



THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF TECUMSEH

Corporate Services & Clerk
Report No. 34/16

TO: Mayor and Members of Council

FROM: Director Corporate Services & Clerk

DATE: September 12, 2016

DATE TO COUNCIL: September 27, 2016

SUBJECT: Examination of Urban Chicken Control & Rodent Complaints

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Corporate Services & Clerk Report No. 34/16, titled "Examination of Urban Chicken Control & Rodent Complaints" be received.

BACKGROUND

As a result of growing concern from the community, an examination of the Town of Tecumseh's (Town) urban chicken population is being undertaken, along with complaints relating to rodents and other wildlife. This report is submitted as information relative to these concerns and steps being taken to address the issues.

"Urban chickens" have become a growing trend across North America. In an effort to be more involved in their own food production, urban residents across Canada are opting to raise and keep chickens in their backyards. Chickens raised on urban residential dwellings are therefore referred to as "urban chickens" or "backyard chickens".

Growing your own food can be very rewarding and many people are looking at the opportunity they have right in their own backyards. Vegetable gardens and fruit trees are already a part of the urban environment for many people, but others are looking for more ways to bring the farm to towns and cities. Some, for example, choose to raise chickens in their backyards, which can be a source of both eggs and meat. This brings its own unique set of challenges for municipalities across Canada.

As a result of the growing trend of keeping chickens in urban areas, municipalities are left deciding whether to regulate or restrict backyard chickens.

The responsibly humane and sanitary keeping of backyard chickens relies both on the owners, as well as municipalities. Before developing any by-laws surrounding the keeping of chickens in urban areas, several issues should be considered:

- I. **Animal & Public Health:** Poultry can host diseases that can be passed on to humans. These animals require health management and veterinary care, as well as basic biosecurity measures, to minimize the occurrence and spread of diseases.

- II. **Animal Care:** Basic hygiene is essential when caring for these animals, which also need proper shelter, food, water and adequate space to stay healthy. Manure must be disposed of in a safe and environmentally responsible manner. Even with the best of care, some animals will die, which means there have to be plans for the disposal of dead chickens.
- III. **Predators:** Poultry can attract predators such as coyotes, rats, skunks, raccoons, foxes and neighbourhood pets.
- IV. **Food Safety:** Municipalities should also be aware of provincial and federal regulations regarding food safety. For example, regulations under the *Food Safety and Quality Act, 2001* govern the sale of ungraded eggs.
- V. **Nuisance:** While there are potential benefits to permitting backyard chickens, there is also the potential for disease, food safety and nuisance issues to take into consideration. These nuisance issues include increased noise, unpleasant odors, and the attraction of rodents and wildlife [ie: skunks, racoon, opossum...].

Persons who wish to keep chickens must consider a variety of factors, which include but are not limited to the following:

- I. The keeping of chickens is a long term commitment— they can live up to ten (10) years, but most only produce eggs for up to five (5) years;
- II. For shelter and protection from predators, chickens need an enclosed house with a locking door, which is known as a coop;
- III. Chickens are also social creatures. This means those who wish to keep chickens need to keep more than one (1) so that the chickens are able to socialize and engage in fundamental behaviours;
- IV. Chickens also require adequate space. Too little space can be a stressor for chickens, who may respond with aggressive behaviours such as egg eating, pecking at each other, and even cannibalism;
- V. Chickens require diligent care and upkeep, including proper care in the winter months.

The list above is not exhaustive. There are many other factors which need to be considered before a person decides to take care of chickens, as there are both benefits and risks associated with the keeping of backyard chickens.

Some Tecumseh residents have voiced their concerns in regards to the rodent population within the Town. As a result of these concerns, a public education notice entitled "*Pest Control—Dealing with Rodents*" was developed and released earlier this year [[Appendix 1](#)]. This educational notice is available on the Town's website, and was linked to social media and the Town App. It describes what a rodent is and looks like, how to prevent pests such as rodents from appearing on your property, and how to safely remove unwanted pests.

The Town is not the only municipality currently dealing with an increased volume of complaints regarding unwanted pests, such as rodents. The City of Windsor is currently experiencing a seemingly growing rodent problem.

Preliminary research does not clearly indicate a direct correlation between the keeping of backyard chickens and rodents. Research indicates rodents are attracted to food sources. Chicken feed, if not stored properly, may offer rodents a food source, as well as backyard gardens and bird feeders.

The concerns of Tecumseh residents regarding urban chickens and rodents has not gone unnoticed. Administration is working diligently to find potential cause(s), as well as alternative ways to address the concerns.

COMMENTS

In an effort to keep up with the growing popularity of urban chickens, Administration has been working to better understand its role in dealing with this trend. Currently, the Town's Animal Control Bylaw No. 1999-07 does not regulate the keeping of urban chickens.

The Town's current zoning by-laws do not provide specific regulations pertaining to the keeping of urban chickens (or any other type of animal/pet) within residential areas. As a result, and in an attempt to provide some reasonable application of the by-law, there has been reliance upon a simplified interpretation of other provisions in the zoning by-laws as a means to ensure that the noted use does not become an incompatible use within residentially zoned areas.

More specifically, with respect to urban chickens (and the associated structures which house them) the Planning and Building Services Department has relied upon the definition of "accessory" when dealing with the introduction of urban chickens on a residentially zoned property. Currently, the use is being interpreted as an accessory use to the permitted residential use provided it meets the zoning by-law's definition of "accessory" (*"being a use that is normally incidental, subordinate and exclusively devoted to a main use..."*) along with the associated accessory use provisions (building size, minimum side and rear yards, building height, etc.).

As the demand for urban chickens has increased over the past several years, the above noted interpretation was applied to any property complaint received by the Town. The approach consistently being used is that in order to meet the "accessory" definition of the zoning by-law, a maximum of three (3) urban chickens could be deemed a permitted accessory use on the basis that the Animal Control By-law establishes the number "three" as the maximum number of cats or dogs that are permitted on an individual property, provided once again that the definition and associated provisions regarding accessory uses/buildings/structures are met.

Neighboring municipalities were surveyed for the purpose of this report, most of which ban the keeping of chickens on residential property. The municipalities surveyed for the purpose of this report that restrict the keeping of chickens on residential property, within their respective Animal Control By-laws, are: the Towns of LaSalle, Lakeshore, and Kingsville and the City of Windsor. Like Tecumseh's Animal Control By-law this matter is silent in the Town of Essex and Municipality of Leamington by-laws.

Although there are some Canadian cities which allow for and regulate urban chickens [i.e. Vancouver, Victoria, and Montreal], most municipalities either ban the practice or do not currently have a policy in place to deal with this issue.

When deciding whether or not to regulate or restrict the keeping of chickens on residential property within the Town, a variety of factors must be taken into consideration as previously commented, in addition to enforcement, inspection and monitoring.

As noted earlier in this report, research has shown urban chickens, and improperly stored food, have the potential to attract rodents and other wildlife. The Corporate Services & Clerks, Public Works & Environmental Services, Planning & Building Services and Information and Communication Services Departments are working collaboratively to establish where urban chickens are known to be located within the Town in relation to where complaints have been received about rodents, in order to see if a correlation between the two can be established. Based on preliminary analysis, it is not clear that such a correlation will be revealed.

Consultation has also taken place with the Windsor Essex County Humane Society (WECHS) which could not offer any support on the correlation of urban chickens to the perceived increase in the rodent population. A variety of factors can attract rodents to an area including, as already mentioned, food sources and shelter, in addition to predators in the area [ie: cats, raccoons, skunks, fox, coyote, etc...]. With respect to urban chickens, the WECHS advises they receive very few chicken in-takes. In-takes are generally surrendered male chickens [non-egg producing], strays; or in one case, seized for improper care.

Residents often look to their local municipality for assistance in rodent and wildlife control, for which they have no obligation to provide. Locally, the City of Windsor (City) has a rat baiting program. Through this service, the City contracts a pest exterminator. Residents who have rodents on their property pay a \$100 fee for a maximum of four (4) baitings per session, for each residential address. In regards to the extermination of rodents, the Town does not currently offer its residents any extermination services, but may wish to explore offering a similar baiting program as the City, at the full cost to the resident.

In terms of the prevention of pests such as rodents, the Town previously released a public education notice, "*Pest Control—Dealing with Rodents*", informing residents all about rodents and how to prevent them. By providing Tecumseh residents with the necessary information and educational tools to deal with rodents, we can help to discourage unwanted pests within the community.

Also in regards to the prevention of pests within the Town, Administration has reviewed and will be making recommendations to update the Refuse Control Bylaw (2003-40). In 2014, the City of Windsor introduced a bylaw which mandates that all curb-side garbage be placed in hard-sided containers. As a result of this measure, the City has reported a noticed a reduction in the number of urban wildlife, including skunks and rodents. Rodents, including rats, are attracted to garbage, and it is imperative that the Town stay up to date with the necessary measures, including updating by-laws, to keep any unwanted pests at bay.

Administration is continuing to work to understand how to best deal with urban chickens and keep unwanted pests out of our community. To date, the following steps are being taken:

- A public education notice has been developed and promoted on ways to deal with unwanted pests as a proactive measure to combat the issue of rodents in the community;
- Exploring whether there is a correlation between urban chickens in the community and the increase of complaints in regards to rodents;
- Consulting with the Windsor-Essex County Humane Society to better understand the keeping of urban chickens, in relation to regulating or restricting; and
- Reviewing by-laws and potential amendments to by-laws that pertain to the regulating or keeping of animal [ie: Animal Control and Zoning By-laws] and that may help prevent the attraction of rodents and wildlife [ie: Property Standards and Refuse Control By-laws].

CONSULTATIONS

Planning & Building Services Department
Public Works & Environmental Services Department
Essex County Municipalities
City of Windsor
Windsor Essex County Humane Society
Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications. This is an informational report.

LINK TO STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

No.	2015-16 Strategic Priorities	Applicable
1.	Make the Town of Tecumseh an even better place to live, work and invest through a shared vision for our residents and newcomers.	✓
2.	Ensure that the Town of Tecumseh's current and future growth is built upon the principles of sustainability and strategic decision-making.	
3.	Integrate the principles of health and wellness into all of the Town of Tecumseh's plans and priorities.	✓
4.	Steward the Town's "continuous improvement" approach to municipal service delivery to residents and businesses.	
5.	Demonstrate the Town's leadership role in the community by promoting good governance and community engagement, by bringing together organizations serving the Town and the region to pursue common goals.	

COMMUNICATIONS

Not applicable

Website Social Media News Release Local Newspaper

This report has been reviewed by senior Administration as indicated below and recommended for submission by the CAO.

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Appendix 1: Public Notice: "Pest Control—Dealing with Rodents"

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Appendix 1



Public Notice

Pest Control — Dealing with Rodents

Pests:

What is a Pest?

A pest, as defined by the *Federal Pest Control Products Act*, means “an animal, a plant or other organism that is injurious, noxious or troublesome, whether directly or indirectly, and an injurious, noxious or troublesome condition or organic function of an animal, a plant or other organism.”

There are many common pests including rodents (rats and mice), moles, skunks, raccoons, etc. There are easy ways to both identify whether you might have pests and ways to prevent them from living or returning to your property.

Pest Control – Dealing with Rodents will focus on ways to identify and prevent rodents. To learn more about dealing with other pests and wildlife in urban areas, please visit the Town’s website at www.tecumseh.ca.

What Does a Rat Look Like?

The rat has a stocky body, weighing 200 to 500 grams. Their fur is black or brown, and the tail is scaly. It has a blunt nose with small ears and eyes.



What Does a Mouse Look Like?

A mouse is a small rodent with a pointed nose, furry round body, large ears and a long often hairless tail. Mice come in a variety of colours and sizes.



Where Am I Most Likely to Find Rodents on my Property?

Rodents are pests that are found year round. Rodents typically live outdoors and then migrate inside when cool weather approaches. They are found around buildings, in gardens, near garbage or composters, and within homes, including in the roof and in drains.

Rodents are nocturnal animals, meaning that they are most active at night. However, if food and water sources are scarce, or if large infestations occur, rodents will become active during the day.

How Can I Tell if I Have Rodents on my Property?

1. Look for places where rodents live - most rodents tend to live in nests or burrows. Burrows are holes in dirt or concrete from one to four inches wide, with smooth edges, and can also be found under bushes and plants. They will often have an entrance and exit hole. They will burrow into the ground close to their food source.
2. Look for nests. Rodents nest in any safe location where food and water are available, such as under wood piles, in abandoned vehicles, between walls or under floors in garages or sheds.
3. Look for droppings. For rats, they are 1/4 to 1/2 inch in length, capsule shaped, with blunt ends and are usually a shiny black (though variable according to diet). They are often times found close to garbage. For mice, they are approximately 3 to 6 mm in length; they are granular in shape and black in colour.
4. Look for holes and gnaw marks on wood and plastic garbage cans.
5. Check walls and grass for signs of runways. Rodents run along the same path many times a day, leaving dark greasy track marks along walls and worn down paths in grass.

Preventing Rodents:

There are several simple steps you can take to prevent rodents on your property:

Remove Clutter

- This is an important step as clutter gives rodents lots of places to hide, sleep, nest and reproduce.
- Remove (and recycle) piles of newspapers, paper bags, cardboard and bottles.
- Clear out your basement and yard.
- Try to store items away from walls and off the ground.



Maintain Your Yard

- Control weeds, shrubs and bushes as pests are often found in burrows under bushes and plants.
- Keep tall grass, bushes, shrubs and mulch away from building foundations.
- Make space between plants and avoid dense planting.
- Keep gardens free of weeds and trash.

Manage Your Garbage

- Bring garbage cans and bags to the curb as close to pick-up time as possible.
- Use hard plastic or metal cans with tight fitting lids.
- Always put garbage inside pest proof containers with tight fitting lids.
- If you compost, remember to follow good composting practices:
 - Do not throw food scraps into backyard compost without covering them.
 - Have a pest proof compost container.



Keep Food Away

- Do not put food out for stray cats, pigeons or squirrels.
- Remove fallen fruit and nuts from your yard.
- Remove pet food right after feeding and do not leave it outside overnight.
- Clean out waste and food from pet enclosures.
- Equip bird feeders with trays and clean spilled seeds often.
- Repair any plumbing leaks to remove a water source, and remember to always cover pools when not in use.

Eliminate Potential Hiding and Living Places

- Trim plants near buildings so that 15 to 20 cm (6 to 8 inches) above ground is clear. Trim branches of trees or shrubs to prevent access to roofs or balconies.
- Remove unused piles of lumber and old sheds.
- Do not store old cars or furniture outside.
- Store lumber and firewood on stands high-off the ground.

Keep Rodents Out (Pest-Proofing Your Home)

- Be sure to seal cracks and small holes (usually with caulk).
- Close gaps under doors with rodent-resistant metal door sweeps.
- Close window gaps with metal flashing.
- Put screens on vents, especially on lower floors.



Removing Pests:

The most effective way to thoroughly eliminate pests from your property is to contact your local pest control agency. These agencies are equipped with the necessary resources to effectively and safely remove any unwanted pests.

