

April 24, 2023

RE: EC3.4 Follow Up Report on the UrbanHensTO Backyard Hens Pilot Program

To members of the Economic and Community Development Committee,

I am writing to request that, rather than cancel the Urban HensTO program indefinitely, the program be placed on pause for 1-2 years and reassessed when there is more information available about Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI).

A considerable amount of time and energy by City staff and residents has gone into creating a comprehensive and successful program with few problems. Removing the program from the Municipal Code at this point is premature when bodies such as the [Ontario Ministry of Health](#), [Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#) and [US Center for Disease Control](#) are not advocating for eliminating backyard flocks.

As indicated by Dr. Waltner-Toews, an award-winning veterinarian and epidemiologist, prevailing advice is to promote proper sanitation and biosecurity practices. With an active program, the city can increase residents' understanding and application of ways to reduce disease transmission.

The threat of closing the program is particularly disappointing as we will lose the opportunity to test out equity-focused community chickens projects. These pilot sites would establish best practices for sharing the benefits of henkeeping with people who don't have space or money to keep their own hens.



Figure 1: Hens at Ashbury Community Garden

We hear people say chickens don't belong in the city. It's an antiquated notion that food is produced somewhere else, far from where we live. We are now paying the price for this disconnect with ignorance, loss of food skills and poor health outcomes. Policies that allow urban hens are an investment in reversing this trend and restoring a healthy food system for all Toronto residents.

Sincerely,



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