

October 15, 2010

Dear Roots & Shoots Parents,

We would like to introduce you to a community project Roots & Shoots will be undertaking in the coming months. In partnership with James Emery-Elkin, a member of the City of Geneva Green Committee, we will be creating and running a chicken co-op in downtown Geneva. The idea is simple but the impact will be far-reaching - across campus, across neighborhoods, across the Finger Lakes region. We have the opportunity to model something powerful to our children.

The cooperative will consist of a henhouse and roughly 30 laying hens on a plot of land in or near downtown Geneva. Volunteers from the community will make up the cooperative, feeding and caring for the hens. In addition to the daily tasks, members will also build the henhouse and related infrastructure, fortify against predation, manage the land, and clean the coop. In exchange, participants will receive a share of fresh, free-range, and organic eggs and the eternal gratitude and adoration of 30 fluffy girls. Your children will be directly involved in all of these facets.

The co-op will serve many needs. It will build community by bringing residents downtown in shared commitment. Local schools will be invited to visit and learn about tending farm animals and the life of chickens. Citizens will learn the importance of local food sources and how to become more self-sufficient. In the future, the co-op project can grow to include further educational experiences like solar power, rain catchment systems, composting, and beekeeping.

Chickens are hardy, quiet, clean animals that require minimal care. They are personable, productive (one egg per hen per day for several years on average), and beneficial to the land they inhabit, keeping bugs down and fertilizing the soil. They are also a curiosity, and tourists will be drawn to Geneva to see the progressive chicken farm happening right in the middle of downtown. This model has been successful elsewhere (for example, Zenger Farms in Portland, Oregon) and is ideal for a city the size of Geneva.

We are excited about this significant, ongoing, hands-on learning experience for the children. The co-op will serve as a link between different segments of the population around us, including the HWS campus, downtown Geneva, surrounding neighborhoods, and the grammar schools. It is consistent with the mission of the City of Geneva Green Committee.

Our proposal will be brought before the City of Geneva at the November 3rd City Council meeting. We will suggest a site, submit a petition supporting the idea (which we ask your help in distributing), and field any concerns. We hope you are able to attend with your children in show of support. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact us with questions or suggestions. We look forward to bringing chickens to the city and into your children's lives!

Sincerely,

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