

# Animal activists celebrate as Lawrence blocks chicken art project

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The Kansas City Star

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The chickens have been granted a stay of execution. City codes prevent Amber Hansen, a Lawrence artist, from displaying and then butchering chickens for an art project, a city official says.

And that has animal activists rejoicing.

Karen Davis, president and founder of United Poultry Concerns, considers the city's ruling a win for activism and chickens worldwide.

"We feel this project and our response to it has helped Amber even though the original project has been blocked," said Davis, whose group advocates for chickens. "We also feel that she has been introduced to a sensibility about animals that maybe she hadn't been exposed to before."

Hansen, a University of Kansas lecturer, had planned to house five chickens in a nomadic sculpture resembling a chicken coop for one month, encouraging public interaction before the birds were slaughtered and served as a part of a community potluck on April 21.

The project, called "The Story of Chickens: A Revolution," was intended to instigate public discourse about people and their food consumption, specifically in the switch from family farms to industrial farming.

Hansen could not be reached for comment Tuesday but an organization that gave her a grant for the project said she is reconfiguring her plans in light of city regulations and community feedback.

On Feb. 22, in response to Hansen's inquiries, Assistant City Attorney Chad Sublet informed her that the project violated city ordinances that protect the harm or killing of domesticated animals within city limits.

"A while back people wanted to keep chickens within the city for egg production and in order for that, they have to be considered domesticated," Sublet said. "The only animals allowed in the city are domesticated animals."

Davis, who currently resides in Virginia, said Lawrence resident and Animal Outreach of Kansas activist Judy Carman and another activist met with Hansen on Monday to discuss the project.

Carman could not be reached for comment but wrote in a letter to fellow activists that Hansen's potluck will go forward but that Hansen will allow a vegan chef to join three other chefs.

Carman also wrote that Hansen has requested her and another activist to speak during at the event, and they have accepted.

Hansen's project was being funded by the Andy Warhol Foundation for Visual Arts' Rocket Grants program in collaboration with the Charlotte Street Foundation and the University of Kansas Spencer Museum of Art.

The Rocket Grants program issued a statement Tuesday that it "remains committed to the project as the artist engages responsively and responsibly with her local community. Ms. Hansen's intention throughout the project has been to engage regional residents in dialogue about the relationship between humans and the food we consume."

Hansen had interviewed KU Professor of Anthropology and co-author of Slaughter House Blues, Don Stull, during the beginning stages of the project because of his research focus on farming and agriculture's transition to an industrial model of the course of the 20th century.

Stull said Tuesday that the project has more than met Hansen's goals of creating conversation surrounding the subject.

"I think perhaps the discussion about the project has gotten off-topic but it's not at all uncommon for people to wander off," Stull said.

When The Kansas City Star published a story about the project on Feb. 18, a barrage of criticism was already beginning to reach the city.

Sublet said his decision was based on a "balancing test."

"Any time there is a First Amendment issue you balance the rights of an individual, Ms. Hansen, against the public health and safety of the citizens and in this case we have to provide for the safety of the citizens and there is a great interest in preventing animal cruelty as well," Sublet said.

Davis and fellow activists hope the city ruling will inspire art galleries and establishments on a local and national level to implement a "No Animals in

Arts” policy.

“We do not believe that live animals should be treated as museum specimens or be art objects and we certainly don’t consider the slaughter of animals to be artistic,” Davis said.

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