

Survey says — raising chickens not wanted in Courtenay

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The idea of raising backyard chickens isn't going to fly in Courtenay.

Council received a staff report Monday providing the results of last year's backyard chicken survey and recommending that councillors do not pursue any changes to existing bylaws or policies that would allow for backyard chickens in residential zones.

Last spring, council directed staff to include a brief survey in the 2010 residential tax notices asking public opinion on amending the city's animal control bylaw to allow for the keeping of backyard chickens under certain conditions.

About 10,500 surveys were sent out, and 2,379 surveys were returned — or about 22 per cent of those sent out.

Sixty-one per cent of respondents opposed the idea, while 39 per cent were in favour of allowing backyard chickens.

There was a small desire to allow backyard chickens on the west side of the city, but there was no desire on the east side, according to senior planner Gina MacKay, who noted that no area within the city showed greater than 50 per cent interest in allowing backyard chickens.

Coun. Manno Theos was impressed with the survey as a form of soliciting public opinion.

"Almost 2,400 surveys were returned, which is, in my opinion, better than expected," he said. "It was an inexpensive way to get the pulse of the community. I think we moved in an intelligent way at very little cost to the taxpayer. I was very pleased staff brought it forward in this way."

Coun. Doug Hillian felt council could learn some lessons from this process.

He reminded his fellow councillors that there was "quite a reaction" when the surveys were first sent out, and he felt it would be good to have more discussion and provide residents with more notice and a rationale before sending out a survey like this.

Hillian also acknowledged that there are a number of people in the city who would like to raise chickens in their backyard.

"I think the people who made the requests to the city that brought this forward in the first place, although they aren't going to get their request, it was a valid request," he said.

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