

April 6, 2015

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Dear Dana Point City Council Members,

I am writing to express my support of the change to city ordinance with regards to keeping backyard chickens in Dana Point. Many communities around the state, country and around the world have updated city ordinances to allow small backyard flocks as the myriad of benefits of a small flock of chickens have come to light. I would like to present some of the positive aspects of owning a few chickens as well as address the concerns noted from the previous discussions. With the growing movement of water conservation, self-sustainability, reducing landfill waste, and taking control of our food, it is my hope that the City of Dana Point will join the forward thinking communities around the globe in allowing citizens the right to choose to have chickens on their properties. With the proper restrictions in place including a minimum distance from neighbors, restricting the number of birds, and of course no roosters, citizens who so choose may enjoy the many benefits of keeping backyard chickens. Chickens are truly "pets with benefits."

**Some of the Many Benefits of Backyard Chickens in Urban Areas**

**\*Reduction in food and yard waste\***

Chickens are being used as bio-recyclers in locations across the globe. They will consume food and yard waste, therefore keeping it out of landfills. While chickens require a balanced healthy feed as well, they also will consume food scraps and yard waste. For example, the city of Diest in Flanders, Belgium is using chickens to reduce their trash management budget. The city bought and distributed three hens to 2,000 homes in an effort to reduce landfill costs. According to their projections, a single chicken can bio-recycle about seven pounds of food residuals in a month. If 2,000 homes raise three hens each, it could potentially divert 252 tons of waste from landfills annually. On a much smaller scale, a Dana Point homeowner with a few backyards chickens could substantially reduce waste through a very simple and natural manner.

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**\*Chickens are Natural Pest Exterminators\***

Chickens love to eat insects of all kinds and will naturally rid your garden of bugs and even small rodents. No need to pay a service to treat your home with poison when a few chickens can take care of business organically and with a high rate of efficiency.

**\*Chickens Provide Natural Soil Enrichment\***

Chicken manure added to your compost bin naturally provides high levels of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium and is arguably the best fertilizer for your yard/garden. Their egg shells added to the compost bin also adds calcium, a vital nutrient for our soil and plants. These nutrients combined with food and garden waste create a powerhouse of a fertilizer when returned to the soil.

**\*Home Grown Eggs have Superior Taste and Nutritional Value\***

Many articles and studies confirm the fact that home grown eggs far exceed factory produced eggs in health benefits. The nutritional benefits include two to three times more omega 3 fatty acids, one third the cholesterol, substantial increases in vitamins A and E, as well as beta-carotene, and folate. The cost of buying comparable organic eggs is about double the cost of growing your own. Oh and don't forget the amazing difference in the taste of fresh eggs!

**\*Chickens Contribute to Quality Family Life\***

Chickens teach children about responsibility in caring for animals, where our food comes from, learning how to be a responsible citizen, limiting waste and promoting a self-sustaining lifestyle. I would much rather see a child run outside in the morning to check for eggs rather than run to play a video game. Chickens are natural entertainment and a pleasure to watch for all ages. For those who do enjoy backyard chickens, they provide the same health benefits as other pets such as reducing blood pressure and increasing oxytocin.

**\* Converting Backyards to Water Saving Productive Areas \***

In this time of extreme concern with water, the citizens of Dana Point are facing the reality of drastically reducing our water use and rethinking the use of our backyard space. Many people continue to pour water on their lawns that serve no purpose. There

are a number of alternatives which I hope will include using space to create a sustainable garden and if someone so chooses, a small area for a few chickens.

### **Possible Concerns with Backyard Chickens**

#### **\*Noise\***

Chickens do make some noise but I'd like to offer some perspective. Normal conversation is reported to be about 60 decibels. A large dog's bark is about 100 decibels as is the average lawn mower. Most of the time chickens make little noise and at 20-25 feet away would be no more noise than the low the murmur of other birds in the environment, if noticed at all. On occasion, chickens can make a sound up to 70 decibels. Bearing in mind that sound dissipates over distance, at a distance of twenty feet it would be closer to 50 decibels or less, the same as normal conversational speech. Chickens make no noise at night and actually little noise comparatively during the day. With the reasonable restrictions in the ordinance being considered, a few backyard chickens would produce considerably less noise than dogs, gardening equipment, or the annoying crows we often hear at our house.

#### **\*Odor\***

Any animals have the potential to cause a problem with odor if not properly cleaned up after. This becomes a nonissue with responsible citizens.

#### **\*Possible Attraction of Pests\***

I saw concerns that chickens may attract unwanted pests such as rodents. Chickens themselves do not attract rodents and actually, as stated earlier, can kill rodents. What attracts these unwanted pests is the feed. This is no different than the bird seed many people put in feeders in their yards which is of course allowed in Dana Point. For the backyard chicken keeper, this is easily managed by some simple actions on the part of the responsible citizen. These include use of a small gauge wire for enclosing the coop and run, hanging the feed on a tripod, bringing the feed in at night, and/ or using a treadle feeder which completely encloses the food.

I have been around chickens for much of my life as relatives and friends have enjoyed the many benefits of backyard hens. I sincerely hope that the city of Dana Point will join

the forward thinking movement occurring around the world and that we will have this option if we so choose. I would love to make this choice as I renovate my yard to be organic and self-sustaining with reduced water consumption. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Houser