

Coming soon to a backyard near you???

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"Locally-sourced food" is taking on new meaning in the City of Toronto.

Late last year, City council approved a backyard chicken pilot project which will allow residents in four wards (Ward 5:Etobicoke-Lakeshore; Ward 13:Parkdale-High Park; Ward 21:St. Paul's and Ward 32 Beaches, East York) to keep up to four chickens in their backyards. The eggs they produce are permitted for personal consumption only and the sale, or offering for sale, of the eggs strictly prohibited.

The project will run for a three-year period, with an interim review after 18 months. Participants in the program must be properly registered with the City of Toronto and will be subject to periodic inspections by City staff. No roosters will be permitted (due to noise concerns) and the hens must remain on an owners' property at all times.

While it is difficult to argue with the benefits of free-range food, the project, not surprisingly, is not without its critics. Among other things, people have raised concerns that the chickens will attract predators, such as racoons (already a serious problem in the City) and potentially transmit disease. And, let's face it, the mere concept of backyard chickens in a City as densely populated as Toronto just seems *strange*.

As it turns out, Toronto is not the first large North American City to allow the raising of chickens across municipal territory. Montreal already allows for it, as do cities like New York, Chicago and Vancouver. In fact, the Department of Parks and Recreation in NYC actively supports the growing urban agricultural movement and sponsors workshops for people interested in learning how to raise their own chickens.

It is as yet unknown how many residents in Toronto will take advantage of the pilot project. What is clear, however, is that if the project is to succeed, sufficient resources will have to be allocated to the project to ensure that it is well-implemented and that the residents seeking to raise chickens in their backyard are well-suited to the task. If not, we may see neighbours flocking to court with nuisance-related claims.

(This blog is provided for educational purposes only, and does not necessarily reflect the views of Gardiner Roberts LLP).

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