Neiman Marcus Chicken Coops: Exploring Class and Identity Through Backyard Chicken Keeping and the Contemporary Food Movement

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NEIMAN MARCUS CHICKEN COOPS: EXPLORING CLASS AND
IDENTITY THROUGH BACKYARD CHICKEN KEEPING
AND THE CONTEMPORARY FOOD MOVEMENT

by

Traci D. Joseph

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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NEIMAN MARCUS CHICKEN COOPS: EXPLORING CLASS AND
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Traci D. Joseph, M.A.
Western Michigan University, 2013

This paper is a case study of a proposed backyard chicken ordinance for Grand Rapids, Michigan. The study is viewed in light of social movement theory, specifically new social movement theory, to determine if events surrounding and leading up to the debate can be labeled as a social movement. A key finding is a culture of consumption as a common thread throughout the debate. The poultry industry pushed for continued consumption of its products with an agenda of fear regarding disease and improper handling. Proponents countered with a discussion on an ethic of care for the birds. Ultimately, this rejection of the culture of consumption by the proponents of the ordinance becomes the focus of the ruling class and their actions regarding the rejection of that consumption. In the end, the backyard chicken debate in Grand Rapids cannot be categorized as a social movement. At best, the debate, combined with other discussions on local food, may be able to contribute to an overall cultural change toward local foods from which future movements may be able to draw to create a dialogue over other food issues. Suggested future research is to determine the role of fair food policies in conjunction with race and class issues in Grand Rapids, in-depth research regarding the lack of food policy in Grand Rapids in general, and the role of fear regarding production of food in today’s society.
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Traci D. Joseph, M.A.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Chicken coops, and their inhabitants, are making an appearance in unlikely places. Chickens, once thought to be a strictly rurally raised animal, are now finding homes among the hustle and bustle of city life. As one might expect, bringing these animals into the city raises questions that many municipalities have rarely considered. Even more, backyard chickens and their resulting regulation issues do not seem to be on the radar for many social scientists.

As such, there is a gap in the literature as it relates to urban farming, specifically backyard chickens, and their rise in popularity in the United States. There is a lot of discussion in the news regarding the debate, and sometimes tension, between groups who want to raise backyard chickens in the city and those who are firmly against such a practice. Local governments are placed at the center of this debate when neighbors disagree about whether to allow chickens in an urban setting. In addition, coupled with the rise of the self-sufficiency movement, it would appear that the local government becomes increasingly central to the discussion on urban farming. And, while issues on the federal and state levels are important avenues for research to investigate various movements, it is the day-to-day workings of such movements that impact our daily lives. Communities must reconcile through the ordinance process the practicalities and challenges of allowing, or disallowing, changes to existing practices. Through the debate
that occurs at the local level over ordinances, there is an opportunity to study this movement of backyard chicken keeping as part of the larger food movement.

The contemporary food movement incorporates a variety of interpretations of similar goals. Local food, slow food, sustainable food, GMO-free and cruelty-free food are concepts that run through each section of the food movement. For example, Starr (2010) advances the idea that the local food movement is aimed at building “local food systems” which incorporates a number of ideals that other food movements hold “such as [considering] watersheds, sustainable farming, seasonality, heritage of biodiversity, and cultural preferences” (p. 484). Relationships are formed that do not rely solely on commerce, which is not the case at the local supermarket. However, do these ideals and groups, when combined, constitute a “food movement”? According to Pollan (2012), if there is an organized political force to make a specific change to the current food system, then the “food movement” is truly a social movement. Pollan’s observations refer to the national level of debate; however, local communities have already been debating many of these issues for a number of years. One of these issues is whether chickens should be allowed in an urban landscape.

Anyone interested in acquiring and maintaining a flock of backyard chickens must turn to their local municipalities to understand whether they are able to begin a flock. The municipality may allow, restrict, or stand mute on the subject. With the increasing popularity of backyard chickens, many are working toward changing local ordinances to allow these flocks.
Through the community debate regarding whether or not to allow backyard chickens, insight may be gained into the type of cultural narrative at play in the food movement. Making sense of the cultural features of social movements has been a focus of new social movement theory, and two concepts associated with this perspective are identity and class. This study will explore whether the viewpoints of those who are in favor or against flocks of chickens in the community are informed by class or identity considerations.

Individuals who have backyard chickens may identify themselves as a certain type of person. There are those out there who have chickens as pets (even keeping them indoors with a diaper [Lewis, 2001]); others may want to be considered to be “in” the food movement from a variety of perspectives, or they may identify as someone who situates themselves outside of the industrial food supply and does not trust large egg operations for a number of reasons.

Shifting to class, according to Wells, et al. (2011), the middle class spends a lot of time contemplating the food that they eat, and both flavor and nutritional value are important. However, working class considerations are decidedly different. Economies of time and money are at play. Wells and her colleagues also found that while flavor is important for members of the working class, it often comes at the expense of nutrition (e.g., junk food).

The backyard chicken and at-home egg production have not moved to a strictly elite status, however. Following Jordan’s (2007) suggestion that heirloom tomatoes “are
cultural objects” and are uniquely situated to be available to the elite as well as ordinary individuals, perhaps backyard chickens may also cross these class boundaries.

Jordan’s discussion situates the heirloom tomato as a symbol of elite status, of taste, as Bourdieu (1984) would say. The dialogue surrounding heirloom tomatoes has changed from the gardener’s exploits of the material aspects of growing and producing the tomato to the sensory aspects of “aesthetics and flavour [sic]” (Jordan, 2007:33). Jordan (2007:36) also points out, however, that even though the heirloom tomato has reached the heights of the most exclusive restaurants, the same tomato is still available to anyone with the ability to grow a plant and “may increase access by creating a greater demand for seeds and seedlings”. Therefore, the heirloom tomato may readily be on the table for both the elites as well as poor farmers.

This accessibility across class boundaries is one that can be replicated with the backyard chicken movement. These chickens seem to be taking on a similar elite status for taste as well as health reasons. Elites such as Martha Stewart and celebrity chef Paula Deen, for example, showcase their flocks for viewers as they tout the exceptional flavor of the eggs. And, for the 2012 holiday season, luxury retailer Neiman Marcus boasts a $100,000 coop inspired by the Palace of Versailles (Hickman, 2012). Magazines such as Mother Earth News (Long & Alterman, 2007) have written studies about the health benefits of free-range eggs versus conventionally raised eggs. Backyard chickens appeal to both “foodie” and the health-conscious individuals. And, since all but the rarest of breeds are inexpensive to purchase (most chicks range from $.99 to $4.00 each), chickens are accessible to anyone with a desire to raise them.
The purpose of this study is to examine the contemporary food movement as it is expressed in backyard chicken keeping and the efforts to regulate the practice through the local ordinance process with the conceptual resources of new social movement theory. New social movement theory proposes that there is more to social movements than the Marxist discussions of social movements. Rather than the struggles of the working class against the elites, new social movement theory suggests that in the post-industrial world, personal experiences and situations give rise to conflict. As Melucci (1980:219) explains,

Sexuality and the body, leisure, consumer goods, one’s relationship to nature -- these are no longer loci of private rewards but areas of collective resistance, of demands for expression and pleasure which are raised in opposition to the instrumental rationality of the apparatuses of order.

Rose (1997:478, 481) suggests that class culture is an important aspect of the new social movement theory, specifically, that middle-class culture seeks out movements that are of a “universal” nature or extend the “personal and/or career development of the middle class”. Further, the middle class has the resources to look past the immediate material need, which can restrict the working classes. And, according to Rose, the middle class can pursue interests that would not necessarily serve an economic purpose. In fact, owning backyard chickens is typically for the family alone and they are generally not raised to provide income or reduce costs. Rose (1997:481) further states that the middle classes generally have access to governmental agencies since most of those who are in the agency themselves are among the middle class. This access grants middle class individuals an audience within the governmental bodies that individuals from the working class would not normally receive.
Many backyard chicken owners believe that the flavor of their eggs is superior to supermarket eggs (Bender 2012; Bailey 2011; Price 2007). They note that the eggs have a better texture, are richer with a creamier yolk and are significantly fresher (due to the much shorter supply chain) than the store-bought varieties. This is attributed to the varied diet of the backyard chicken as opposed to the commercial feed that is fed to the chickens in the industrial food supply.

Furthermore, those that keep backyard chickens generally claim that their eggs are more healthful than the store-bought counterparts. (Salatin 2011; Long & Alterman, 2007). Studies conducted of industrially produced eggs against eggs from known free-ranged chickens indicate that as a whole there is less cholesterol and fat and an increase in vitamin A, omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin E and beta carotene (Long & Alterman, 2007). The claim, then, is that eggs produced by the backyard hen (who generally is able to eat more than just chicken feed) can be consumed knowing that it is a more healthful product.

It would seem that chicken-keeping, with the claims that the quality of the egg is better, or that it is more healthful to the family, would fit well within what is suggested in Rose’s theory. The middle class, with its extra time and resources to consider where food comes from and how it is produced, has begun to make conscious choices about its food consumption. They are, as Pollan (2012) puts it, “voting with their forks” and “building an alternative food chain”. Further, Pollan believes the food movement needs to move into politics for the food movement to be legitimate or it will continue to exist in the elite circles. And while Pollan was distinctly speaking of Washington, there have
already been numerous debates in city halls all across the country. These debates area also laying the groundwork for the larger statement that Pollan had hoped would be made in the upcoming election, with the electoral failure of Prop. 37 in California about genetically modified food labeling being one of the most obvious examples. While the national discussion is very important, it is the day-to-day discussions and debates that create the dialogue that the larger debates rely upon. Therefore, this research will be considering the discussion in one Midwestern city to look for emerging themes in its debate over backyard chicken keeping.

While there have always been individuals who have stayed outside of the mainstream when it comes to food, there has been an increasing number of people who have moved toward local food. Many of these people are not only purchasing food locally, but are looking for ways to produce their own food. Films like Farmageddon, and Food, Inc. have brought these lifestyles to the public-at-large and are likely influencing others to consider how they obtain their food. Author Barbara Kingslover (2007), in her book Animal, Vegetable, Miracle, chronicles her family’s challenge to eat locally for a year, producing much of their food themselves. Furthering the debate about local food is the discussion surrounding the reliability of government agencies’ assertions they can give unadulterated recommendations on what to eat and the safety of that food. As Nestle’s (2002) book Food Politics discusses, there is little unbiased advice coming out of the USDA or the FDA and this gives consumers little confidence in their ability to make good decisions about something as vital and necessary as nourishing one’s body.
As part of the backlash surrounding the questions regarding the safety and healthfulness of food that is purchased at supermarkets, the popularity of local food has risen. There has been a considerable increase in the number of farmers markets, CSA’s (Community Supported Agriculture), and interest in raising food and vegetables in just about every environment.

In 2012 the USDA reported an increase of 9.6% in farmer’s markets (self-reporting) which lists 7,864 markets on the Department’s National Farmers Market Directory (Agricultural Marketing Services). Michigan ranks fourth for its number of markets at 311, following California (827), New York (647), and Massachusetts (313) (Agricultural Marketing Services 2012). CSA’s are even more prevalent according to the USDA’s 2007 Census of Agriculture. The Census identified 12,549 farms that sell its wares through the CSA model (United States Department of Agriculture 2007). There was no corresponding designation in the 2002 survey which may indicate the rise in popularity of these types of farms. Finally, discussions surrounding backyard gardens appear frequently in the media, in part brought about by First Lady Michelle Obama’s garden at the White House.

As the popularity of farmers markets, CSAs, and gardening expands, discussions surround urban agriculture and urban farming are becoming a regular voice in the dialogue in many cities across the United States. While many of these locations focus on vegetables, more and more are including traditional farm animals in urban environments. As such, local governments are increasingly finding themselves faced with addressing these agricultural issues that were previously not thought to be urban issues. And, as
local governments debate and decide the fate of urban farming, the backyard chicken appears to be the unofficial mascot of the local food movement.

So, we ask, as the City of Grand Rapids was faced with the apparent rising popularity of the backyard chicken, who participated in the ordinance process in 2010 and what can we learn from this debate? In short, what can the disputes voiced in the ordinance process tell us about the “culture of the chicken” and the participants in the (local) food movement? What beliefs do we hear expressed in the argument to allow chickens within city limits? What viewpoints are communicate by those opposed to backyard chickens? With answers to these questions, we may begin to get a picture of the larger food movement and the beliefs that are embodied within it.

The organization of this thesis is as follows. Chapter 1 is the introduction, which includes a bit of background on the city of Grand Rapids, the history of the proposed backyard chicken ordinance, and the ordinance process in Michigan and specifics to the city. Chapter 2 discusses the local food movement with the history of the move from smaller farms to a large, complex industry that now produces our food. As a reaction to this industrialization of the food supply, organizations have developed a number of alternatives to procure food. Chapter 3 explores the literature on social movement theories, focusing on new social movement theory and its focus on class and identity within a particular social movement. Within the food movement, class and identity seem to align well with this theory and I investigate how the concepts of class and identity shape the local food movement.
Chapter 4 discusses the methods of my research. For this thesis I conducted an exploratory and descriptive case study. I gathered public materials from the City Clerk, the City Attorney, the media, and blogs on the internet. I then created a coding scheme that allowed me to capture pertinent information on each individual actor in the public debate. With that information I was then able to construct themes based on the arguments of the actors and compiled them according to the actor’s stance on the issue (for or against). At the same time, I also determined what actors would be considered to contact for an interview to allow in-depth insight into the process.

Chapter 5 reports my findings. I break up the findings first with demographic information of each of the wards in Grand Rapids followed by a description of the actors that were against the proposed ordinance. I then discuss each group of actors and the themes that were prevalent among that group. Next, I present the actors that were the proponents of the ordinance and follow again with the themes that were among each group. In Chapter 6 I discuss some of the implications of the findings. Applying new social movement theory, along with new ideas such as the creative class that were raised during the debate, I propose that while the movement failed in its objective, there does appear to be some elements of a social movement at the local level. Lastly, I raise some questions that were presented on review of the data and suggest avenues of further research based on these questions.
Background

The City of Grand Rapids

Grand Rapids is located in the southwest region of Michigan. After Detroit the city is the second largest in Michigan with a population of 188,040 in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau). The city is run by the Mayor and Commissioners. The Mayor is the head of the Commission and has a vote equal to any Commissioner. For purposes of citizen representation, the city is divided into three wards: Ward 1, Ward 2, and Ward 3. Each ward elects two commissioners to a term of three years. In 2010, Ward 1 Commissioners were Dave Shaffer and Walt Gutowski; Ward 2 Commissioners were Rosalynn Bliss and Ruth Kelly; Ward 3 Commissioners were James White and Elias Lumpkins. The Mayor, George Heartwell, and the Commission direct the City Manager, Greg Sundstrum, who in turn runs much of the city departments. The City Attorney (Catherine Mish), City Clerk (Lauri Parks), and City Treasurer (Al Mooney) all report directly to the Mayor and the Commission.

Much of the land surrounding Grand Rapids is agricultural. Many locals call this region the “bread basket” of Michigan. Drive in any direction outside of the city for a few miles and there will be farms with a wide variety of produce and livestock. According to the Kent County Visitors Bureau, with all of the agriculture surrounding Grand Rapids it has been “an early model for the farm-to-table movement” (experiencegr.com). Additionally, the Fulton Street Farmers Market, one of the more popular markets, has been in existence since 1922 (Fulton Street Market n.d.) and so busy on Saturday mornings it is nearly impossible to find space to park and walk through.
without being jostled about. This market is just one of eight farmers markets in Grand Rapids as of 2011 (Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council n.d.). A brand new venture, Downtown Marketplace, was just opened on May 4, 2013, with 80 vendors selling everything from produce to flowers and everything in between.

Additionally, the “foodie” scene for restaurants, bars, upscale coffee shops, and brews pubs is featured on the Convention and Visitors Bureau website (http://www.experiencegr.com/about-grand-rapids/hot-eats/) and in advertisements for Grand Rapids with the line “Cool City, Hot Eats.” This is a city where one can eat locally, know one’s farmer, and a quick drive can provide a quick assessment of the conditions of how one’s food is being raised (with examples of factory farms as well as smaller “mom and pop” farms).

This town does not just love food. This town adores good food. This town goes nuts for its ten-dollar-a-pound organic, free-range chicken breasts and eight-dollar-a-cup organic, fair-trade, sustainable, hand-picked just for them, coffee. Given the success of the markets, the restaurants, breweries, and high-end coffee shops, it is reasonable to say that many in this town desire high quality food. Knowing this background, then, the failure of the proposed ordinance creates a number of questions that give rise to this study.

**Ordinance Process**

To understand the events that took place during the debate over backyard chickens in Grand Rapids, it is helpful to understand the process by which an ordinance is created. While the Michigan statutes lay out a structure that municipalities must follow
to create an enforceable law, there is a space created by the statutes to allow individual municipalities to govern the process. Therefore, it is important to review both the statutes of Michigan as well as the Grand Rapids City Charter to understand the requirements to enact (or amend as in this specific example) an ordinance. Under the Grand Rapids City Charter, the City Commission is given authority,

[t]o pass all ordinances and regulations of every character to secure the public peace, health, safety, welfare and convenience, to regulate and license trades, occupations, businesses and amusements, and to exclude or restrict heavy traffic, the erection of business houses and the establishment of trades in residence districts within the City (Grand Rapids, Michigan Code of Ordinances, Part 1 - Charter, Title V, 52(a)).

An ordinance, or amendment, commonly begins with someone from within the governmental body recognizing a need to create the ordinance or amendment. Sometimes drafting an ordinance is done in collaboration with government officials, citizens and businesses that may be affected. With the information gathered from the public and private sectors, the ordinance is then crafted with some very specific guidelines spelled out in Michigan’s statutes (e.g. format) (Davis, 2004; Grand Rapids, Michigan Charter 1916, as amended).

It is possible, although it is not common, that citizens may initiate the process without government collaboration. For the city of Grand Rapids, citizens must file a petition with no less than twelve percent of registered voters signing the petition (Grand Rapids, Michigan Charter 1916, as amended). For this study, it appears that citizens initiated the process, but they consulted the City Commission and a commissioner,
Rosalyn Bliss, took the amendment on and therefore a petition was not needed (Schaut, 2010, Interview with Jen Wolfe; Personal interview with Lisa Rose Starner\(^1\), 2013).

Drafting the ordinance is a process that involves multiple parties. In this study\(^2\), the public committee that included Commissioner Bliss drafted a proposed amendment to an existing housing code ordinance. The Commissioner then forwarded the draft to the City Attorney, Catherine Mish. The city attorney’s job is to conform the proposed statute in accordance with state law and the city charter. It also appears that she solicited input from the city departments that would be affected by the change. She included the City Manager and the code compliance officer to determine if the proposed amendment would need any adjustment from their respective positions. She also did some of her own research with various external resources to find language and to address questions posed to her by city employees, residents, and commissioners. Once she had compiled this information, she reworked the draft and submitted it to Commissioner Bliss for her review and comments. Commissioner Bliss forwarded the new draft to the committee for input and a few points were clarified and adjusted (for example, language was added forbidding slaughtering chickens and the City Attorney put the ordinance in conforming language as required by the Michigan statutes). The draft was then forwarded to the full Commission.

Once a proposed ordinance is drafted, the Commission places it on their agenda and they deliberate and decide whether or not the proposed ordinance moves forward. If

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1 Lisa Rose Starner, personal interview, April 16, 2013, Madcap Coffee.
2 Electronic copies of the City Attorney’s email folder entitled “chickens” was provided to me for this study. These emails gave me a starting point to understand the history of the backyard chicken keeping ordinance. Further, a personal interview with Lisa Rose Starner also provided some pertinent information on the beginning of the ordinance. The data is outlined in more detail in the methods section of this thesis.
it does, then a public hearing is scheduled and public notice is posted. In this study, the Commission deliberated in their Committee of the Whole meeting, which was held on the morning of the city commission meeting on June 22, 2010, and Commissioner Gutowski objected to moving forward with the ordinance. Therefore, the proposal was placed on the regular agenda (as opposed to the consent agenda when the entire Commission is unanimous in its decision and votes on all items with one vote) and was discussed at the June 22, 2010, commission meeting (Commission Hearing, June 22, 2010). At the commission meeting, Commissioner Bliss presented the proposed ordinance and the Commission voted to set the proposed ordinance for public hearing. The Commission’s vote was 5-1 in favor of a public hearing with Commissioner Gutowski the only vote against.

A public hearing is held to include voices from the community. This is the time that the commissioners can hear what the public’s opinion is on a given issue. One does not need to be a resident or a business in the community to attend and speak. In Grand Rapids, individuals are given three minutes to speak regarding the proposal. The public hearing held on July 13, 2010, had the most commentary out of the three hearings. However, at each Commission Hearing there is a public comment portion when individuals can speak to the Commission regarding any issue. It is during these public comment portions of the June 22, 2010, and August 10, 2010, hearings that individuals approached (or re-approached) the Commission to express their views on the proposed backyard ordinance.
Once the public hearing has been closed (no further formal public comment can be gathered), the Commission is scheduled to vote on the proposal. This is the time where the Commissioners discuss the proposal and voice their opinions and make a decision. According to Michigan statutes, unless directed otherwise from the local charter (which is not the case in Grand Rapids), ordinances must be passed by majority vote. If there is a tie, which was the case in Grand Rapids due to an absent commissioner, the proposal fails.

If the ordinance passes, there is a publishing phase before it can go into effect. Once that has been completed, the ordinance is printed into the ordinance books and, from the date the new ordinance designates, goes into full effect.

Background on the Proposed Amendment to Allow Backyard Chickens

In 2009, Richard and Brenda Beerhorst and their family were raising chickens. That fall they received a cease and desist letter from the city of Grand Rapids indicating that there had been a complaint of unacceptable conditions on their property. Instead of finding a new home for their chickens, the Beerhorst family decided they wanted to change the City’s ordinance to allow chickens. The family contacted the City Commission, which seemed receptive to the idea; however, the Commission asked that the proposal come from the residents.

Jen Wolfe, who found a group talking about chickens in the city, attended one of the first meetings that eventually became the “Chicken Task Force” thinking it was about how to go about raising chickens in the city. She did not realize that it was illegal since
she knew so many who already had them. When she arrived, she realized what was happening and as someone who had raised chickens in the past, she became a part of the group. She explained that the Beerhorsts started the discussion when they received a notice to remove the chickens and they chose to challenge the ordinance. The Chicken Task Force group was created by residents responding to the City’s request that any proposed ordinance be spearheaded by citizens. The Commission asked the residents to provide the legwork for research and write up a proposal for an ordinance. Due to the number of people who attended the meetings of the task force, the members of the task force decided to break up the group into three committees: Ordinance Writing, Education, and Rescue (Schaut 2010).

However, according to Lisa Rose Starner, discussions of food justice and food security had been taking place for about 10 years prior to the 2010 vote on the backyard chicken ordinance. She, and others, saw this opportunity to bring chickens into the city as a good option for people to increase their own food security. Ms. Starner corroborated Ms. Wolfe’s recollection of the events leading up to the formation of the “Chicken Task Force” (Personal interview, 2013). Ms. Starner added that there was a lot of collaboration over email and occasionally they met at Founders over beer (Founders is a trendy microbrew pub).

The Ordinance Writing Committee met with Commissioner Rosalyn Bliss and they drafted an ordinance that was ultimately sent to the City Attorney, Catherine Mish, for review (See Appendix A). Ms. Mish solicited input from city departments and the city manager, asked clarifying questions to Commissioner Bliss, and suggested revisions
based on this information as well as her legal expertise. The bulk of Ms. Mish’s suggestions fell along the lines of conforming the document appropriately to the required statutory language. However, she did expand on the approval process for adjoining neighbors, the permitting process, the occupancy status of owners, and the size of coops and space for chickens and can be viewed in Appendix B.

Commissioner Bliss attempted to place the proposed ordinance on the Commission’s agenda in February of 2010, but at the last minute it was called off due to the burden of working on the City’s budget during difficult economic times. Once the bulk of the budgetary issues had been handled, Commissioner Bliss again requested that the proposed ordinance be placed on the agenda in May, but it was then pushed to June 15. Commissioner Gutowski, however, was out of the country that day and insisted that it be placed on the June 22 agenda. At last, the proposed ordinance was placed on the agenda. A few people spoke at this hearing regarding the proposed ordinance. Some in favor, others opposed. When the vote came up, Commissioner Gutowski was the sole “no” vote for setting the proposed ordinance for a public hearing. He reasoned that there were currently code compliance issues and the proposal would add more problems with compliance.

The public hearing was held on July 13, 2010. That night, the 200-seat room had few available seats available to the number of individuals standing in the back. Mayor Heartwell interrupted the hearing to help those standing who wanted to sit find a few of the remaining open chairs. The discussion at this hearing was overwhelmingly in favor
of the proposed ordinance. The vast majority of the opinions given (both for and against) on this proposed ordinance were at this particular hearing.

The final hearing regarding this ordinance was held on August 10, 2010. At this hearing, the plan was to vote on the proposed ordinance. There was some discussion earlier in the day that the Commission would delay the vote to investigate a reality television show, *Dirty Jobs*, and its airing of a chicken problem in Miami, Florida. Many of the Commissioners informed *The Grand Rapids Press* that they expected to delay the vote to better address issues raised by citizens and to find out more about what happened in Miami. Lisa Rose Starner was informed, however, by Commissioner Bliss earlier that day that the proposal was not going to pass. The vote to delay split the Commission 3-3. The city charter requires a majority vote to have an effect on any action of the Commission, without the seventh member of the Commission, the proposed delay could not pass. The missing Commissioner White was acting in a movie being filmed in the nearby Jenison, *Touchback*, where he played the assistant coach.

At this hearing, there were fewer citizens that spoke regarding the proposed ordinance. This time, however, the majority that spoke was not in favor of the ordinance. Commissioner Bliss then moved to amend the ordinance to address concerns regarding coop location relative to other buildings and again the Commission was split 3-3, meaning the amendment failed. Finally, the proposed ordinance came up for a vote and that failed, too, at a 3-3 vote. With the failure of the ordinance, chickens would not be legally allowed in the city. Those chickens currently residing in coops across the city
would remain outlaws and their human companions subject to enforcement actions by city agents.

The Proposed Ordinance

The proposed ordinance that was presented to the Commission would have created a guideline for city residents if they chose to raise chickens in their backyard. (See Appendix B).

Lisa Rose Starner provided some insight into the ordinance planning committee’s process of deciding what to put into the ordinance. She indicated that the citizen committee came together because the City had asked that citizens take over this proposal. The group was willing to take on the responsibility and attempted to find the best solution that would be acceptable to most everyone,

‘Fine, in good faith, we’ll organize, we’ll benchmark, we’ll call local municipalities, that match, you know, cities of our size. . . . [W]hat can we design that’s reasonable, that would be reasonable in implementation and scope.’ My master’s is in public administration so thinking about it from the city’s perspective--what’s reasonable, what’s manageable, what’s doable, what’s--you know if we do a permit process what’s--what are the resources actually to fund a mandate or fund this structure, how can we at the time, you know, social media, how can we use free platforms as an education piece that local advocates run. . . . How can we be there to help this policy be successful so it does not add burden to the city staffers. And, and something that also in good faith is good for the birds, good for our neighbors. So that’s kind of the—if that gives you a little bit of an idea of how that’s—that push, how did it end up on the docket to be voted on. (L. R. Starner, personal interview).

City Code Compliance Manager, Virginia Million, however, had a different view of the process and the underlying beliefs that the framers of the proposed ordinance held. According to Ms. Million, the group wanted to have “free range chickens,” and “[t]hey
all want to be able to slaughter their animals;” further, by leaving the ordinance vague, “roosters, ducks, geese, goats” will fall under the “farm animals” reference (Email correspondence to C. Mish, January 25, 2010). Ms. Million also indicated that the group wants to have egg sales; however, they “changed the term ‘sale’ to barter” when told they could not sell their eggs (Email correspondence to C. Mish, January 25, 2010). The group also did not want any setbacks from homes, they wanted to build against their homes or garages. Neighbor approval was contentious and according to Ms. Million it was a struggle just to get the group to agree to “50% permission” of neighbors (Email correspondence to C. Mish, January 25, 2010). The word “hen” could be construed to mean other types of fowl, including pea hens, and she reiterated that the ordinance needed to be sure that meat versus egg hens were specifically designated (Email correspondence to C. Mish, January 25, 2010). She also expressed that the group did not seem to think that the ordinance would truly mean anything if it passed. She said, “not only do they already have chickens, they have expressed that the number of chickens we would allow means nothing to them either. If they want more they will have them” (Email correspondence to C. Mish, January 25, 2010).

Commissioner Gutowski held the same attitude as Ms. Million (he was forwarded a copy of her email with this information during the debate) in a telephone conversation with me this year. He said that the “group really wanted to slaughter and have other animals” and no one really wanted to talk about it except him (Telephone communication, January 20, 2013).
The final draft of the ordinance set a five year probationary period which would have at least been revisited by the end of the five year period (or sooner if circumstances demanded it). Five hens could be kept without a permit, however, if desired and approved (by both the city and fifty percent of adjacent neighbors), a permit could be requested to allow more than five. A fee would be attached to the permitting process and reapplication would be required each year and would not be transferrable. No roosters would be allowed. Chickens could only be kept by an individual living at that specific residence (i.e. no absent chicken-keeping). Chickens would be kept confined to a coop, no free-range chickens, and in the backyard with construction to prevent rodents and predators from entering the coop. Food bins were to be weather and rodent resistant. Chicken owners were held to the same standards of health and safety as owners of other pets. And, lastly, there could be no slaughtering of chickens at all.

As stated above, this study will attempt to identify the “culture of the chicken” as a social movement and to consider whether class and identity play a part of being chicken owners. These cultural attributes may help explain the larger food movement and begin to cast light onto the movement that has little discussion surrounding it in the literature.
CHAPTER II

LOCAL FOOD MOVEMENT

Trying to get a solid description of the contemporary food movement is a lot like trying to herd chickens. You may be able to corner one of them, but the rest of them migrate to a different spot, where you may, again, only be able to get a hold of one of them. Similarly, the many types of movements that fall under the name of “food movement” are many and take some time to navigate and understand. Allen et al., (2003) say that this decentralization of the food movement may be challenging to study, but its distributed nature lends strength to the overall movement.

To begin to understand this decentralized food movement, it may prove helpful to start with a brief introduction to the history of the agrifood system and what the status of the industry is today. At the turn of the last century, over a third of Americans were involved in farming in some way (Lobao and Meyer 2001). Schupp and Sharp (2012:94) state that the rise of the “professional farmer” and technology that became widespread in the mid-1800s gave urban residents nourishment without the time expended to maintain a garden and space needed for both vegetables and livestock.

As technology advanced and the farmers had the ability to cultivate more and more land, the farm population decreased dramatically in the mid-1900s. (Lobao and Mayer 2001). From 1945 forward, machinery replaced workers, petroleum-based fertilizers become widespread, and monoculture (raising only one plant or animal) took
hold (Pratt 2008). In 1910 the percentage of individuals living on a farm was 34.7%, by 1960 that percentage had dropped to 8.7%, and in 1995 that number had plummeted to 1.8% of Americans living on a farm; conversely, the average number of acres of a farm increased from 138 in 1910 to 438 in 1995 (Labao and Mayer 2001:108). Labao and Mayer (2001:106) further state that nearly all farms in the country (98%) are categorized as family farms, and even most corporate farms are held by families. However, in 1997, the “top 3% of farms . . . accounted for more than half of all sales nationally” (Labao and Mayer 2001:106). And some mid- to small-sized farms, in their struggle to stay viable, turn to contracts with larger agribusiness companies. However, “[w]hile only 3% of farms operate under production contracts, they produce almost all poultry, half of all hogs, and a quarter of cattle” (Labao and Mayer 2001:109). These numbers begin to bring into focus the reality of how food security issues can arise. Considering the volume of food that would need to be grown or raised by just 3% of farms begins to shed light on how difficult it can be to control the quality of food. Many times contagions are not discovered until after the meat or produce has been combined with other products at the production facility and by then it is challenging, at best, to contain the contamination.

DeLind and Howard (2008) describe the challenges in the current food supply chain to identify and track down the source of tainted spinach in the *E. coli* O167:H7 outbreak of 2006. The supply chain from producer to consumer has become extremely complicated and quickly tracing the source of an outbreak becomes impossible. The outbreak of 2006 lasted for six to eight weeks, encompassing at least 26 states. “It took a week to accurately identify the distributor (Dole, via Natural Selection Foods) of the *E.
coli O157:H7 infected spinach and where it had been grown . . . Finding its actual source would take far longer” (DeLind and Howard 2008:302). In the end, it was six months after the outbreak to locate the farms, and then the researchers could at best speculate as to the source of the contamination. (DeLind and Howard 2008). DeLind and Howard identified 30 brands of bagged spinach and 13 brands of products that included spinach were recalled. This was traced back to a processing plant that gathers and processes spinach from hundreds of contract farms. (See Figure 1, DeLind and Howard 2008:304).

Far from the bucolic pictures that appear on packages of food, the United States’ contemporary food system is primarily enmeshed in large-scale production creating many of the problems with food safety that the public is concerned about. As a result of the tainted spinach, legislation was presented to Congress requiring more regulation and guidelines which, according to DeLind and Howard (2008), favor large scale operations and also puts the onus on the same groups and technologies that originally failed in the spinach contamination.

Feenstra (2002) explains that large corporate farms have the ability to produce food with great efficiency. However, this production has come at a cost: ecologically devastating the land with large-scale mono-cropping, pesticide use, and concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs). The economic cost of the small farmers from this practice is, in many cases, the loss of the farm. The resulting situation is that fewer and fewer farms are feeding us. The corporatization of the production and distribution of food has lead to great efficiencies in the food supply. However, this corporatization has also created issues relating to the safety of food (DeLind and Howard 2008), access to
food (Feenstra 2002), separation between the community and the farmers as well as a degradation of the flavor and wholesomeness of food (Feenstra 2002).

It is in response to these central concerns that much of the food movement has emerged. With each issue, there has been a reaction which seeks to counter one or more of the problems produced by the current food system. Feenstra (2002:100) discusses these “alternative food and fiber systems”,

These alternative systems may be characterized as more environmentally sound, more economically viable for a larger percentage of community members and more socially, culturally, and spiritually healthful. They tend to be more decentralized, and invite the democratic participation of community residents in their food systems. . . . They attempt to recognize, respect, and more adequately compensate the laborers we often take for granted -- farmworkers, food service works, and laborers in food processing facilities, for example. And they tend to be place-based, drawing on the unique attributes of a particular bioregion and its population to define and support themselves.

Allen et al., (2003:62) would label Feenstra’s “alternative food and fiber systems” as “alternative food initiatives” and state the issue in a different way, “AFIs seek to construct and portray alternatives to the construction and reproduction of hegemonies of food (and agriculture) in the conventional food system”.

The variety of responses to the contemporary food structure is, as Henderson (1998:113) believes, “swelling into a significant social movement” and she agrees with Allen and her colleagues that the diversity of the movement is beneficial. Researching this diverse movement, however, has the challenge of making sense of the parts that make up the whole of the movement. In Table 1, I have re-categorized Allen, et al. (2003:64) attempt’s to lay out the “core forms” of various AFI research on movements
instead placing the focus on the subjects discussed by the primary researchers in the literature.

As can be noted below, the primary theme that runs through nearly each food movement is a rejection of corporate agribusiness by moving toward a local food supply chain. Allen et al., (2003:63) argue that,

New locally situated and decentralized agrifood initiatives are framed as counter-movements that challenge the control of corporations and other national and global institutions and resist the ecologically and socially destructive practices of the contemporary global agrifood system.

DuPuis and Goodman (2005:361) also advance the theory that “[l]ocalism becomes a counter-hegemony to this globalization thesis, a call to action under the claim that the counter to global power is local power”. And, by countering the globalization of the food supply, environmental and social justice problems can be addressed and righted (DuPuis and Goodman 2005).

Further, local food brings visibility to the farmers producing the food and allows the consumer to know his or her farmer (Feagan, 2007). “The natural conditions of food production can be restored as inherent spatial elements in agro-food systems, in contrast to industrializing food systems which are seen as displacing nature as a factor of production” (Feagan 2007:25). Food becomes “re-imbedded” within the locale within which it is created (Feagan 2007:28).
Table 1

*Subjects and Authors of Alternative Food Movements*

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<td>College-level educational farms</td>
<td>Feenstra (1997)</td>
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<td>Community food security coalitions</td>
<td>Lacy (2000)</td>
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<td>Community gardens and cooperative organizations</td>
<td>Pretty (1998)</td>
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<td>Community land trusts</td>
<td>DeLind (1994)</td>
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<td>Sustainable agriculture</td>
<td>Lacy (2000)</td>
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Most importantly, the local food system for many creates a reflexive food economy that is “regenerative” and creates a “public culture of democracy” (DeLind, 2011:279). This allows residents located within the community to offer input about the food they purchase as well as to develop an understanding of the farmer and the work it takes to produce the food. This process is expected to engender not only a relationship between the consumer and farmer but also interconnections within the community as a whole (including the farmer within the network). This relationship, as explored in Europe in the context of the value-laden ideas of quality, turns to trust in the food by way of minimizing the food chain (Feagan 2007; Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000). Pratt (2008) counsels, however, that there should be some skepticism in this assumed trust as local does not inherently create honest farmers.

Another challenge with growing the local food system is that it narrows the range of farmers to “elite niche markets for relatively small numbers of specialized producers” (Mount 2012:108). Likewise, there is a problem on the other side of the table; a local food economy may only be reached by those who can pay for the privilege of real food (Goodman 2004; see also Guthman 2008; Slocum 2006; and Hinrichs and Kremer 2002).

While the local food movement literature discusses the economics, social justice, environmental impact, and community aspects of producing and purchasing food within the local “foodshed,” one aspect of the local food economy is noticeably absent. There is little discussion in the literature regarding the self-sufficiency features of the food movement. What is more local than the backyard? Certainly a backyard cannot feed an entire community; however, individuals worried with the quality, safety, and security of
the food in the contemporary food supply may also turn to their own devices for at least some of the food they consume. There is very nearly no literature discussing vegetable gardens or raising animals to provide for the immediate family.

One study has discussed home gardening and the social reasons for doing so. Schupp and Sharp (2012) present the history of home gardening and analyze the 2008 Ohio Survey of Food, Agriculture and Environmental Issues to see if there is a correlation between home gardening and a variety of independent variables. The study found a positive relationship between economic hardships, environmental behaviors, and participation in local food systems. The study also found that social status, measured as household income, did not alter the odds of having a home garden. This study’s key finding was that rural locations were not necessarily a key factor in home gardens controlling for spatial features of a residence. Schupp and Sharp conclude that there should be more research done on the connection between participating in local food systems and home gardening. They ask the question, “Do home gardeners come to the local food system movement or does the local food system movement incline folks to be home gardeners?” (Schupp and Sharp 2012:103).

There are, save one dissertation (Blecha 2007), no studies that speak specifically to raising backyard chickens as part of the local food system, food security, self-sufficiency, or any permutations thereof. As Shupp and Sharp (2012:103) observe, home gardening “is strongly associated with a bundle of other household local food system activities”, so too one would expect that raising chickens and other livestock would also be associated with the local food movement. To remedy the gap in the literature and to
entertain the hunch that backyard chickens contribute to the local food movement, this study will closely examine activities associated with the democratic junction between local food initiatives and individual contributions to the local foodshed.

According to Blecha (2007), there is no demographic data regarding backyard chicken keepers. We can only look to accounts written in the popular media to develop a rough sketch of the participants in the movement. While Blecha (2007) also points out that there are cultural (e.g., recent immigrant status) examples of urban livestock, there also appears to be an uptick in popularity of backyard chickens among middle to upper class homes. Flanders (2002:D1) reports that chicken sales to “urban residents by one of the country’s largest breeders is up 25 percent” and that chicken coops that cost upwards of $2,500 are popular. Further, Bhatia (2002:W1) confirms that McMurray Hatchery’s (a popular chicken breeder) shipments of baby chicks to upscale zip codes has risen by “25% in the past two years,” and $1,500 “Henspas” by a company in Virginia have increased sales by 15%.

The reasons for raising backyard chickens in an urban environment are varied; health, hobby for children, entertainment, and a desire to live an agrarian lifestyle are reported by various newspapers. Chicken keeping for health is generally regarded as the higher quality of the egg produced due to the care of the owners; however chicken owners claim a calming effect after a hectic day (Bender 2012; Flanders 2002). Some parents find the responsibilities of raising chickens are an excellent way to teach children responsibility (Fleming 2005; Flanders 2002). Still others find chickens to be entertaining or “very cool pets” (Bhatia 2002:W1; Flanders 2002). For urban residents,
having chickens allows them to feel as if they have a small taste of country living without having to forgo the city lifestyle and living “in the middle of nowhere” (Fleming 2005:9).
CHAPTER III

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

According to Touraine (1985:730), “social movements should be conceived as a special type of social conflict”. There has to be an opposition for a conflict to be created; therefore, it cannot just be a trend or rise in popularity. Further, a movement “expressed directly and practically appears here as principles, ideas, or convictions which are relatively separate from actual practices” (Touraine 1985:762). Keeping backyard chickens can certainly create a social conflict and run counter to the prevailing practices, especially in an urban setting. Neighbors may not carry the same enthusiasm for the chickens and challenge the legality of owning fowl within city limits (Bhatia 2002).

As Buechler (2011) contends, social movement theory as a discipline in sociology was not fully developed until the end of the 1980s. Social movement theory was thought of as an offshoot of efforts to explain collective behavior, or later as part of political theory. As singular events for specific purposes, social movements and resulting theories surrounding them did not emerge clearly in sociology for much of its history. To state it another way, “. . . perhaps it could be said that with the development of political sociology in the 1950s, social movements went from ontological orphans to foster children of the discipline. It would take another decade of social change and two decades of theoretical development before they became full-fledged members of the family” (Buechler 2011:90).
While social movements may have been “ontological orphans” in the early history of sociology, we can find foundational principles in classical theory that are still relevant in current social movement theory,

Marx, Weber, and Durkheim predated the subdivision of sociology into specialties such as collective behavior and social movements. They did not use the generic category of social movements as a basis for systematic theorizing about the causes, processes, and consequences of collective action. . . . [However,] [t]hey represent three largely distinct paradigms for understanding collective action. As a result, their work has informed many subsequent schools of thought and lines of research in the field of social movements (Buechler 2011:55).

Therefore, to understand current theories, an overview of the history of social movement theory is needed. Buechler (2011) will be used as a guide to this review as his book has been described as a thorough, even-handed depiction of both the history and theory of social movements (Li 2012). Utilizing this volume as a foundation to create the structure of this chapter will fashion a reliable background upon which to build further discussion.

**Karl Marx**

Karl Marx’s concepts lay the foundation for many sociological theories, not the least of which is social movements. “Rightly or wrongly, Marx saw himself not prescribing for a future mobilization of working-class resistance, but rather describing existing challenges” (Buechler 2011:10). “Marx is therefore something of an accidental theorist of social movements. . . . He was . . . shaped by a broader intellectual climate that promoted socialist solutions to capitalist problems and advocated working-class mobilization as the key to implementing such solutions” (Buechler 2011:10-11).
Additionally, Marx’s theory on the alienation of labor, according to Buechler (2011:11), is a “structure theory of social movements”. It is the “structure” of society as a capitalist one that inherently creates conflict that workers revolt against. Buechler (2011:11) also states that the alienation of labor is also a “relational theory of social movements” due to the “polarization between classes” and subsequent solidarity within them” that is an essential aspect of movements. Labor is what makes us human and we recreate ourselves in our work. Capitalism removes our capacity to act on our understanding of the world. It deforms the natural process of labor and the humans within the system. “Alienation is better measured not against the past but rather in terms of the governing gap between the human potential for self-directed labor and the deformations that capitalism imposes on this potential” (Buechler 2011:12).

Further, Marx’s discussion on labor theory of value as well as surplus value and exploitation lends itself to the social movement dialogue. Marx’s view of labor, exchanged for wages, creates an exploitive environment that profits the capitalists. Nowhere better can this be seen than in the field laborer working for minimum wage (or less) for a large corporate farm. This exploitation also provides some understanding regarding the reasons why social movements begin; out of “structurally rooted conflicts of interest, Marx’s dissection of capitalist dynamics provides a logically compelling account of how such conflicting interests generate collective action” (Buechler 2011:15).

Marx’s views on class have had long-standing influence on social movement theory. Class models began when people who were similarly situated began to come together and see themselves as a distinctly different group, for instance, those that
worked for a living and those that profited from others work. These groups, called classes, would then begin to advance their specific material needs which would create conflict between them and begin the process Marx called class formation. The formation “culminates with political organization. . . . classes-for-themselves are most fully developed when they become politically organized” (Buechler 2011:18). While Marx’s theory as a “factual prediction” has not shown to be a tool to predict development, it has shown itself to be quite useful as a tool to explore society (Buechler 2011:18).

Marx’s theories are helpful in the study of social movements with his theory of class formation, which according to Buechler (2011:22) is easily “generalizable to other groups,” his understanding the “centrality of social conflict in social life,” and his discussion regarding how conflicts arise between groups. These ideas have had widespread appeal to the study of social movements.

The proposed backyard chicken ordinance in the Grand Rapids community emerges as a debate (discussed more in depth in the findings chapter) between those in control of the production process and the labor class (residents who wanted to raise their own chickens). The poultry industry and the city governance, including employees of the city, the county, neighborhood associations, as well as the local newspaper upheld the poultry industry’s stance which was at odds with many residents who challenged the existing ban on chickens in the city. The industry wanted the laborers to leave the business of raising eggs to them, while the laborers wanted to be independent of the industry and have their own eggs. Apparently, the classic struggle over the mode of production is still relevant today.
Sociology Versus Political Science

As sociology and political science began to become more sharply defined at the beginning of the last century, and each discipline began to associate itself with particular types of study, social movements theory such as it was at the time was left behind. Political sociology began to take shape in the Columbia School in the early 1950s. During this time sociology took a quantitative turn with new methodologies and techniques for data collection coming onto the scene. European thought also contributed with Heberle and his book *Social Movements: An Introduction to Political Sociology*. “Heberle conceptualizes a social movement as a social collective whose intention is to change the patterns of human relations and social institutions that characterize a society” (Buechler 2011:77). Here we can see Marx’s discussion of class being applied to social movements. Heberle also used Weber’s theory of ideal types to consider motivations for an individual’s participation in social movements. (Buechler 2011). However, Heberle did not want to discuss the psychology of the individual; rather, he wanted to understand the societal picture. “Heberle contends that most movements revolve around social classes. Class position, however, does not guarantee class consciousness or political organization, and there are many reasons why the correlations between class, consciousness, parties, and movements are imperfect” (Buechler 2011:78).

Political sociology followed Marx’s lead on class as the primary component of social movements (Buechler 2011). This arm of sociology saw social movements carried out on a group’s “interests and ideologies, as gaining solidarity through conflict with out-groups, as pursuing goals that reflected class interests and status politics, and as part of
much larger processes of social change as they interacted with each other and the larger political system” (Buechler 2011:89). Yet, political sociology, as argued by Buechler (2011), did not fully study social movements in a holistic way. Instead, social movements were a cause of larger political issues, not a study unto itself.

Resource Mobilization Theory

The social upheaval that is attributed to the 1960s brought about a change of thinking regarding social movements (Buechler 2011). This change rejected the collective behavior theories in favor of more specific ideas on social movements as a force in and of itself, and it also removed the irrational behavior theory that had hung on for so long (Buechler 2011).

One of the theories that came out of the shift in social movement dynamics is resource mobilization theory. This theory defines social movements as “opinions and beliefs that represent preference structures for change” (Buechler 2011:117). However, for the preferences to become a movement, resource mobilization theory “focuses on the preexisting organization and integration of those segments of a population which share preferences” (McCarthy and Zald, 1977:1218). Additionally, securing involvement in a movement is dependent on what an individual will see as the cost and benefits of participation (Gameson 1975; McCarthy and Zald 1977).

Yet, according to Perrow (1979), resource mobilization theory almost immediately became two theories, one that focused on the political process and one that was primarily based in economics. The political split eventually became known as the
political process theory, which basically claims that the strength of a social movement is not solely based on its own organizational capacities; the movement’s success is bound up with government’s position on the debate surround any change. Resource mobilization as it is now known is, on the other hand, grounded in the economic model of explaining social movements (Buechler 2011). Resource mobilization treats social movement organizations as “business firms organized into industries and sectors” as a means to study them (Buechler 2011:124). It is resource mobilization theory’s “premise that both individuals and organizations must not only secure resources but also calculate the costs and benefits of alternative courses of action” (Buechler 2011:124).

However, resource mobilization theory “has been criticized for not explaining individual choices, for not giving sufficient weight to grievances, and for viewing incentives and resources alone as sufficient causes” (Oostveen 2000:794; Ennis and Schreuer 1987).

Political Process Theory

As discussed above, political process theory split from resource mobilization theory almost as soon as it had started. Political process theory views social movements thorough political conflict and distances itself from resource mobilization theory by way of grievances. Whereas resource mobilization did not view grievances as a way to explain social movements, the political process saw them as an important partner to the role of creating a movement. Grievances are, in this discussion, a point of contention between the movement and the established governance. One key factor in analyzing a
movement within this theory is to understand the connections between the movement and society at large which includes governing bodies (Johnson 2000).

In Grand Rapids, it would appear that the grievance by the residents is the inability to raise chickens within city limits and was the impetus to change standing ordinance. Many individuals within the citizen-led group believed that this was a “slam dunk” since many individuals that were interested were “educated [and] cautious” and appeared to point to a consensus that this grievance would quickly be resolved (Rick Beerhorst, Commission Hearing, June 22, 2010).

The backyard-chicken discussion does appear to fit better within this theory than with resource mobilization based on the central grievance as well as the loosely organized citizen-lead group. This was not a highly organized group and from what I could glean from the data, I did not see much in the way of a participants engaging in a cost-benefit analysis for participating in the movement.

Framing and Social Construction

The theory known as social constructionism or framing came about in response to social movements in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Not satisfied with the analysis of resource mobilization or political process perspectives, social construction saw room for discussing “framing, signification, and culture more generally” (Buechler 2011:156). Further, Buechler (2011:156) states that through framing and social construction theories social movements became “objects of analysis in their own right rather than subsuming them under the broader category of collective behavior”.
While some of the theories discussed above could be utilized to analyze the
backyard chicken movement, these theories do not consider aspects such as identity of
both the individual participating in the movement and of the movement itself. Further, as
Touraine (1985:778) explains, post-industrial society is moving away from a publicly
controlled (“means of production”) life to a private sphere (which includes the “ends of
production”) that alters “our body, our sexuality, [and,] our mental life”. To this end, we
look to new social movement theory for the cultural explanations, specifically discussions
on class and identity, of social movements.

New Social Movement Theories.

According to Steven Buechler (1995:441), new social movement theory is one
“alternative to the resource mobilization perspective”. Resource mobilization theory uses
the “catchwords” of “[o]rganization and rationality” (Cohen 1985:676). New social
movements instead,

focus on grass-roots politics and create horizontal, directly democratic
associations that are loosely federated on national levels. Moreover, they
target the social domain of ‘civil society’ rather than the economy or state,
raising issues concerned with the democratization of structures of
everyday life and focusing on forms of communication and collective
identity (Cohen 1985:667).

This theory, based out of Europe, is “in large part . . . a response to the inadequacies of
classical Marxism for analyzing collective action” (Buechler 1995:441). And, unlike
collective-behavior theory which advances that groups form out of “nonrational or
irrational response to change,” new social movement theory argues that “conflictual
collective action is normal, and that participants are usually rational, well-integrated
members of organizations” (Cohen 1985:672-673). Cohen (1985:699) asserts that Touraine agrees that social movements are not unusual; rather, they “make up the fabric of social life” and that “the way a society produces its cultural orientations involves both social conflict and social relations of domination”.

Additionally, Touraine (1977, 1992) looks at Marx’s class discussions on the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in a different light. While still viewing them through an economic lens, he views the struggle now to be between consumers (the “common people”) and capitalists (the “business elites”) (Kozinets 2004:693). Kozinets (2004:693) characterizes Touraine’s view of social strain comes about from the prevailing “consumer culture”. Therefore, in today’s society it isn’t the modes of production that create social unrest, it is, instead, composing and maintaining one’s identity (Kozinets 2004, Touraine 1977). Modern movements would be likely to find a strong connection within the consumer base challenging the “managers” of society (Kozinets, 2004:693).

My study on the Grand Rapids debate can be refined from my earlier discussion of the actors within the debate under Touraine’s theory. The poultry industry can be recategorized from the owners of the mode of production to the capitalists or business elites. The remaining groups opposing the proposed ordinance: the government by way of the Commissioners, employees of the city, a county representative, neighborhood organizations, and the local newspaper can be moved to a more precise category of managers--acting on behalf of the capitalists to assert its dominance. The residents supporting the proposed ordinance can now be categorized as Touraine’s consumers.
With the rearranging of these categories, it becomes more apparent that the poultry industry needs consumers to continue to consume. Becoming self-reliant or independent is not in the industry’s interest and would be a strong motivator to prevent even this small step away from consumption.

Class

With the rejection of the classical Marxist theories on social movements, the question regarding the importance of class within social movements becomes one of debate. Buechler (1995:453) states that “there is no consensus on how this social class [that new social movement theory draws from] should be defined or whether the concept of class should remain central to the definition of the movement’s base”. Cohen (1985:667) states that the individuals participating in the new movements do not define themselves in “terms of a socioeconomic class”. “Most observers agree, however, that they come primarily from the ‘new middle classes’ . . .” (Cohen, 1985:667).

Traditionally class within social movements as been defined in economic terms. The working class has been the primary player as it fought the business owners for a variety of issues (better wages and safer working environments are just two examples). However, as the nature of work has changed, so too has the definition of class for new social movement theorists. Rose (1997) defines the new middle class as individuals who are in positions of management or professionals who have, through their education and experience, the skills and abilities to shape their work and direct others and who are part of a growing segment of the work force.
However, while there is an economic component based on labor, the changing work environment has brought in new constraints over “consumption, services, and social relations” (Rose, 1997:467). In fact, an argument has been made that consumption, or consumerism, is actually a better description for class. Touraine (1971) explains that work is no longer the defining characteristic in understanding class; instead post-industrial society’s consumptive practices is a gauge by which we should examine class. Touraine (1971:7) suggests that individuals are pressed to conform to “consumption and education” which feed into the “systems of social organization and power”. He further goes on to address the idea that alienation is a form of social control on an individual creating “dependent participation” which attracts, “manipulates and enforces conformism” (Touraine 1971:9). “For the mass of semi-skilled workers [e.g., the middle class], participation in the culture is no longer based on professional life or traditional social role, but on consumption of items and products produced for the entire society” (Touraine 1971:197). While the upper classes define themselves more by “cultural characteristics” than their economic value or profession, the middle class is defined by consumption which “allows much more potent diffusion of behavior and taste which strengthen control” (Touraine 1971:206).

While Touraine views consumption strictly as a means to control the middle classes, Ansori (2009) states that consumption by the middle classes is more than a single event in time (when one purchases an item) and is not just a by-product of becoming middle class; rather, it is integrated within the system that produces the middle class
itself. “Through lifestyles and consumption, people manifest a kind of class consciousness in a very practical way” (Ansori 2009:89).

Lifestyles of the middle class can be seen in both the conformist point of view (e.g., what sort of clothes to wear, and restaurants to frequent) as well as a rejection of certain values (e.g., industrial food). Touraine suggests that alienation can be used as a gauge to measure if individuals are distancing themselves. Through the lens of alienation we can see “social conflict between those who run things and cultural values” (Touraine 1971:10).

McAdams (1982) argues that for social movements to come into being, cultural values are an essential part. Without these values, McAdams (1982:51) calls them “broad socioeconomic processes”, the movement is without a foundation upon which the other aspects of social movements (what McAdams labels “expanding political opportunities” and “indigenous organizational strength”) can grow into “cognitive liberation” which then becomes a social movement.

For his part Rose (1997:463) suggests that “social class shapes distinct cultural subsystems that order consciousness, organize perceptions, define priorities, and influence forms of behavior”. Therefore, while class may not be the rallying circumstance that defines a social movement, it instead works quietly behind the scenes shaping thought and action.

Rose (1997:478) explains that social class is the reason why movements begin in the first place. Individuals in the middle class generally have the ability to devote time and resources towards a movement. These movements may not be based in hard
economic realities; rather, they are focused on issues that are “universal”. By “universal”, Rose means issues that are rooted in moral issues such as the peace, environmental movements.

These universal ideas can also be related to raising chickens in the backyard. Owners describe that they like the idea that their flock is getting fresh air, able to roam the yard, and are “happier than those at mass-production chicken farms” (Bailey 2011:C3). Further, there are chicken clubs that strive to maintain “heirloom breeds and not allowing birds to mingle and produce mutts” (Druse 2005:F7). And while Blecha (2007) points out that there are certainly individuals who keep backyard chickens as part of a cultural norm, the rise in popularity in backyard chickens within the ranks of the middle to upper classes fits well within the discussion of class and new social movement theory.

**Identity**

While the importance or location of class in new social movement theory is debated, identity is generally regarded an important foundational aspect of the theory. Melucci (1980:220) asserts that new social movements rely on “direct participation” and reject representation. The very nature of the new movements relies specifically on identity and, therefore, this direct participation is an integral part of the collective action. Identity is discussed primarily in social movements as specific to an individual. Personal identity, according to Melucci (1980:218) is rooted in the “biological, psychological, and
interpersonal” structures of an individual an is where the foundation of social movements begins.

Reuter (2011:155), agrees that these new movements “offered their (mostly young) participants a way to self-identify around a cause . . . . They challenged the politics of the time and searched for new ways to reach the public”. Cohen (1985:694) takes this further and states that the participants not only could identify, but they “became aware of their capacity to create identities and of power relations involved in their social construction” and that they “strive to create a group identity within a general social identity whose interpretation they contest”. In essence, the participants in new social movements have the social capital to understand their unique situation and put that to good use.

Interestingly, Blecha (2007) also has found an identity formed among Seattle backyard chicken owners, contrasting themselves against people who show chickens. Blecha (2007:39) calls the chicken owners “New Urban Chicken Keepers” or “NUCKs” for short. She describes “NUCKs” as: they have small flocks (not more than 12 chickens), keep the chickens for their utility (eggs, meat, and manure), they do not necessarily have any contact with chickens as children but have decided to keep them in the city, the chickens are not kept to make any money, and they can generally be regarded as “hobbyists” (Blecha 2007:40).

One “NUCK” interviewed, Audrey, saw what she does as quite different from another chicken group--those “who raise animals for show” (Blecha 2007:40). The backyard chicken owners are perceived as urban, and individuals who “show” as rural.
She believes that the rural group thinks that the urban group are “goofballs” and that there is a disconnect between the two (Blecha 2007:40). According to Flanders (2002:D1), the backyard chicken “attracts a certain type of person. It’s more of a connoisseur pet”. In fact, as Blecha (2007:25) points out, Martha Stewart’s “flock of blue-egg-laying Auracana hens has captured the imaginations of many fans of her magazine and television show”.

Conclusion

Social movement theory, particularly new social movement theory, appears to be particularly relevant to the events that surrounded the proposed backyard chicken ordinance in Grand Rapids. As mentioned above, Touraine’s re-conceptualization of Marx’s original class categories is particularly relevant. The poultry industry, as the re-imagined capitalist or business elite publicly pushed very hard against the proposal and those that were in the management positions also lobbied against passage. As discussed below in the findings section, residents speaking publicly against the proposal were few in comparison to residents who spoke in favor. The residents, regardless of specific income brackets, fall within Touraine’s definition of consumer. These individuals were fighting to produce some of their own food but in the end ultimately failed in the attempt.

An unexpected turn in the discussion came when some residents used the term “creative class” as a way to convince the Commission to pass the ordinance. Apparently, there are many municipalities that are trying to draw individuals who are members of this group. Similar to Rose’s description of the new middle class, the creative class, coined by Florida (2002) are individuals who are in management or professional positions that
allow self-direction. From the data gathered in this study, individuals also appear to readily identify as part of the creative class.

As noted by new social movement theory, individual identity is an important aspect of one’s participation in a group. There are a number of factors that could motivate people to participate in the backyard chicken-keeping proposal (personal history and envisioning oneself as an “urban farmer” are two examples). These identities are deeply personal and create a foundation upon which individuals decide to become part of a movement. Answers might be provided from a close study of one effort to keep chickens in an urban location.
CHAPTER IV

METHODS

Case Study

As stated earlier, the questions considered in this study are: who is participating in the ordinance process specifically as it relates to urban chicken-keeping? How do the concepts of identity and class as defined by new social movement theory contribute to the local food movement? By answering these questions we may be able to come closer to understanding the local food movement.

This single-case descriptive case study will incorporate a convenience sample as it explores the debates surrounding one Midwestern city (Grand Rapids, Michigan) and the arguments regarding backyard chicken-keeping generated during the ordinance process. A case study is appropriate, even “preferred when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (Yin 2003:1).

According to Yin (1993:5), case studies can be “single- or multiple-case studies” of which there are three types: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. Exploratory case studies are inductive wherein the researcher gathers the data and makes inferences and draws out themes as the data are analyzed (Yin 1993). Explanatory case studies review “cause-effect relationships” (Yin 1993:5). A descriptive case study, on the other hand, “presents a complete description of a phenomenon within its context” (Yin 1993:5).
However, Yin (1993:21) cautions that a descriptive study does not mean “[l]et’s collect information about everything;” data collection has to have a direction, what Yin describes as a “descriptive theory”. A descriptive theory is a guide to the “scope and depth of the object (case) being described” (Yin 1973:21). This guide will then create the parameters of the data collection and, if strictly followed, prevent a wandering eye toward outside information. Once the theory is in place, then consideration must be given toward what types of data can be collected. For my study outlined the documents (discussed below) that I believed would bring as full of a picture as possible regarding the discussion surrounding the proposed ordinance.

The unique aspect of case studies is that it incorporates more than one point of data collection. Yin (2003:83, 85-86) states that “there are six possible sources of evidence for case studies: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts”. In fact, Kohlbacher (2006:23) goes so far as to call this type of information gathering a “strength” for case studies. Gillham (2000:20) views the variety of data points as one of the unique features of case studies and that “[a]ll evidence is of some use to the case study researcher, nothing is turned away”. Once the scope of the study has been determined, then any data gathered that fell within that scope is brought in and considered.

“[D]ata may then be organized around certain topics, key themes or central questions, and finally the data need to be examined to see how far they fit or fail to fit the expected categories” (Kohlbacher 2006:27). Ultimately, the goal of the case study is to

Selection of Case

This convenience sample is based in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which is geographically close to me. Further, a backyard chicken ordinance was considered (and ultimately failed) in 2010. Consideration was given to a second city for comparative purposes that was close in population and located in the Midwest. However, a potential problem with controlling state law may influence not only the ordinance process, but the potential ordinance itself, was enough to limit the study to the state of Michigan at this time. A second city within Michigan was also considered, again for comparative purposes, but due to the volume of data acquired in Grand Rapids and the time constraints for this thesis, I decided to limit the research to a single case.

Gathering of Media and Ordinance Process Data

Sources

As discussed above, for a case study, multiple sources should be considered to get as complete a picture of the case as possible. I gathered the following information:
News Media: Television And Print

Each source covered the proposed ordinance process. The *Grand Rapids Press*, the primary newspaper for Grand Rapids, provided news coverage and an editorial on the debate. Further, letters to the editor, printed in the paper, contributed additional voices to the debate. WOOD TV8, one of Grand Rapid’s local television channels, also provided news coverage on the hearing and the decision.

In addition to the commercial television, Grand Rapids Public Access television presents community discussions with the Mayor of Grand Rapids, as well as at least one of the City Commissioners. Since these shows discuss relevant issues for the city, discussions regarding upcoming ordinances as well as public questions to these officials has been informative.

Official Records from the City Clerk

The city clerk holds all of the documents entered into the official record during City Commission meetings, letters sent to the City Manager, and the official proceedings (agenda and minutes, and recordings of the hearings). Three hearings were held: June 22, 2010, which introduced the proposed ordinance; July 13, 2010, the public hearing, August 10, 2010, when the vote was held. This information has been instrumental to understanding what the proposed ordinance was and to clarifying objections to or agreement with the proposed ordinance. Further, letters from the public to the City Clerk were combined together with the other public opinion discussions for analysis.
Recordings of the Commission Hearings, provided by the City Clerk, will be transcribed and the transcripts analyzed with regard to public opinion and any commission discussion or response to the debate.

**Documents from the City Attorney**

Documents compiled by the city attorney’s office while the proposed ordinance was written, prepared by both citizens and actors within the various governmental agencies, were helpful to understanding what considerations were made (whose voices were heard) while constructing the ordinance.

**Electronic Media**

Aside from the prominent newspapers and television, there are small, local newspapers and blogs that discussed the issue. These were included in the analysis to provide as complete a picture as possible. An internet search engine, Google, was employed to locate these data sources with its advanced search feature at: http://www.google.ca/advanced_search. Specific descriptors of “Grand Rapids, MI,” and “chicken,” “urban chickens,” “chicken ordinance” were used to locate media specific to the city and the topic at hand.

**Select Interviews**

Once the data were compiled and reviewed according to the analytical plan, which is detailed below, select individuals were contacted and interviewed to supplement the public documents.
Preparation for Analysis

The case study utilized qualitative content analysis to identify whether and how the themes of class and identity are at play in the chicken keeping debates of Grand Rapids. Audio and video from the Commission Hearings was transcribed for ease of coding, but visual coding was not conducted. Documents gathered from the other sources listed above were also reviewed as they relate to the themes.

According to Krippendorf (2004:41), “[c]ontent analysis can handle unstructured matter as data”. While some data methods impose a heavily structured data gathering scheme, content analysis largely copes “with texts in a diversity of formats associated with different purposes . . . and cannot fully anticipate the terms and categories used by the sources of their texts” (Krippendorf 2004:41). While this may create some disadvantages relating to interpretive value of the analysis, the “chief advantage of the unstructuredness of content analysis data is that it preserves the conceptions of the data’s sources, which structured methods largely ignore” (Krippendorf 2004:41, emphasis in original).

Identifying Themes in the Data

In utilizing a thematic content analysis, I treated the individual contributors to the debate about the chicken keeping ordinance as the unit of analysis. I was focused especially on those I considered to be “important actors”. To be considered an important actor, the individual must do more than just make a quick foray into the process. The actor should have a sustained presence, one that carries some weight or at least garnering
more attention than others. For this study, an important actor is one who appeared in three separate areas of the data. Therefore, repeatedly showing up as an interviewed individual in the newspaper, but failing to speak at the hearing or to contact a public official, for example, did not constitute an actor as an important one for purposes of this study. If the data not support three separate instances, I planned to consider two instances. Conversely, I planned to add additional venues if the there were too many actors identified in three venues.

For each important actor, a host of information will be identified in the source document as follows:

a. Venue (hearing, interview, letter, etc.)
   b. Individual or group?
      i. If group, business (what type?) or citizen formed?
      ii. What is their interest in the proposal?
   c. Position taken? (for or against ordinance)
   d. Reasoning for position (why for or against)
   e. Location of actor (if given)
   f. Importance of actor.

Rounding out a picture of each key actor in this manner has allowed for a fuller picture of the debate about chicken keeping in Grand Rapids to emerge. Venue refers to the mode of transmission of an actor’s opinion (a hearing, for example), while the individual/group distinction establishes the capacity in which an actor was speaking. The heart of the analysis has centered on the position and reasoning for the position articulated by each actor; this information has permitted me promising views on the role of identity and class in the chicken keeping debate. Finally, location of actor, which refers to the place where
the actor resides\textsuperscript{3}, and the “importance of the actor”, which refers to the number of instances he or she has been identified in the data, has yielded insights on individuals and groups that were at the forefront of the debate.

The study began by transcribing the audio portions of the three commission meetings of June 22, 2010, July 13, 2012, and August 10, 2010. Television broadcasts and radio broadcasts specifically related to the proposed ordinance on urban chickens in Grand Rapids were also transcribed. Written materials were included for review, but were not transcribed.

Once the data was all in written form, then each item was analyzed for the four items above in relation to the actors. As each item was read, every important actor identified was given their own card with their name and location (if given) placed on the “master card.” Then, after a second pass through the data was made items a-e listed above were written on the master card.

As each source was analyzed, master cards were created as new actors entered into the data stream. When a previously identified actor appeared, the master card was be noted (date and venue) and another card was attached with the same a-e categories being noted for the new venue. This process was repeated until all data sources were exhausted.

\textsuperscript{3} Initially, I had planned on plotting the location (either by ward or address) of each actor to potentially locate the actors in neighborhoods and wards. My hope was to find a pattern of those opposed versus those that were in the proponent group. However, as the cards were filled out it became clear that while there were some that gave their information freely, many did not and with a relatively small group (hovering around 100) I thought that the loss of even a handful of individuals’ demographic information would become problematic with drawing conclusions.
Once data collection of all sources had been completed, then section f took over. The master cards were scrutinized for frequency of appearances, noting the venues as they related to the previously identified categories. At this point a determination was made as to limit the important actors to those identified in three separate instances in the data. I separated the actors into proponents and opponents of the proposed ordinance. I then looked at individuals within these groups for the number of distinct instances they appeared in the data. I had two actors in the opponent’s section that stood out, Commissioner Gutowski with four appearances and a combined presence of Herbruck’s Poultry Ranch with five appearances. On the proponents side, I had two actors with four distinct appearances, Lisa Rose Starner and child Makel Geiss. I chose not to contact the child since I expected that three year old events for a then nine year old would be challenging to recall. I also considered that a parent might not allow access to interview their child. When I designed the study, I did not anticipate the heavy involvement of children in the process and was surprised to find a child as a top actor. Instead, I chose Rick Beerhorst, who had three separate instances, and whose family challenged the ordinance when they were fined for raising chickens.

Once identified, I attempted to contact these four actors. Emails were sent to break the ice to Herbruck’s Poultry Farm, Commissioner Walt Gutowski, resident and food activist, Lisa Rose Starner, and resident Rick Beerhorst who had originally decided to challenge the ordinance. I received responses from Ms. Starner and Mr. Beerhorst to the initial inquiries. I conducted an interview with Ms. Starner on April 16, 2013. I was unable to connect further with Mr. Beerhorst as he did not respond to a second email, nor
a follow up telephone call. Commissioner Gutowski, who had responded back in January in less than 48 hours to an email inquiry regarding email correspondences to the Commissioners, did not respond to my second request for an interview. Herbruck’s also never responded, nor did I get any return calls on my messages. Therefore, I am left with my interview with Ms Starner and my telephone conversation with the Commissioner, for which I took notes during and immediately after the conversation. While this does limit the ability to create a broader picture of the events that took place, both of these conversations afforded some interesting insight into the debate.

After determining who my prospects for interviews would be I then directed my attention to sections b-d to determine if there were any prevailing themes in the data. Through this process, I was able to explore if class and identity, as defined through new social movement theory, are a part of the local food movement, as it relates to the city of Grand Rapids and their debate on urban chickens.
CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

In this chapter I will lay out first the demographics of the wards, including the geographic locations, comparison between each wards’ population by way of race, education level and employment. Poverty levels and income distributions among the wards are also discussed in this section. Next, I consider the opposition to the chicken amendment beginning with identifying the groups that were involved in the discussion. I then move to an examination of the general themes expressed against the proposed ordinance. After that, I consider how these themes are associated with specific groups that were active in the debate. Subsequently, I begin the discussion of the proponents of the backyard chicken ordinance beginning again with an overview of the groups involved and the general themes expressed in the public dialogue. Finally, as with the opponents, I conclude this chapter with an assessment of the proponent’s themes and their relation each specific group.

Demographics of Wards

The Community Research Institute compiles demographics at the ward level for the city of Grand Rapids. The distribution of the population by race, education level, and employment is provided from the United States Census Bureau’s 2010 census. The percentage of residents in poverty by ward is based on the United States Census Bureau’s
2000 census which was the latest information constructed for each ward that is currently available.

**Geographic Locations of Wards**

Appendix B is a map of Grand Rapids and helps to understand the location of each of the three wards. The map outlines the city limits without delineating each of the wards. The location of the wards is described below.

The First Ward is located to the west of the city. The majority of the geographic area is west of the Grand River while about a quarter lies to the southeast of the river within the city’s boundaries (See Appendix C). The two Commissioners of the First Ward voted against the proposed backyard chicken ordinance.

The Second Ward lies within the northeast of the city’s boundaries. The ward’s boundaries are east of the Grand River and extend north and east to the furthest boundaries of the city. The southern boundary lies along Wealthy Street and a small section of Lake Street, with the rest of the southern border at the end of the city limits (See Appendix D). The two Commissioners in the Second Ward voted in favor of the proposed ordinance, along with Mayor Heartwell.

The Third Ward is the southern-most ward; its northern border is shared with the Second Ward along Wealthy Street while it joins the First Ward on the western border. The southern and eastern borders extend to the city limits (See Appendix E). One Commissioner, Elias Lumpkins, voted against the ordinance and Commissioner James
White was not present for the vote. He later released a letter indicating he would not have voted in favor of the proposed ordinance.

**Comparison of Demographics of Wards**

To understand where the residents from each ward are situated, it may be constructive to review the demographic data for each ward. This may also give some insight into my theory regarding class and backyard chickens. Variables from the Community Research Institute have been selected for an understanding of each ward as shown in Table 2.

Each ward is close in its respective total populations, with 3,164 separating the first (highest population) and third (lowest population) wards. The second ward falls within the middle of the two. More telling, however, is the density of the population per square mile, with a 1,068.8 difference between the third ward (highest density) and second ward (lowest density). So while the first ward has the most population, the third ward has the most residents per square mile, indicating a more tightly packed community.

The distribution of race also shows some interesting differences. I am not reporting the full extent of the racial distribution as the other races are three percent or less in all wards. In the First Ward, white individuals are the majority at 54%, but the Hispanic or Latino/a population is 29.8%, while the African American population is only 11.3%. The Third Ward’s population is even more equally distributed with 48.2% of the population being white, 36.1% are African American, and 9% Hispanic or Latino/a. In
sharp contrast to the First and Third Wards, the Second Ward’s distribution is 74.0% white, 13.7% African American, and 7.3% Hispanic or Latino/a.

Further, 25.4% of the First Ward’s population has no high school diploma, 47.2% have a high school diploma or GED equivalent, only, 13.9% have a bachelors degree as the highest degree earned, and 6.8% have a graduate or professional degree. Therefore, 72.6% of the population does not have a secondary education. The Second Ward fares a little better with 11.7% having no high school diploma while 46.8% have a high school diploma or GED equivalent, 21.0% have a bachelors degree as the highest degree finished, and 11.9% have a graduate or professional degree. The Second Ward has 58.5% of its population without a secondary education. The Third Ward falls in just behind the Second Ward in terms of educational attainment, with 16% of its population without a high school diploma, 44.2% with only a high school diploma or GED equivalent, 19.9% with a bachelors degree as the highest degree finished, and 12.7% having finished a graduate or professional degree. The Third Ward, however, just surpasses the Second Ward at 60.2% of residents without a secondary education.

The Second Ward also appears to have more of its population employed than the other two wards, 85.5% employed and 14.5% unemployed, with the Third Ward at 82.9% employed and 17.1% unemployed and the First Ward lagging behind at 80.9% employed and 19.1% unemployed. However, there is no indication as to what type of employment for the residents for each Ward.
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<th>First Ward</th>
<th>Second Ward</th>
<th>Third Ward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>64,464</td>
<td>62,276</td>
<td>61,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Density (per square mile)</td>
<td>4,011.5</td>
<td>3,896.9</td>
<td>4,965.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of White residents</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>48.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of African American residents</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Hispanic or Latino/a residents</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with No High School Diploma</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with High School Diploma or GED</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with Bachelors as Highest Degree</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with Graduate or Professional as Highest Degree</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Civilians Employed</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>82.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Civilians Unemployed</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Below Poverty</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lastly, the percentage of poverty for each ward in 2000 indicates that the Second Ward is better off than the other two wards as well. The First Ward was the highest with 17.3% of its population at the poverty level, the Third Ward was next at 15.4%, and the Second Ward had 14.3%.

A clearly defined line regarding education, poverty, and income, however, cannot be drawn easily. Estimates from the American Community Survey, compiled by the Community Research Institute at Grand Valley State University (2013) cover a five year window from 2007 through 2011. According to these estimates, the Third Ward has the highest median income at $38,801.87 while the Second Ward is close behind at $38,456.78 and the First Ward comes in last at $37,034.80. When income levels are broken down into ranges, the Third Ward consistently tops the other two wards with the highest number of households whose income is $100,000 or more, but it also has the most people in the $15,000-$19,999 and $30,000-$34,999 income ranges. On the other hand, the Second Ward leads at these income levels: $10,000-$14,999; $60,000-$74,999; and $75,000-$99,999. The First Ward has the upper-hand from at the less than $10,000 income and then $20,000 through the $29,999 and $35,000 through $49,999 income brackets.

Therefore, the Third Ward has a higher median income range than the Second Ward, which would follow given its percentages of secondary education levels. However, it is interesting since the Third Ward surpasses the Second Ward with its poverty and unemployment levels. We will return to these demographic data following
the presentation of the qualitative data below as they will provide some insight into the proposed ordinance on backyard chickens.

**Opposition to the Ordinance**

**Actors in the Opposition**

In all of the venues, twenty-seven separate individuals spoke out against the ordinance. Table 3 indicates the distribution of interests that opposed the ordinance. The largest group of interested parties was residents themselves (nine) who spoke against the ordinance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of individuals</th>
<th>Interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Herbruk’s Poultry Ranch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Local neighborhood associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Commissioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Michigan Poultry Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Editor of <em>The Grand Rapids Press</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kent County Health Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>City of Grand Rapids Code Compliance Officer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, one poultry farm, Herbruk’s Poultry Ranch, located in Saranac, Michigan, coupled with a representative of all Michigan poultry farms, the Michigan Poultry Alliance, closely follow the residents in number of representatives speaking against the ordinance with a total of six.
The local neighborhood associations that represent their respective neighborhoods came in with the same number of representatives as the poultry industry. One neighborhood association forwarded a letter that combined responses from their residents on both sides of the issue. While the associations claimed to speak for the neighborhood as a whole, one resident indicated he had not come across anyone in his neighborhood that held the same view as his neighborhood association,

I live on the northwest side, a little bit north of the zoo there. And, uh, I haven’t yet talked to any—I’ve talked to quite a few of my neighbors and haven’t found any of them that are against it. I think perhaps the Association was against it but I don’t know, I don’t know how that worked out. But, um, I, uh, a lot of my neighbors, in fact all of them of every side, I think thought it was a pretty neat idea (J. Neil, Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

The Commissioners that voted against the ordinance came in next with the four that opposed the measure. The earliest public discussion from Commissioner Gutowski (First Ward) indicated that he was opposed to the ordinance almost immediately. Commissioners Shafer (First Ward) and Lumpkins (Third Ward) later voted against the ordinance. A few weeks after the vote Commissioner White (Third Ward) wrote an open letter revealing his stance on the proposed ordinance, indicating he would not have voted for the ordinance.

The editorial in *The Grand Rapids Press* (2010:A15), while not expressly stating an opposing viewpoint, certainly raised issues that were slanted toward that view. The paper indicated that chickens were “historically zoned out [of the city] because they are better suited to rural areas.” and that the “Commissioners should be convinced that keeping chickens won’t create a nuisance or a health hazard”.

Dave Kraker, as a representative of the Kent County Health Department, wrote a memorandum that indicated its stance against the proposed ordinance, claiming that the budgetary constraints of the department would require it to seek remuneration for complaints it handled for the city (Memorandum to Cathy Ravesky, June 23, 2010).

Lastly, Virginia Million, a Code Compliance Manager with the City of Grand Rapids, wrote to the Cathleen Mish, the City Attorney, that her office was opposed to the ordinance based on budgetary constraints (Email communication to C. Mish, January 25, 2010).

Opposition Discussion and Thematic Results

In the discussion against the proposed ordinance, 11 separate themes arose. The themes are indicated in Table 4. Each theme poses a distinct concern raised by the opponents of the ordinance.

Potential Health Risk/Disease

One of the primary issues appeared to be the health risks to humans and potential from the potential spread of disease. Many of those raising questions over health risks repeatedly brought up the issues of avian flu and salmonella transmittal. These ideas were expressed primarily by Herbruck’s Poultry Ranch and supported by the Michigan Poultry Alliance.

The first thing we do not want to forget that the pandemic for avian influenza which was just a few months ago which threaten [sic] our nations. Having a chicken--our poultry--or poultry around the city here is
going to [be a] melting pot for different types of viruses which it can increase very high level of the flues seasons which comes specially for younger children and olderly [sic]. . . . Over in Vietnam and south Asian countries ‘til today they spent millions of dollars to try to get rid from their mistake [of] having birds in the backyards. (M. Mousa, Commission Hearing, June 22, 2010).

Table 4

Frequency of Themes in Discussion Against Proposed Ordinance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Potential health risk/disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Code enforcement issues (both current and potential)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Just not in favor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Odor/sound/rodents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Chickens belong in country/move to country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Budgetary concerns (re: City budget)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Protect local farms/business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Densely packed neighborhoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Possibility of loose chickens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Chickens are work/responsibility/need clean-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kids grow up/bored/novelty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the risks that needs to be recognized is salmonella. It doesn’t matter [if] it its one egg or one million eggs, salmonella is a high risk bacteria to the bird and to humans. Consuming eggs with salmonella or handling a sick chicken can spread disease to humans and pose especially high risk to children (H. Herbruck, Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

I think what we want to support is finding a way that we can protect people from chickens and chickens from people because both need to be done. Biosecurity is the key issue. Avian influenza sounds like a big serious problem, as several people have suggested because it’s monitored so carefully, it probably doesn’t represent the risk that salmonella represents (G. House, Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

There were, however, other health woes such as asthma that resident Robert Pelton expressed in her statement to the Commission at the public hearing on July 13,
I have an issue and it is not avian flu, it is something that in layman’s terms is called bird fancier’s asthma and it is extremely transmittable. Approximately all of poultry workers get it every year but it masks itself as cold and flu symptoms . . . that is a real condition and I have three asthmatics in my household. My next door neighbor lives—there’s 14 feet between our houses, the space of my driveway plus 2 ½ feet it will actually force us to move because of health reasons.

**Code Enforcement Issues**

Code enforcement was a dilemma for many. Discussions regarding lack of enforcement for current (at the time) code violations came through in many discussions. Many then extrapolated the lack of code enforcement at the time and overlaid that to the future of potential chicken owner violations that would not be resolved. As will be noted below, many residents already kept (and still keep) chickens in violation of current city code.

Commissioner Walt Gutowski, at the June 22, 2010, Commission Hearing where he voted on setting the proposed ordinance for public hearing, reported that “currently code compliance is a challenge and this will add to it”. This belief was reiterated at the July 13, 2010, public hearing by Margo Johnson, a representative of the neighborhood association known as SWAN (South West Area Neighbors), when she lamented that current code violations with homes and pets were not being handled.

Resident Pete Wayland also voiced his apprehensions at the July 13, 2010, public hearing, saying that while chickens “were an absolutely brilliant idea”, he was worried about those individuals who “don’t wanna [sic] follow your rules” and added later in an interview that the “city can’t afford the enforcement” (*The Rapidian*, July 13, 2010, interview). In a letter to the editor, resident Diane West expressed her opinion that,
We have enough of a problem with irresponsible and uncaring animal owners and because of it, shelters are overloaded with animals that have no home. We don’t need to add to the problem with people dumping their no-long-wanted chickens off at shelters, or just letting them roam loose to fend for themselves (*The Grand Rapids Press*, 2010:A9).

This stance was also adopted by resident Nola Steketee in which she indicated there was no supervision of the many cats and dogs loose in the city (Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010).

**Just Not in Favor**

Some of the participants were not in favor of the ordinance but did not give much in the way of supporting reasons. Jesus Solis, in his letter to the Commission, wrote simply, “I am not in favor of chickens within city limits” (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010). Bunny Swank thought “I thought it was cute when that one family in the *Press* were enjoying their chickens so much. . . . I would not want any chickens even on my street though” (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010).

The Commissioners came into this category more strongly since many of their statements were against, but with not much discussion as to why they were against it. Commissioner Shafer said “The pulse of the community is that some [constituents] say ‘yes’ but more [are] saying ‘no’” (Commission Hearing August 10, 2010). Commissioner Lumpkins reported he “would have to reflect the desires of the 3rd Ward residents and vote against” (Commission Hearing August 10, 2010). Commissioner Gutowski recounted that his children participated in a program at the Blandford Nature

---

4 Garfield Park Neighborhood Association.
Center that had the “chicken experience, but it stayed in the classroom” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

**Odor/Noise/Rodents**

Issues of potential odors, sounds, and predators and rodents also ranked high with the group of detractors. Many were fearful of the potential smell (especially from unattended coops), the noise that the chickens could make, as well as the possibility that rodents (primarily mice and rats) and predators (such as raccoons and dogs) could wreak havoc in neighborhoods,

...I grew up on a farm, my dad raised 100 chickens and a dozen turkeys at a time. I know first-hand they’re dirty, they’re smelly... (R. Boss, Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010).

The Kent County Health Department, in its June 23, 2010, memorandum to the Commission, expressed problems with “nuisance conditions from improperly maintained areas: flies and odor” which would facilitate a follow up from the Health Department, the Housing Commission, and perhaps the police. They also indicated that “improper feed storage can create issues with mice, rats, and raccoons” and complaints would be followed up by the Health Department and Housing Commission.

Another quandary expressed in the editorial written in The Grand Rapids Press was that noise and odor that may be generated by the birds. Resident Nola Steketee also voiced her worries regarding smell and pests generated by chickens in an urban setting,

You had come before you seven chickafar [sic]—chicken farmers and explain the problems and possible disease, smell, flies, etc., when people are living so close together and chickens are roaming in the area (Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010).
Some opinions came from personal experience as one resident discussed conditions he had experienced in South America,

I used to live in South America, I lived in Venuzuela, I lived in Peru. I’ve traveled all of South America. My neighbors in Peru and Venuzuela had chickens. Right next to my house. . . . I also have a concern about rats and mice. I know that my neighbors had rats and mice. . . . There are a lot of situations that come up when you have chickens in the city. I can attest to it because I lived next door to it for many years. The flies, we personally had fly papers hanging all over our house because of the flies that came from next door. And the rats, and the mice. (B. Van Ravensway, Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

**Chickens Belong in Country/Move to the Country**

A fair number of individuals expressed that chickens are not a city animal. These individuals believed that if someone really wanted to have chickens so badly they should move to the country where there would be room without bothering close neighbors. One resident went so far as to say that,

Some people NEED to be different, unusual or special and not follow social norms. Some of the chicken advocates seem to fit this description. . . . People who need to ‘break the mold’ by raising chickens, conducting unlicensed home occupations or otherwise exceed the limits of the place that they’ve chosen to live should find a better place to live (G. Janik, email communication to Commission, July 16, 2010).

He concluded his email by stating “Vote no, let them move to the country” (G. Janik, email communication to Commission, July 16, 2010).

Resident John Butler supported Mr. Janik’s point of view by stating in his letter to the Commission, “Chickens are farm animals. If you must have chickens, move to the country” (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010).
City Budgetary Concerns

For many municipalities, 2010 was a challenging year for their budgets. Grand Rapids was no exception. In fact, at the June 22, 2010, hearing, the Commission had just finished a months-long budget process that resulted in some difficult decisions and city employees volunteering to take a pay cut and additional concessions to help balance the budget. It was with this in mind that many individuals, commissioners, residents, and neighborhood organizations questioned the feasibility of the proposed ordinance and expressed their concern that allowing this ordinance to proceed would be detrimental to the city’s budget. For instance, the Kent County Health Department claimed that with their budget constraints they would seek to recover costs associated with responding to violations (Memorandum to C. Ravensky, June 23, 2010).

Protect Chicken Farms/Local Business

The only group that brought up potential problems regarding local poultry farms was the industry itself. Herbruck’s Poultry Ranch and the Michigan Poultry Alliance wanted the Commission to be aware of their opinions should the ordinance be passed.

George House, Executive Director of the Michigan Poultry Alliance, indicated at the July 13, 2010, public hearing that within a 40-50 mile radius of Grand Rapids is “ninety percent of all poultry producers with over $300 Million in annual gross sales.”

As a fourth generation farmer, Brandon Herbruck asked for controls to be put in place to protect his family farm (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Greg Herbruck, one of
the current owners of the farm, voiced his beliefs regarding the proposed ordinance as well,

We’re specialists in egg production. We spend a lot of time and effort at this. It can put our business at risk. We employ 400 people in Ionia County but again this is--birds don’t know any city limits (Commission Hearing, June 22, 2010).

Much of the fear regarding business was expressed in relation to potential risk of disease passing from city flocks to factory flocks 30 miles away.

**Densely Packed Neighborhoods**

This theme was a primary dilemma by the neighborhood organizations. The representative maintained that there were not enough restrictions in the proposed ordinance to keep coops at a reasonable distance from neighbors’ homes. Margo Johnson, a representative of SWAN, spoke at the July 13, 2010, public hearing and voiced the organization’s views,

In this, in our neighborhood, as you know, our homes are very densely packed, um, the homes are built many times almost to lot lines so when you have an ordinance that says 50% of the backyard and this is your backyard, you’re really densely packing the chickens and so that particular, um, you know part of the code. . . . I don’t think the code as it’s been presented here as the SWAN Board said, fits a neighborhood like ours where we have densely packed homes.

Roberta Pelton from the West Grand Rapids Neighborhood Association, also indicated that the lot sizes were too small and the end result would be an impact to health (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Resident Bunny Swank said that she “just can’t imagine a space for chickens” in the city (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010).
Possibility of Loose Chickens

Nearly every group that composed the opposition had at least one person raise questions regarding the possibility of chickens getting out of their pens and wandering around in neighbors’ yards, roadways, or generally running amuck. The Grand Rapids Press asked “who is responsible for chickens who get loose?” (July 1, 2010). Commissioner Lumpkins indicated in his objection to the ordinance that “some people feel that the community will be overrun with loose chickens” (The Grand Rapids Press, August 10, 2010). Resident Delores Sneed was also worried about chickens getting loose and causing problems with neighborhood dogs (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010) and Nola Steketee worried about whom to call if chickens were to escape from their coops (Commission Hearing August 10, 2010).

Chickens are Work/Responsibility/Need Clean-Up

Some individuals thought that future chicken owners would get bored with the chickens and begin to neglect the maintenance of the coop. They expressed opinions that chickens were a responsibility and would need to be looked after for more than just a few weeks or months. Gene Janik summed it up when he asked, “What happens to all the droppings and other detritus connection with their chicken operations? . . . HOW specifically are these ‘farms’ cleaned on a regular basis? Where does the ‘stuff’ go?” (Email communication to Commission, July 16, 2013).
**Kids Grow Up/Bored/Novelty**

Related to the last counter argument, a few individuals thought that urban chickens were a “novelty” that would wear off after a short time. Once that novelty wore off, then what would happen to the chickens? George Herbruk stated at the June 22, 2010, Commission Hearing,

> I think this is, this is a novel idea. It’s a feel-good idea to... [change] the housing code to have poultry in the backyard. ... And so I think I just wanted to make sure everybody understood that this is a novel idea. It’s--we look at it as a luxury.

Resident Robin Bass went a step further and was believed that after the novelty wore off, then the chickens would be left uncared for,

> I understand why people would--I mean the fresh eggs are great. Kids would get a kick out of it, but the kick they’d get out of it would be very temporary. It’s just like anything. It’s a novelty for a while, the novelty wears off, and then nobody’s gonna take care of the chickens (Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010).

Reviewing the overall discussion of the objections raised by those opposing the ordinance, it appears that the main worry lies with the potential health risk or disease that the chickens could incubate and the lack of code enforcement. In an attempt to better understand the discussion surrounding the debate, I then sorted the data based on the actors involved. Of those actors that were against the ordinance, I identified seven separate groups of actors involved in the public discussion: residents, poultry industry, commissioners, local neighborhood associations, *The Grand Rapids Press*, the Kent County Health Department, and a City of Grand Rapids’ code compliance officer. I then went back and applied the themes to the appropriate groups of actors. With this, some very interesting patterns develop within these distinct categories of actors.
Resident Actors

There were nine residents that came forward at the hearings, through letters, or email. These residents were: Robin Boss, who attended the August 10, 2010, Commission Hearing; John Butler, who wrote in as part of the GPNA letter on July 13, 2010; Gene Janik, who emailed the Commission on July 16, 2010; Delores Sneed, who also wrote in as part of the GPNA letter on July 13, 2010; Jesus Solis, wrote in as part of the GPNA July 13, 2010, letter; Bunny Swank, who wrote in as part of the GPNA letter; Bob Van Ravensway, who attended the July 13, 2010, public hearing; Pete Wayland, who attended the July 13, 2010, public hearing and was also interviewed in *The Rapidian* that same day; and Diane West who wrote a letter to the editor in *The Grand Rapids Press* on August 21, 2010.

Some residents viewed the proposal through their past experiences as children, such as Robin Boss, quoted above, who was raised on a farm. Others like Bob Van Ravensway experienced chickens through his travels in South America. The rest of the residents did not give any background information as a reference point in their objections to the proposed ordinance.

Residents’ Findings

Contrary to the findings in Table 4, the themes present for the residents reflect a different set of priorities. As Table 5 indicates, there is a three-way tie between the themes of “odor/sound/rodents”, “code enforcement issues”, and “chickens belong in country/move to country” with six instances each in the discussion from residents.
“Disease” has half as many instances, as do the “chickens are work/responsibility/need clean-up”, “kids grow up/novelty/bored” and “just not in favor”. In only one instance was the possibility of loose chickens raised in the residents group.

Table 5

*Residents’ Thematic Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Odor/Sound/Rodents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Code enforcement issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Chickens belong in county/Move to country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chickens are work/Responsibility/Need clean-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kids grow up/Novelty/bored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Potential health risks/Disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Just not in favor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Possibility of loose chickens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lack of current code enforcement was one of the primary reasons residents objected. During the hearing process, many residents came forward and admitted to having chickens illegally. This did not sit well with those that opposed the proposal. Gene Janik indicated in his email to the Commission “What gives these ‘new urbanists’ the right to make their own rules and defy norms established by our city code?” He then asked the Commission to vote against the proposal so “cute little kids aren’t taught that breaking law is appropriate if it’s ‘educational’” (July 16, 2010). There was even a resident who wanted chickens (and for that reason is not mentioned in the list above) but asked the Commission to vote no if the city could not enforce the guidelines (C. Hart, email communication to Commission, July 12, 2010).
Another top worry was the potential for odor, noise, or attraction of rodents that having chickens may create. Delores Sneed indicated that she was worried about the noise and smell of the coops. She also worried that the presence of chickens might encourage pests and predators (GPNA letter, July 10, 2010). Bob Van Ravensway, as mentioned above, thought he would be forced to relive the invading flies and rodents that he experienced while living in South America.

Many also felt that chickens belonged in the country, not in an urban center. Some even went so far as to say that if an individual feels that he or she needs chickens, that individual should move to the country. Gene Janik mentioned in his email to the Commission, “We all give up the ability to do things when we live in the City. That is part of the deal. If we want to shoot guns in the back yard or raise chickens or do a host of other things, the place to do them is where it is legal and not in direct and bold defiance of the law” (July 16, 2010).

A few residents brought up that chickens are a responsibility, need to be cleaned up after, and generally require work to care for. Robin Boss said plainly that “they require a lot of work” (Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010). Diane West wanted to know, “What happens when people are bored with the chickens?” (The Grand Rapids Press, August 21, 2010). She seemed to base her question on the stray dogs and cats that roam the city. Gene Janik asked about the fate of the farm after the kids grow up and the “so-called educational benefits of raising the birds has ended” (Email communication to Commission, July 16, 2010).
“Potential health risk/spread of disease” came in at half of the number of issues as compared with problems with odor/sound/rodents, code enforcement issues, and chicken owners should move to the country. Only three out of twenty instances in which health risks were noted are attributable to residents, the group most likely to be affected. As quoted earlier, Roberta Pelton indicated that she was troubled about the potential effects on her family’s asthma (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Delores Sneed voiced her concern, stating that “[r]aising chickens might encourage . . . disease” (GPNA letter July 13, 2010). Bob Van Ravensway claimed that “rats carry salmonella,” implying disease would be spread not just through chickens.

Interestingly, the same number of residents were simply “not in favor” without any explanation of having chickens in the city as those who objected to the birds on health grounds. As Bunny Swank wrote in her letter, she did not want chickens on her street (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010). Jesus Solis, in the same letter, also stated quite succinctly that he did not want chickens in the city (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010). John Butler asks, “What’s next?” (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010).

There was a sole voice among the residents that conveyed disconcert with chickens getting loose. Delores Sneed wrote, “If chickens got out of their coop/yard, could be problematic with neighborhood dogs” (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010).

Poultry Industry Themes

Unlike the residents, the poultry industry had a very narrow view of the issue. I have combined the five company representatives’ theme with the poultry industry
representative’s theme due to the nearly identical themes that presented themselves. The representatives from Herbruck’s Poultry Ranch were Brandon Herbruck, son of an owner, Cody Herbruck, son of an owner, Greg Herbruck, owner, Harry Herbruck, owner, and Mohammad Mousa, veterinarian. George House, Executive Director of the Michigan Poultry Alliance, is also included in this group.

As shown in Table 6, there were three themes that emerged with the poultry industry; worry regarding the “potential health risk/disease”, a desire to “protect local farms” (especially their own), and that “chickens are better suited to country life” rather than urban areas.

Interestingly, the Herbruck’s Poultry Ranch is located 30 miles east of Grand Rapids in Saranac, Michigan. According to its website, Herbruck’s produces 1.6 billion eggs a year and distributes those eggs throughout the country (http://www.herbrucks.com/index.php/about-us). According to a recent article in The Grand Rapids Press, Herbruck’s has “more than 6 million hens . . . [and] produces all of the eggs for McDonald’s restaurants east of the Mississippi” (Harger 2013:no page). During the course of the public discussion on the proposed ordinance, three of the Herbruck’s representatives indicated that the ranch employs 400 individuals (Commission Hearing, June 22, 2010 and Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).
Table 6

*Poultry Industry and Industry Representative Thematic Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Potential health risk/Disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Protect local farms and businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chickens belong in country/Move to country</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Michigan Poultry Alliance represents all poultry producers in Michigan, and according to its Executive Director, George House, “Ninety percent [of the poultry producers in Michigan] are located within 40-50 miles of Grand Rapids and generate $300 million in gross sales” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

It is interesting to note that out of the 90% of poultry business residing so close to Grand Rapids, Herbruck’s was the only poultry farm that spoke publicly regarding this proposed ordinance. Certainly, the Alliance represented the industry as a whole; however, if the fear of disease were so great as the industry points out, it would seem that there would have been more poultry farmers commenting on the issue (though, admittedly, they did not need to since the ordinance did not pass).

There were nine separate instances from six individuals regarding the potential risks to health of humans and poultry, as well as the possible spread of disease. Mohammad Mousa, the veterinarian at Herbruk’s, spoke at two public hearings primarily about these risks. He stated at the June 22, 2010, hearing,
Salmonella can be present in chicken feces in the floor, ah of any backyard and if the chicken pick [sic] that up, a child go play in the area which it was in there that child will be infected and also again the city is going to pay too much. Or, who’s going to spend money for health care for children. Other issue, CDC just issued report that having chicken in backyard any citizen is a health hazard and I have article over here anybody wanna look at it. It says this is very dangerous--.

Dr. Mousa returned to the July 13, 2010 public hearing and said that while he was not specifically against chicken keeping in Grand Rapids, the Commission needed to put controls in place to protect chickens and people since the average citizen does not know how to care for chickens,

We vaccinate chicken about nine times. Let me mention to you the diseases which they have. In the hatchery they can be vaccinated for Maddox disease. After that, three weeks old, IBD infection personal disease, then infection bronchitis, laringyotracheitis, fowl pox, then salmonella vaccine.

Greg Herbruck wanted the Commission to know that disease does not stop at the city limits, which is why the company was so interested in this proposed ordinance. He told the Commission, “It’s a feel-good idea to this having changing the housing code to have poultry in the backyard. I just want to caution that there are serious risks to public health in so doing” (Commission Hearing June 22, 2010). He further stated that “the lesson [of avian influenza] from the Vietnam and Asia experiences [is] . . . don’t live with your animals” (Commission Hearing, June 22, 2010).

George House, in his letter to the Commission on June 21, 2010, laid out the threats of disease to the industry,

The hazards posed by these free ranging chickens to the commercial industry are very significant. The specific diseases which can affect birds and/or humans include:
1. Avian Influenza both low pathogenic and high pathogenic strains.
2. Salmonella transmitted by contact from handling the birds or contact with the fecal matter of infected birds.
3. Infectious laringotracheitis which is highly contagious and lethal in certain strains.
4. Exotic Newcastle Disease, an outbreak in California brought in by a ‘Fighting Cock’ caused the destruction of over 8 million layers.

Brandon Herbruck, a son of one of the owners, expressed his apprehension, “[p]lease make sure that any changes won’t put us all at risk. I know our dog has a license and it needs to get the right shots and vaccinations, doesn’t it make sense that we should expect this from all the animals that live near us?” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010) Cody Herbruck, another son of an owner, stated he was worried as well about lack of requirements for vaccinations “to protect chickens and people” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Harry Herbruck, an owner, was also uneasy about potential for the spread of the disease through the urban hens: “we fear that without proper precaution urban flocks could open up a vector to . . . introduce diseases into our area. One positive case of avian influenza could restrict any bird or egg movement in an entire region” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). George House, Executive Director of Allied Poultry Industries, also feared the potential for movement of disease from urban flocks to farms.

Our request is that if you are to approve a [sic] ordinance allowing backyard chickens an adequate biosecurity protection be put in place so that transmittal of salmonella or other transmissible diseases like avian influenza, which can be contracted from wild waterfowl, be monitored in such a way that it not represent a health hazard (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).
The industry representatives were concerned about the disease because of the potential effect it would have on their business and wanted to preserve their livelihood. Brandon Herbruck voiced his anxiety over his future livelihood should the ordinance pass without regulation on backyard flocks. “My future, and the jobs of 400 families I work with, could be at risk if these rules are changed and no controls are in place to prevent disease from spreading among all these new birds” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Cody Herbruck echoed Brandon’s reaction, “I fear that if people have chickens in their backyards and do not give them proper vaccinations and protections that my future and the future of the other 400 families whom I work with at the farm are at risk” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Greg Herbruck simply stated that any potential outbreak of disease can “put our business at risk” (Commission Hearing, June 22, 2010).

Harry Herbruck complained that there was no regulatory oversight created with the new ordinance that would protect factory flocks,

We are concerned, however, about chickens being raised without any regulatory oversight, proper educational training, or requirements. Minimum standards would need to be set, uh, so that vaccines get done and proper care is given to the birds. Proper handling of the eggs also needs to be verified to maintain food safety (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

He does not, however, offer any suggestions as to how to accomplish such a feat.

Lastly, there was one instance where the poultry industry representatives indicated that chickens belong in the country rather than the city. Greg Herbrook said “I think I just wanted to make sure everybody understood that this [city chickens] is a novel idea. It’s--we look at it as a luxury” (Commission Hearing, June 22, 2010).
The primary issue, however, that permeated through the poultry industry’s presentations was disease and the potential damage that could be wrought on the factory flocks and, consequently, business should illness in the city flocks get out of control.

**Neighborhood Association Themes**

There were as many individuals speaking on behalf of local neighborhood associations as there were from the poultry industry. The neighborhood associations work as an intermediary between the City and residents. The associations can assist residents by providing an outlet to voice grievances regarding the neighborhood and they can also take issues to the city on the residents’ behalf. The City works in partnership with the associations as well since they often serve as the eyes and ears of the city when it comes to problems within the neighborhood (e.g., code compliance issues and illegal activity.) The neighborhood organizations receive Community Development Block Grants, which are federal funds that the City distributes to various organizations (Connie Hoch and Margo Johnson, Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010).

There are thirty-two neighborhood associations in Grand Rapids. So with only five individuals representing three neighborhood organizations speaking publicly on the issue, the public voices of these groups are less than one percent of the total neighborhood organizations. However, according to Commissioner Gutowski, there was a “tidal wave” of opposition from the neighborhood organizations (Telephone communication, January 20, 2013). Further, at the August 10, 2010, Commission Hearing, Commissioner Gutowski indicated that the neighborhood organizations within
the Second Ward “were on the sidelines” (Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010). Therefore, the number of associations from the First Ward and Second Ward are twenty-two. Eleven from the Second Ward remained silent on the issue. Of the neighborhood associations that contributed to the debate over the proposed ordinance, two were from the First Ward, with the third association primarily in the First Ward, but has a small section pushing into the Third Ward.

The individuals participating in the public dialogue are: Margo Johnson, representative, South West Area Neighbors (SWAN); Marie (no last name given), representative, SWAN; Roberta Pelton\(^5\), Crime Prevention Organizer, West Grand Neighborhood Organization (WGNO); Nola Steketee, Executive Director, WGNO, Kathleen Woudstra, Director, Garfield Park Neighborhood Association (GPNA).

\(^5\) Roberta Pelton appeared on behalf of West Grand Rapids Neighborhood Organization and as a resident. She made some comments on behalf of the organization and others on behalf of herself (both were against). She claimed that she was there “first and foremost as the Crime Prevention Organizer of West Grand Rapids Neighborhood Organization because my director was unable to be here” (Public Hearing July 13, 2010). The majority of her comments were based on the organization’s concerns so she is placed within the neighborhood organization group and not added to the resident group. However, she did make comments as a resident that were personally relatable to her. Therefore, when her comments are personal, she is labeled as a “resident” and those comments appear in the residents section. Where her comments relate to the organization, she is labeled as “WGNO representative” and those comments appear in the neighborhood organization section.
Table 7

*Local Neighborhood Associations’ Thematic Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Densely packed neighborhoods/Drainage issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Code enforcement issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Budgetary concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Just not in favor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Potential health risk/Disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Odor/Sound/Rodents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chickens are work/Responsibility/Need clean-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Possibility of loose chickens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 7, the neighborhood associations had a different take on the issue than both the residents and the poultry industry. The primary point of contention coming from the neighborhood organizations was the issue of densely packed neighborhoods. This group was the only one that raised this issue.

Margo Johnson of SWAN appeared at the public hearing on July 13, 2010, and stated,

> In this, in our neighborhood, as you know, our homes are very densely packed. The homes are built many times almost to lot lines so when you have an ordinance that says 50% of the backyard and this is your backyard, you’re really densely packing the chickens and so that particular, you know part of the code. . . . Minimum lot sizes that are adequate in size should be considered.

She returned to the August 10, 2010, Commission Hearing and reiterated the organization’s distress,
SWAN has the same concerns about you passing this ordinance. And we don’t wanna see it passed. We really have an issue with not having setbacks from homes, and not having minimum lot size, sizes, designated in the ordinance. And definitions of what is a drain. Is it a gutter? Is it the gutter on the street? Those types of things.

Roberta Pelton also was worried about the size of the lots in her neighborhood, “our plot sizes do not afford the space for a chicken coop. And to simply put something in when you can reach out your window and pass a can of soda to your neighbor’s window, it’s not fair to the people who . . . don’t want it” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Code enforcement issues, like for the residents, were also one of the top issues for the neighborhood associations. Again, Margo Johnson indicated her fear that current code issues were not being addressed, “We have code issues in our neighborhood where people aren’t neighborhood where people aren’t even draining the roof of their--the--the water, uh, rainwater off their roofs correctly” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Roberta Pelton agreed with Margo regarding existing issues not being handled, “We are already having issues with code compliance. The west side has had problems with unlawful chickens, unclean chicken coops, cockroaches, complaints from the neighbors” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). She further went on to say that it wasn’t those who would take care of the coops, “it’s the ones that have already been a problem that this is going to give license to further” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Nola Steketee put the code issue in light of animals that were currently allowed in the city.

If the City and County cannot have an agency that will address the amount of dogs and cats a property owner may have or address the owner who does not clean the waste their dog leaves behind, how we going to govern a chicken ordinance? (Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010).

She went on to further say,
I was told by another organization that there are many chickens in the city and no one complains. Well that’s not entirely true. Many have called the above-mentioned agencies [inspectors and police] and were told to contact the others. Just passing the buck because there’s really no action to be taken when you--and when you, yourself, heard residents come before you and blatantly state they are breaking the law and still nothing has been done about it (Commission Hearing August 10, 2010).

Kathleen Woudstra, in her letter to the Commission, stated that, “As the City of GR housing code enforcement department is currently understaffed and can’t enforce the current housing code, I am against allowing chickens in backyards (at this time)” (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010). The consensus from every group represented was that the current code was not being enforced well and adding this ordinance would only make matters worse.

An issue associated with the code compliance was that there were budgetary constraints on the City and its departments and the proposed ordinance in turn would create an even greater strain on the various departments. As indicated by Kathleen above, the code enforcement issues were directly related to the budgetary issues the City was facing. She adds, “the City does not have enough inspectors to handle the current level of work and are already suspending many nuisance complaints. We absolutely can’t add additional work on an already overworked department” (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010). Margo Johnson contributed, “And, you know, obviously we all know that we’re, you know, we have budget issues right now and we have limited resources and so to stretch those even further just doesn’t make sense . . .” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Nola Steketee also wanted to know how the city would address code violations with the departments being short-staffed (Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010). Her
apprehension, however, focused on the neighborhood associations and what they may be asked to do as the City’s budget shrinks, “I am asking you to please think about the agencies. You are asking today to cut staff and the neighborhood organizations you’re asking to assist you while you cut the budget” (Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010).

Ms. Steketee also relayed to the Commission that “The majority of our residents have made it quite clear they are not in favor of the ordinance” (Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010). This statement falls within the theme of “just not in favor.” The other instance of this theme occurring is from Marie, with SWAN, who stated in an email to City Attorney Cathleen Mish, “We don’t want them [chickens]” (n.d.).

With the neighborhood associations, there are only two instances where there was mention of the potential health risk or disease was discussed. Nola Steketee referenced the poultry representatives when she raised the issues,

You had come before you seven chickafar--chicken farmers and explain the problems and possible disease, smell, flies, etc., when people are living so close together and chickens are roaming in the area. . . . I think you heard enough from the farmers and those that oppose this ordinance on the problems that occur with the ownership of chickens (Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010).

Roberta Pelton, was troubled with the close quarters of the houses in her neighborhood, indicated that having chicken coops with the homes so close together was “not healthy” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Interestingly, that was the only discussion at all among the neighborhood associations regarding risk of disease or proximity of the coops to residences. Perhaps it was an implied threat, but it was never expressly stated.

Again, there were only two instances where the matters of smell, noise, or rodents were discussed in relation to the neighborhood association. Nola Steketee, who identified
as having grown up on a farm, was the only individual who raised the issue. She mentioned it in the above quote, attributing the concern regarding flies to the comments the farmers had given previously. She further asked, “How do we address the call that the smell of the chickens next door is too much to bear . . .?” (Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010). Similar to the issues that residents’ complained of, she wanted to know how the City was expecting to respond to calls that would, in her opinion, inevitably be forthcoming should the ordinance be passed.

One instance occurred with the theme that chickens were a responsibility and required work; that comment came from Marie in her email to Cathleen Mish when she voiced her opinion that the neighborhood organization was not in favor of the proposed ordinance and that there was “too much garbage, trash, and irresponsible people already”, indicating that by passing the ordinance the City would just exacerbate the existing problems (n.d.).

Lastly, the fear over loose chickens resurfaces as a worry for the neighborhood organizations as well. Nola Steketee, in asking how the proposed ordinance would be enforced, again wanted to know “how do we take the call that a resident has someone else’s chicken in their yard causing their dog to bark, leaving behind their droppings?” (Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010).

**City Commissioners’ Themes**

Seven individuals sit on the Commission. One individual is the Mayor, the other six are elected from three wards (two from each ward). Three Commissioners actively
voted against the proposed ordinance (Commissioners Gutowski, Shaffer, and Lumpkins), with one Commissioner (White) who did not attend the formal vote later writing an open letter explaining that he would have voted against the ordinance and his reasoning. Therefore, I have included four of the Commissioners in this section.

Interestingly, as shown in Table 8, the most prevalent theme for the Commissioners was that they were just not in favor of the ordinance. This is reflected in the Commissioners’ statements that their constituents were not in favor of the ordinance with little information given to follow it up. When the vote came up, they expressed that it was not a good fit for the city.

Commissioner Walt Gutowski indicated in *The Grand Rapids Press* that “95 percent of his constituents are opposed to the chicken ordinance. They just don’t want them” (Harger 2010:A3). In the same article, Commissioner Dave Shaffer said, “I’ve taken the pulse of the community on this issue. While there were some saying ‘yes,’ there were more saying ‘no’” (Harger 2010:A3). Commissioner Elias Lumpkins also suggested in the article that “most of the constituents he has talked to also are opposed to the ordinance” (Harger 2010:A3). Additionally, Commissioner Lumpkins stated in his discussion during the vote that he “would have to reflect the desires of the Third Ward residents and vote against” (Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010). Commissioner James White, stated in his open letter “In principle, a public policy should have meaningful public support. I have been persuaded that my Third Ward constituents are opposed to a chicken ordinance” (Smith 2010:n. page).
Table 8

*Commissioners’ Thematic Result*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Just not in favor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Code enforcement issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chickens belong in country/Move to country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Budgetary concerns (re: City budget)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Possibility of loose chickens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The arguments against the ordinance by the Commissioners centered on their constituents’ desires. Commissioner Gutowski indicated that the considerations he put into the decision was that there was a “small sector” that wanted the chickens and even with a well written ordinance, he needed to balance what they wanted with the rest of the constituents. His view was that, “one, the constituents didn’t want them, and two, enforcement expenses, which is the reason it [the proposed ordinance] went down” (Telephone communication, January 20, 2013).

The next prominent theme that was seemed important to the Commissioners was the issue of code enforcement. Commissioner Guotowski observed that “Most city residents who have chickens now are not conforming to the proposed ordinance language” (Harger 2010:A3). When arguing against setting the proposed ordinance for public hearing, Commissioner Gutowski, alleged that there are already code compliance issues and that adding this ordinance will add to the workload (Commission Hearing, June 22, 2010). Commissioner White cautioned that if the proposed ordinance passed, there could be issues with interpretation later on,
If someone wanted to have turkeys, on what logical ground would we deny them that right? In my opinion, the chicken ordinance fails this test. A chicken is a farm animal and so is a turkey. To apply an ordinance to one farm animal and not to another, could be criticized as subjective or inconsistent (Smith 2010:n. page).

Further, Commissioner Gutowski indicated that the Commission had dealt with the issue for a year and thought that the time and resources consumed in considering the proposal were not well spent (Telephone communication, January 20, 2013).

Next, the theme that chickens do not belong in the city (and therefore, belong in the country) is brought up by Commissioner Shaffer twice in slightly different ways. In The Grand Rapids Press article, the Commissioner states “’I want as much as I can to support the urban food movement, but there is a difference between urban gardens and livestock” (Harger 2010:A3). Later that day, during the Commission Hearing while articulating his response to the amendment’s provision to require 100% of neighbor approval, he said that,

[Citizens expressed to him] ‘Hey I live in a city for a reason. It’s planned, it's zoned. It's a [sic] urban setting, and I’ve chosen that setting for a reason.’ . . . I think overall was the character of the urban environment and how we plan and zone for things. . . . We have certain other restrictions that we put into place (August 10, 2010).

Another theme that was raised, but did not rank as high as would be expected given the recent cuts the City had to make, was the budgetary constraints that the new ordinance could potentially place on the City and its departments. Two Commissioners spoke up regarding the issue, Commissioners Gutowski and Lumpkins. Commissioner Gutowski said, in his response to the proposed amendment to require 100% of neighbors
agreeing to allowing chickens, “Again, with all due respect Commissioner, again that’s going to take more resources. We’re cutting jobs. I don’t see it’s the right time” (Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010). Commissioner Lumpkins also was uneasy about the financial situation of the City and how it would handle the additional strain, “No, but, uh, deer and raccoons, they are problems, I know within the Third Ward, and I think on the west side, also. So, I think with limited resources we shouldn’t be adding to those type of problems” (Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010).

Finally, the fear of loose chickens was on the mind of Commissioner Lumpkins’ constituents. In his statement to The Grand Rapids Press, he noted “Some people feel the community may be overrun with chickens” (Harger 2010:A3).

*The Grand Rapids Press* Themes

The *Press* is the largest circulating paper for the Grand Rapids region. An editorial regarding the proposed ordinance ran on July 1, 2010, and while the paper did not give an outright endorsement or a rejection of the proposal, the overall tone of the editorial was skeptical of the idea.

Table 9 shows the themes that arise in the editorial. Since there was only one editorial, the prevalence of themes is low. However, the article did raise questions that are worthy of exploring.
Table 9

*The Grand Rapids Press’s Thematic Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Potential health risk/Disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chickens belong in country/Move to country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Odor/Sound/Rodents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Possibility of loose chickens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One question that the editorial raised most was the potential health risks and potential for disease regarding urban chickens. “Commissioners should be convinced that keeping chickens won’t create a nuisance or health hazard” (Editor 2010:A15). The article pointed out the possibilities of disease that the Centers for Disease Control publish regarding salmonella and the human reaction to salmonella poisoning. The editorial further went on to ask “Would neighbors of those who keep chickens be protected from disease . . .?” (Editor 2010:A15).

The *Press* also warns that chickens may not be suited for urban life and parroted some of the other groups’ thoughts. “The reason chickens and other farm animals have historically been zoned out of urban areas is because they are better suited to the more sparsely populated country” (Editor 2010:A15).

Noisy chickens also showed up as an issue in the editorial. The *Press* asked if neighbors would be “shielded from noise?” (Editor 2010:A15). In this question and a later statement regarding the sensibility of keeping roosters out of the city, “[t]hird shift workers shouldn’t have to live next door to animals that loudly announce the sunrise” (Editor 2010:A15), the editors show their city roots as roosters do not only crow at dawn.
Lastly, *The Press* was not immune to worrying about stray chickens. The writer wanted to know, “Would owners be responsible for chickens that go on the lamb -- something that has happened in other cities that permit urban roosts?” (Editor 2010:A15).

The editorial ended the article by stating, “But Grand Rapids commissioners should take these questions and concerns fully into account, or risk laying an egg in their decision on backyard chickens” (Editor 2010:A15).

**Kent County Health Department Themes**

The Kent County Health Department’s Environmental Health Division sent a memorandum to the city with its comments regarding the proposed ordinance. In its one page document the Department raised a number of issues in bulleted form. Two questions were equally raised as shown in Table 10.

The Health Department thought the potential for “flies and odors” that could occur with “improperly maintained chicken containment areas” was potentially problematic (Memorandum to C. Raevsky, June 23, 2010). Another apprehension was with feed storage containers or feed left out which would attract “mice, rats, raccoons etc.” (Memorandum to C. Raevsky, June 23, 2010). According to the memorandum, the complaints would need to be investigated by the Health Department, the Housing Commission and potentially the Police Department.
The budgetary strain was equally important to the Health Department by way of the expenditure of resources to follow up on complaints of “cruelty and improper care,” “shelter resources to house and care for the birds,” and since chickens fall into the category of livestock, “the County may be liable for any damages to birds caused by dogs⁶” (Memorandum to C. Raevsky, June 23, 2010). Further, according to the memorandum, due to the added demand on resources, “there will need to be a mechanism for the County to recover costs associated with the passage of this ordinance” (June 23, 2010).

The Health Department’s primary apprehension with loose chickens was the resources that it would take to catch them and house them. This, in turn, would become a budgetary strain for which the Department would seek remuneration from the City.

Lastly, the Health Department was raised the alarm regarding salmonella. Interestingly, however, the Department wanted to apply an industry requirement to backyard flocks,

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⁶ This opinion is predicated upon Michigan’s Dog Law of 1919 which mandates that a township is required to pay damages to an owner of livestock (including poultry) for harm created by dogs. However, the Department’s fears were unfounded; according to an opinion of the Michigan Attorney General in 1983 this law does not apply within city limits.
Poultry and hatching poultry eggs must conform to the Animal Industry Act, Act 466 of 1988, 287.730, Section (30)(4). In part this section states poultry and hatching poultry eggs must ‘Have a negative official test for salmonella pullorum-typhoid within 90 days before change of ownership.’ (Memorandum to C. Raevsky, June 23, 2010).

The Department recommended speaking to the Michigan Department of Agriculture regarding this issue.

City Code Office Theme

The Grand Rapids City Code Manager, Virginia Million, voiced her reservations regarding the proposed ordinance. According to her email to City Attorney, Catherine Mish, she attended all of “the chicken meetings” and gave Ms. Mish an inside view of the meetings so that she could write a clear ordinance. At the end of her email, she gives her opinion of backyard chickens in the city and that is what constitutes the theme shown in Table 11.

Table 11

City Code Office’s Thematic Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Budgetary concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ms. Million expressed her opposition to the ordinance as it related to the City’s budget cuts, “My office is opposed to allowing farm animals in the City especially since
our department has been cut in half and we have had to make severe cuts in service”
(Email communication to C. Mish, January 25, 2010).

Proponents of the Ordinance

**Actors in Favor of the Proposed Ordinance**

 Seventy one people spoke on behalf of the proposed ordinance. Of those 71, 17% were children roughly between the ages of 3-12. As shown in Table 12, the vast majority of individuals who spoke in favor of the ordinance were residents (sixty-one); only ten individuals represented three other groups. The other groups are: Commissioners (four) which includes Mayor Heartwell, the Chicken “Task Force” (four) created to write the ordinance, and the Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council (two).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of individuals</th>
<th>Interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Commissioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Chicken Task Force”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were some residents who did not actually want to own chickens themselves; rather, they either wanted the community to have access to local food, or, as Laura Murison stated, “[t]hough I have no intention of getting my own birds, I would like
my neighbor to be able to keep his and for others to enjoy the right to tend their own little flock, on their own little plot of land” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Other residents indicated they already had chickens, a revelation which surprised resident Jason Neil, “I can’t believe people are giving their real names and admit—uh, but, I don’t know, you’re writing ‘em down!” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Still others indicated they were hoping for the ordinance to pass so they could benefit from being able to produce some of their own food.

There were three commissioners who voted in favor of the ordinance. Prior to the vote a commissioner from the Second Ward who was in favor of the ordinance, retired and his replacement ended up registering her vote for the proposed ordinance as well. Although there were technically four Commissioners in favor, only three could vote at the time, yet the retired commissioner did publicly speak in favor of urban chickens. His comments are included in this study.

Four individuals spoke in the public setting on behalf of the “Chicken Task Force” and while they are residents, they were part of the group that helped to write the proposed ordinance and they took part in the other two committees, (education and rescue) as well. Some residents may also have been a part of the “Chicken Task Force”, but they did not identify as such when they spoke on the record and so they remain in the residents category.

Finally, two individuals spoke on behalf of the Greater Grand Rapids Foods Systems Council. According to Lisa Rose Starner, who took part in the group at its
founding in 2001, the Foods Systems Council has been “very loosely organized” yet tries to advocate for food policies as a social justice issue (Personal interview, April 16, 2013).

Proponents’ Discussion and Thematic Results

There were fifteen separate themes that arose as the proponents of the ordinance tried to persuade the Commission to pass the proposed ordinance. Table 13 enumerates the various themes found in the public discussion.

Local Food/Eggs are Good/Better for You

For all four groups combined, the most prevalent theme was that chickens provide “local food”, that “fresh eggs taste good and are better” for you than eggs produced by factory chickens. Naomi Billings, a 10 year old, wrote a letter to the editor and said that “[t]he eggs Lily and Rebecca are very yummy” (The Grand Rapids Press 2010:A8). Jody Colter, in an interview with The Rapidian, admitted that she does not trust the sources of eggs, except from local farmers where she has seen how the birds live. By raising her own chickens, she would guarantee the quality of the eggs (2010). Andy DeBraber believed that raising chickens locally was an important endeavor for children. “It is important that we as a culture, and particularly our children being raised, be able to see that our food comes from actual animals and not simply from a grocery store” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).
### Table 13

*Frequency of Themes in Discussion in Favor of Proposed Ordinance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Local food/Eggs are good/Better for you</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Environment/Sustainability</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Just supports</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Disease is a non-issue/Pests are a non-issue</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Pets with benefits</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Other cities are fine</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Low cost/Budget friendly</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Good experience</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Hens do not make much noise/Odor is slight if taken care of</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Less of a nuisance than dogs/cats</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Community building</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Questioned ban on roosters/slaughter</td>
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<td>Enforcement costs low</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Brings in creative class</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Agrees with limits</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Environment/Sustainability**

A theme that was quite prevalent also was the discussion that having backyard chickens was good for the environment and would further the City’s designation as a “sustainable city.” Carol Gastongame gave an in-depth overview of how chickens would be helpful to the environment and provide sustainable solutions to city dwellers,

The chicken would reduce the need to spray, which would reduce the deposits of heavy metals and other harmful chemicals into the ground. Also, most cities have rules about noxious weeds and the length of lawns and chickens keep those noxious weeds down. Greens are part of a chicken’s diet they are happy to scratch them through as they look for
bugs. So, when you reduce the noxious weeds and the grasses then you reduce the need to mow, which reduces the level of emissions that we put out into the environment. We also reduce (unintelligible) very small amount, it reduces our dependency on petroleum. Along with that, chickens as they are omnivores, and they will eat almost everything they’ll eat kitchen leftovers. I have things right now that I don’t put in my compost pile because they take a different kind of bacteria, dairy and meat. And chickens will eat those. With that—when chickens eat that it reduces landfill waste that goes to the landfill which even further reduces the o—my overall imprint (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Another child, Makel Geiss, simply stated, “[i]n May of this year [2010], Grand Rapids was award the most sustainable city in the nation. Let’s allow the people of Grand Rapids to be more sustainable by allowing backyard chickens” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Rachel Lee also saw a connection between chickens and the environment and sustainability,

I truly feel that we are at a time as society that that disconnection between our food and our environment is over. And as a sustainable city that we all claim to be living in, I feel that this is one more thing to add to that. Urban agriculture is not a trend (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

**Just Supports**

Many individuals simply supported the ordinance. Many from this category signed a letter co-written by Esther Neil (age 11) and Hosanna Neil (age 9) that they circulated asking for the ordinance be passed so they were placed in this thematic category. Dawn Boer, who wrote as part of the GPNA letter to the commission (that included statements from both sides of the debate), said plainly, “I support allowing chickens in the city of Grand Rapids” (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010). Jamie Cowell, in her presentation to the Commission, said that she was a “big fan” of chickens (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).
Disease is a Non-Issue/Pests are a Non-Issue

Many individuals responded to the poultry industry and residents’ arguments regarding potential for disease and pests that could arise with the addition of chickens in an urban environment. Rick Beerhorst told the Commission that he had pests before he had chickens and that chickens can also be part of the solution,

[Just last week I watched--and we’ve had mice long before we have chickens and that [sic] why we have cats--and I watched Fluffy [who] was batting around a mouse around the way cats like to do and lost it and went into the chicken coop and it was over. That mouse was over, it was history in about two minutes (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Jason Otto, a resident who was part of the “Chicken Task Force” helping to draft the proposed ordinance and also a graduate student at Michigan State University in the agriculture and natural resources program, used currently available research to help calm the fears raised of potential disease and its spread. “[T]here’s no published evidence of airborne spread over long distances and no significant correlation can be found between backyard flocks and commercial farms” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Anna DeBraber, another 10 year old child, tried to put disease into perspective, “[s]ome chickens may have diseases, but all living creatures do, including the ever-popular cat and dog” (The Grand Rapids Press 2010:A8).

“Pets With Benefits”

Quite a few individuals indicated that chickens were not just a source of food production, but they were actually pets for the family. Jen Wolfe, part of the “Chicken Task Force”, mentioned the term “pets with benefits in an interview with The Rapidian,
concluding that chickens are fun and people like them (2010). Many of the proponents of chickens as pets were children, though some parents reported that they became enthralled by the chickens once they brought them to the backyard. Tess Phillips, an honors student who participated in the Blandford School (a sixth grade-only that not only teaches hands-on in the natural setting, but each student runs their own chicken business for the year selling eggs) said that “the chickens are actually a really fun and entertaining pet” and her mom, Cara Phillips, who was reluctant to have them originally, said “[b]ut I, too, by ways of a Blandford student, have inherited chickens. And much to my absolute delight” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Anna DeBraber said that she and her brother spend more time with the chickens than they do with the television or computer (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Malachai Geiss, a fairly young child, told the Commissioners, “I want chickens because they are good pets to train and they are really fun” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Other Cities are Fine

Some of the arguments for urban chickens were that other cities have passed ordinances allowing backyard hens and have had little to no issues. Kim Geiss wanted the Commission to know that other cities were getting along with chickens in their cities, “Mr. Consulman said ‘we haven’t had any problems here in Ann Arbor. I now have four hens in my backyard legally and I’m on the Ann Arbor City Council’” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Makel Geiss asked the Commission, “So many other cities allow
chickens, why not us?” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Donald Heydens wrote to the Commission and said that it works well in other locations (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010).

**Low Cost/Budget Friendly**

Another popular discussion with regard to having backyard chickens was the ability to have a low cost way to obtain healthful eggs, especially with the economic climate challenging at that time. Richard Avery, in his letter to the Commission, said that having backyard chickens would provide “families an opportunity to provide for their food needs in a low-cost . . . way” (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010). Rick Beerhorst also indicated that “our situation right now is extremely challenged a lot of people are really trying to—like myself as an artist who make [sic] very little money” (Commission Hearing, June 22, 2010).

Jamie Cowell acknowledged that she purchases organic and free-range eggs for $4 a dozen and shared that “I know it would save me a lot of money because I spend a lot of money on eggs” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Leigh Emory also communicated that she felt that having chickens in the backyard would help with a family’s bottom line “. . . they’re economical, especially when people got really limited food budgets right now” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

**Good Experience**

Some of the proponents, both adults and children, thought that having chickens would be a good experience for kids. Not only would having hens be a good way to
teach responsibility, but it would be good for the children to learn other valuable traits by
caring for an animal. Naomi Billings wrote that, “[c]hickens are special animals and a
good experience” (*The Grand Rapids Press* 2010:A8). Steve DeJong shared his
observations of how his own children reacted to raising his flock,

As our children helped take care of the chickens, whether it be one or so
many, they learn not just to focus on their own wants and needs but
become aware of, and sensitive to, the needs of something outside
themselves, the chickens. . . . This teaches them a sense of responsibility.
Some may say ‘well, that’s just chickens’ but the care, sensitivity,
responsibility, and reliab [sic] reliability that they learn, and we learn, in
caring for the chickens will spill into every other area of their lives also
(Commission Hearing, June 22, 2010).

*The Grand Rapids Press* reported that resident Chad Morton said that his small
flock was “an educational tool for his home-schooled children” (Harger 2010:A3).
Esther Neil, an 11 year old, wrote a letter to the Commission and expressed that “taking
care of chickens would be fun” (June 18, 2010).

**Hens do not Make Much Noise/Odor is Slight**

In response to those opposed to the ordinance, or anticipating these arguments,
there was a fair number of people who expressed to the Commission that hens did not
make much noise. One resident, Cara Phillips, said “I will go on record of stating that
most of my neighbors do not even know, except for those who have children, who delight
in coming over to see the hens” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Naomi Billings shared,
“[o]ur chickens are quiet for the most part. They are not any louder than we are” (*The
Grand Rapids Press* 2010:A8).
Odor was a troubling aspect of chicken-keeping for many of the opposing arguments and the proponents also tried to alleviate those worries. Bruce Morrison, another Blandford parent, said that taking care of the smell was easy, “the easiest way to deal with that is every morning get out there first thing and clean the poop out of the coop” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Anna DeBraber also wrote that, “[c]hickens do have an odor, but it is slight if you take care of the chickens like we do” (The Grand Rapids Press 2010:A8).

Less of a Nuisance Than Dogs/Cats

Some individuals made a connection to caring or interacting with the typical animals in a city, with chickens having the upper hand. Tom Cary of the Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council was cited in The Grand Rapids Press in his view that “urban chickens are less of a nuisance than dogs that bite. ‘Just thinking about the number of people who have been injured from dog bites, nobody says much about whether you can have a dog or not’” (Harger, 2009:A7). Steve DeJong agreed and in his television interview with WOODTV 8 said, “No one calls 1-800-CALL-SAM for chicken bites” (referring to Sam Bernstein, a personal injury attorney who has run glut of television ads over the years) (Television interview, May 27, 2010).

Some individuals pointed out that chickens create less waste product than an average dog. Kim Geiss shared with the Commission that dogs produce a lot of waste with little additional benefits whereas chicken waste is beneficial to gardens and in comparing the two animals, “the half pound per day is average for a dog, [so] we’ll
compare it with an average chicken. Uh, the simple calculation shows that seven hens produce the equivalent waste of one average-sized dog” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

**Community Building**

Some individuals saw having backyard chickens as an opportunity to connect with their neighbors and build relationships. Matthew Goad is able to keep chickens legally in the city (due to his large yard) and shared his experience with his neighbors,

I—my main thing that I like chickens are with—as pets they will, they are the quickest to bring smiles to people. I have my neighbors. I got a large family right next to me, I got a large family two houses down. Our houses are all—the backyards are all connected. And the chickens are the easiest way to connect with them (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Martha Daling Jager wanted “to comment this potential action” and thought that adding the hens would be a way to “enhance any others [actions] of the City and community” (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010). In painting a picture of the lives of the City’s children, Jennifer Wolf, as representative of the “Chicken Task Force”, thought just because they are not country kids, it “doesn’t mean they shouldn’t get to feel like they are a part of their lives and with gardens and chickens and other things like that, it’s a way for them to connect to their city and to their neighbors and to their families” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

**Questioned Ban on Roosters/Slaughter**

Amid the attempts to resolve the problems raised by those against the proposal all while extolling the benefits of urban hens, some questioned the ban on both roosters and
slaughtering chickens. One example was what to do when the hens had outlived their usefulness; another example involved one who had received a male instead of a female bird as a chick.

In an interview with *The Grand Rapids Press*, Brenda Beerhorst “questioned the strict ban on roosters. Although most poultry sellers try to determine the gender of the chicks, roosters sometimes appear but are not obvious until they begin crowing”. She further “questioned the ban on chicken slaughter, noting some residents may want to make chicken soup after their hens have stopped laying eggs” (Harger 2010:A3).

**Enforcement Costs Low**

Some residents tried to appease the concerns laid out by the opposing side regarding the potential for enforcement of the proposed ordinance to create a burden on the city coffers. Jen Wolfe explained in an interview with *The Rapidian* that the “Chicken Task Force” had set up a rescue committee and that they had volunteers ready to teach residents about chickens, to show how to care for them, and even to rescue them should the situation arise,

We’ll go and take the chickens from you at no cost to you and find new homes for them and that sort of thing. Or the City, we’ve even volunteered that if the city wants to call us, that we will be on call and we will get the chickens from them, from the people or from the city. So animal control doesn’t have to do it so it won’t be a cost to the city. We have told them we will do this (July 13, 2010).

Bruce Morrison shared his idea with the Commission on how to create revenue so the city would be able to afford any situations that would arise,

I think [if] we’re gonna do this we should actually create a fee, much like
you would buy a dog license for your dog so everything is out in the open, you’ll have money to hire a part-time health inspector to actually go around and make sure everybody’s doing it properly (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Brings in Creative Class

An interesting point that was raised that seems particularly pertinent to my research is that if the City were to pass the proposed ordinance, it would be a draw for individuals that are part of the “creative class”. Andy DeBraber argued that enticing the creative class would enhance the appeal of Grand Rapids as a city to live in,

Secondly, our growth as a city and our desire to be one that is attractive to the creative class and to young families will be heightened by approving this ordinance. Should this ordinance not be approved it will give me the first pause to consider whether I do really want to live in this city (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Carol Gastongame also told the Commission that “I am one of the elusive twenty-somethings that all cities are trying to prevent from leaving right now” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Agrees with Limits

Lastly, a few residents also indicated that there were definitely lines that should not be crossed. There was agreement that roosters should not be a part of the plan and that the size requirements for coops made sense. Matthew Goad qualified his agreement with the limitations, “I don’t mind some distance limits are reasonable, but the current one is overkill. And, you know, shots and stuff and stuff like that, that’d be fine. I’m sure nobody would care” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).
Resident Actors

As stated above, the vast majority of actors in favor of the proposed ordinance were residents (61). Many appeared at the Commission Hearings, and nearly all that wrote letters to the editor, interviewed by television and newspaper, and wrote to the Commission had also appeared at least once at a Commission Hearing. Due to the number of participants, I will not list them out here.

Residents’ Themes

As shown in the overall thematic categories and descriptions above, there were fifteen thematic categories for all groups. All fifteen thematic categories remain for the residents as shown in Table 14. While, there is a bit of a shift in importance of some of the themes, the most popular themes from the combined groups remains intact for the residents-only group.
The most popular reason to have chickens among the residents was the fact that the eggs were local, they tasted better, and were overall a better product. Leigh Emory told the Commission, “[t]hese eggs are as local as local gets. They’re nutritious, they’re healthy . . .” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Josiah Geiss, a child, came before the Commission and said, “I want chickens in the city, ‘cause they give good, free, local food . . .” (Commission Hearing, June 22, 2010).

Karen Morris added that she wanted to purchase eggs from her “neighbors & know the conditions the chickens live in” (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010). In Esther Neil’s

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<td>Agrees with limits</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Enforcement costs low</td>
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Table 14

*Residents’ Thematic Results*
letter to the Commission, she indicated that “[h]aving chickens would also provide a
more natural and fresh source of eggs” (June 18, 2010). Hosannah Neil, age nine, spoke
at the public hearing and was disappointed that “[n]owadays our City is not allowing us
to produce our own fresh eggs by having chickens which have been around for centuries”
(Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Reverend Rodney Otto thought that Grand Rapids should join other cities in
adopting this ordinance and wrote his belief that “[m]ore and more efforts need to be
made to provide local foods . . .” (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010). Arlene Hendricks Potter
also wrote in as part of the GPNA letter and shared his hopes that the proposed ordinance
would be approved because “[t]he benefits are tremendous. First of all, healthy chickens
for great-tasting and healthier eggs (providing the chickens are fed organic food and are
well cared for)” (July 13, 2010).

Lisa Rose Starner saw this proposal as a way for Grand Rapids to continue to be
relevant in the larger food movement,

And I think we’re well poised for Michigan right now to say how does this
fit into the bigger picture of making Grand Rapids a good food city? I
think the state is positioning Michigan as a good food state through the
Michigan Good Food Charter. If you’re not aware of it, it was unveiled
recently, just in the past week, by the Governor and her Michigan Food
Policy Council. Something, her task to us is make it relevant, locally. So
what’s our responsibility as Grand Rapids to say, ‘this might just be about
chickens, but what does it do for the City of Grand Rapids?’ (Public
Hearing, July 13, 2010).

In a recent interview, Ms. Starner said that she believed there was a connection
between the larger food movement and local food as symbolized by the proposed
backyard chicken ordinance,
I think it not passing touches on all of these other subjects that I talked about, public trust, working with the city, diversity, um, curating, things being—embracing chaos. Not to say that chickens would be chaos, but embracing something that is more organic and to put power back into the hands of citizens (Personal interview, April 16, 2013).

Another very popular theme was the importance of chickens in maintaining a healthful ecosystem and allowing individuals and families to be more sustainable. Rick Beerhorst felt that urban chickens were a way to spark change and allow for sustainable practices, “[t]here’s a tremendous groundswell of interest and it isn’t just chickens but it’s chickens--it’s kind of a lightning rod right now for lot of things which have to do with sustainability and local foods and being a resilient city” (Commission Hearing, June 22, 2010).

Leigh Emory thought that chickens would be another way that Grand Rapids could show its sustainability,

I believe that allowing residents to keep chickens is wholly in line with the City’s sustainability goals. I’m also aware of the award that the City recently won for being an American leader in sustainability. I know a lot of that had to so with some of the green buildings that have been built, but certainly a part of that is things like this. Backyard chickens is sort of a small thing but at the same time I feel that it’s a crucial part of a larger goal of developing sustainable local food systems (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Carol Gastongame also felt that she could be more environmentally conscious with chickens. She could give chickens her food scraps, which would reduce the waste sent to the landfill. She expressed how she wanted to create an urban farm like “Growing Power” in Wisconsin (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Makel Geiss read a poster from

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Growing Power is a non-profit urban garden in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Will Allen, the founder and CEO, purchased an abandoned nursery that now serves as the primary source of fresh food for inner city residents who previously had little to no access to supermarkets. On two acres of land Growing Power maintains
1918 that indicated that “[t]able and kitchen waste provide much of the feed for the hens” (Commission Hearing, June 22, 2010). Laura Murison stated simply, “[t]hose who think of hens as unbefitting a modern city need to come to terms with the fact that the Chem-Lawn monoculture is on its way out and sustainability is on its way in” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

There were a number of individuals, adults and children alike, who signed letters in support of backyard chickens. These people were counted among those who were “just in favor” of backyard chickens in Grand Rapids. Folks like them spoke publicly to say that they “just like chickens”, as Steve DeJong told the Commission (Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010). Josiah Geiss, for his part, said he “just really want[s] chickens” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Just under half of the instances in the public record were of the residents trying to assuage any fear regarding potential diseases or pests from being a problem. Jason Neil, who has a degree in chemistry at the University of Michigan, refuted the poultry industry’s statements regarding biosecurity when he stated that it had to do with the numbers of chickens in close proximity, much like when humans live in close proximity and overtax their sewer systems. “So, biosecurity maybe comes into play a little bit more seriously with, uh, 9,000 chickens in a backyard but 5 should be doable” (J. Neil, Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

In addition, Steve DeJong said that his birds were immunized against diseases, which should alleviate the potential for disease (Commission Hearing, June 22, 2010).

over 20,000 plants. To create a sustainable ecosystem the farm has fish, worms, chickens, rabbits, bees, ducks, and goats. The non-profit also holds workshops for those interested in replicating this concept. (Growing Power, n.d.).
Scott Geiss also said that reports from the World Health Organization show that the avian flu “threat remains very small” and that a study by the University of Florida revealed that diseases in small flocks are “uncommon enough that they should not discourage bird-keeping” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

In his letter of support for the proposed ordinance Nathan Jonker argued that pests could be handled, “[g]iven our population of skunks, raccoons, and opossums, residents should be encouraged to build sturdy pens to keep these predators out . . .” (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010). Carol Gastongame wanted to remind everyone that pests are not a new issue in the city. “I think cities have always had and will always have cockroaches, mice, and rats. I don’t believe that chickens will contribute to that any more than anything else is already in the city” (C. Gastongame, Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Tess Phillips said that a good cage would keep rodents out (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Many children spoke in favor of the proposed ordinance and wanted the Commission to know that they regarded their chickens as pets, but better. Adults also found chickens to be a fun source of entertainment like any other pet could be. Steve DeJong in his interview with WOOD TV8 quipped that he wanted pets and eggs for breakfast, so he got chickens (May 27, 2010). Josiah Geiss told the Commission at two separate hearings that chickens made good pets (June 22, 2010, July 13, 2010).

Bruce Morrison relayed to the Commission that his chickens were “a great joy” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). As Chad Morton said in his interview with The Grand Rapids Press (2010:A3), “We have gotten attached to them. They’re great pets . . .”. Cara Phillips told the Commission that her family treats their chickens like any other pet.
“They are as much a part of our household as other peoples’ dogs or cats would be. We take care of them as well as we would a cat or a dog” (C. Phillips, Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Arlene Hendricks Potter thought “[t]his is really helpful for those with kids and want a ‘pet’ to care for that is more than a pet as far as usefulness” (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010).

Another popular argument for the proponents of the backyard chicken ordinance was that having the chickens was a low-cost way to provide food for themselves and their families. This theme is the first disparity between all of the proponent groups and the residents’ results. This theme was moved up in frequency ahead of the theme that other cities are doing fine. All of the twelve instances that appeared in the overall category appear here in the residents’ results while the other cities theme fell by two instances.

Jody Coulter asked the Commission to allow her to raise chickens to help with her budget, and to be able to give her the opportunity to “stand on my own two feet” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). In an interview with The Rapidian, Ms. Coulter also expressed that she could have “an incredibly healthy food for pennies, basically” (July 13, 2010). Marthea Daling Jager also added that the addition of chickens would “serve as a much needed micro enterprise and food (egg) source, much needed during these very challenging economic times” (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010).

In trying to show that Grand Rapids would be alright with urban flocks, some individuals brought to the Commission examples from other large cities that had successfully implemented the ideas. Lisa Rose Starner emailed the Commission and relayed a detailed discussion she had had with an animal control representative from Salt
Lake City, Utah, in which the representative shared that there were virtually no issues with urban flocks. In my interview with Ms. Starner this year, she shared that she still is confused about the decision against the proposed ordinance given the number of cities that have allowed chickens in the city,

> If Madison can do it, you know, Salt Lake can do it, all these cities that are, you know even rust belt-type cities. East Grand Rapids! Rockford! Like, what—So when you start to look at this all of sudden it doesn’t make sense (April 16, 2013).

Makel Geiss, at both the public hearing on July 13, 2010, and her subsequent interview on the same date, listed many cities that allowed urban chickens, including others in Michigan (Traverse City, Benton Harbor, Ann Arbor, East Grand Rapids, East Lansing, Lansing, Wyoming) and cities larger than Grand Rapids such as New York City and Chicago. Miss Geiss asked “So many other cities allow chickens, why not us?” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Rachel Lee thought that Grand Rapids should give the ordinance a chance and said,

> Cities that have an ordinance in place and have had little problems, they also have small lots, they also are very dense, and they’ve been able to work through this with their neighborhoods (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Marie Mulder also expressed her disappointment that Grand Rapids had not followed in the path of other cities. Reverend Otto told the Commission that progressive cities around the country are allowing backyard hens (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010) and Ruth Salzman wrote to the editor that the trend toward urban chickens is spreading (The Grand Rapids Press 2010:A16).
There were ten instances of individuals who mentioned that having chickens would be a good experience, mostly for children. Donald Heydens wrote that he thought it would be beneficial for “kids to see nature close up” (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010). Hosanna Neil, a 9 year old, shared with the Commission,

May I also mention that the experience of having chickens will greatly add to our knowledge of taking care of animals. Chickens nowadays are not getting to participate in this learning experience (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Amy Townsend added that she thought raising chickens would add to her daughter’s education (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Joanne Wood echoed these feelings in her letter to the editor (The Grand Rapids Press 2010:A15).

Some residents tried to counteract the anxiety surrounding potential offensive sounds and smells emanating from a neighbor’s backyard. Steve DeJong suggested that one way to remedy odors was to move the coop around the yard (Commission Hearing, August 10, 2010). Others, as discussed above, suggested daily cleaning of the coops to alleviate the potential for noxious odors.

Regarding noise, Bruce Morrison tried to allay fears of loud noises piercing the quiet city streets, “I would like to address what maybe the neighbors have concerns about. Uh, one is noise. Hens make very little noise, about as much noise as the curtains over here” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

A handful of residents believed that having chickens allowed for communities to become strong and develop relationships. “[W]e’re neighbors, we’re community and that’s more and more, [of a] kinda opportunity to work these things out together. . . . there’s been a lot of good camaraderie that’s happened through this” (R. Beerhorst,
Paula Besherrari likened having chickens to her experience with having a vegetable garden in her front yard. She explained that her neighbor would scold her and tell her that vegetables were for the back yard, not the front. However, at the end of the season, her neighbor conceded that the garden was a “beautiful addition” to the neighborhood. She believed that chickens can also be a “beautiful addition” to the city (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Steve DeJong added that, “[i]t also deepens our relationship with others, particularly with our children and a backyard flock you may already have discovered that many children like nothing better than to go see the chickens and help take care of them” (Commission Hearing, June 22, 2010).

Other residents argued that chickens are a better choice than the typical cat or dog that lives in the city. Fran Spitzer wrote that she did not see anything wrong with chickens (or roosters for that matter), “I see nothing wrong with five chickens or roosters. Better than five cats roaming all over!” (GPNA letter, July 13, 2010). Amy Townsend, a veterinary technician, wanted to be sure that everyone understood that animals residing in the city legally were not immune to diseases, “I won’t scare everyone by telling you all of the communicable diseases that we diagnose in our dogs and cats every day” and that it takes responsible pet ownership regardless of the animal (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Some residents did not understand the ban on slaughter and one individual thought that roosters would be fine; in fact, this resident missed “hearing the rooster over on College Avenue” (F. Spitler, GPNA letter, July 13, 2010). One resident was very troubled about what to do with chickens when they die or wanted to know if a legal place would be set up for slaughtering city chickens (A. Hendricks Potter, GPNA, July 13,
Another resident wanted to know what the difference was between slaughtering a chicken and throwing away the unusable parts from a chicken purchase at a store. She suspected that there was a political motivation behind the ban, “I am suspicious that this suggestion to ban slaughter of hens isn’t so much a concern for waste as it is a small group’s political interest” (K. Locke, GPNA letter, July 13, 2010). Unfortunately, she did not elaborate further on the identity of the group.

The theme that urban chickens may help to bring in the creative class was strictly raised by residents, jumping ahead of a few other themes relative to the ordering found for proponents overall. Rachel Lee argued that passing the proposed ordinance would attract new residents and keep existing ones (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Cara Phillips suggested to the Commission that the same cities with which Grand Rapids is competing to attract young people allow urban chickens (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Lisa Rose Starner asked, “What do cities offer creative professionals?” She suggested that she and her husband were considering options on what cities to live in and the decision the city made would be part of their consideration (the family did not move, however) (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

A few residents agreed that there should be limits on roosters and quantity of hens. Bruce Morrison shared that when he was in the Peace Corps he lived next to roosters and he wanted to tell the Commission that “roosters should not be part of the plan” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Tess Phillips, a student, agreed that roosters should not be allowed (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).
The last category, one that dropped from the combination of groups, was that the enforcement costs would be low for the city. Andy DeBraber informed the Commission that in other cities where urban chickens have been approved the enforcement costs have been “very, very low” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Commissioners’ Thematic Results

While there were four Commissioners in favor of the proposed ordinance, one retired and was replaced. There were only themes that arose in the Commissioners’ discussion. The majority of the dialogue involving these Commissioners was about the administration of the proposed ordinance rather than their own opinions on the topic. Table 15 shows the two instances that arose with the Commissioners.

Table 15

Commissioners’ Thematic Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Environment/Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Agrees with limits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commissioner Rosalyn Bliss indicated in an interview with *The Grand Rapids Press* that having chickens “was consistent with the vision for the city” (Harger 2009:A8). Additionally, David LeGrand, the retiring commissioner, was quoted in the same article that “every argument against chickens is theoretical at best” and that he
“favored ‘common sense’ restrictions on noisy roosters and odors from manure” (Harger 2009:A8).

All other instances of public speaking by Mayor Heartwell, such as in his monthly television appearance, newspaper references, or hearing discussions, were largely directed toward administrative matters. This was true as well for the commissioners. Commissioner Kelly, in her hearing discussions, and Commissioner Bliss, in her discussion at the hearings and emails with the City Attorney, were both steeped in procedural issues and did not rise to the level of opinion. This is not to say that they were not involved in substantive issues related to backyard chickens; in fact, Commissioner Bliss was a regular attendee at the meetings to draft the proposed ordinance and forwarded the proposal to the city attorney for review. Lisa Rose Starner indicated she was in contact with the Commissioner on the day of the vote and heard that it would be defeated before the hearing took place (Personal interview, April 16, 2013).

“Chicken Task Force” Themes

While there were many who participated in the “Chicken Task Force”, according to Jen Wolfe what started out with ten to 15 people became over 35 participating individuals, although only four individuals identified themselves to the Commission as representatives of the group – Jen Wolfe, Kim Geiss, Jason Otto, and Kevin Hayes.

The two top themes for the task force included responding to fears over disease and pests and the potential lack of enforcement of the proposed ordinance. The remaining eight themes had one instance each as shown in Table 16.
Table 16

*Chicken Task Force Thematic Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Disease is a non-issue/Pests are a non-issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Enforcement costs low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Less of a nuisance than cats/dogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Good experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Other cities are fine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Local food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pets with benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Environment/sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Community building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Questioned ban on roosters/slaughter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In response to the alarm raised regarding disease, Kim Geiss brought a report from the Centers for Disease Control that stated there was no need to remove backyard flocks (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Jason Otto lent his support to Jason Neil’s earlier assessment of biosecurity,

Large concentrations of chickens like those found in industrialized situations have accelerated of human pathogenic viruses that have existed for centuries in these birds. This is because the virus is allowed to mutate much easier among the new larger populations of birds. In a backyard situation the birds would most likely die before it could mutate to a human pathogenic state. Proper biosecurity measures are act—by lars [sic]—by large-scale growers are actually the best protection against commercial contamination, not laws banning us from raising our own hens (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

With the City’s budget a prominent talking point in their argument against the ordinance, the “Chicken Task Force” wanted to let the community know that they were available to help with education and rescue should the need arise. Jen Wolfe pointed out
that getting a chicken “is not like taking home a kitten” (*The Rapidian* 2010). The “Chicken Task Force” had plans to educate anyone who wanted to raise chickens, to help them through the planning phase, and to be on-call for any issues that would arise. The group viewed this as a way to prevent problems before they started. They also offered to catch, or pick up, unwanted chickens and relocate them without having animal control involved (*The Rapidian* 2010).

Jason Otto agreed and added that by voting the proposed ordinance down, the city may create more enforcement issues with individuals willing to break the law to have chickens. Lisa Rose Starner confirmed that there are individuals still keeping chickens within city limits and if they get an order to remove them, they do so when the inspector arrives and then return them after the inspector leaves (Personal interview, April 16, 2013).

In respect to chickens being better then, and less of a nuisance then, cats or dogs, Kim Geiss, as reported above, did research on the average waste a dog produces versus the average waste (including litter) of an average hen. The volume of waste eliminated by a canine far surpassed the chicken by seven to one (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Covering the themes of “great experience” and “sustainability”, Jen Wolfe believed that having chickens was the “perfect educational tool. It’s the perfect way to partnership with a garden for your own sustainability. They make great pets with benefits, sort of idealist, sort of partnership with an animal” (*The Rapidian* 2010). In an attempt to play down the perceived problems of chickens in the city, Kim Geiss spoke
with a council member who indicated there were no issues in Ann Arbor (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Jen Wolfe also believed that city kids should be able to connect to their food just as much as country kids. By doing so they benefit from local, healthful food, and connect with their community. Just because city kids live in the city,

doesn’t mean they shouldn’t get to feel like they are a part of their lives and with gardens and chickens and other things like that, it’s a way for them to connect to their city and to their neighbors and to their families. . . And kids can raise these things. And they can make dinner out of these things. And they can be involved in their own world (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

Lastly, in an email to the Task Force, City Attorney, and Commissioner Bliss, Kevin Hayes simply stated “We should be able to process our own chickens” (Email communication, January 25, 2010).

**Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council Themes**

The Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council is a group that, according to Lisa Rose Starner, attempts to advocate for food policies within the city (Personal interview, April 16, 2013). The Council backed the proposed ordinance and thought that having chickens would give residents the opportunity to have access to local, healthful food. During the debate, two individuals represented the Council in the public discourse, Cynthia Price and Tom Cary. Together they brought four themes to bear on behalf of the Council as shown in Table 17.
Table 17

*Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council Thematic Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Less of a nuisance than cats/dogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Environment/sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Enforcement costs low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Other cities are fine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tom Cary believed that chickens in the city were less of a problem than owning a cat or dog in the city. “Just thinking about the number of people who have been injured from dog bites, nobody says much about whether you can have a dog or not” (Harger 2009:A8).

Cynthia Price told the Commission that the from the beginning the Council has “worked toward encouraging individual and community self-reliance” and along with maintaining a garden, chickens would add to residents’ ability to be self-reliant and sustainable (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

The ecological benefits of local food, including food grown and raise at or near home, go beyond the elimination of the massive fossil fuel waste of trucking food long-distance. . . . the presence of chickens can complete a backyard ecosystem. Chicken waste provides nutrients for growing fruits and vegetables. Since chickens eat insects they may relieve growers of the need to use pesticides (C. Price, Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).

She further went on to say that she understood that the Commission may be mindful of costs for implementing the proposed ordinance and offered the services of the Council to assist the city in supporting the ordinance (Public Hearing, July 13 2010). And at the same time she informed the Commission that in her conversations with other cities,
within and without Michigan, she had found few complaints and problems after allowing
backyard hens (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010).
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The questions that framed the study once again are: who is participating in the ordinance process in Grand Rapids specifically as it relates to urban chicken-keeping? How do concepts of identity and class as defined by new social movement theory give us insight into the local food movement? The hope is that the answers to these questions will provide an understanding of what is going on among those who participate in food movements.

Since this is a case study of one Midwestern town, broad generalizations should be used sparingly, if at all. However, the insight this study provides can be a springboard for studies to test the themes that have arisen within Grand Rapids. This research has also brought up some interesting questions that were not on my radar at the outset of the study. Some of these questions I have attempted to address within the scope of this research. However, other questions that I cannot attend to here may be useful for future researchers to consider as they begin to construct their own research that my methods were not designed to incorporate.

As my review of the research presented in this chapter will support, a main conclusion about backyard chickens and the food movement yielded by this study is that it fits within the Marxist ideas of alienation of labor. However, Touraine’s discussion on the business elite, managers, and consumers also fit well within this conclusion. The
poultry industry shows its desire to retain control of the production of the final product. The city and its affiliates (the neighborhood associations, the newspaper, and even the county) manage this control by opposing the idea of giving residents the ability to raise their own chickens. And the residents remain consumers of a product they could have produced themselves. Furthermore, identity, for new social movements is important, and I find that an “ethic of care” appears to run through the movement as a factor that may have unified the group in its shared goal of passing the proposed ordinance. The second leg of new social movement theory, class, if defined in economic terms, had little by way of identification in the debate; however, when class is viewed as a lifestyle, middle class concepts are clearly shown in the debate.

Actors in the Study

By far the largest category of individuals participating in the chicken ordinance process were residents at sixty-eight. Next came the Commissioners at eight (though only seven sit on the commission at any time) followed by the poultry industry with six representatives. The neighborhood organizations had five representatives and the “Chicken Task Force” had four representatives. The Food Systems Council had two representatives while *The Grand Rapids Press*, the Kent County Health Department, and the Grand Rapids Code Compliance Manager had one representative each.
One of the fascinating items that came to light during the debate was that many individuals openly acknowledged keeping chickens in defiance of the law. One resident, Jason Neil, even commented that he was surprised to hear of all those that had “confessed” to having backyard chickens. Rick Beerhorst shared at the June 22, 2010, Commission Hearing that many educated individuals in the community already had obtained their chickens and coops because they thought it would be a “slam dunk.” The Beerhorsts, who had procured their flock the year before, decided they wanted to change the law when they were cited for illegal chickens. Scott Geiss, too, had established his large flock and was cited. Some of these people knew the law and chose to break it; others chose to break the law with an expectation that the law would change. The opponents of the ordinance pointed out that the individuals who had their flocks already were breaking the law and questioned whether they would obey the restrictions of the ordinance if it passed. Would keeping backyard flocks rise to the level of civil disobedience?

When civil disobedience is considered, images of the 1960s with its protests, sit-ins, and burning draft cards come to mind. More recent events such as the Occupy Wall Street movement on a national level have brought people out to protest and camp on the streets of many of the major cities in defiance of the law, leading to arrests. There are acts of civil disobedience when it comes to food as well. Dan Allgyer, an Amish man in Pennsylvania, was raided by the FDA for selling raw milk across state lines in April of 2010, and he continued to do so until February of 2012 when a federal court upheld the
FDA’s actions (Eng 2012). When Julie Bass’s front yard was torn up by the city of Oak Park, Michigan, she planted a vegetable garden and faced jail time for refusing to pull it out to plant a lawn (Kirplani 2011). These are two examples of civil disobedience on a local level regarding food that is taking place around the United States. It is possible then, that backyard chicken keeping could follow in the same steps.

According to Sanford J. Rosen (1969:442), civil disobedience is an act that is a “kind of self-help” that breaks the law for political reasons. “[T]he disobedient actor is morally indignant. He chooses to disobey some law because he believes it is unjust or wrong, or to indicate disapproval of some other value, institution or practice” (Rosen 1969:443).

The Beerhorsts may not have originally considered breaking the law for political reasons in the time leading up to the debate; however, after the ordinance failed, they did not remove their chickens. According to the chicken group’s Facebook page, they have had inspectors out a number of times and have paid the fines, but kept the chickens. Others in the group report that when they receive the notice, they remove their chickens until the inspector arrives at which time they bring them back. There are a number of discussions on Facebook on how to handle the inspections as well.

Certainly, those within the group know that it is against the law, and those that raise chickens do so in defiance of that law. Do they do so to make a political statement? That is hard to tell. No one came to the commission and said they were raising the chickens to change the law, though some did say they should have the right to raise them. This may be an important aspect of the argument, since this brings in a legal aspect of
fundamental rights. Is raising one’s own food a right under the law? According to Circuit Court Judge Patrick J. Fiedler (2011) in Wisconsin, the answer is no. Judge Fiedler ruled that plaintiffs did not have a fundamental right to own a cow and drink any milk from that cow. Perhaps owning backyard chickens is an act of civil disobedience after all.

This conclusion may further be supported by the chicken group’s Facebook page that has discussions of what to do to change the law. And while the reasons presented on why they want backyard chickens follow along the same line of the themes raised during the debate, many view the law as restrictive and overly protectionist.

Political process theory, as mentioned in my chapter on social movements, could also be considered in this context. There was a grievance (not being able to have chickens), a political opportunity to create change, and an appearance (based on the comments of the various residents) that the climate was ripe for introducing the proposal. Since the movement failed, however, it is likely that the climate was not ready as the proponents supposed.

Power to the People?

It is worth noting again that those in the opposing group fell primarily within groups that held positions of power in one way or another. The poultry industry, a rather large industry arguably with a lobbying budget to persuade government to see their point of view; the internal city employee who may have held some sway with the Commissioners; Kent County representatives who likely have a working relationship
with the city; and neighborhood organizations, groups that receive federal money through the city and work closely with the city to resolve problems. These groups, would appear to hold considerable sway over the city government leaving the resident with little bargaining power even in larger numbers as is shown in this case study. This runs counter to the popular belief that the consensus model of lawmaking is the primary way with which our governments conduct business. Rather, it would seem that a conflict model, or even a pluralist model would be more accurate in this instance. Ms. Starner would likely support this view when she voiced her confusion regarding the reasons surrounding the Commissioners’ negative decision and indicated on her blog her belief that special interests were at the heart of the results (Starner, n.d.). She was shocked and believed that there was no transparency in the decision (Personal interview, April 16, 2013).

However, while on the surface this certainly appears to be the case, one category of data that could have provided much stronger evidence to support this idea, emails that were received by the Commission, was not available to me. This, then, makes it challenging to draw conclusions on the type of governance that was at work in Grand Rapids during this time.

Show Me the Money

Perhaps, too, the demographic data can shed some light on potential factors for owning backyard chickens. In Michigan’s second largest city, the figures show that the median income for all of the wards is less than $40,000 a year. While the median
incomes are above the poverty line, households making less than $40,000 will certainly struggle to make ends meet. The argument raised by many of the proponents about raising the hens to provide cheap, yet healthful, protein would appear to be supported by the income data as well as the unemployment data. While I was not able to gather information regarding incomes or neighborhoods from those who were part of the public debate, it would seem plausible that those that opposed were in a better economic position (directors of neighborhood organizations, poultry industry, and city employees) than those that stated eggs would help their budget.

This runs counter to my original thoughts that individuals who were in a better financial position (those in the middle to upper-middle class) would be the strongest advocates for backyard chickens. While some of the proponents may well be in that position, there was no good way to track that information with the data I had. Although the economic definition of class could not be examined, cultural displays of class or lifestyles are exhibited in the arguments of the proponents.

The discussion surrounding sustainability, local, and the health benefits of the egg could be middle class concerns, according to Wells et al., (2011), but many advocates of backyard chickens said that they were worried about their budget and were also cognizant of issues like sustainability and health. Rose (1997) argues that the middle class spends its time concerned with issues that encompass ideals based on morals or ethics. Ideas of sustainability, environmental concerns, local food, and the quality and production of food all fall into a cultural discussion that is heard in the middle class. It, then, may not be a
coincidence that these are the top themes found in the proponents’ arguments for backyard chickens.

“They Never Meant to Say Yes”

It is interesting to note that the overwhelming majority of residents spoke publicly in favor of the proposed ordinance, and the proposal was considered a citizen-led movement, yet it did not pass.

Interestingly, the most vocal neighborhood organizations against the ordinance were located in the First Ward. Lisa Rose Starner called SWAN “pot-stirrers” because they have a history of being vocal and demanding (Personal interview, April 16, 2013). Commissioner Gutowski’s viewed SWAN’s objections in a different light than Ms. Starner. He explained that the proposed ordinance would put more pressure on the neighborhood organization to help the city enforce it (Telephone communication, January 20, 2013). Garfield Park Neighborhood Association was a bit different than the other associations in that it sent in a letter that had the director officially disagreeing with the proposal along with a few other residents within the boundaries of GPNA, but in the combined letter, the majority of residents in that association who wrote were in favor of the proposed ordinance.

The “Chicken Task Force” tried to impress upon the Commission and community that they were willing to be an integral part of the implementation and enforcement of the proposed ordinance. The Food Council, too, offered to be a part of the process and to not leave it in the hands of the city.
As the proposal made its way through the official channels, the First Ward Commissioner, Walt Gutowski, began publicly disapproving of the proposed ordinance in June, 2010, but by then the “Chicken Task Force” was eight months into its work on the proposal. The other First Ward Commissioner, Dave Shaffer, and the two Third Ward Commissioners waited until the day of the vote to voice their opposition. Lisa Rose Starner felt that the Commissioners had given lip service to the citizens who wanted the proposed ordinance,

I trusted that as I spoke to my own Commissioners, I’m in the First Ward, that they truly wanted to understand. They might not have personally wanted chickens which is fine, but they wanted to understand, they wanted to do what was right, regardless of what my personal opinion is, and was, of them at that moment, I truly—I wanted to trust them. They’re my elected leaders, right? But that experience, to have it flipped, I felt like there was double-speak and that—that there was no intention of upholding what was—what they were promising. I mean, there’s the foundation of that trust was—was, you know, eroded, I guess after that. Not even eroded, just washed out (Personal interview, April 16, 2013).

She views the ordinance as a symbol of other food justice issues that give power back to the people. She believes that by not passing the ordinance the Commission effectively told the citizens that they are going to retain power while making those that worked on the proposed ordinance expend a lot of time and effort for something they had never planned to approve (L. R. Starner, personal interview, April 16, 2013). The Commission asked the residents to become involved, received their comments and recommendations, and had a large group of citizens willing to assist the city to keep budget and other perceived problems at bay. In the end, when the decision was made, the feeling was, “we’re token. We don’t matter. Our voices don’t matter. Will you act in the citizens’ interest, ever?” (L. R. Starner, personal interview, April 16, 2013).
According to Pedrina (2006:1729), law is a “symbolic resource” that groups use to legitimize a movement; translating “a cultural frame into an officially recognized legal right is itself one of the central objectives of social movements (emphasis in original). Since the proposed ordinance ultimately did fail and, therefore, failed to legitimize the backyard chicken movement in Grand Rapids, the backyard chicken advocates have diminished significantly since that time. While there still is a group on Facebook continuing to push for the law to change, and Ms. Starner agrees with and supports them, she felt that she had more important issues with which to worry about,

‘Cause this really needs to die. Um, it’s—it’s not even a big deal. You know, that’s what’s -- there are a hundred things we could get our panties in a bind over right now, you know, other -- that are a bigger deal. Because I really don’t think this is the biggest deal ever -- chickens (Personal interview, April 16, 2013).

Pedriana (2006:1754) indicates once a social movement succeeds and law is created to produce new rights for the group, it changes the political landscape and now there is a new normal, so to speak, for all actors involved in future discussions of law creation. However, it may stand to reason that an attempt and failure to create new law can damage the legitimacy of the movement and the political landscape would then be more challenging to navigate.

This lack of legitimacy seems to be the outcome for the backyard chicken movement. In my conversation with Commissioner Gutowski, he had no interest at all in revisiting the topic (Telephone communication, January 20, 2013). When I contacted the City Clerk’s Office to gather documents for my data collection, a clerk was keenly interested in my reasons for wanting the information. She informed me that she spoke
against the proposed ordinance and would not want to see it come back (Robin Boss, telephone communication, December 5, 2012). Scott Geiss contacted Commissioner Shaffer after the vote in an effort to understand the Commissioner’s vote; in that conversation the Commissioner told Mr. Geiss that he would reconsider the proposed ordinance if he were presented with one thousand signatures of registered voters in favor of backyard chickens in the First Ward (Geiss 2012). Nearly three years have passed and no one has taken up the task of gathering signatures, though it has been brought up repeatedly on the Facebook page.

“It’s not Even About Chickens”

Ms. Starner saw the lack of acceptance by the city leaders as part of a more important problem within the city, “is it part of a larger food movement? Yes, but I think the underlying issues that it brings up are actually a bigger deal and they’re bigger issues. It’s not even about chickens” (Personal interview, April 16, 2013).

When looking at the distribution between those that were against the proposed ordinance and those who wanted the proposal to pass, the actors in the opposition had the majority of the “power” groups: big business, neighborhood associations, the local press, the Health Department and a City Manager. The groups that were part of the advocacy were made up largely of residents, followed by a resident-formed task force and the Food Council. According to Lisa Rose Starner, the Food Council does not hold any sway with City leaders either,

The city has no intention of investing in that discussion. . . . The city does not want to get into the food business. They don’t wanna, you know, there
are lots of different, like the Toronto Food Policy Council, um, that’s a really great organization to look to as a model. . . . And it’s this vacuum, there’s still a vacuum there (Personal interview, April 16, 2013).

Therefore, all of the opponents, even though they publicly numbered less than half of the public proponents, held the majority of the voices of power in the community.

The second-largest opponent group was the poultry industry itself. This industry wanted to let the community know that they knew best about how to raise chickens. They did so in part by creating an atmosphere of fear with the discussion on disease and biosecurity. George House told the Commission, “we need to protect the people from chickens and the chickens from people” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Veterinarian Mohammad Mousa’s first appearance at the June 22, 2010, Commission Hearing included a very scientific discussion on the diseases, including reports from the CDC, and discussions of how avian flu has impacted other countries (but he did not state that there has not yet been one case in the North America). Many of the representatives of Herbruck’s Poultry Ranch also played to economic fears when it argued that backyard chickens could jeopardize 400 families and their livelihood should disease become an issue. Even when these voices were counteracted with strong research-based evidence to the contrary (e.g., Jason Otto and Jason Neil), it did not seem to impact the decision-making process.

Through this discussion it seems to that the poultry industry wanted to convey to the Commission and the general public that the average resident should not be in charge of producing their own eggs. That responsibility should be left to industry. To state it
another way, the residents should continue to be consumers and the industry should remain producers.

There is a possibility here to view this through Marxist lens, modified with Touraine’s new social movement discussion. The residents, must be consumers of the goods they use because they have been separated from the modes of production. Here the residents who want to “get back to the land” even in a modest way are being told by big business that the dangers of disease are not to be left to the average person and there are safer alternatives. The alternatives, of course, are to buy their eggs and meat products. Commissioner White, in his open letter after the vote in which he lays out his opposition to the proposal, wraps up the letter by stating that there are alternatives to having your own chickens such as visiting a farmers market and buying directly from a farm (Smith 2010).

However, these alternatives remove the consumers (a/k/a the residents) from the direct production of their food and therefore alienate them from the direct benefits of producing that food. Some of these benefits were enumerated by residents when they mentioned the economic, health, and enjoyment benefits of raising chickens. This is at the heart of Marx’s alienation theory. When an individual cannot make the things necessary for his or her daily living, that activity belongs to the business owners. In this case, the residents do not have the opportunity, even in a small way such as having a few chickens, to provide some food that they have a part in producing. Instead, the industry and the local government, as Touraine’s managers of the business elite, forces the residents to become consumers and purchase the eggs. If the studies about the factory
eggs are to be believed, then the only one truly benefiting from the factory farm eggs is the industry. The consumers not only do not have the benefit of producing the egg, but they also receive an inferior quality of egg.

Further, as Touraine (1971) points out, the farther individuals move away from conforming to the consumerist society, the more social conflict can be observed. Therefore, the elites do not want consumers to pull way from their consumption of purchased eggs because it can reveal the problems with the industrialization of food. The more they pull away, the harder it is to maintain conformity, which is the status that the elites want to maintain among the middle class.

So, What About the Creative Class?

There were a few instances where individuals discussed the “creative class” and some individuals self-identified as part of that group. Since one of the goals in this study was to understand class as it related to a push for backyard chickens, this concept was intriguing to find. While there were only four instances where this theme is mentioned, it is worth an exploration in this context.

Florida (2002) created the concept in his book *The Rise of the Creative Class* and he wrote a follow up article in 2003 entitled *Cities and the Creative Class*. This “creative class” is described by Florida (2003:8) as people whose work is “to create new forms”. The types of work that fall into this definition are in the sciences, academia, writing (fiction, non-fiction), art, entertainment (acting, designing), and engineering. He also includes “editors, cultural figures, think-tank researchers, analysts and other opinion
makers” (Florida 2003:8). This class is at the forefront of creativity that others are able to use and integrate into society. Further, he draws in another group he calls “creative professionals”, which include technology, health, finance, law, and business workers (Florida 2003:8). These individuals have a tendency to have more education and their work is mainly categorized as “creative problem-solving” (Florida 2003:8). Florida estimates that thirty percent of workers in America fit into this creative class.

To attract and keep this class of worker, Florida (2003:10) advances “3Ts of economic development: technology, talent, and tolerance” (emphasis in original). The technology component is both in the development as well as the pre-existing location with robust technology centers. Talent refers to the educational attainment of individuals, and Florida defines that as having completed a minimum of a four year degree. Tolerance, for Florida, is inclusion of a diverse group of people and a willingness to interact with them. If a city has two components and not the third, the city will not draw and attract the creative class.

Why is it important to attract the creative class? According to Florida’s research, the creative class provides an economic boost to a city’s economy. Cities with large populations of creative class positively correlate to industries in technology and new products (as measured by patents) in a “statistically significant” manner (Florida 2003:10).

Interestingly, as Florida (2003:9, 14) reviewed the various cities (both large and mid-size) in his paper, he specifically references Grand Rapids, Michigan, as having a very small group of the creative class (it fits the “Working Class Index” better), whereas
East Lansing, Michigan, has a very high concentration of the creative class. Florida would argue that Grand Rapids does not fit well into the creative class definition because there is less anonymity and stronger community ties in the city and these features do not attract the creative class which desires more anonymity and weaker ties to community. This would seem to fit within the region’s strong ties to its religious roots and core values, which anyone moving to the region is quickly told by a local. This appears to be supported as well in the data since there were six thematic instances about having backyard chickens as community building (two more than the themes regarding the creative class).

However, when researching the creative class, there appears to be a lot of discussion surrounding municipalities quickly trying to attract the creative class with little to no research regarding the true impact of this group. Reese, Faist and Sands (2010) studied mid-size Canadian cities and could not find an impact that the creative class made on the economies of those cities. They did not believe the policies that many cities were implementing to draw in that group were going to be helpful. Hoyman and Faricy (2009) concluded that there were not any sound economic indicators to indicate that the creative class would be beneficial to municipalities and instead they counsel that cities should focus on social and human capital policies. Comunian, Faggian, and Cher Li (2010) found that bohemian college graduates as a rule did not fare well locating jobs post graduation in the United Kingdom. This was an interesting find considering this group is one said to be highly valued in the policies surrounding drawing the creative
class, yet when one of these graduates find a job, the pay does not appear to reflect this value.

The family that began the push for backyard chickens, the Beerhorsts, also seem to embody the creative class as defined by Florida and examined by Comunian, et al. (2010). Rick Beerhorst is a full-time artist with painting and drawing as his primary medium. His wife, Brenda Beerhorst, is also a full-time artist whose medium is painting as well as fiber arts. On their Etsy shop, Ms. Beerhorst describes her family as an “artist family” where they all contribute to support themselves fully as artists. Their profile also mentions that they are urban homesteaders with “backyard chickens” (Beerhorst, n.d.).

This family falls well within the scope of creativity that Florida promotes as the backbone of the creative class. While there are not many who can live solely as an artist, this family claims to be able to make it work. They do not, however, appear to be immune to the struggles of the economy as Mr. Beerhorst stated at the June 22, 2010, Commission Hearing, “our situation right now is extremely challenged -- a lot of people are really trying to -- like myself as an artist who make very little money” and he saw backyard chickens as a way to help stretch the budget a little further. Ms. Starner also believed that the definition of creative class should include individuals who may not have the economic wealth that Florida expects to be present.

Some individuals argued that Grand Rapids is competing with Ann Arbor (arguably closer to the requirements Florida advocates for drawing the creative class) for creative workers. Jen Wolfe said that we cannot complain that Ann Arbor is taking all of these individuals away if we do not make the changes necessary to draw them in (Schaut
2010). Of course, the arguments regarding attracting the creative class did not appear to sway the Commissioners who voted against the proposed ordinance. One question that is raised by these circumstances is, “In the face of the potential economic benefit during difficult economic times (and specifically since many municipalities are not waiting for research to prove otherwise) why would Grand Rapids not enact an ordinance that would draw in creative people?”

As mentioned above, while the economic value of the creative class may be questionable, one of the “3Ts” -- tolerance -- may ultimately be problematic for Grand Rapids. “We will not have a fair good food movement until we talk about the racism, until we talk about ways that people can engage policy to change things. So, it’s really a fine example of how not fair our food system is” (L. R. Starner, personal interview, April 16, 2013). Ms. Starner’s opinion of the diversity issue in Grand Rapids is that it is “overcurated” (Personal interview, April 16, 2013). She takes her views from diversity in nature, which is not as ordered and simple as the very orderly life people have created in Grand Rapids. She argues that people do not want to get into the difficult discussions “because [like nature] it’s messy” and there’s no simple path to follow (L. R. Starner, personal interview, April 16, 2013). Grand Rapids has created the vision of the creative class as “mostly white, mostly affluent, and there are token minorities put in for quota” (L. R. Starner, personal interview, April 16, 2013). According to Florida’s description of the creative class, there must be a more open and inviting atmosphere for the creative classes to be enticed by Grand Rapids.
Surprisingly, there was no discernable evidence on identity regarding chicken keeping. No supporter identified with chickens in a “I’m a chicken person” way much like some people proclaim that they are a dog or a cat person. I expected to find a few very devoted individuals who would be very happy to extol the virtues of how connected they felt to chickens. The closest anyone came to this was that a few individuals expressed that they liked chickens a lot and one woman said she was “a big fan” (J. Cowell, Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). The Beerhorsts have identified themselves as urban homesteaders on their website, however they were the only ones to make the claim. The identity of the chicken and how it does (or does not) fit into an urban landscape seemed to be more of the discussion during this process.

Furthermore, as part of new social movements, the identity of the participants within the movement is considered an essential part of the movement. The closest cohesive identity from any of the proponents of backyard chickens was that they wanted chickens in the city. That was the unifying factor. The individuals did not appear to converge over Melucci’s idea of an individualized identity as he defined it. Though, the data did not readily give these identities: age, socioeconomic status, or race. Gender was relatively easy to obtain, on the other hand, but did not appear to be a polarizing factor in the debate.

Personal ideals, the morality that Touraine (1977) discusses, on the other hand, seem to emerge as an “ethic of care” which is manifested in the data with many actors stating that they take good care of the chickens (or that anyone owning chickens should).
Steve DeJong, in his comments to the Commissioners on June 22, 2010, reiterated that teaching his children to care and respect the chickens was tantamount to teaching them to care and respect of others, including future children and aging parents or grandparents (Commission Hearing, June 22, 2010). Others also recognized this care ethic; Arlene Hendricks Potter agreed that children would learn how to care for the chickens (GPNA letter to Commission, July 13, 2010). Cara Philips, parent, also expressed that they took care of their chickens as well as any other pet, and that they were part of the family (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Laura Murison shared that she prefers to eat eggs from “well-cared for hens” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). The point that Ms. Murison shows that the ethic of care could be gleaned from those individuals who prefer to buy local eggs due to the quality of life of the factory chickens.

Not surprisingly, there were children that acknowledged this care ethic as well. Hosanna Neil, 9 years old, indicated that she is learning how to be responsible and care for another living thing (Communication to Commission, June 18, 2010 and Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Anna DeBraber and Naomi Billings (both children) wrote to The Grand Rapids Press (2010) and expressed that if chicken owners took care of the chickens there would be little odor for neighbors to smell.

Interestingly, this care ethic language is also seen in the poultry industry. Brandon Herbruck indicated that he was learning how to take “proper care” of the birds on his farm (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Mohammad Mousa also shared that the industry knows how to care for the poultry and expressed concern over new chicken owners’ lack of knowledge of chicken-keeping (July 13, 2010). Like Brandon, Cody
Herbruck indicated he too was learning how to care for chickens and was concerned that the City would not require certain measures to be put in place for the safety of chickens and humans (July 13, 2010). Harry Herbruck shared with the Commission that his farm knows how to properly “care” for chickens.

It would appear that each side of the debate was unified by its own definition of care. For the industry, care was a rigid system of control that needed to be followed to prevent bad things from happening. For the proponents of the chicken ordinance, they expressed care in terms of love and affection as well as teaching skills that will can be evinced in other aspects of life. In terms of the movement to allow chickens, this latter definition does appear to be a unifying theme that runs through much of the discussion in the movement’s quest to allow chickens in Grand Rapids.

This unifying theme is an essential part of new social movement theory, and this particular moral identity does appear to have been a part of the group’s collective behavior. However, it would be instructive to interview more individuals who were in favor of the proposed ordinance to better understand if this ethic of care existed in the debate.

Additionally, while I had expected more of a discussion on a unifying them of self-sufficiency, I did not find it to be as prevalent as much as the care ethic. In the proponents themes, there were a handful of discussions regarding taking care of oneself through self-sufficiency. A comment by Cynthia Price of the Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council encouraged the Commission to adopt the ordinance to increase food security through “self-reliance” (Public Hearing, July 13, 2010). Two residents discussed
being able to provide food for themselves by having chickens. That was all there was to the self-sufficiency dialogue. With the current data, there is little evidence that this term could be a unifying factor for the movement in Grand Rapids.

Failure to Organize?

Given the food culture in Grand Rapids and its focus on local foods, the inability to have eggs in your backyard, essentially the pinnacle of local food, is interesting. It is possible that the failure of the proposed ordinance had to do in part with the organization, or lack of organization, within the citizen group. Certainly, this sort of ordinance has passed in other cities, some much larger than Grand Rapids, and it is possible that there may be lessons to learn on a social movement level. One of the limitations of this study is the lack of information from within the organization and so getting data on how the “Chicken Task Force” was organized is challenging at best. However, there are some insights provided to help get a glimpse of the mindset of the task force.

Lisa Rose Starner is a food activist with a master’s degree in public administration and when they were working on the proposed ordinance, she felt she was able to help draft the proposal in a light that would work well for the city, both from an economic perspective as well as from an implementation standpoint in tough economic times. She explained that the task force was a group of residents gathering together for a common purpose and they did their “part of being advocates and active citizens. Civic engagement, really in its purest form of trying to help our city create something that’s
reasonable” (L. R. Starner, personal interview, April 16, 2013). However, Ms. Starner also indicated that,

it was a volunteer task force. I mean as any project. I can’t even say that there was any one particular ringleader out of the whole deal. I mean it was really, it was a collective effort, it was collaborative . . . it was done virtually. I mean we had emails, we met over a beer at Founders (Personal interview, April 16, 2013).

It is interesting that Ms. Starner does not recall any one individual leading the group. Two individuals were identified in the data as chairs of the subcommittees: Kim Geiss chaired the ordinance writing committee and Jen Wolfe chaired the education committee. No one identified as the chair of the rescue committee. Additionally, no one identified as the overall task force representative. The group appeared to have a good set of goals with organized committees able to come up with proactive plans to address questions regarding raising backyard chickens. However, there did not seem to be a leader among the group that could potentially direct the group and work with the media to advocate for the cause. Lack of leadership, coupled with the failure of the proposal, may make a case that this event was not actually a social movement. It may also demonstrate the enduring explanatory value of resource mobilization theory in understanding the rise and fall of social movements.

There is an interesting avenue for potential research with this topic. Traverse City, Michigan, a city that is considerably smaller than Grand Rapids, considerably less diverse than Grand Rapids, but also has a vibrant “foodie” scene does allow chickens in the city. Another intriguing comparison is with regard to food trucks. Grand Rapids has not given food trucks the ability to park in public places. Traverse City, however, just
recently passed an ordinance to allow food trucks in public spaces. Both of these issues, backyard chickens and food trucks, obviously involve the production and distribution of food and both have had high profile, vocal discussions, with a smaller town embracing both initiatives while a city that claims to be progressive and green has not. There is a contradiction waiting to be explored in a comparative study.

**Tying it all Together**

The consumptive class (e.g., the middle class) winds its way through this conclusion. Each topic, while seemingly independent, is connected through a culture of consumption and how the ruling class handles a rejection of that consumption. While some discussions here may be obvious (the creative class discussion as one example), others are more subtle. The ethic of care may not immediately be seen to connect to this culture of consumption. However, when discussing this ethic on the proponents’ side, elements of the care that owners give to their chickens and the belief that the poultry industry does not provide that type of care is an argument against purchasing and consuming the industry’s product. Therefore, the proponents’ ethic of care is a rejection of the consumption of industrialized poultry and a rejection of the conformity that the poultry industry wants to maintain. It is this rejection of industrialized consumption and conformity that would create the beginnings of a social movement regarding chickens in Grand Rapids.

There may have been a segment of the population that rejected this consumption, but according to McAdam (1982), there had to be political opportunities to allow for the
discussion and an organizational strength within the group pushing for backyard chickens. While there was some acceptance in the political sphere (Commissioners Bliss and Kelly and Mayor Heartwell all were behind the proposal), there was not enough momentum within the elite group to grant the space for pushing the proposal forward. Also, as Lisa Rose Starner shared with me in my interview with her, the group was organized loosely and while they did a lot of work on the project, there was no clear leader and structure to carry out the push for the backyard chickens. Since neither of these two important steps were completed, cognitive liberation was never achieved in order to coalesce into a social movement. At best, the backyard chicken debate in Grand Rapids, combined with other discussions on local food, *may* be able to contribute to an overall cultural change toward local foods from which future movements may be able to draw to create a dialogue over other food issues.

Where do We Go From Here?

For now, it may only be a future study that can provide more information to make a convincing case on whether there was a social movement regarding backyard chickens in Grand Rapids. However, there are also questions that were raised through the course of this research that could be followed in future study.

Studying some of the larger issues that came through during this research, such as the lack of strong social food policies in Grand Rapids, and the minimizing of food organizations, like the Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council, by the city government, could provide more insight into the failure of the backyard chicken proposal.
Is it, as Lisa Rose Starner advances, that there will never be any fair food policies until issues of race and class are addressed? A disturbing question that is raised for me is: how can a city with such great food opportunities still have issues with food security? What makes this question even more puzzling is that the local government is certainly aware of these issues and yet steadfastly refuses to engage in any food policy discussions with organizations working to provide food security to at-risk populations. Why does the city refuse to have these discussions? Why do they dismiss the food policy organizations?

Another question that arose for me during the course of this study surrounds the idea of food safety. The poultry industry presented to the City Council that raising chickens was potentially dangerous to the families that would have them in their backyard. It occurred to me that as a society we have become so divorced from understanding about how to raise our own food that it is very easy to accept the poultry industry’s argument on this subject. Are we as a society really scared to produce our own food? Will we continue to need to rely on the food industry for our food?

Lastly, another question that ties in with the questions above is the fear that the poultry industry spread regarding disease and problems with raising chickens. Fear played a large role in much of the poultry industry’s arguments. How much did that fear affect the minds of the Commission? How much does fear play a part in people’s reluctance to become self-sufficient, even on the small level of raising a few chickens?
Conclusion

Returning to my questions at the beginning of this study, who participated in the ordinance process in 2010 and what can we learn from this debate? The participants for the opposing side appeared to have strongest support within the poultry industry, and those in positions of influence (the government, both city and county, the neighborhood organizations, and the local newspaper) with a few residents voicing their objections as well. Conversely, the majority of individuals speaking in favor of the proposed ordinance were residents. The proponents outnumbered the opponents of the proposal by more than two to one and yet they were unable to convince the power holders to pass the ordinance.

What can the disputes voiced in the ordinance process tell us about the “culture of the chicken” and the participants in the (local) food movement? The proponents aligned themselves with wanting backyard chickens as fully supporting the city’s sustainability initiative and adding to the rise in popularity of local foods. However, these views were not strong enough to win the day for the backyard chicken. As detailed above, the ethic of care appears to be a strong value in the “culture of the chicken” as well.

What beliefs do we hear expressed in the argument to allow chickens within city limits? There were many beliefs expressed by those arguing in favor of allowing backyard chickens. Many of these beliefs centered on an ethic of care: for their bodies (eggs are better for you) for the planet (environment, sustainability), for the chickens themselves (pets with benefits, agreeing with limitations), or creating an ethic of care
among children (good experience). While there were other themes, this particular aspect appears to be the strongest theme that runs through the data for this group.

What viewpoints are communicated by those opposed to backyard chickens? There were fewer viewpoints expressed by the opposition, perhaps due to the smaller number of participants, or perhaps because the participants viewed the problem of city chickens in a narrow light. The biggest concern was the risk of disease to both chickens and humans. As I mention above, this could also be viewed as a form of care, however, it appears more in the protectionist view where the industry knows best and the average person should not be meddling with nature. This care could also be seen in the discussions on the fear of lack of care (odor/sound/rodents, densely packed neighborhoods, chickens are work/responsibility/need clean-up, kids grow up/bored/novelty) which dominated much of the debate of the opposition.

The initiative to allow backyard chickens within the city of Grand Rapids does appear to show traces of social movement, specifically new social movement theories, and could align itself with the larger food movement. With the poultry industry succeeding in controlling the industry, however, this particular movement was not successful. The power of the business elite and the managers appears to have been too strong for this movement. Hope has not faded from the proponent group and there are regular discussions of revisiting backyard chickens with the Commission. Perhaps with a shift in their debate, they could succeed in the next iteration.
Appendix A

Original Proposal of Backyard Chicken Ordinance Submitted by Commissioner Bliss on Behalf of the “Chicken Task Force” to City Attorney Mish

Article 8: HEALTH AND SAFETY STANDARDS

Section 8.525 Animals
(2) Farm animals. No farm animal shall be kept or allowed to be kept within any dwelling or dwelling unit or within one hundred feet of any dwelling unit, well, spring, stream, drainage ditch or drain.

(a) Exceptions: Backyard chickens may be kept according to the following conditions
(1) A maximum of five (5) urban chickens may be kept per parcel without the need for a permit on residentially owned properties. Permits review the size of the lot and require written consent by 50% of adjacent neighbors.
(2) Roosters are prohibited
(3) Chickens must be kept in a coop in a rear yard and remain in a coop or an adjoining fenced enclosure.
(4) Enclosures shall be designed with adequate yard space for each chicken. Enclosures must be clean and resistant to predators and rodents. Chickens must be confined to the property lot lines.
(5) Chicken feed must be in rodent resistant and weather proof containers.
(6) Enforcement and abatement shall be regulated by the Housing Code.

FYI - Thoughts on the permit is that it would initially be a 1 year permit for a certain number of urban chickens for $10 and after the first year, if no violations or complaints, it would convert to a permanent permit for the specified number of urban chickens.
Appendix B

Proposed Backyard Chicken Ordinance in Grand Rapids, Michigan
(An amendment to Section 8.582)

Sec. 8.582. - Animals.

(1)  *Domestic Animals.* If an occupant or owner keeps or allows domestic animals within a dwelling, in a yard, in a structure, or upon a property, the occupant or owner shall remove any odorous or unsanitary condition. The property owner shall be responsible for the repair of any damage to the dwelling, structure or yard caused by the animals and shall be responsible for any unsafe condition.

(2)  *Farm Animals.* No farm animal shall be kept or allowed to be kept within any dwelling or dwelling unit or within one hundred (100) feet of any dwelling, dwelling unit, well, spring, stream, drainage ditch or drain. Except for chickens as provided below, no farm animal shall be kept or allowed to be kept within one hundred (100) feet of any dwelling or dwelling unit.

(3)  *Wild Animals.* Any animal not a domestic animal or farm animal, as defined by this Chapter, is a wild animal, and shall not be kept or allowed on any property in the City of Grand Rapids.

The amended code would have amended paragraphs 2 and 3, and added a paragraph 4 as follows:

(2)  *Farm Animals.* No farm animal shall be kept or allowed to be kept within any dwelling or dwelling unit. No farm animal shall be kept or allowed to be kept within one hundred (100) feet of any well, spring, stream, drainage ditch or drain. **Except for chickens as provided below, no farm animal shall be kept or allowed to be kept within one hundred (100) feet of any dwelling or dwelling unit.**

(3)  *Chickens.* For a period of five (5) years from the effective date of the ordinance that adopted this sub-section, chickens may be kept in the City according to the following conditions:

   a. A maximum of five (5) adult female chickens may be kept on a residentially zoned, occupied property, by an occupant thereof, without the need for a permit. Subject to the provisions of sub-sections (3)b. through (3)e. below, five (5) adult female chickens are the total maximum number allowed on a parcel of real property, regardless of how many persons reside on that parcel of real property.
b. Any person wanting to keep more than five (5) adult female chickens on a residentially zoned, occupied property must first apply for and obtain a permit from the City Manager or his/her designee.

c. The person applying for such a permit shall provide the City Manager or his/her designee with the written consent of the owners of at least 50% of the adjacent properties. For the purposes of this sub-section, “adjacent properties” include all properties sharing a common lot line with the residentially zoned, occupied property on which chickens are proposed to be kept. If the applicant is not the owner of the property on which he or she wants to keep chickens, the applicant must also provide the written consent of the owner of the property. Without such consent, the City Manager or his/her designee shall not review the permit application and no permit shall be issued. With such consent, the City Manager or his/her designee shall review the size of the lot, the adequacy of the applicant’s plans for housing and confining the chickens, the applicants stated reasons for desiring to keep more than five (5) chickens, and other factors relevant to the applicant’s particular circumstances.

d. Any person applying for a permit to keep more than five (5) chickens shall pay an application fee established by resolution of the City Commission. An initial permit shall be valid for a period of one (1) year. If the permittee has abided by all ordinance provisions and permit conditions, and has not created a nuisance to the occupants of adjacent properties or the neighborhood, the permit may be renewed for up to four (4) additional one (1) year periods. Any permit may be revoked by the City Manager or his/her designee upon a finding that the permittee has repeatedly violated applicable ordinance provisions or permit conditions.

e. A permit as described above is personal to the applicant. Such a permit may not be transferred to another individual. If the underlying real property is sold, the permit does not run with the land, and a person desiring to keep chickens on the property must apply for a new permit.

f. Roosters are expressly prohibited, regardless of the age or maturity of the bird.

g. Chickens may only be kept by the occupant of a dwelling unit located on the real property on which the chickens are kept.

h. Chickens must be kept in and confined in a properly designated and constructed coop / chicken house or a fenced and covered enclosure, both located
in the “rear yard” of the property, as that term is defined in Chapter 61 of this Code, known as the Zoning Ordinance.

i. Each fenced and covered enclosure shall be designated with adequate yard space for each chicken, and the coop / chicken house and the fenced and covered enclosure combined shall not cover more than 50% of the rear yard. Enclosures must be clean and resistant to predators and rodents.

j. Chicken feed must be in rodent resistant and weather proof containers.

k. The personal keeping the chickens shall abide by all health and safety standards of this Chapter.

l. Chickens may not be butchered, slaughtered, or otherwise killed, for any reason or any purpose on any property on which chickens may be kept pursuant to this ordinance.

(4) Wild Animals. Any animal not a domestic animal or farm animal, as defined by this Chapter, is a wild animal, and shall not be kept or allowed on any property in the City of Grand Rapids.

(Bolded sections are the proposed amendments to Section 8.582.)
Appendix C

Map of the City of Grand Rapids
Appendix D

First Ward Map
Appendix E

Second Ward Map
Appendix F

Third Ward Map
Appendix G

HSIRB Approval Not Needed

Date:  February 14, 2013

To:    Gregory Howard, Principal Investigator  
       Traci Joseph, Student Investigator for thesis

From:  Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re:    Approval not needed for HSIRB Project Number 13-02-28

This letter will serve as confirmation that your project “Neiman Marcus Chicken Coops: Exploring Class and Identity through Backyard Chicken Keeping and the Contemporary Food Movement” has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB). Based on that review, the HSIRB has determined that approval is not required for you to conduct this project because you are analyzing publicly available data and not collecting personal identifiable (private) information about individuals.

Thank you for your concerns about protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects.

A copy of your protocol and a copy of this letter will be maintained in the HSIRB files.


Ansori, Mohammad Hansan. 2009. “Consumerism and the Emergence of a New Middle Class in Globalizing India,” EXPLORATIONS a graduate student journal of southeast Asian studies 9:87-97.


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