



Secondhand Stories

Non-Profit Bookshop & Farm Microsanctuary

February 6, 2023

Dear Toronto City Council Members,

I am writing today as the founder of Secondhand Stories, a farmed animal microsanctuary which is home to 13 rescue chickens in Lombardy, ON. We are one of only a few dozen animal sanctuaries which can care for chickens in Ontario, and like many others, our capacity is limited. I have cause for serious concerns about the UrbanHens TO Pilot Program.

As a chicken rescuer, I have concerns of public health & safety via the spread of Avian Flu; of how animal welfare standards will be enforced when funding for agents under the PAWS act is already extremely limited; of where backyard chickens will receive medical care and treatment when veterinary professionals are not accepting clients with chickens; and of how coyotes could possibly be deterred when prey animals such as chickens are being kept in urban areas.

However, I would like to focus my letter by speaking to my unique perspective as a sanctuary founder and alert you to the lack of contingency plans in place for the lives of hens which, for one reason or another, can no longer be cared for. I would like to share my experience in rescuing abandoned and surrendered backyard chickens.

Our microsanctuary began unofficially July 2022 when we purchased a house and the former owners left behind their backyard chickens. If we did not take them, they would have been killed. There was no contingency plan in place for them.

Then, in September 2022, within mere days of announcing our microsanctuary publicly, we received two direct requests to rehome chickens. Luckily, as a brand new operation we were able to say yes to both cases.

The first was from a backyard hen owner. She indicated she purchased three hens from a hatchery, but could not care for them throughout the winter and were told if we did not accept them by the first frost they would be killed. We accepted these surrendered hens and named them June, Emily and Alma.

The second surrender was from another backyard chicken owner with a blind chicken. This owner was breeding her chickens and indicated the surrendered four month old chicken was a blind hen. Ellie is a rooster. As per UrbanHens TO Pilot Program, it is believed that an owner should know the sex of the chicken by this age. Our experience proves that even a breeder cannot be certain of the sex.



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Furthermore, we adopted two roosters from Montreal SPCA who had been surrendered by an owner with backyard chickens who could not tell the difference between a hen and rooster. Rolo and Hershey were discarded and only by luck ended up in our care.

These four situations are not unique. Ask any sanctuary owner and they will likely tell you stories even worse than ours. Not just neglect, but cases of abuse and cruelty. We have reviewed at least 150 indirect requests to rehome backyard chickens in just five months of operations. This does not factor in any chickens who are killed without any attempt at rehoming.

The UrbanHens TO Pilot Program will only worsen this problem. If the City of Toronto is going to encourage residents to own hens, you have an ethical obligation to ensure the protection of them. I do not believe this is being done. As it stands the only mention of any sort of contingency plan is in Section 3 of the Terms and Conditions which states that if at-large hens are not redeemed within 24 hours they may be euthanized.

There is no mention of what will happen to hens who are abandoned and no requirements of owners who no longer want their hens. How will they be re-homed? *Will they be re-homed?* I do not believe that it would be right for these hens to be euthanized simply because they are no longer wanted.

There is already a problem. There is simply no capacity for sanctuaries to take in additional unwanted hens and it is unreasonable to expect non-profit sanctuaries to step up when we are already under-resourced. I believe I would be correct in assuming the City of Toronto has not set up a fund in place for those who rescue unwanted hens from this program.

Allowing this program to move forward would exacerbate an already dire situation. I believe that it would be irresponsible of the city council to vote to continue this pilot project and I urge you to reconsider extending this program knowing that it would mean certain death for at least some of the hens you allow to be placed in this program.

Warmly,

Liz Wheeler
Founder, Secondhand Stories
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