

Appleton approves backyard chickens ... finally

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Full text: APPLETON - It's over. Chickens will be allowed in the city, a decision made Wednesday night after six months of discussion at City Hall.

After nearly two hours of debate, the Common Council approved allowing up to four hens and no roosters within city limits with an 8-6 vote. The six against were Aldermen Ed Baranowski, Greg Dannecker, Curt Konetzke, Kathy Plank, Cathy Spears and Christine Williams.

Under the rules approved, a resident would need to:

Pay a one-time, non-refundable \$145 pre-inspection fee

Pay an annual \$24 fee to keep their chickens

Have a coop with at least 3 square feet per chicken and a chicken run no greater than 24 square feet

Neighbors adjacent to the property would be notified by the Department of Health, but neighbors can submit a written objection within 14 business days. That objection leads to an automatic no on the application for chickens, but the property owner could appeal the objection to the Safety and Licensing Committee.

The council took three separate votes related to chickens: One to approve specific rules and regulations tied to keeping chickens, the second to allow up to four hens and no roosters, and a third to approve the ordinance language that would specify the rules and regulations approved in the first vote.

Nine-year-old Hazel RianWanzeck jumped up and down in the hallway after the vote, saying she had wanted chickens as long as she can remember. She plans to name her first one Cassiopeia after the constellation.

"Greatness," she responded to a USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin reporter on how she felt after the vote.

But the six months it took to debate and approve urban chickens? "It's kind of silly," she said.

Her mother, AnnMarie Rian, said while she was thrilled overall with the final vote, it was "disheartening" to see the issue dragged out.

"It's such a minor issue compared to all these other things we worry about," she said.

The debate on regulations clocked in at more than two hours. The Board of Health punted on drafting new rules for the council to debate at its meeting last week, arguing that council members should make the rules and regulations themselves on the council floor.

Among the amendments considered:

One from Baranowski would have required applicants to personally get written approval from neighbors. It failed.

Another from Baranowski would have required that coops be limited to 12 square feet in size. It failed.

A third from Baranowski would require chicken runs be no greater than 24 square feet. It was approved.

One from Konetzke to allow other farm animals, such as goats and sheep, to be in the city, failed.

One from Alderman Patti Coenen to change the annual fee for chickens from the draft \$59 to \$6 per chicken, was approved but was brought back for later reconsideration. Then the council approved a flat \$24 fee instead.

One from Plank to have all denials or appeals of permits go to the Safety and Licensing Committee instead of the Board of Health was approved.

This was the third attempt by the council in recent months to make a decision on chicken-raising in the city. The first vote ended in a tie, which was broken by Mayor Tim Hanna. A reconsideration was later delayed until Wednesday's meeting, when a new council was in place.

This is the second time in four years that a chicken-raising ordinance has been debated. The first proposal in 2012 failed after a five-month debate.

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