

February 10, 2024

To the Members of the Bristol Historic District Commission,

I am writing this letter in support of the James D. Riley Foundation's request to keep the Bristol Santa House on the Bristol Statehouse grounds indefinitely.

As we know, the Town Common was originally used for public gathering (as the site of the first meeting house). In the early 1800s, the First Baptist Church and Statehouse were added to the site, with Byfield and Wally Schools added later in the century. Today, the Town Common is used for civic, recreational, social, educational, and spiritual purposes – freely open to everyone.

The Bristol Santa House is enhancing the current use of the Town Common by welcoming families and individuals (those with and without special needs) to visit and enjoy an immersive holiday experience without cost. It is totally run by volunteers. As a program of the James D. Rielly Foundation, the Bristol Santa House serves as a space for everyone to make treasured memories, regardless of any physical, mental, or financial challenges.

The building itself is not trying to appear to be a historic structure, yet it does not detract from the historic charm of the setting. The use of the structure perfectly suits the current use of the Common as a public site, accessible to all. I believe that as the Bristol Santa House becomes even more well-known, it will continue to serve its host Town as a destination site and experience.

I personally have only been associated with the James D. Rielly Foundation for a short time, having joined the board in January. I was compelled to join this joyful group of volunteers after witnessing the magic of the Bristol Santa House firsthand with my grandson, and then learning that the Santa House was just one part of the Foundation's work. The Rielly Foundation performs acts of kindness and charity throughout the year, often anonymously. I love the thought that their work will only increase over time, given encouragement and support. I hope the HDC will support the Foundation's work by providing a stable home base on the Town Common.

Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,



Dyan Vaughan
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