

Attachment 1 – Summary of UrbanHensTO Additional Consultation

In 2022, feedback on the future of the program was obtained via public opinion research and a public survey and included in the report ([2022.EC28.10](#)). Key findings were as follows:

- Public opinion research found that 62% of surveyed residents agreed or somewhat agreed that the City should allow residents across Toronto to keep hens under similar conditions as those for the pilot program. 63% agreed that hen owners should be required to register their hens and pay a registration fee.
- The public survey, organized by the City, received 2900 responses. 77% of respondents agreed or somewhat agreed the pilot program should be expanded across Toronto.

Building on the consultations for the 2022 report, the City connected with residents and stakeholder groups to gauge the extent to which there was support for making the UrbanHensTO program permanent and City-wide and to collect new perspectives on the future of the program.

Stakeholder meetings

The stakeholders included in [2022.EC28.10](#) were re-engaged as part of this report. Generally, sentiment around the program and its requirements remained the same. There is general interest in hen keeping across the City and support for introducing more oversight to ensure it is done properly:

- Animal health and welfare groups reiterated that the program should have adequate staff resources to ensure proper oversight, that hen owners should pay registration fees to cover program costs, and that the City and hen owners should have a succession and rehoming plan in place for hens that no longer produce eggs (as they lay fewer eggs as they age).
 - These groups also raised concerns with companies that rent hens to residents seasonally. In some cases, it is unclear what happens to the hens when they go back to the company. From a disease control perspective, there are concerns about mixing hens that have been loaned out to different locations.
 - These groups encouraged staff to consider the risks of avian influenza, given the disease can kill entire flocks and is the reason why some rural municipalities have decided not to permit backyard hens. They also noted that there are few hatcheries that provide vaccinated chickens before selling them, which increases the chances of the animals coming into the City with disease.
- Food policy stakeholders reiterated support for and interest in community hen-keeping projects, the specifics of which should be community-led. Stakeholders supported projects where the landowner would 'lend' property to a community-based organization to start a project, as well as for these projects to be permitted to share eggs and to keep more hens than the current limit if there is a larger plot of land.

Additional groups were consulted with for this report, including Animal Alliance of Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), and farm sanctuaries:

- Animal Alliance of Canada recommended that Council defer expansion of the program given the additional financial costs during a financial shortfall and increased incidents of avian influenza in backyard flocks in 2022. The Alliance noted that the use of seasonal rental companies for hens and coops makes hens “disposable” and does not promote responsible animal ownership. If the program were to be expanded, they recommended the use of these companies be prohibited, and that participants should commit to keeping their hens once they secure them.
- The CFIA was consulted to discuss the inspection and mitigation activities the organization conducts to respond to outbreaks of avian influenza. The CFIA’s feedback is incorporated into the report on avian influenza. Federal and provincial organizations, like the CFIA and Public Health Ontario, do not typically comment on matters of municipal jurisdiction, but encourage setting policies that consider all aspects of humane care, public health, animal health, and disease prevention.
- Several farm sanctuaries provided comments on the UrbanHensTO pilot program and do not support expansion. Sanctuaries outside of Toronto have received various requests to rehome chickens, both hens and roosters, some from Toronto. These organizations noted concerns that there are no contingency plans to rehome chickens and are concerned about animal welfare.

Public survey

The City of Toronto issued an online public survey about the UrbanHensTO program from January 16, 2023 to February 6, 2023. In total, approximately 1000 individuals took the survey, with 881 reaching the end.

- 74% of respondents agreed or somewhat agreed the pilot program should be expanded.
- Survey respondents noted that the main reasons they would participate in the program are for access to fresh local eggs and to support food security/sovereignty.
- Survey respondents who were opposed to program expansion were concerned about animal welfare and access to veterinary care, the emergence of avian influenza, as well as potential for noise, attracting unwanted animals, and the costs of a permanent program.
- 37% were concerned or somewhat concerned about transmission of avian influenza, 45% were not concerned or somewhat not concerned.
- 54% were concerned or somewhat concerned about backyard flocks leading to problems with wildlife and other animals, 45% were not concerned or somewhat not concerned.
- For an expanded program, 62% noted that a coop inspection should be a requirement, 58% of respondents believed that an education or training requirement should be required for hen owners, 56% supported a requirement to

solicit approval from the property owner, if renting a home, and 46% supported an annual registration requirement.

Pilot program participants

Two engagement sessions were held with registrants of the pilot program in March 2023. Invitations were sent to any household that had participated or is currently participating in the program. Some key highlights include:

- General support for the pilot program and its expansion. Participants noted positive benefits from the program, including access to fresh local eggs, educational opportunities related to food systems and urban agriculture (i.e., understanding where food comes from) and mental health support.
- Participants emphasized the environmental benefits of backyard hen keeping, including using the hen droppings as fertilizer and feeding hens food scraps.
- Some participants noted that they used the services of seasonal hen rental companies; hens were procured from hatcheries outside of Toronto or through private online sales.
- It was noted that the start-up costs to participate in the program are significant. In addition, many of the proper resources needed to care for hens, including feed and coop materials, are not readily available in the city.
- As for hen health, participants noted the limited access to veterinarians in Toronto. If a vet was available, the costs of the visit and any treatment/medication, were expensive.
 - Many participants instead relied on online forums and homeopathic solutions when hens were ill or injured.
- Participants were made aware of avian influenza by Toronto Animal Services (TAS) and managed it by keeping food and water covered, as well as not letting hens outside often.
- Participants noted that the program is working well under its current design and that significant changes or the introduction of regulations and fees were not necessary. They cautioned that too many rules would make the project unwieldy, expensive to manage, and reduce uptake.
- Participants requested additional information from Toronto Animal Services on avian influenza, veterinarian care, common health ailments, as well as a list of resources on hen care and guidance for rehoming if necessary.