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59th KZGN News Talking Points Editorial
By: Tom Wiknich

Are you ready to have chickens in your neighbor’s yard?

As I reported yesterday, a subcommittee for the Ridgecrest Planning Commission met at city hall. The committee was formed as a result of a recent planning commission meeting where it was brought up about allowing chickens in residential zones of the city. It seems that the current municipal code is lacking in good definition whether chickens are allowed or not. However, let there be no misunderstanding, currently chickens are not allowed in the city. The planning commission started discussion of the item. After some lengthy discussion, it was determined what had been presented by staff for the planning commission consideration was not ready for a decision. They decided to establish a subcommittee to try and refine the document for the proposed change to the municipal code to allow chickens. The meeting was dominated by people wanting the change to allow chickens. A couple people from the public were very vocal against the idea. The major players in pushing the change appear to be councilman Jim Sanders and the chairman of the planning commission Mathew Boudwin. It has to be mentioned that the actual process is as follows. Once they have a document to put for consideration, the full planning commission will hear the item. After receiving public comment, they will decide to either approve the change or not approve the change. If they approve it, then it goes to the city council for consideration. The city council will then hold public meetings to consider approving it.

The real thorn in this proposal seems to be two fold. One, chickens in very small residential lots, 6000 sq feet. Second, what about the potential for health and safety code violations?

Proponents feel that the proposed ordinance provides adequate protections against potential problems. I talked to one opponent and he said that he would be getting petition signatures of opposition to this idea. I should mention that this proposed new ordinance also sets new standards of allowed pets and other indoor animals. It’s not just about chickens. It seems the chicken part is the most controversial part. My opinion is that this is a ridiculous idea. There was one member of the public that attended the meeting that was very upset with the prospect that he could wind up with chickens next to his fence. He was also concerned that the committee was holding a meeting at a time when working folks could not attend. Starting the meeting at 5:00pm when the majority of working people were just getting off work was not right. He envisions noise problems, and worse, health and safety problems. The ordinance addresses that the chickens will be limited to 2 chickens, unless, you demonstrate you can take good care of chickens, wherein, then you can apply for a permit to have 2 more chickens. It allows chickens right up to a neighbor’s property line. It even allows chickens in the smallest of residential lots, 6000 sq foot lots. This is a lot that could be only 50’ wide. The opponent almost yelled: If you want chickens, move into the county. I moved into the city a few years ago to get away from farm animals that stunk terribly. The city is no place for farm animals. Animal control officer’s attending the committee meeting stated they get about 5 complaints per month concerning chickens in residential neighborhoods. Most complaints have to do with noise and health and safety issues.

As I was the volunteer code enforcement officer for about two years, I can support complaints about chickens. I handled many myself, and I also saw most complaints concerned noise and health code concerns, smell from the yard next door. The worst times for complaints were during the summer when chicken feces were rotting in the hot sun. This does really smell. People on the opposite side of a fence complained they couldn’t even sit out at night because of the stink. The proponents of allowing chickens argued that if people don’t take care of the smell and noise, then just cite them. Why do we want to create a problem for the animal shelter officers and put neighbors against neighbors? It is generally under control now. Why do we want to invite more people to have chickens? I have to say I agree with the loudest opponent last night. This is nonsense. Stop this now. I don’t want to have chickens on the other side of my fence. I don’t want to have to call in and complain about my neighbors. This can create friction between neighbors, where there wasn’t any before. Animal control officers also were concerned about the possible extra effort they would have to expend enforcing a chicken ordinance. I believe allowing chickens onto small 6000 sq foot residential lots is not appropriate. At least require them to only be allowed on lots of 40,000 sq feet or larger. 40,000 sq feet is about an acre lot. Anything smaller is begging for problems with neighbors. There is no way they can draft a law covering all the possible problems this new allowance could create. Once it is ok to have chickens, it will be very hard to go back and ban those chickens when the council realizes they made a big mistake. Again, be clear. Right now chickens are not allowed in the city. This will change that, and even allow chickens into even the smallest of residential lots. A change like this wreaks of unintended consequences problems. Councilman Sanders seems to think this is a property rights issue. Look at what we just went through with the Howard properties out in Ridgecrest Heights. One person’s rights do not trump another person’s rights. People have a right in a residential neighborhood to use their property without animal noise and stink coming from the neighbor’s yard. Good neighbors would not subject their neighbors to this nonsense. Let’s see, what was that rule my parents taught me? Oh yeah. Do onto others, as you would have them do unto you. Love and respect your neighbor. So, stay tuned. I’ll let you know when this item goes back to the planning commission for consideration. And if you don’t like this change, start letting the mayor and council, and the planning commissioners know now.

In conclusion, I’m against farm animals in residential zones in the city. If you want to run a business, you set up in a commercial zone. In the same spirit, if you want to raise farm animals, do it in a zone that allows it. Don’t change things to suit you, that will infringe on your neighbors rights to enjoy their property. They aren’t infringing on your rights for peaceful enjoyment of your property. Why infringe on their same rights?

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.