

Small Animals in Anchorage

Currently, the city zoning ordinance specifies excessive setback requirements for structures used to house animals of any kind other than dogs on single family residential lots (AMC 21.40.030 and in 21.05.07 of the present draft). The setback requirements may be appropriate for large animals but should be reduced or eliminated in cases concerning small animals such as poultry, rabbits etc. The rewrite of Title 21 provides the perfect opportunity to correct this flaw and appropriately address the keeping of small animals other than household pets in ordinary neighborhoods.

It is surprising how many people in this town keep chickens or rabbits in their yards and more surprising that they are unknowingly in violation of the city's land use ordinance. These people would be shocked to learn that the city has the authority to make them tear down their chicken coop or rabbit hutch even if the animals in question pose no nuisance or threat to the surrounding community.

Anchorage has a "sister city" – Seattle. Seattle actively encourages the keeping of chickens in the urban setting. The city has an educational program called Seattle Tilth's 2005 City Chickens Program that offers classes for interested homeowners on how to construct coops and enclosures and how to properly care for the animals within the city's regulatory environment. They even hold an annual City Chickens and Coops tour.

There are no setback requirements for chicken coops in Seattle. There is a limit of 3 chickens per 5000 sq ft lot and one additional chicken is allowed for each additional 1000 sq ft of lot area.

Many other cities provide allowances for the keeping of small animals. Portland's code specifies a 25' setback from lot lines while Sonoma stipulates that coops and enclosures must be 50 feet from any human dwelling other than the owners' home.

Some may argue that keeping animals like poultry may pose a risk to public health or be too noisy for neighbors. The city already has rules to deal with public health nuisances as well as excessive noises, odors and all sorts of things that might prove problematic should anyone abuse their privilege of keeping animals on their property. The city may even justifiably prohibit the keeping of roosters on small lots. However, these potential problems are not sufficient reason to make it against the law to keep animals other than household pets.

Indeed, one could argue that dogs and cats pose a greater public nuisance than chickens, ducks or rabbits. Cats are rarely confined only to their owner's homes. They roam neighborhoods, have loud fights and poop in their neighbor's yards. Dogs bark louder and more frequently during the day and night than any chicken can cluck. We can't outlaw our neighbor's cats and dogs nor should we actively discourage our neighbors from keeping other small pets.

Our property rights are important to us in the state of Alaska. We must fight for and maintain the individuality and integrity of our neighborhoods. To promote the attractiveness and diversity of our city, we should follow the lead of our sister city and not only stop prohibiting the safe housing of the pets we already own but educate the public and encourage the proper keeping of all sorts of pets.

BRIEF SUMMARY

- **This city currently discourages homeowners from keeping any animals other than dogs.**
- Original language for AMC 21.40.030.C4 makes the “outdoor harboring or keeping of dogs, animals and fowl in a manner consistent with the requirements of all titles of this Code” one of the permitted accessory uses and structures for lots zoned R-1 or R-1A, R-2 and R-3. The Code then states that “Paddocks, stables or similar structures or enclosures which are utilized for the keeping of animals other than dogs shall be at least 100 feet from any lot line.”
- According to this, dogs are the only animal allowed to be housed within 100 feet of any lot line.
- The new draft of AMC 21 (21.05.070.C and D) also excludes dog runs and dog houses from the setback requirements for permitted accessory structures. This should be the case for structures housing other small animals including but not limited to chickens, ducks and rabbits.
- “Paddocks, stables and barns” still have setback requirements of 100 feet from any lot line under this draft. However, chicken coops and rabbit hutches are a far cry from paddocks, stables and barns. If dog houses are exempt so these should be.
- **Our sister city, Seattle, promotes the keeping of chickens on urban and suburban lots with a reasonable limit to the number of animals and no setback requirements. So should the city of Anchorage.**

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