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83rd KZGN News Talking Points Editorial
By: Tom Wiknich

The chickens are coming, to your next door neighbor’s yard soon!

Coming soon—chickens and other farms animals living right next to you. Do you want to have chickens and other farm animals living next door to your home? This is a heads up for everyone to be aware that at tomorrow’s city council meeting, they’ll be taking up changes to the Ridgecrest municipal code concerning what animals are permitted within residential housing zones in the city. Along with regular animals like dogs and cats, and other home pets that are mostly kept inside homes, they are now considering allowing certain farms animals within residential neighborhoods. Animals such as poultry and other fowl, including chickens, geese, ducks, pigeons, doves, and others yet to be determined. According to the staff recommendation, this new ordinance will allow chickens in even the smallest residential lot, allowing up to 4 chickens. The planning commission had a few meetings concerning this code revision. While there are areas of the code that do need updating, the provision to allow certain farm animals in residential areas is new. City animal control officers for years have not been allowing these animals in residential neighborhoods. Animal control and code enforcement officers receive numerous complaints from neighbors that have these animals next to their homes every year. Many people attended the planning commission meetings voicing support and opposition to the changes. The planning commission finally decided to not debate the issue any further and just send it to the full council, which is where it has to go anyway.

Here are my problems with this new ordinance. There is one provision in the ordinance that states the following condition: No poultry and/or other fowl shall disturb the peace and comfort of any neighborhood. I have to wonder how that will be decided. In whose opinion will the squawking and clucking of chickens, geese, and the other animals be determined a nuisance? Will neighbor disputes be handled by the police department? Will disagreements be determined civil matters when one or the other disagrees with the police determination? Will neighbors be forced to use the civil court system to try and have a peaceful back yard—a peaceful backyard free of irritating farm animal noises and stink coming from their neighbor’s yard. My next problem is the size of the lots they propose to allow these farm animals. Allowing them into a 6000, 7500, or 10,000 square foot lot is not appropriate. Lots of 40,000 square feet or bigger is fine. For those that don’t realize what size lots those square footages represent, Most of the lots in Ridgecrest heights are 6000 square feet. The average lot size in most of Ridgecrest is 7500 square feet. The larger lots in the tracts on the northwest end of Ridgecrest and College Heights area are typically 10,000 square feet. Most of those smaller square footages leave a backyard of about a 50 x 50 area. The next size up about a 75 x 60 foot area. The 10,000 square foot lots would have a variety of different back yards, but this is still not sufficient area to keep the noise and smell of chickens from infringing on their neighbors back yard enjoyment. We do have certain freedoms in how we are allowed to use our private property. Everyone keeps declaring that they have the constitutional right to do so, and I agree except, one person’s rights are not allowed to be exercised to the detriment of another person’s rights.

I worked as the volunteer code enforcement officer for over 2 years. I handled the complaints from neighbors that called in complaining about chickens in their next door neighbor’s yard. On a hot day, and we do have a lot of those here, I could smell the stink from the chickens in the adjoining backyard, not to mention the constant noise. People complained they couldn’t even open the bedroom windows at night due to the often noise and smell. You have to realize, the smell doesn’t just come from a build-up of feces. It comes from urine too. If people have these chicken pens in the back yard, how do they clean them in a manner to not allow the build-up of feces and urine falling onto the ground below the pens? If they hose them out, where does the waste go? On the ground. Will they have to put plastic covers under the pens so this animal waste can be rolled up and throw out in their trash? Think about it. Another problem is it’s known that these type animals attract certain rodents. The rodents come for the chicken feed, which winds up all over the ground when the chickens eat. How do the people clean up enough to keep from attracting rats and mice? Oh by the way, what animals are the main predators of rats and mice? Cats and snakes. Animal control has even had reports of bobcats and coyotes coming into an area where chickens are kept. Bobcats and coyotes can smell fowl from a mile away. If a bobcat or coyote were to come looking for chickens and spot your small dog or cat in your backyard, what do you think might happen? How will you explain the loss of your family pet to your children, due to an animal that may have just come in pursuit of the smell of chickens next door? Keeping these animals has a chain effect. It is nature’s way of life.

If you have an opinion about allowing farm animals living right next door to you, no matter where you live in the city, you might want to get ready to attend tomorrow’s council meeting. Meeting will be at the city hall starting at 6:00pm. If you oppose this change, make sure you attend because those that have pushed for this change will be there to encourage approving this change. Attendance at the meeting is the most powerful way to make sure all the council hears your opinion. However, if you can’t make it, at least email or call as many of the council as you can to provide your opinion. The mayor can be reached at the swap sheet. They need to hear from “we the people”.

In conclusion, I am against chickens in residential neighborhoods. There is no way people can keep these animal pens clean enough to keep the smell from building up over time. There is no way to clean them enough to keep from attracting rats, mice, snakes, bobcats and coyotes. No one in a city should have to contend with this problem.

I’m Tom Wiknich, and that’s what I think. I’d like to know what you think. If you have any comments about this editorial, or would like to discuss or recommend a topic, I’d like to hear from you. Please email them to info@kzgn.net.