

Attachment 3: Summary of UrbanHensTO Review Research and Consultations

Jurisdictional Scan

Staff completed a scan of 25 Canadian and American cities to determine which jurisdictions allow backyard hens and to compare program requirements. The jurisdictions were chosen for their size and comparable climate and urban landscape to Toronto.

Of the 25 jurisdictions reviewed, 16 permit backyard hens. The program requirements for UrbanHensTO generally align with regulations in other jurisdictions that allow hens. For example, the majority of cities prohibit roosters, limit the number of hens permitted, do not allow hens to be kept as livestock to eat, have specific requirements for hen enclosures, and have requirements for yard space and property setbacks. Of the 16 municipalities that permit backyard hens, 9 have a registration requirement, 6 require an annual fee (ranging from \$25 to \$70) and 2 perform inspections of hen enclosures before households are permitted to get hens. Edmonton also requires residents to take an education course prior to getting hens.

Since December 2020, Waterloo, Kitchener, Halifax and Calgary have voted in favour of bylaw amendments to allow hen-keeping and Mississauga has approved a backyard hens pilot project. In Waterloo and Kitchener, each hen must have a band that includes current contact information of the hen's owner. In Halifax, the number of hens permitted is based on the size of the lot and the new by-law will be reviewed by City staff in two years. For Calgary's program, initial permits to participate will be capped at 100 households.

The City of Mississauga voted in favour of a backyard hens pilot program in May 2021. The pilot project will run for two years and allow for ten sites in three City wards. The City of Winnipeg is also reviewing its Responsible Pet Ownership By-law, including recommendations on urban hen keeping which will be presented to Council in spring 2022 for consideration.

Additional municipalities in Ontario allow residents to keep backyard hens, including Brampton, Guelph, Kingston, and Niagara Falls. Major cities across Canada also allow the keeping of backyard hens, including Vancouver, Victoria, and Edmonton. A number of large cities in the United States, including New York City, Chicago, Washington D.C., and Cleveland allow hens.

City staff consulted with counterparts in select municipalities (including Kingston, Guelph, Waterloo, and Vancouver) to better understand their respective programs, including the number of households registered, complaint volumes, and program requirements. Generally, less than one percent of total households in the consulted municipalities are registered to keep backyard hens, and complaint levels are low. For example, the City of Vancouver notes that complaints about backyard hens represent only one percent of animal services call volume.

Public opinion research

City staff procured a third-party vendor to conduct demographically representative public opinion research and to better understand opinions of Toronto residents about the UrbanHensTO program and urban hen keeping generally.

Key research findings include:

- A majority of Toronto residents are not aware of Toronto's current rules related to keeping hens (63%) or of the UrbanHensTO pilot program (75%).
- Less than 1% of Toronto residents keep hens, while 9% of respondents know someone who keeps hens or has kept hens in Toronto in the past.
- 62% of residents agree or somewhat agree that the City should allow residents across Toronto to keep hens under similar conditions as those for the pilot program. 25% of residents disagreed or somewhat disagreed and 13% were unsure.
- 45% of residents would not be concerned or somewhat not concerned if their neighbour was considering getting backyard hens. 42% of residents would be concerned or somewhat concerned and 13% were unsure.
- 63% of residents agree or somewhat agree that if hens are permitted across Toronto, hen owners should be required to register their hens with the City of Toronto and pay a registration fee.

See Appendix 2 for a summary of public opinion research findings.

Public survey

The City of Toronto issued an online public survey about the UrbanHensTO program from January 21, 2022 to February 11, 2022. The survey was advertised through a City of Toronto news release, as well as through emails to Councillors, registered households in pilot program, and interested stakeholders. The survey included separate questions for households registered in UrbanHensTO and for the general public. In total, approximately 2900 individuals took the survey, with about 2500 reaching the end.

Key feedback from households registered in the UrbanHensTO pilot program:

- About two-thirds of survey respondents are still participating in the program.
- Top reasons for participating in the program are access to fresh local eggs, a hobby and/or interest in urban agriculture, access to organic and/or ethically raised food, enjoyment of having hens as pets, and opportunities to teach household and/or others about food production.
- One-quarter of respondents used a third-party service to rent hens and/or a coop when participating in the program.
- 97% indicated very positive or somewhat positive interactions with neighbours related to their backyard hens.
- Half of respondents saw no increase in the presence of unwanted animals (rats, mice, raccoons, or coyotes) following the addition of hens to their property. 35% saw a mild increase and 12% saw a moderate to significant increase.
- 97% agree or somewhat agree the UrbanHensTO program should be expanded across Toronto.

Key feedback from the general public:

- 77% of respondents agree or somewhat agree that the UrbanHensTO program should be expanded to all City of Toronto wards. 22% somewhat disagree or disagree.
- The main reasons for supporting expansion of the program were allowing residents access to fresh local eggs, opportunity for a fun hobby and to teach others about food production, and to support food security and/or food sovereignty.
- Survey respondents who were opposed to program expansion were concerned about animal welfare and access to veterinary care, and potential for noise, odours, or attracting unwanted animals.
- If the program is expanded, 61% of respondents believed that an education or training requirement should be required for hen owners, 49% noted that a coop inspection should be a requirement, and 49% also supported an annual registration requirement.
- To improve equitable access to the program, a number of respondents suggested communal hen ownership in community spaces like allotment gardens or community buildings with sufficient outdoor space.
- Generally respondents felt that backyard hen-keeping could have a medium impact on supporting food security and food sovereignty in Toronto. Some respondents did not believe that backyard hen keeping could have a significant impact on food security and sovereignty due to initial and ongoing costs to properly care for hens. These respondents noted that a better use of City resources would be to invest in other actions – like helping people learn how to cook low-cost foods or grow fruits and vegetables as well as provide financial support to community food organizations.

Stakeholder Consultations

As part of the review, staff consulted with internal and external stakeholders to better understand both the current and potential impacts of the program. The feedback received from past and present consultations informed this report and its recommendations. Through the consultation process staff received wide-ranging feedback regarding the pilot program and its expansion. Feedback received is discussed throughout the report.

City staff hosted a roundtable discussion in February 2022 on the UrbanHensTO program with various food policy organizations, including FoodShare, the Stop Community Food Centre, Toronto Urban Growers, Toronto Youth Food Policy Council, and Raised Roots.

City staff also met with veterinarians and animal welfare and poultry industry stakeholders and organizations, including the College of Veterinarians of Ontario (CVO), Ontario Animal Health Network (OAHN), Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and the Poultry Industry Council. Topics discussed included feedback on the pilot, as well as considerations related to proper hen care and animal welfare, disease prevention and biosecurity.

Three common feedback themes related to the potential expansion of the project include: (1) ensuring humane care of animals (for example, access to veterinary care

and owner education); (2) equitable program access (for example, providing opportunities for community hen ownership); and (3) public health considerations (for example, ways to mitigate risks of incidence of disease).

The majority of stakeholders either supported city-wide expansion of the UrbanHensTO program or were not opposed to expansion as long as additional requirements were in place to support animal health and welfare and reduce public health risks. Generally, those stakeholders that do not support the expansion of the program cite concerns over public health and disease, as well as an increased presence of rodents, and the costs of proper hen keeping.