

I am submitting written testimony in favor of zoning amendment 128.0.D.9 titled “Residential Chicken Keeping.” The text for this amendment appears as follows:

**128.D.9. RESIDENTIAL CHICKEN KEEPING**

**ONLY IN RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS WHERE IT IS ENUMERATED AS AN ACCESSORY USE, THE KEEPING OF HENS IS PERMITTED PROVIDED IT IS IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE CRITERIA BELOW.**

**A. THE LOT SIZE SHALL BE 10,000 SQUARE FEET OR LARGER.**

**B. THE LOT SHALL BE IMPROVED WITH A SINGLE-FAMILY DETACHED DWELLING WHICH IS OCCUPIED AS A RESIDENCE.**

**C. THE MAXIMUM NUMBER OF CHICKENS IS EIGHT HENS. ROOSTERS ARE PROHIBITED.**

**D. A DETACHED ACCESSORY BUILDING SHALL BE PROVIDED AS A HEN HOUSE. THIS SHELTER SHALL BE LOCATED IN THE REAR YARD AND SHALL BE LOCATED 15 FEET FROM ALL LOT LINES AT A MINIMUM. THIS MINIMUM DISTANCE CANNOT BE REDUCED THROUGH VARIANCE PROCEDURES. THIS HEN HOUSE SHALL ALLOW ADEQUATE AIR CIRCULATION TO PREVENT THE CONCENTRATION OF ODORS.**

**E. THE AREA IN WHICH THE CHICKENS FORAGE ON THE PROPERTY AND IN WHICH THE SHELTER IS LOCATED SHALL BE FENCED IN SUCH A MANNER THAT THE CHICKENS ARE CONFINED TO THE PROPERTY. THIS FENCE SHALL COMPLY WITH ALL REQUIREMENTS FOR FENCES AS NOTED ELSEWHERE IN SECTION 128.0.**

**F. THE OWNER(S) SHALL CONDUCT PROPER LITTER MANAGEMENT PRACTICES WITHIN THE SHELTER SO THAT ODORS ARE NOT DETECTABLE FROM ADJOINING PROPERTIES.**

On March 27, 2013, I spoke at the Planning Board Testimony for the Comprehensive Zoning Plan in Ellicott City on a totally unrelated issue. But as I sat and heard testimony from other Howard County residents for almost 3 hours, I noticed that it seemed like every testimony was in opposition to overdevelopment. Basically, people were saying that the county is growing too fast...or becoming “too urban.”

In contrast, I am not in opposition to, but rather in favor of a proposed change. This change does not concern overdevelopment. Rather, it is a proposal that allows residents to become “less urban” in their own personal space.



Take a look at the Howard County seal which dates back to 1840. When Edward Stabler designed it, he included typical elements of the area: tobacco plants and a shock of wheat – important early crops; necessary farming implements, a plowed field, and rolling hills in the background.

- from "The Great Seal of Howard County"

<http://www.marylandtheseventhstate.com/article1064.html>

Clearly, Howard County has rural origins. Even today, there are many parts of the county that still prides itself in these roots. As you heard at the March 27 Planning Board Testimony, several people buy residential property in Howard County because they like being near undeveloped land and away from the more dense urban sprawl. Unfortunately, this is all changing much too fast.

While we, as residents, can only do so much to preserve our rural or natural surroundings, the county can enable us to make our own private spaces a little less urban so that when we come home from a hard day at work, fighting through busy rush hour traffic jams, we can enjoy our own little piece of paradise.

In Howard County, this all started a few years ago. The following appeared in a February 7, 2011 Columbia Flier article titled "Howard County eases restrictions on beekeepers,"

*Until the council changed the zoning law, apiaries (a cluster of beehives) fell under the zoning regulations for farming, which require animal shelters to be set back at least 200 feet from neighboring properties.*

*The zoning regulation amendment the council passed Monday creates specific provisions for apiaries, allowing them as long as they are set back 25 feet from neighboring properties, or 10 feet in cases where a six-foot-tall fence or barrier surrounds the apiary.*

This was a huge victory, not just for beekeepers and potential beekeepers but also the environment.

If it passes, the "Residential Chicken Keeping" zoning amendment will give people a similar choice when it comes to making their private space seem a little less urban.

There are many benefits to allowing residents to own egg laying hens but I'll just touch on three that I personally feel are very important.

1. Keeping backyard chickens encourages sustainable, small-scale food production. "Sustainability" is a word seen frequently in the Howard County General Plan 2030. What better way for the county to promote sustainability than giving residents more options to grow their own food?
2. Organic, free-range eggs are healthier. Research has shown that organic eggs have 25% more vitamin E, a third more vitamin A, 75% more beta-carotene, and significantly more omega-3 fatty acids.  
- from "Prince George's Hens" <http://www.pghens.com/>
3. Education! How many children have a chance to see where their food actually comes from? With our county's rural origins, it is a shame that so many young people never get a chance to see or appreciate where their breakfast originated.

Those in opposition to their neighbors owning chickens probably have limited up-close and personal experience with them or are unfamiliar with zoning amendment 128.0.D.9 which was written to protect their rights.

1. Hens are not noisy but roosters are. Hence, the zoning amendment does not allow roosters. The clucking of hens is commonly compared to a human conversation – both register around 65 decibels. At night, chickens have a homing instinct to roost and sleep. Thus, there should be little concern with clucking hens disturbing neighbors at night.
  - from “Illegal Fowl: A Survey of Municipal Laws Relating to Backyard Poultry and a Model Ordinance for Regulating City Chickens” by Jaime Bouvier
2. As long as the owner practices proper litter management (a requirement of the zoning amendment), odors will not be noticeable. Six hens generate the same amount of manure as a 40 pound dog. And unlike dog or cat waste, chicken manure is not harmful and can easily be composted into valuable garden fertilizer.
  - from “Prince George’s Hens” <http://www.pghens.com/>
3. One of the big reasons why people move to Howard County is because they believe their property values will stay high. While no studies have been done on how backyard chickens affect property values, research shows that agricultural practices (such as community gardens) actually increase them.
  - from “Illegal Fowl: A Survey of Municipal Laws Relating to Backyard Poultry and a Model Ordinance for Regulating City Chickens” by Jaime Bouvier

In a time when Howard County residents are complaining about all the negative impacts of overdevelopment, I applaud the county for proposing zoning amendment 128.0.D.9. I strongly believe that it is in the best interest of the county and its residents to pass this amendment.

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