



A People Place, A Change of Pace
SHELBURNE
ONTARIO, CANADA

Meeting Date: Monday, September 14, 2026

To: Members of Council

From: Jennifer Willoughby, Director of Legislative Services/Clerk

Report: LS2026-15

Subject: **Backyard Hen Pilot Program**

Recommendation

BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council receives Report LS2026-15 for information;

AND THAT Council approve Option 3 - maintain the current prohibition and not proceed with a backyard hen pilot program.

Background

At the May 25, 2026 Council meeting under communications an item requesting a backyard chicken program titled "Citizen Proposal – Shelburne Backyard Hen Pilot Program" was listed. It asked that residents be permitted to keep backyard hens within town limits. The link to the communication item is <https://pub-shelburne.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=6330>

Analysis

An online survey was conducted from June 29-July 19, 2026 asking residents to provide feedback before any decisions are made.

Interest in backyard hens has grown in many Ontario communities as residents seek local food production, food security, educational

opportunities, and sustainable living options. In Ontario, there is no single provincial rule that either permits or prohibits backyard hens in residential areas; instead, municipalities regulate this matter through animal control, zoning, licensing, property standards, and nuisance by-laws.

Backyard hen programs typically regulate a small number of hens for personal egg production. Most municipalities that allow hens prohibit roosters, home slaughter, commercial sale of eggs or manure, and free roaming. Common requirements include licensing, rear-yard placement, coop setbacks, sanitation standards, rodent-proof feed storage, and complaint-based enforcement.

Review of Ontario Municipalities

Staff reviewed Ontario municipalities that currently allow residents to have chickens and the status or approach that the municipality takes.

Municipality	Status / Approach	Key Program Features
Kitchener	Permits backyard chickens	Allows up to four chickens; permit and fee required; property inspection required; coop setbacks apply; roosters, product sales, and free roaming are restricted.
Kingston	Permits backyard hens	Allows up to six hens with an annual permit; neighbour notification is required; hens must be kept in coops/runs; roosters, home slaughter, and product sales are prohibited.
Georgina	Permits urban hens by licence	Licensing program applies in eligible residential and rural zones; applicants must review biosecurity, bird health, and rodent control education materials.
East Gwillimbury	Moved from pilot to permanent program	Two-year pilot began in 2024; staff recommended permanent approval after limited uptake and manageable administration; program includes licensing, education, inspections,

Municipality	Status / Approach	Key Program Features
		sanitation, setbacks, and rooster prohibition.
Toronto	Pilot program reviewed; expansion paused	UrbanHensTO allowed up to four hens in selected areas and reported low complaints, but staff later recommended pausing expansion due to cost, staffing, avian influenza risk, and nuisance concerns.
Adjala-Tosorontio	Backyard hen pilot considered	Staff reported complaints mainly related to roosters, coop location, and free-ranging birds; consultation identified concerns about rodents, odour, viruses, wildlife, and noise.
Chatham-Kent	Does not generally permit chickens in non-agricultural areas	Chickens are prohibited unless on agricultural-zoned lands; previous proposal to permit up to four chickens in urban and rural residential areas was defeated.
The Blue Mountains	Proposed backyard hens by-law	Proposed framework would allow hens and pullets only, prohibit roosters, and regulate coops, setbacks, residential zones, and registration requirements.
Smith Falls	Moved from pilot to permanent program	Permanent program approved July 2026. Up to six hens per property, hens are permitted to roam in fenced backyards, coops must be insulated and dry.

The experience of other municipalities suggests that backyard hens can be managed when a clear regulatory framework is in place. Programs that include licensing, inspections, setbacks, sanitation standards, rodent-proof feed storage, education requirements, and enforceable penalties appear better positioned to address common issues before they become neighbourhood conflicts.

The most common concerns identified across municipal reports are noise, odour, rodents, pests, animal welfare, disease transmission, coop placement, and impacts on neighbouring properties. Noise concerns are frequently associated with roosters rather than hens, which is why almost all municipal programs prohibit roosters. Rodent and odour concerns are generally addressed through sanitation requirements, secure feed storage, manure limits, and complaint-based enforcement.

Public Consultation Survey Results

The Town's Have Your Say Shelburne Backyard Hen Survey was open from June 29, 2026 to July 19, 2026 and received 317 responses. Of those respondents, 316 indicated that they live in or own property in the Town of Shelburne. The survey results show that the community is almost evenly divided on whether backyard hens should be allowed:

- 46.06% were supportive,
- 46.69% were opposed, and
- 7.26% were neutral or unsure.

Interest in personally keeping backyard hens was lower than overall support for allowing them. A total of:

- 39.75% of respondents said they would be interested in keeping hens if allowed,
- 53.31% said they would not, and
- 6.94% said maybe.

This suggests that, even if a program were permitted, actual participation may be limited to a smaller group of interested households.

When asked whether Shelburne should start with a limited pilot program:

- 49.21% supported a pilot,
- 47.00% opposed a pilot, and
- 3.79% were unsure.

While support for a pilot was slightly higher than opposition, the margin was narrow and does not demonstrate a clear community mandate to proceed. Given the divided response and the level of concern identified elsewhere in the survey, Council may determine that a pilot program should not proceed at this time.

Respondents identified both potential benefits and significant concerns. The most commonly selected benefits were:

- fresh eggs at 58.04%,
- food security at 46.37%,
- sustainability at 43.53%, and
- education opportunities at 39.75%.

The most commonly selected concerns were:

- odour at 61.51%,
- rodents or pests at 59.62%,
- neighbour disputes at 56.15%,
- animal welfare at 54.26%,
- noise at 49.21%, and
- enforcement at 42.90%.

The survey also shows that residents who could be affected as neighbours are divided. A total of:

- 47.00% of respondents said they would be comfortable living next to a property with backyard hens,
- 46.69% said they would not, and
- 6.31% were unsure.

Respondents were more likely to expect a negative neighbourhood impact, with:

- 46.06% selecting negative,
- 26.81% positive,
- 10.73% no impact,
- and 16.40% unsure.

If a pilot program is introduced, respondents indicated that Council should review health and safety, complaints, enforcement, resident satisfaction, participation levels, and costs. The results were:

- 79.50% health and safety,
- 72.87% complaints,
- 66.88% enforcement,
- 65.93% resident satisfaction,
- 45.43% participation levels, and
- 33.44% costs.

Survey Question / Measure	Result	Implication for Council
Total survey responses	317 responses	Provides a local public consultation sample for Council's consideration.
Respondents living in or owning property in Shelburne	• 316 respondents; • 99.68%	Results largely reflect Shelburne residents or property owners.
Overall view on allowing backyard hens	• 46.06% supportive; • 46.69% opposed; • 7.26% neutral/unsure	Community opinion is almost evenly divided, with opposition slightly higher than support.
Interest in personally keeping hens if allowed	• 39.75% yes; • 53.31% no; • 6.94% maybe	Potential participation may be limited compared with overall public interest.
Support for starting with a limited pilot program	• 49.21% yes; • 47.00% no; • 3.79% unsure	A pilot has narrow support but does not have a clear majority mandate.
Comfort living next to a property with backyard hens	• 47.00% yes; • 46.69% no; • 6.31% unsure	Neighbour compatibility is divided and should be monitored closely.
Expected neighbourhood impact	• 26.81% positive; • 10.73% no impact; • 46.06% negative; • 16.40% unsure	More respondents expect a negative neighbourhood impact than a positive one.
Top reported benefits	• 58.04% fresh eggs;	Benefits relate primarily to food access, sustainability, and education.

Survey Question / Measure	Result	Implication for Council
	• 46.37% food security; • 43.53% sustainability; • 39.75% education opportunities	
Top reported concerns	• 61.51% odour; • 59.62% rodents or pests; • 56.15% neighbour disputes; • 54.26% animal welfare; • 49.21% noise; • 42.90% enforcement	Any program should include strong controls for sanitation, pests, animal welfare, noise, and enforcement.
Top review items if a pilot proceeds	• 79.50% health and safety; • 72.87% complaints; • 66.88% enforcement; • 65.93% resident satisfaction	A report back should focus on measurable health, safety, complaint, enforcement, and satisfaction outcomes.

Shelburne Considerations

A Shelburne program would need to balance resident interest in local food production with the Town's responsibility to protect public health, neighbourhood compatibility, animal welfare, and enforcement capacity. The survey results do not show clear community consensus in favour of allowing backyard hens or proceeding with a pilot program. Although some municipalities have managed backyard hen programs through licensing and enforcement controls, the local survey results show significant concerns and divided neighbourhood comfort. On balance, the results support maintaining the current approach and not introducing a pilot program at this time.

By-law enforcement capacity is an important consideration for any backyard hen pilot program. While a program could be structured around licensing, education, and complaint-based enforcement, it would still create additional responsibilities for staff, including reviewing applications, confirming eligibility, responding to complaints, conducting inspections where required, and following up on matters such as odour, rodents, noise, coop placement, animal welfare, and non-compliance. Given the Town's limited staffing resources, these additional responsibilities could affect the ability to respond to existing by-law enforcement priorities in a timely manner. As a result, any decision to proceed with a pilot program should consider whether the Town has sufficient capacity to administer and enforce the program effectively without impacting current service levels.

Options for Council

1. Permit backyard hens through a permanent by-law. This option provides certainty but may be premature without local data on participation, complaints, and staff impacts.
2. Implement a time-limited pilot program. This option would allow Council to test local impacts before making a permanent decision; however, it is not recommended at this time because survey support for a pilot was narrow, overall views on allowing backyard hens were divided, and concerns regarding odour, pests, neighbour disputes, animal welfare, noise, and enforcement were significant.
3. Maintain the current prohibition or do not create a program. This is the recommended option. It avoids creating new licensing, inspection, complaint response, and enforcement responsibilities, reflects the Town's limited by-law enforcement capacity, and aligns with the divided survey results, the slight overall opposition to allowing backyard hens, and the significant concerns identified by respondents.

Based on the municipal scan and the Have Your Say Shelburne survey results, staff do not recommend that Shelburne proceed with a backyard hen pilot program and recommend Option 3 – maintain the current prohibition. While some Ontario municipalities permit or have piloted backyard hens, the local survey results show divided public opinion, slightly higher opposition than support for allowing backyard hens, limited interest in personally keeping hens, divided neighbour comfort, a higher expectation of negative neighbourhood impacts than positive impacts, and significant concerns related to odour, rodents or pests, neighbour disputes, animal welfare, noise, and enforcement. Maintaining the current approach is therefore recommended unless Council wishes to direct additional public consultation or future policy review.

Financial Impact

There are no direct financial impacts associated with this report. However, if Council were to proceed with a backyard hen pilot program, there may be indirect administrative and staffing impacts related to program development, licensing, inspections, complaint response, enforcement, and ongoing monitoring. These activities would need to be managed within existing resources unless additional resources were approved.

Policies & Implications (if any) Affecting Proposal

N/A

Consultation and Communications

N/A

Council Priorities

Council's Priorities has three Pillars - Sustainable, Engaged and Livable. There are a total of 14 Priorities with the three Pillars.

This report aligns with the Engaged and Liveable Pillars within the Priorities of:

EP3 Consultation and collaboration with community

SP5 Build responsive organizational capacity

Supporting Documentation

N/A

Respectfully Submitted and prepared by:

L. Alice Byl, Deputy Clerk, Committee Coordinator

Reviewed by: Jennifer Willoughby, Director of Legislative Services/Clerk

Reviewed by: Denyse Morrissey, CAO