



**Independent, locally owned and operated!**

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published December 2nd, 2015

## Yes to Chickens and Bees, No to Turkeys

*By Sophie Braccini*

Tarnished by the reputation of their wild counterparts to be more of a nuisance than friendly pets, farmed turkeys were not elevated to the status of small farm animals, as were Moraga chickens, rabbits, doves and honey bees by the town council at its Nov. 18 meeting. Turkeys will linger in the livestock category of Moraga's municipal code.

Vice Mayor Mike Metcalf, who challenged the need for allowing chickens and other fowl in Moraga, stated, "There may be a lot of young people in town, but there's an awful lot of older folks too, and I am one of them that tend to be pretty conservative. There are people I know that absolutely think that this is the stupidest idea around, and they have a right to feel that way, they have the right to peace and enjoyment of their property." Metcalf spoke in agreement with resident Dale Walwark who stated that the process for getting a small farm ordinance approved was skewed by proponents of the idea.

At issue was the question of smell, which was discussed at length. The ordinance declares that a coop should not generate any odor; councilmember Dave Trotter asked if there was a quantifiable unit to measure bad smell. "We apply a reasonable person standard," responded Planning Director Ellen Clark. "It is not a quantitative criteria. That's also true for noise and glare and we manage to regulate them."

John Kiefer, a Lafayette resident who conducted pro bono research for Lafayette to draft its own ordinance and also worked with Moraga planning staff, talked about the sustainable coop design concept where chickens are raised directly on soft soil, which does not cause any odor. "The ordinance states that there will be no odor at all," he said, "and that's what the sustainable coop does."

But Metcalf was skeptical that every chicken owner would build such a coop, and that if their operations started being a nuisance to neighbors, not much was written in the text to enforce compliance. "He (Kiefer) says that if you do it correctly it won't smell; what happens if you don't do it correctly?" asked Metcalf. "How will we respond (to complaints)? You can be a month with something that's in violation and you're going to pay \$174. That's not enforcement, that's a joke. There is no teeth in this regulation to make (people) comply." Metcalf added that he was concerned about unintended consequences of a text that had been rushed through the approval process. The question of turkeys became a real roadblock. "Would you like on the other side of your fence (that) your neighbor has six turkeys?" asked Walwark. "It does not make any sense at all!" Turkeys could not find any kind of support from anyone. Councilmember Dave Trotter proposed reassigning them to the livestock category in the municipal code, which allows one animal per 20,000 square feet of property.

The question of slaughtering animals in the privacy of the property was not an issue, although councilmember Teresa Onoda said she felt that small children should not see such things. Metcalf countered that these were facts of life and that hamburgers were once on hoofs. Both councilmembers Phil Arth and Trotter agreed.

The ordinance passed with three in favor, and one abstention from Metcalf. Mayor Roger Wykle was absent. The small farm animals include chickens, doves, pigeons, quail, game birds, rabbits and honey bees. Pets are not part of the ordinance and animals that make noise such as roosters, waterfowl, peacocks and guinea hens are not allowed in Moraga.

The minimum size lot to raise small farm animals is now 6,000 square feet. Parcels of 6,000 to 10,000 square feet can have a maximum of four small animals, properties 10,001 square feet to 20,000 square feet should not have more than six, parcels 20,001 square feet to 40,000 square feet have a maximum of eight, and lots greater than 40,000 square feet can have 16 animals. Multi-family housing sharing a lot of at least 6,000 square feet can raise chickens if all the neighbors agree. Usual setback rules apply to the placement of animal structures.

The council will hear another reading of the ordinance text on Dec. 9 and it will become effective 30

days later.

Reach the reporter at: [sophie@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sophie@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA