



## The Two-Way

AMERICA

# Backyard Beekeeping Approved In Los Angeles

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Beekeeper Rob McFarland (photographed last year) inspects the beehive he keeps on the roof of his Los Angeles house. The Los Angeles City Council voted unanimously on Wednesday to allow residents to keep beehives in their backyards.

*Damian Dovarganes/AP*

Overturning a 136-year-old ban, the Los Angeles City Council voted on Wednesday to legalize urban beekeeping.

Once the ordinance is signed by the mayor, Los Angeles will join cities including New York, San Francisco and Washington in allowing beekeeping. There is even a beehive on the White House grounds.

The ordinance will limit beekeeping to backyards of single family homes and establish buffer zones, and beekeepers will have to provide a source of water at their hives, according to the Associated Press.

According to an op-ed in The Los Angeles Times by Noah Wilson-Rich, author of *The Bee: A Natural History*, the repeal of the beekeeping regulation is long overdue:

"On June 10, 1879, Los Angeles lawmakers banned beekeeping within city limits. According to Mark Vallianatos, who teaches environmental policy at Occidental College, their rationale was frankly preposterous. Having noted the affinity between bees and fruit trees, they reasoned that bees attacked and damaged fruit, and concluded that outlawing bees was the best way to preserve crops.

"Soon enough scientists debunked this ridiculous theory — bees are vitally important pollinators — and by 1917, the Los Angeles Times was calling the no-beekeeping policy 'an ancient and still-unrepealed city ordinance.'"

While critics worry about the dangers posed by bee stings, supporters point out that bees already live in the city in the wild. The AP adds, "Feral hives that are discovered in public areas usually are wiped out because of worries that they might contain Africanized bees — hybrids of tamer European honeybees and a hardier but more aggressive strain."

In the op-ed, Wilson-Rich counters this claim:

"Hives maintained by beekeepers are less dangerous than wild hives; beekeepers effectively tame hives through re-queening — the process of removing an aggressive queen and manually adding a docile queen."

The vote is welcome news to scientists who warn that declining bee populations, due to such factors as climate change and loss of habitat, will damage crop yields, as NPR's Allison Aubrey reported in April.

"Even if you're not a lover of bees or honey, you should know that bees are critically important to our food supply. They help pollinate billions of dollars of crops each year, from apples and carrots to blueberries and almonds.

"So if bees are threatened, ultimately, the production of these crops will be threatened, too."

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