

Dear Chair Sheldon and Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife,

The Agency of Agriculture would like to thank you again for inviting us to discuss H.704. We very much appreciate your time, attention, and insight. I write now because I heard that someone represented that the Statehouse is .4 acres in size, and that assessment did not seem quite right.

For context, an acre is equal to approximately 10 high school basketball courts (just the court—not the gym). (A court is 84' x 50' or 4,200 square feet. Ten courts = 42,000 sq. ft, and an acre is 43,560 sq. ft.) As it seems like more than four basketball courts can fit inside the Statehouse, we requested a related map.

Below, please see maps of the Statehouse and its grounds from the following ANR website: [Vermont ANR - Natural Resources Atlas HTML5 Viewer](#)

The individual who viewed the map also calculated and listed some of the combined areas. The map suggests the Statehouse occupies .74 acres of land, and that the building, steps, walkways, and parking lot use 2.28 acres. The grounds themselves are obviously much larger. (And, while the Statehouse is massive and appears large, we all know its footprint is not as big as it seems....)

AOFBs will certainly not have buildings like the Statehouse, but when evaluating the footprint and the potential disturbance for driveways, extended farm roads, parking, water and sewer, and any new building, 10 basketball courts can be occupied on a farm more quickly than we think. The one-acre size is also administratively prudent, so district coordinators and district commissions are not consistently tasked with making time-consuming and challenging judgments about the size of AOFB disturbances on a farm.

Regardless, the goal is not to spur unfettered development. It is only to encourage and permit farms to reasonably diversify their existing businesses, which are already developed for the business of farming. Importantly, all new development would be on the farm and specifically related to the farm and/or agricultural products. We believe this type of concentrated development on existing developed farms may help keep farms in operation and may help revitalize our rural communities. As Abbey Willard shared recently, Vermont lost 81 dairy farms in 2020 and 2021, and 32% of its cropland from 1987-2017. The question may be whether we want more second homes or more working farms.

As one farmer told me recently, “those of us who are left are pretty good at it.” The objective is to retain existing farms by allowing them to modestly expand their farming repertoire, and any community that wants to regulate AOFBs can utilize site plan review to impose appropriate restrictions. Our sense is that many rural communities would welcome on-farm development that fits within one acre on an existing farm—particularly if it would help their neighbors remain in business. We also believe that farms who invite visitors not only promote local economic vitality, but are also responsive to the related economic incentive to beautify their existing farms.

We recognize that not everyone has the same views and that divergent perspectives are essential to good policymaking. We want to take a reasoned and balanced approach that helps

farms, rural communities, and economic development without harming others. We did not propose changing the Act 250 “farming” definition to incorporate these additional farm-related practices. Under that direction, AOFBs would not be limited in size. While we agree that it is important to consider everyone’s interests, we also want Vermont to remain a vibrant agricultural State. We think H.704 works to strike that balance, but if it does not meet crossover, we very much look forward to continuing to discuss this important issue.

Thank you so much and have a terrific weekend.

Steve

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Statehouse buildings: 0.74 Acres
Statehouse buildings + entry steps: 0.88 ac.
Statehouse buildings + walkways: 1.48 acres
Statehouse buildings + walkways + parking: 2.28 acres



