



BEEKEEPING in the Village

By Douglas H. Frazer



On August 13, 2019, after considerable study, the Fox Point Village Board enacted an ordinance (creating section 579-17.7) to permit residents to engage in small-scale, hobby beekeeping, joining a growing number of municipalities across Wisconsin.

The honeybee (*apis mellifera*) is a critical pollinator for flowers, fruits, and vegetables. This is important in the urban environment because pollinating insect populations are usually significantly smaller than in rural areas. Managed colonies of bees help sustain biodiversity along with increases in yields and quality of large varieties of plants found in backyard gardens, municipal parks, and flower beds.

According to Sustainable Cities Collective, “urban bees survive better, produce more honey, and are healthier than rural bees. Urban bees have a winter survival rate of 62.5 percent, compared to just 40 percent for their rural counterparts. Urban bees also produce 26.25 pounds of honey on average in their first year while the yield for rural bees is only 16.75 pounds.”

Bee health is particularly important because over the past decade bee populations have declined due to colony collapse disorder (CCD). CCD has no identified cause, although a correlation exists between harsh chemicals and bee disappearance. Because urban bees are not exposed to these chemicals, they are less likely to die off from CCD.

Honeybees are naturally gentle and non-aggressive. They may sting if they perceive a threat to their colony, but only as a last resort – the bee will die shortly after depositing its stinger. While foraging for nectar and pollen away from the colony, honeybees are completely docile and only concerned with the task they are set out to do. In most cases, people living in close proximity of beehives will never know that the honeybees are around.

The village board is aware that not everyone has a positive view of bees. Some individuals have a fear of bees (melissophobia). Other individuals or members of their family are at least mildly allergic to bee stings (it's around 3-5 percent of the population). These are concerns that the village will consider before granting a beekeeping permit.

This ordinance closely follows the regulatory framework that the village adopted concerning the keeping of chickens. The permit process, application form, and many of the regulations are substantially identical. Other elements are borrowed largely from the Wauwatosa model.

Here is how it will work. The village will issue a beekeeping permit subject to the following guidelines, limitations, and restrictions:

- An application is required, including a description and drawing that clearly represents the location where the hives will be kept on the lot, a description and depiction of all fencing, and any other structures to be used for beekeeping use. The application will also describe a plan to ensure (1) the proper maintenance and cleaning of the area where the bees will be kept, and (2) the proper watering of the bees.
- The number of hives is limited to two.

- All honeybees shall be kept in hives with removable frames that will be kept in sound and useable condition.
- A flyway barrier shall be located between the hives and the property lines for all hives located within 20 feet of the property line.
- All hives and related structures that form the apiary shall not be located in front or side yards and must be no less than 20 feet from the rear property line.
- Hives must be located a minimum of 50 feet from any structures located on another property.
- In the event the bees repeatedly exhibit aggressive behavior, it shall be the duty of the beekeeper to remove, destroy, or re-queen the hive.
- All apiary structures and flyways must be constructed, located, and maintained consistent with and conform to all applicable provisions of the village code.
- No one can keep bees that cause any nuisance, unhealthy condition, create a public health threat, or otherwise interfere with the normal use of property and enjoyment of life by humans or animals.
- No sales of honey, wax, or other products shall be made from a residential property.
- The village manager, or designee, will determine whether the application is in order consistent with the beekeeping and other ordinances, and is in harmony with the following factors:
 - the project is appropriate to the location proposed;
 - the project is compatible with the neighborhood;
 - the project is not detrimental to the property values of the surrounding property; and
 - the project is in keeping with the residential character and quality of the village.
- If those standards are met, the manager will mail notices of the application to contiguous property owners. If no owner(s) objects within 30 days, then the manager will issue the permit. If an owner files a written objection, the matter will be heard by the plan commission in a public hearing using the same standards. An aggrieved party can appeal the plan commission determination to the board of appeals.

The new ordinance is intended to balance the desires of residents who wish to keep bees with the expectations, and possible objections, of neighboring residents.

We do not expect the demand for beekeeping permits will be high. We do think, though, that creating the opportunity for urban beekeeping will enhance village life. For those dedicated to the endeavor, beekeeping in the Village of Fox Point is now welcome.

Douglas H. Frazer is a Fox Point resident and neighborhood contributor as well as the village president. The views expressed are his own and not necessarily those of the Village, the village board, other village board members, or Best Version Media, LLC.