

The Village of Forest Park's Department of Public Health and Safety is currently researching policies in nearby towns that allow ownership of a limited number of backyard hens (no roosters) in order to assess if a similar change in policy would work in Forest Park. A pilot period, involving a limited number of coops for a limited amount of time, is also an option under consideration.

After a town hall meeting on October 18, 2022, this FAQ has been compiled to answer residents' questions and provide information. Your feedback is valued and encouraged! If you have any additional questions not covered in this FAQ, please reach out to one of the following:

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Hens in Forest Park – Frequently Asked Questions

Is ownership of chickens currently allowed in Forest Park?

No. Chickens are currently prohibited under village code section 5-1-2, "Prohibited Animals."

Would roosters be allowed?

No.

Will there be a limit on how many chickens a person can keep?

Yes. The number of chickens allowed in backyards in Illinois suburbs is limited depending on municipality. Some examples:

Westchester: Maximum 3

Evanston: Minimum 2, Maximum 6

Lombard: Minimum 2, Maximum 6

Berwyn: Maximum 3

Berkeley: Maximum 4

Riverside: Minimum 2, Maximum 4

Oak Park: Maximum 2

A minimum number of chickens is often required because chickens are not solitary creatures and do not do well alone.

Will the Village limit the number of people allowed to keep chickens?

Most likely. Many towns place a limit on the number of chicken-keeping permits active at one time. For example, Westchester limits the number of permits to 10 at any one time but as of October, 2022 had only two active permits. Other towns have done pilot programs, where a very small number of permits are given for a limited time period (generally a year), to test how backyard chicken keeping works and to see what, if any, problems arise. (See below item on pilot programs for more information.)

Will chickens be allowed to run free in backyards in Forest Park?

No, or at least not most of the time. Most towns have a cooping requirement, so hens have to be kept in a coop or enclosed run at all times. This prevents chickens from bothering neighbors by running up to the fence, reduces risk of escape from the backyard, and protects hens from predators. Some towns, such as Berwyn, allow chickens to leave their coops and run free in an enclosed back yard, but only during the hours of 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and only when the owner is present.

How can the Village assure residents that they will not be bothered by a neighbor's chickens?

Other towns have put in place multiple regulations to ensure that a neighbor's chickens don't bother anyone else. These include:

- Setback requirements (in Berkeley, for example, a coop must be set back at least six feet from all property lines of an adjacent property)
- Cooping requirements (in many towns, chickens must be kept in a coop or enclosed run at all times, or can roam free in the yard only during the day AND when owners are present)
- Requirements to notify neighbors prior to obtaining chickens (Des Plaines, for example, requires a resident desiring chickens to send courtesy notices to neighbors at least two weeks before submitting an application to the village)

How can the Village assure that the chickens are properly cared for?

Like any animal, chickens deserve to be treated humanely. It is especially important for chicken owners to be aware of special needs of their animals because veterinarians that treat fowl are less common locally than those that treat more commonly kept animals such as cats and dogs.

Other towns have helped ensure animal safety and health through the following:

- Designating minimum coop size requirements to ensure hens have enough room. Berkeley's code, for example, states the following: "Coops shall provide sufficient area for the chicken(s) to stand up, sit/lay down and move around and able to be protected from natural forces such as wind, rain and snow." Other towns have a specific minimum coop square footage required per hen.
- Requiring coops to be kept in sanitary conditions, not only to prevent offensive smells, but to protect the hens. Berkeley's code states: "All pens, coops, buildings, yards or enclosures for hens shall be kept clean, sanitary and free from all refuse and waste. Such areas shall be thoroughly cleaned at least once every twenty four (24) hours, and all refuse and chicken waste shall be disposed of in a clean and sanitary fashion."
- Requiring coops to be weather and predator-proof. Westchester's code states the following: "Hen shelters shall be constructed of durable building materials, shall be weatherproofed, in order to withstand inclement and extreme weather, and shall be secure from any predators. A professional predator protection system approved by the community development department shall be required to be installed on any outside shelter for housing hens."

Other ideas include:

- Making available a list of local veterinarians that provide care to hens
- Providing workshops or training on safe chicken-keeping, potentially through the public library

Will anyone in town be allowed to get chickens?

Probably not. Most towns only allow single-family homes to have coops and chickens. Property-line setbacks for coops might disallow owners of smaller lots from having chickens. Finally, restrictions on the number of permits might prohibit people from getting hens.

Are chickens noisy?

Roosters, which would not be allowed, are noisier than hens. But chickens themselves are not silent animals and do make noise throughout the day. Research suggests that the noise level varies by breed, and that many chickens are quiet throughout the day, peaking in the morning or when they first lay an egg. Commonly shared information is that chickens max out at about 60-70 decibels (approximately the same as a human conversation).

Do chicken coops smell bad?

If not properly maintained, chicken coops can and will smell bad.

Do chickens spread disease?

There are certain diseases associated with fowl, although the incidences of spread to humans is generally low. The CDC has excellent information on several diseases here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/pets/farm-animals/backyard-poultry.html>

Most suburbs nearby that allow backyard chickens require the chicken keeper register with the Illinois Department of Agriculture, which contacts owners in the case of any outbreak of which they should be aware. More information can be found here:

<https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/agr/Animals/AnimalHealth/Pages/Premises-Registration.aspx>

Are people allowed to slaughter chickens in residential areas?

Slaughtering of backyard chickens is not allowed in most suburban towns.

Would people be allowed to sell eggs from their chickens?

No. Keeping chickens is not meant to be a business opportunity.

Will chickens make the rat problem in town worse?

Any source of food for rats can make the rat problem worse. Failure to pick up waste from any animal, including dogs, can result in rats stopping by to feed. While rats are not attracted to chickens themselves, they are attracted to chicken feed, poop, and eggs. Certain restrictions, such as keeping chicken feed in metal or other rat-proof containers, will help avoid the problem with food. Requiring daily coop maintenance will help avoid problems with poop and eggs. Allowing only a limited number of people to keep chickens will ensure the Village can properly monitor coop maintenance.

Can the Village do a test run or pilot program to see whether to adopt an ordinance or not?

Several towns have done pilot programs prior to changing village ordinance or code. These towns include Elgin, Villa Park, Des Plaines, and Lake Bluff. In 2016, Elgin wrapped up a one-year pilot study involving a limited number of permits and published their results online. They ended up allowing chickens in town. See the pilot program results here:

https://www.cityofelgin.org/DocumentCenter/View/57045/Backyard-Chicken-Pilot-Program-Review_January-2016?bidId=

Forest Park might consider doing the same. A very limited number of permits (six, for example) could be allowed for a one- or two-year period, after which time the results could be studied and a recommendation made to the council on a more permanent plan.

What nearby suburban, residential towns allow chickens?

There is a growing number of nearby neighborhoods that do allow backyard hens. Nearby towns include: Berkeley, Berwyn, Brookfield, Oak Park, Westchester, Riverside, and Chicago. Also included are Elgin, Highland Park, Lake Bluff, Lombard, and Naperville.

To view code from other towns to get a sense of what's allowed, you can do a search on the name of the town with "chicken ordinance" after it. For example, to look at Berwyn's code, simply type "Berwyn chicken ordinance" into a search engine. Here are some examples of code from other towns:

Berwyn:

https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/berwyn/latest/berwyn_il/0-0-0-31232

<https://www.berwyn-il.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/3824/637852839907370000>

Brookfield:

https://library.municode.com/il/brookfield/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=COOR_CH10AN_ARTIICACO_DIV2LIOTFACR_S10-78KECHRECO_WACO

Berkeley:

https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/berkeleyil/latest/berkeley_il/0-0-0-4029

Westchester:

https://library.municode.com/il/westchester/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=TIT10AN_CH10_08PO_10.08.030ROCOFOROENRE