



[VLGMA Civic Engagement story (Stoke Nov 2020)]

Emotional support chickens for everyone

The fabric of society has run afowl during the pandemic. We recently had a complaint of chickens in a R-1 subdivision with small setbacks. The owner of the chickens called them “companions” during difficult times and requested that he be allowed to keep them on the property for emotional support. Unfortunately, our current laws did not allow this request. The County felt the need to review and revise our zoning code regarding poultry in the community. Rather than let the feathers fly, we decided the best course of action is a public comment period, postcards to residents, and a survey before the item goes to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. We stressed the need to receive public input on potential ordinance changes, which would affect the keeping of poultry (including chickens) on smaller residential properties in the County.

So far, so good. The citizen input and discussion has been brisk. As the process goes through the official government boards, staff has a better understanding of the issue due to the public input. We know both sides of the road and why the required fence stopped the chicken from crossing. Don’t be afraid to start with the citizens, they are not chicken to let you know how they feel. (Interesting note: emotional support animals are not covered under local zoning laws.)

Moral of the story:

Everyone is still on edge due to the pandemic – both staff and citizens. Controversial issues should be discussed openly and before any votes are counted. Involve the citizens up front before you lay an egg. It makes all the difference.