

Geneva City Councilors, Mayor Einstein, Manager Horn, good evening.

I stand before you representing the elements of this community who support the egg cooperative. Some of them join me here tonight.

For four months we have done our best to be available for criticism and open to questions. I spoke at length with the city's Green Committee - *your* Green Committee - and answered their questions to their satisfaction. We hand-delivered a letter to each of you and invited response. My email address and phone number appeared on posters throughout downtown, in the Finger Lakes Times, in the HWS Herald. I requested a meeting with Manager Horn three times. We sought to hear from everyone... because this has always been, and remains, a project focused on building community.

And I did hear from many. But not a single response - not from a councilor, not from the mayor, not from a business or a citizen - came to me in the form of an objection. Not a single one. Instead I received curiosity and enthusiasm, along with a strong desire for this to happen. It came from enough committed citizens to supply volunteers for three chicken cooperatives. It came from businesses, including two not only wanting to see this happen, but willing to donate a constant supply of food for its operation. It came from out of town, from people wishing to live in Geneva if this should come to pass.

Your staff has suggested that this project does not align with downtown development goals. I, and many in this room, respectfully disagree. I ask you if an empty, overgrown lot aligns with development goals. I ask you if 1.2 miles of swimming, 56 miles of cycling, and 13 miles of running appear in your planning documents. I ask you if your studies and your charts encompass the full breadth and depth of development possibility. That lot doesn't represent potential as it currently stands; it represents neglect.

I have here a rather lengthy document addressing the real risks, and the real joys, of keeping chickens in an urban setting. It is not based on my own opinion, but on the collective wisdom of experts and the 500 American cities and towns which have dismantled chicken prohibitions in the last two years. I stand before you tonight with a small army of citizens simply desiring to take care of a small piece of Geneva.

You're about to vote on a city ordinance that we believe is outdated and no longer relevant to its original intent. If you oppose this cooperative, please do so because you have sound reason and have asked the appropriate questions. If you vote yes, please do so for the same.

Martin Luther King talked about creative tension. It is the need for society to have some grains of sand rubbing against the skin of complacency so that pearls may result. I am your grain of sand, and I do not apologize for not going away.

There are concerns that have been presented to you borne of misunderstanding and fear. They are not based in fact or an understanding of what's being proposed. They ask "what if" but don't seek a reply.

I have my own what if's.

What if you allow a downtown coop and attention returns to an old abandoned lot, not in the form of decreased property values but as a place people once more want to be?

What if you allow these individuals and families to care for these hens, and a family from Massachusetts moves to town because they've heard how progressive it is?

What if a business locates here because the city is known as open-minded and incubating?

What if this city requires fewer police officers, fewer graffiti removals, fewer ordinances because Pride of Place has returned and we care for each other and our collective property?

What if. You'll never know until you ask.