

Oregon Senate rejects bill meant to pave the way for backyard chickens, bees, and veggies

Updated: Jun. 04, 2021, 3:03 p.m.

Published: Jun. 03, 2021, 3:56 p.m.

By Chris Lehman | *The Oregonian/OregonLive*

The Oregon Senate voted down a bill Thursday that would have allowed people in planned communities to override their homeowners association bylaws in order to grow a garden, raise hens or keep bees.



Oregon state senators rejected a bill that would have required homeowners associations to allow gardens, hens and beekeeping. (Terry Chea) AP

House Bill 3322 fell two votes short in the Senate after previously passing the House, 53-2. It is now dead for the session.

“People make choices about where they live,” said Sen. Lee Beyer, D-Springfield, who was one of four Democrats who joined most Republicans in voting against the bill. “Some people want to live in a planned community that’s very dense, and that doesn’t have animals of any kind. And I think that’s a reasonable choice.”

The three other Democrats who voted against it were Sen. Betsy Johnson of Scappoose, Sen. Kate Lieber of Beaverton and Sen. Chris Gorsek of Troutdale. Sen. Dick Anderson of Lincoln City was the only Republican to vote in favor of the bill.

Supporters said the measure would help empower more Oregonians to grow or raise their own food, which could help their families’ budgets. They also said growing or raising food would have an educational benefit.

“Unfortunately, a lot of city kids don’t really know where their food comes from,” said Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, D-Portland. “It will help children understand the importance of our incredible agricultural heritage in this state.”

Although an outright ban would not have been permitted under the bill, it would still have allowed homeowners associations to require that the gardening, hen-raising and beekeeping be conducted in a “competent and proficient manner.” The bill would also not have superseded local municipal ordinances which may ban chickens, for example.

One of Oregon’s largest planned communities submitted testimony opposing the measure.

“We believe that small-scale agriculture and food production has a place in some communities, but not in our well-planned and managed landscape,” wrote Steve Switzer on behalf of the Charbonneau Country Club Board of Directors.

The country club, in Wilsonville, consists of 13 separate homeowners associations that include more than 1,600 homes. It allows its residents to have dogs and cats and other “tame” pets but disallows raising, breeding or keeping any other animals or poultry, including bees.

“Our homeowner rules are written by our members to protect our common interests,” wrote Switzer, who added that “vegetable gardens” are permitted in Charbonneau.

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