
**Written Testimony to the VT House Cmte. on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry
Concerning proposed zoning exemptions for bill S.323**

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**From: Chip Sawyer
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I thank Chair Durfee and members of the Committee for consideration of my written testimony on this matter.

I am writing about proposed municipal zoning exemptions concerning backyard gardening and animal husbandry, specifically the language proposed by Steven Collier dated April 20, 2026.

I believe that a State-mandated zoning exemption for plant cultivation and for poultry that is not otherwise regulated by the Required Agricultural Practices Rule (RAPs) will leave households in our dense neighborhoods in St. Albans, and elsewhere in the state, no avenues for preventing and addressing very real quality of life issues and nuisances that will undoubtedly arise from the intense proximity of daily life in these areas.

The average lot size in our City neighborhoods is less than a third of an acre, and the median is a quarter acre. Some residential structures, especially in our historic neighborhoods, are less than 5 feet from the neighboring property line.

While we cannot bring resolution for every conflict that may arise between neighbors, common zoning practices, such as required setbacks from neighboring property lines, are used by municipalities like ours to attempt to provide distance as a preventative measure, if nothing else.

The zoning exemption as proposed would leave both the State and our City with no tools to prevent a household from locating structures associated with animals, compost or waste containment right up to the property line, which is what one may tend to do if there are trying to maximize the interior space of their backyard. I wish I could say that we could assume that every landowner would take their neighbors into account when undertaking such activities, but I can tell you from experience that we cannot. In addition, I can also tell you from experience that we ought to assume that some instances of cultivation and backyard animal husbandry will be under-resourced and badly managed, including for poultry. Our municipality must have a recourse to address such situations. A required setback is the least that we can do to try to mitigate nuisances and quality of life issues in these situations.

As proposed, the draft zoning exemption does not define how large a “small backyard poultry

flock” could be, and it leaves such a use exempt from regulation by both the State and the municipality. At the very least, I would request that municipalities retain our current ability to require setbacks for structures associated with animal husbandry and the containment of waste and compost, in instances that are not otherwise regulated by the RAPs.

I welcome any comments or questions.

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