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CLUCKING OVER CHICKENS: HANFORD COUNCIL DEBATES BACKYARD HEN RULES BUT KEEPS CAP AT THREE



HANFORD — What began as a routine public comment quickly turned into a spirited discussion about backyard poultry at the March 18 Hanford City Council meeting.

During the public comment period, Hanford resident Larry Faria addressed the council to raise concerns about the growing number of households keeping dozens of chickens, despite the city's limit of three hens per residence.

"I think the number of chickens should be what your family can reasonably eat," Faria said. If you've got 25 or 30 chickens, you're disturbing your neighbors and you've got some type of unlicensed chicken [business](#) going on back there.

Faria emphasized that while he supports residents having hens for eggs or teaching kids responsibility, there should be clear limits. His remarks caught the council's attention and prompted a formal agenda discussion later in the meeting.

[Council Discusses](#) Chicken Ordinance

Hanford currently allows up to three hens (no roosters) in most single-family residential zones, provided setbacks and coop requirements are met. But recent code enforcement challenges and resident complaints, including [reports](#) of up to 25 chickens in some yards, led to a council-requested review.



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Vice Mayor Travis Paden expressed concern over overcrowding and public [health](#) in smaller residential lots:

There are houses that have 25 [chickens in their backyard](#)... They have the same size yard as I do, and I don't see how they could have 25 chickens in the backyard and it be okay.

City staff presented zoning comparisons from other cities across California. Some, like [Visalia](#), only allow chickens on large lots with minimum 50-foot setbacks. In contrast, Hanford's ordinance requires just 10 feet from the property line and 5 feet from any dwelling.

Councilmember Kimber Regan questioned whether the issue was widespread:

"Is this something... are people requesting to increase the [home](#) coop capacity? Is there a lot of people with 50 chickens in their yard?"

After learning that enforcement is complaint-based and violations are rare, Regan advocated for simplicity:

"It doesn't sound like that's an enforcement problem right now... I think this is, let's just keep it the way it is. It's not broken."

Later, with a touch of humor, she added, "I'm tired of talking about chickens, Larry."

Councilmember Amanda Howze also voiced support for the current ordinance:

"I'm comfortable with the way it is right now. To me, three chickens per residential area is fine."

Staff and Legal Caution Against Overcomplication

Some council members, including [Mayor Lou Martinez](#), suggested a tiered system based on parcel size, allowing four or five chickens on larger lots and possibly up to six with a permit. But City Attorney Ty Mizote and staff warned against discretionary permitting:

"If there's a petition process, a petition means an application. An application means review.



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Review means a fee... It really complicates matters if you give staff discretionary authority over numbers," Mizote said.

[City Manager](#) Mario Cifuentez added that enforcement needs to be clear and consistent to avoid subjective decision-making:

"We can't write an ordinance for 'a little bit more than three.' We need some direction."

Final Decision: No Changes

After over an hour of dialogue, the [council reached consensus to maintain the existing ordinance](#): three hens maximum per property, no roosters, no slaughtering on-site, and coops must meet setback and sanitation requirements.

"If people are over the limit, that's a code enforcement issue," said Mayor Martinez. "We're not looking to punish people raising chickens reasonably. We just don't want anyone turning their backyard into a commercial operation."