

**From:** [Amy Farrell](#)  
**To:** [Council](#)  
**Subject:** Support for Backyard Chicken Flocks in Atherton  
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Dear Members of the Atherton City Council,

I am writing to respectfully request your support for policies that allow Atherton residents to keep small backyard chicken flocks. As Chair of the Environmental Programs Committee (EPC) and a mother of two boys who attend high school here in Atherton, I believe this initiative is not only a meaningful step toward a more sustainable and environmentally responsible community but also a valuable educational opportunity—especially for our youth.

Backyard chickens provide children with hands-on learning experiences in environmental stewardship, food production, and responsible animal care. As we strive to foster a deeper connection between young people and sustainability, allowing backyard chickens offers an engaging way for families to teach children about food systems, waste reduction, and the natural world.

I would also like to address the size of chicken flocks and ensure that you are fully aware of the impact on the well being of the chickens and related egg production. A well-balanced flock consists of more than six hens, as chickens are social animals that thrive in groups. A larger flock helps reduce stress, promotes natural behaviors, and ensures a more stable pecking order, minimizing aggression and anxiety within the group. Additionally, a flock of at least 6–10 hens ensures consistent egg production suitable for a household. On average, a single hen lays 4–6 eggs per week, meaning a flock of six hens may only provide about 24–36 eggs per week. Considering natural variations in laying cycles, seasonal changes, and the fact that hens lay fewer eggs as they age, allowing for a slightly larger flock ensures families have a reliable and sustainable source of fresh eggs without resorting to store-bought eggs. If you have not had the opportunity to try eggs from a backyard chicken, I would encourage you to do so as they taste very different from the varieties from our big box grocery stores.

I will now turn to the educational and developmental benefits for the children of Atherton. Your responsibility as elected officials is to all of our residents, including the young people in Atherton, and backyard chickens offer unique educational experiences which I have outlined below.

- Understanding Sustainable Food Systems – Caring for chickens teaches children where their food comes from, reinforcing the importance of local, organic food production. Gathering fresh eggs fosters an appreciation for nutrition and self-sufficiency.
- Promoting Environmental Awareness – Raising chickens instills responsibility and encourages kids to think about waste reduction. Chickens consume food scraps that would otherwise end up in landfills, turning waste into a resource—nutrient-rich eggs.
- Encouraging Outdoor Engagement & Responsibility – In an era dominated by screens, backyard chickens provide an opportunity for children to interact with nature, learn responsibility through daily care, and develop empathy for animals.
- Supporting Science and STEM Education – Keeping chickens offers hands-on lessons

in biology, ecology, and even mathematics. Children can explore topics like life cycles, egg production, and sustainable agriculture.

In addition, backyard chickens contribute to a healthier local ecosystem:

- Food Waste Reduction – Chickens divert household food waste from landfills, helping reduce methane emissions and contributing to a circular food economy.
- Soil Health & Composting – Their manure enriches compost, creating natural fertilizers that support healthier gardens and reduce reliance on synthetic chemicals.
- Natural Pest Control – Chickens help manage insect populations, minimizing the need for pesticides that can harm beneficial pollinators.

I understand that concerns exist regarding backyard chickens, but these can be effectively managed:

- Rodent Concerns – Properly stored feed and regular coop maintenance prevent rodent attraction, as supported by research from the University of Minnesota Extension.
- Noise Levels – Hens are quiet, producing only soft clucking sounds, unlike roosters (which are not needed for egg production).
- Upkeep & Responsibility – Chickens require minimal maintenance, similar to household pets, and with proper guidelines, families can manage their care easily.

My EPC colleagues and I can discuss organizing a workshop for residents on backyard chickens to educate them on best practices.

I urge the Council to take all of these points under consideration and be supportive of backyard chicken flocks so that Atherton can provide a valuable opportunity for families to embrace sustainability while giving children firsthand experience in responsible food production and environmental care.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to collaborating in making our community a leader in sustainability and environmental education, particularly for our children.

Amy Farrell

Chair, Environmental Programs Committee

Town of Atherton