. As for the concern about nuisance generally, the size of a coop can be quite small (smaller than the needs of a larger dog run) and the number of hens can be restricted by bylaw. Well kept chickens produce fewer odours than do many animals which can currently be kept as pets, and as they create no noise, the concern over creating nuisance is ungrounded.
4. Concern about the risk of disease is primarily with regard to avian flu. This risk is much lower where one is only dealing with a few hens than with large bird farms - where, if there is a single case of the flu, thousands of chickens have to be slaughtered. In this case, the disease can only affect a couple hens, and cannot have as great an impact. All animals, whether domestic or wild, carry with them a risk of disease. Dogs may contract rabies, cats ringworm and so on. Families who choose to keep hens contained in their yard take on that risk as do all families who choose to keep pets.

A benefit to allowing hens as pets is that families can give the animals personal attention, which is bound to be an improvement on the animal rights issues concerning hens living in cages in large scale egg factories. As a woman from Chicago who keeps chickens says:

Backyard hens are often a community asset. Children love to interact with chickens (watch them, feed them, etc), and older people often have fond memories of growing up with chickens. Excess eggs can be shared with neighbours, and these same neighbours may choose to bring by some of their "waste" (trimmings from kitchen greens, dandelions and weeds from the yard, etc.) rather than send them to the landfill. From my experience, this is how it works, at least. My hens are definitely an asset to the neighbourhood, not a detriment!

Every one wants to have strong communities - well-tended backyard hens help build a strong community!

## Goats

Miniature or pygmy goats are becoming recognized as environmental assets in many urban areas of North America. For example, Seattle has recently passed a bylaw allowing the animals in their city...

Also known as pygmy or dwarf goats, the animals weigh between 50 and 100 pounds and grow to about 2 feet tall. Owners keep them as pets and sources of milk.

People who want to keep goats will have to license them like a dog or cat and get them dehorned. Male goats must be neutered – the unaltered male gives off a musky scent that some find offensive, goat experts say. To protect sidewalk gardens and park vegetation, goats will not be allowed in off-leash areas or anywhere outside the owner's yard, with an exception: They can be lent to other owners to graze in their yards. Portland and Everett have passed legislation legalizing the goats....

"Why stop there? Why not add sheep, llamas, alpacas -- I mean we could go on," Councilman Peter Steinbrueck said Monday, semi-seriously. "There are arguments to be made that could achieve greater heights of urban sustainability by bringing farms back into the city and farm animals."

Source - Seattle Times<sup>2</sup>

Goats provide excellent milk, particularly for people who cannot tolerate cows' milk. Seventy-two percent of the milk used throughout the world is from goats. It is one-third richer than cows milk but more nourishing and easier to digest. Goats are excellent pets, historically, goats were domesticated almost 10,000 years ago around the same time as dogs. Goats are clean, quiet animals that provide excellent lawn and weed care and can clean up invasive plants much faster than humans. Goats can also be trained, like dogs, to walk on-leash.

Perhaps this sounds outrageous, but the majority of Castlegar's neighbourhoods are made up of single family homes on lots of about 4,000 square feet. It is not difficult to set aside an area within such a yard and devote it to goats. Taking care of goats takes work and lots of research, but it can be extremely rewarding for people who love animals and want to produce food in their own back yard.

Castlegar would not be alone in allowing miniature goats, with cities such as Seattle, Berkeley, Nashville allowing residential goats as sustainable pets; as well as other cities such as Denver who use goats as a key part of weed management programs.

## Suggestions

One way for City Council to promote sustainability is to remove impediments which prevent individual residents from practising a more self-sustaining lifestyle. On the individual scale people need to be able to take ownership of their ability to provide for themselves and their families. Historically, we have removed food production from urban centres, but as growing cities make larger demands on agriculture, we now know that if urban centres can provide some food for themselves, they can help reduce the negative effects of large scale food production. This can include the need for pesticides, mono-agriculture, fertilizers and mass animal farming that is not only at times cruel but detrimental to quality food production. As evidenced by the recent interest in the "100-Mile Diet" and the "Future of Food in the Kootenays" Conference held last Fall in Nelson, along with rising fuel and food prices; the ability for Cities to grow a portion, if not all, of the food they consume is becoming an important consideration in any discussion of sustainability.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2003900621\\_minigoats25m.html](http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2003900621_minigoats25m.html)

There are always people who will disagree with any suggestion raised that changes, or is perceived to change the status-quo, but food security is an issue requiring leadership at the local level. Castlegar is blessed with an abundance of under-utilized and often large yards, many of which already provide a level of food security with fruit trees and vegetable gardens.

Overall, urban hens and goats can be greatly rewarding, educational, healthy and beneficial to families, while having little to no negative impact on future generations or on neighbourhoods. Therefore, this would be a wonderful way for the City of Castlegar to further its dedication to sustainability. I hope that as elected officials, you will consider promoting this concept in Council, and allowing the city's residents to improve their quality of life and contribute to the vision of the City.

It is my suggestion that council amend the Zoning and Animal Control Bylaws to permit the following:

1. Hens to be permitted in residential zoned lands as pets and for local food production
2. Miniature goats to be permitted as pets and local food production in residential areas, and subject to similar rules and regulations as dogs in reference to licensing and the use of fences and leashes as appropriate.
3. Agriculture to be further defined to permit hens and miniature goats in residential zones as pets and for local food production.

Thank you for considering for this proposal. I look forward to hearing your support of this suggestion. I have already contacted Sandi at the Kootenay Food Strategy Society who is supportive of this initiative. In addition to this I will be contacting other local like-minded organizations who may be willing to promote this concept.

Yours Sincerely,

Mike Thomas