

June 30, 2017

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To: City Manager

From: Acting General Manager Engineering & Public Works

Subject: **Backyard Chickens and Beekeeping**

For: **Council**

**Recommendation:**

That Council maintains the current Zoning Bylaw restrictions on backyard chickens and beekeeping, which limits these activities to A-3 Agricultural and RS-2 Residential zones.

**Report Purpose:**

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a recommendation on the keeping of backyard chickens and bees as requested following discussion about backyard chickens at the May 24, 2016 meeting of the Sustainability and Environmental Advisory Committee (SEAC) meeting and a subsequent discussion by Council as part of adoption of the 2016 amendments to the Solid Waste Management Bylaw at a regular meeting of Council on July 4, 2016.

**Strategic Goal:**

This report supports the City's corporate strategic goals to "strengthen neighbourhoods" and "achieve excellence in City governance".

**Background:**

In recent years, with a growing interest in Farmer's markets, urban gardens, and eating locally grown, organic, and sustainable food there has also been increasing interest in backyard chickens and urban beekeeping (apiculture). In January 2017, Council endorsed in principle Metro Vancouver's "Regional Food Action Plan", which identifies 160 different actions that local governments are planning to undertake in the next 3 to 5 years to advance implementation of the Regional Food System Strategy (2011). Among these includes "... [encouraging] new types of urban agriculture (e.g. beekeeping,

*backyard chickens ...)*”, but further assessments are required before implementing this or any of the other 160 identified actions.

In Coquitlam the keeping of chickens and bees is permitted under the Zoning Bylaw, but restricted to A-3 agriculture zones and RS-2 single family zones (approximately 785 parcels in total as shown in Attachment 1). Approximately 85%-90% of the lands zoned A-3 are situated within major parks or protected areas, while the remaining 10%-15% are undeveloped forested lands with no access roads. Through a high-level mapping analysis it is estimated that there may only be between 10-20 properties within the A-3 zone that have residents living at these sites. Of the 409 of RS-2 parcels, it is estimated that approximately 345 contain residential dwellings.

To date in the Metro Vancouver Region, a total of 6 municipalities have bylaws in place to allow backyard chickens, and the majority of municipalities allow some form of urban beekeeping. There is, however, a wide range of approaches to how these activities are controlled and regulated. In addition, beekeeping is regulated by the Provincial government under the *Animal Health Act* (Bee Regulation), while there are no Provincial standards for backyard chickens.

This report analyzes the feasibility of expanding backyard chickens and bee hives to residential neighbourhoods.

**Discussion/Analysis:**

In the City of Coquitlam there has not been a significant amount of public interest expressed on the topic of backyard chickens and beekeeping. The City does allow for these activities on properties in the A-3 agriculture and RS-2 residential zones, but it is not known how widespread either of these activities actually is within these zones. Occasionally staff does become aware of unauthorized backyard chickens through complaints, and these situations are addressed through either the City’s Zoning Bylaw or Animal Control Bylaw. Since 2013 there have been twenty-three of these cases related to chickens, and only one known case related to beekeeping.

The keeping of backyard chickens is a controversial issue. Concerns about backyard chickens generally include, noise, potential illness, unsightliness,

and attracting rodents and other vectors. In Coquitlam, there is the added concern of attracting predatory wildlife such as, bears, coyotes and cougars. Chicken coops are a known attractant for bears, and as recently as last year a bear accessed an unauthorized chicken coop in southwest Coquitlam creating a significant public safety concern. Property was damaged, some of the chickens were killed, and the bear had to be destroyed as a result of this incident. Given the significant amount of bear activity in Coquitlam, along with the challenges the City has been having in dealing with attractant management throughout the City, staff does not recommend extending the Zoning Bylaw to allow backyard chicken keeping outside of the limited A-3 and RS-2 parcels that are currently authorized. Allowing chickens in backyards throughout the City would further exacerbate the City's vector and wildlife control challenges.

With respect to beekeeping primary concerns relate to the potential for swarms, increased risk for people affected by bee sting allergies, and attracting bears. In 2016 was the first time City staff was aware of an apiary attracting bears to residential property. The apiary was not being maintained in a secure way and bears were attracted to the honey. This was a rare but serious occurrence that resulted in the hive being destroyed by two bears, the bees swarming in the neighbourhood, property damage sustained by the immediate neighbours and traps set by the Conservation Officer Service to capture the two bears involved. In the end, fines were levied by both the Province and the City for this incident, but the outcome for the two bears involved is unknown.

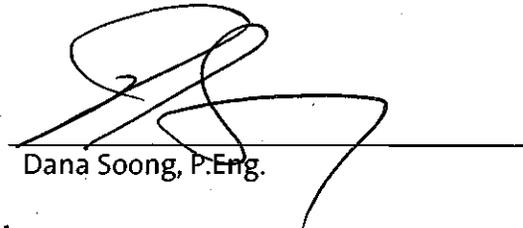
The City has been actively promoting the attraction and proliferation of various pollinators, including bees, through gardening techniques that promote pollination. While beekeeping is an activity that can further promote pollination and biodiversity, there are safety implications in siting beehives in residential neighbourhoods as described above. The City currently does not have bylaw requirements or best management practices established to ensure safe urban beekeeping, and given the widespread concern for attracting bears into residential neighbourhoods, staff does not recommend extending the Zoning Bylaw to allow beekeeping outside of the limited A-3 and RS-2 parcels that are currently authorized.

**Financial Implications:**

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

**Conclusion:**

The keeping of backyard chickens and urban beekeeping are activities that are currently restricted in the City's Zoning Bylaw to a limited number of agricultural and residential parcels in the A-3 and RS-2 zones. While incidences are rare, both of these activities have the potential to attract predatory wildlife and vectors. Given the extensive effort the City has made in establishing a comprehensive wildlife and vector control strategy, and the successes the City has had in addressing related challenges, it is recommended that Council maintains the current Zoning Bylaw restrictions on backyard chickens and beekeeping, which limits these activities to A-3 Agricultural and RS-2 Residential zones.



Dana Soong, P.Eng.

**Attachment:**

1 – Distribution of RS-2 Single Family and A-3 Agricultural Parcels

This report was prepared by Steffanie Warriner, P.Eng., Manager Environmental Services and reviewed by Kathleen Reinheimer, Manager Parks and Andrew Merrill, Manager Community Planning.

# Distribution of RS-2 Single Family and A-3 Agricultural Parcels

