

February 26, 2024

Dear Members of Bristol's Historic District Commission,

In hand I have the most current Historic Commission Agenda for the meeting scheduled for March 7, 2024. On this agenda, there is a proposal for permanent placement/accessory structure of a Santa House to the southern side of The Bristol Statehouse/Bristol County Courthouse (a registered 501C3); a different nonprofit, The James D. Rielly Foundation requests approval for an additional non-compliant accessory structure.

Taken from the Bristol Statehouse Foundation website: "The mission of the Bristol Statehouse Foundation embraces restoration, preservation and education. The restored and maintained building will serve as a site for the study, appreciation and enjoyment of our national, state and community heritage. Through exhibits, lectures, re-enactments and other programs, we will celebrate the essence of American history, our freedoms and our multi-cultural inheritance. We are committed to the youth of the town and region and specific activities will be dedicated towards bringing these values to them." With that, a fictional Santa House is proposed to be permanently placed next to the important Bristol County Courthouse on the Town Common. Among the earliest directives of the Bristol founders in the Grand Articles of 1680 set aside a one-acre square for a Town Common which continues to be used and enjoyed today. The Courthouse is considered an outstanding Federal design, attributed to John Holden Greene or Russell Warren and served as one of the meeting places for the state's General Assembly from 1819 to 1852. Next to it and under the proposed Santa House are the numerous graves without distinct identification; although some of the stones have been moved across to the opposite side of Wood St., the exact location of all bodies has never been determined. In addition, four beautiful civic and religious buildings are on high street on the

common which were carefully considered before their construction in terms of their design and public benefit.

The Santa House is owned by a separate/private non-profit and was not vetted by the people of Bristol for consideration over its value to permanently take up space on the common. It violates countless historic preservation guidelines most noticeably its scale and design—it does not reflect the design of Bristol’s important architectural heritage. People in the historic district play by the rules of the HDC. This project undermines this process by slipping it in through a back door tactic—that it was supposed to be temporary and removed each year—but it is now deemed easier to leave it in place.

The historical significance of a Santa house does not exist however, the character of our historic district defines Bristol as we know it. In attendance to HDC meetings, often with clients, as “they” come to learn the importance of preservation, I have come to learn the significance/reasoning of maintaining and preserving history with historical replication of yesteryear with windows, siding, roofing materials etc., which include building and accessory structures at often an enormous expense to proprietors; setting precedence will be problematic for Bristol moving forward as the face of the historic district will change the face of Bristol.

In addition, I hope to remind the Historic District Commission of something not conjecture in nature: in the past, an unexpected happening caused the Clydesdale horses to scoot into the crowd at almost that very spot of the Santa House location; placement of any structure behind the Fourth of July viewing stand can present a safety issue for individuals who struggle with movement and accessibility as it is not uncommon to see our viewing stand to capacity. Although Bristol prepares for the worst, current day poses many issues uncommon to expected outcome.

I am extremely concerned for Bristol.

Please consider keeping Bristol safe and beautiful.

Thank you for time.

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