

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

Las Crucens peck at chicken issue

By Steve Ramirez Sun-News reporter

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LAS CRUCES — The pluses and minuses of a request from some Las Cruces residents seeking a possible change to a city ordinance that would allow residents to raise chicken hens were discussed at length during Monday's city council work session at City Hall.

Arguments for and against the proposal were raised before a packed house inside Council Chambers. Ultimately, the arguments were convincing enough that there was consensus from the council to direct city administrators and staff members to examine the current ordinance and make some recommendations for potential changes.

"A follow-up work session will be accommodated sometime within the coming month," City Manager Terrence Moore said.

The idea of considering a change to the ordinance came to Jon Simmons, spokesman for CLUCK, Citizens for Legalizing Urban Chicken Keeping, shortly after moving to Las Cruces.

"About one-and-a-half years ago I called animal control to see if I needed a permit to keep chickens," Simmons said. "I was shocked when I was told that under no circumstances, no chickens were allowed. ...Out of this CLUCK was hatched."

Simmons pointed out that the three largest cities in the U.S. — New York, Los Angeles and Chicago — are on a long list of cities that allow chickens to be raised.

In New Mexico, chickens are also allowed in Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

Simmons emphasized that supporters of the initiative are not asking city officials to allow roosters. He said roosters make too much noise, and hens can lay eggs without roosters.

But Councilor Dolores Connor said she had several concerns with the proposal. Connor said she has a cousin who has raised chickens for more than 50 years and learned that hens scream when they lay eggs; that they apparently are not very clean and need ample areas to roam, and that they smell when it rains.

Connor also questioned the cost effectiveness of raising chickens vs. buying eggs.

"What's the cost of feed for a chicken vs. buying a dozen eggs," she said.

But Las Cruces resident Andrea Camunez countered, "I want to be sure my food is fresh and there's nothing more fresh than an egg I know that just came from my chicken."

Camunez added, "It's a freedom issue. If you're allowed to keep a dog, we should be allowed to keep chickens in an enclosed area."

But Ron Camunez, no relation, said chickens could pose a risk to the health and safety of residents.

"I'm totally opposed," Camunez said. "With the increase of Avian bird flu, this would be a tragic mistake to open Pandora's Box."

He added resources are already stretched thin to curb Doña Ana County's animal population.

"We already have enough problems with loose animals," Camunez said.

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Urban chickens

- Citizens for Legalizing Urban Chicken Keeping has asked the Las Cruces City Council to amend a city ordinance that would allow residents to keep chicken hens within the city limits.
- The current ordinance, which applies to small animals including goats, rabbits, poultry, sheep and chickens, stipulates that lots must be at least a half acre in size and located on the outskirts of the city.
- Small animals can only be kept in the rear yard, and no closer than 35 feet to a dwelling or 100 feet to a water well.
- Chickens are allowed to be raised in Albuquerque and Santa Fe.