

CHICKENS AND OTHER POULTRY – A PUBLIC GOOD

**A Planning Guide and Educational Resource for Municipal Officials
in Suffolk County**



**Conserving Tradition Inc.
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Introduction

In recent years, the keeping of poultry has increasingly been the subject of positive municipal attention, with municipalities from Boston to Huntington repealing enactments that prohibited or impeded the keeping of poultry and joining the many municipalities already encouraging the keeping of poultry for its nutritional, ecological, and educational benefits. This liberalization has been largely driven by the increasing enthusiasm for poultry-keeping as evidenced by the popularity of the backyard chickens website and Facebook Group.

Why is Keeping Poultry so Popular?

The keeping of poultry benefits both the homeowner and the municipality. It also has numerous ecological benefits. The below examples are specific to chickens and equally applicable to most other poultry varieties.

- **Chickens Help Control Ticks**

A very important concern for people on Long Island is the danger of ticks and the illnesses they carry. Many families decide to get chickens for this very reason. Chickens eat insects and pests, including ticks, and can be very beneficial to the garden. One study examined chickens post-mortem and found at any one time that each contained an average of 28 eaten ticks!¹ Many local people report having yards where they found ticks often only to find that after getting chickens they no longer find ticks.

- **Chickens Provide Eggs**

This is an obvious benefit to having poultry. The average chicken lays over 270 eggs a year! People want to be able to give their family good, clean food and providing fresh eggs is one way to do so.

- **They are Educational**

Chickens show people, especially children, where their food comes from. Having chickens teaches children responsibility as well as how to care for animals. Sadly, some people in America do not even realize that eggs come from chickens! Chickens connect people with their food.

- **Chickens are Fun, Friendly Pets and Entertaining**

Chickens are fun to watch. They seem to enrapture anyone who comes in contact with them. It is interesting to see how these social birds interact with each other and the world. Many people with chickens sit by their chicken runs and watch their chickens. Children especially love to watch chickens. Having chickens means children will be outside more instead of sitting inside watching television or doing other sedentary activities.

- **Chickens Reduce Stress**

Like owning a cat or dog, some studies show that raising chickens releases oxytocin which is a stress-reducing hormone! Anyone who has chickens would agree that they do indeed reduce stress. Many chicken owners go to their chicken run and spend some time watching their chickens when they are upset to help them calm down and think things out.

- **They Require Very Little Space**
Chickens do not require large spaces to keep. Many people even in the middle of large, bustling cities including our own New York City, have the space to keep chickens. A small 3' x 4' coop can house up to 6 chickens.
- **Chickens are Easy to Care For**
You can easily care for a chicken in just a few minutes a day. Chickens are very low-maintenance and practically take care of themselves. Very little time is needed to properly care for chickens. People spend much more time caring for dogs and cats than is needed to spend caring for chickens.
- **Chickens Give Gardeners High-Quality Fertilizer**
Most people with chickens also have a garden. Having chickens enables them to have rich fertilizer for their garden. This fertilizer, in turn helps people to produce more abundant vegetables and more showy flowers in their garden. Chicken manure is “garden gold” and when the popular “deep litter” method is applied or when properly composted produces no foul odors.
- **They Dispose of Weeds and Kitchen Scraps**
Many towns in Long Island and across the county encourage residents to produce compost and even provide residents with compost tumblers.ⁱⁱ Some cities even require citizens to compost kitchen scraps and prohibit throwing them into the regular garbage.
- **They are Chemical-Free Weed Reducers**
Chickens forage in a garden and will eat weeds. You can place them in an area and they will eat whatever greens they can find. Many people nowadays use so-called “chicken tractors” which is simply a sort of cage that fits over an area of your garden or yard which you want to rid of weeds. Chickens are very efficient weeders. Having them means that chemical weed killers are not needed.
- **The Eggs are Healthier than Store-Bought Eggs**
Many studies show that fresh, free-range eggs are healthier than most store-bought eggs. A 2007 study noted that, compared to commercially produced eggs, they have:
 - 1/3 less cholesterol
 - 1/4 less saturated fat
 - 2/3 more vitamin A
 - Two times more omega-3 fatty acids
 - Three times more vitamin E
 - Seven times more beta carotene!ⁱⁱⁱ
 Other studies have shown that compared to commercially-produced eggs, they have 50 percent more folic acid and 70 percent more vitamin B12 (British Journal of Nutrition, 1974), higher omega-3s and vitamin E (Animal Feed Science and Technology, 1998), 10 percent less fat, 34 percent less cholesterol, 40 percent more vitamin A, and four times omega-3s (Barb Gorski, Penn State, 1999).
- **The Eggs are Tastier than Store Bought Eggs**
If you taste a fresh egg alongside a store bought egg, you will taste the difference. You can see the difference as well just looking side-by-side at a store bought egg and a backyard chicken egg – the yolk is usually a much brighter and richer orange-yellow color vs the store bought egg’s light yellow coloring.

- **Chickens Help Give Food Security**

Since chickens provide eggs, they can help families to give food to their families. For pennies a day a chicken can be fed and in return they give back eggs. Thus, they can help families provide food for themselves.

- **Backyard Chickens Provide an Alternative for People with Animal Welfare Concerns**

Many people are concerned with the conditions in which many commercial chickens are kept. They want to be able to obtain eggs knowing that the chickens have been treated humanely.

What is the Position of Most Suffolk Communities with Respect to Poultry?

Most towns and villages in Suffolk County in a 2016 study were found to have “poultry-friendly” laws, including four of the five towns of Western Suffolk! And backyard chickens are not just for rural and suburban areas: the three largest cities in the United States, New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago, allow poultry without any licensing, special regulations, or other requirements.^{iv}

Glossary

Chicken: The domesticated descendants of the wild jungle fowl.

Cock: *See* Rooster.

Cockerel: Young male chicken.

Coop: Permanent living area for poultry, typically comprised of a Henhouse and a Run.

Fowl: *See* Poultry.

Hen: Female chicken.

Henhouse: Permanent enclosed structure for chickens to sleep in at night.

Poultry: Any gallinaceous bird such as chickens, ducks, geese, or turkeys.

Pullet: Young female chicken.

Rooster: Male chicken.

Run: Enclosed area providing an area for chickens to range during the day.

ⁱ Fourie & Kok, Predation of livestock ticks by chickens as a tick-control method in a resource-poor urban environment (1997).

ⁱⁱ [Http://www.toh.li/sanitation-department/rain-barrels-and-composters](http://www.toh.li/sanitation-department/rain-barrels-and-composters).

ⁱⁱⁱ Long & Alterman, Meet real free-range eggs, Mother Earth News (2007).

^{iv} Ronda Kaysen, New York City Backyards Welcome Chickens and Bees, N.Y. Times (July 25, 2014); <https://www.kcet.org/home-garden/chicken-in-the-city-is-yours-up-to-code>; & <https://sites.google.com/site/chicagochickenenthusi/city-chicken-policy>.