



# Town of Bristol, Rhode Island

## Department of Community Development

10 Court Street  
Bristol, RI 02809  
[bristolri.gov](http://bristolri.gov)  
401-253-7000

April 14, 2026

TO: Steven Contente, Town Administrator

FROM: Diane M. Williamson, Director

RE: **Recommendation for James D. Rielly Foundation's Santa House as a permanent structure on the Town Common**

*Williamson*

2026 APR 16 AM 9:39

JOHN CLERKS OFFICE  
BRISTOL, RHODE ISLAND

In review of the above mentioned petition, I have reviewed this with the Department and offer the following:

- In review of our records, the Santa House was first installed as a temporary structure on the State House property of the Town Common in 2023. In 2024, there was an application to the Historic District Commission (HDC) to keep to it as a permanent structure on the State House property, which was later withdrawn when the Building Official at the time provided preliminary guidance for what would be required for a permanent structure on the Town Common property. (A copy of Mr. Greenleaf's memo is attached). The applicant then submitted for a temporary structure being placed on the property in early November and being removed by mid February. In review of meeting minutes from the HDC there was discussion about this being a permanent structure on the Town Common and the minutes reflect that the HDC felt it was not an appropriate location for this as a permanent structure.
- The Town Common is zoned Public Institutional which is a zone intended to protect the existing institutional uses on the property. As a permanent structure, we do not believe it is in keeping with the purpose of the district. As you know, we are trying to find a long term lease holder for the Byfield School and it's possible that placing this as a permanent structure closer to Byfield School could impact future re-use of that building.

- The Building Official, Matt Cabral, would need to review the building plans for code review to determine specific code compliance requirements for the structure. The petition indicates that no permanent foundation is proposed however Mr. Cabral indicated that a foundation that extends below the frost line is required (as previously noted by the former Building Official). The petition also indicates that sidewalks and permanent electrical connections would be installed which adds additional improvements to the Common to support this structure.
- The site plan presented states “there are no known historic cemeteries within or immediately adjacent to the parcel”; however, there are historic unmarked graves on the Common.
- I have reviewed the recommendation of the Director of Parks and Recreation and agree that this could set a precedent for more requests from other organizations to have buildings on the Town Common.

For these reasons, I cannot support this request for permanent placement of the James D. Rielly Foundation’s Santa House on the Town Common. I would be happy to work with the Foundation to explore other locations for a permanent placement.

*Reviewed  
The Intake*



# TOWN OF BRISTOL, RHODE ISLAND

## BUILDING INSPECTION DEPARTMENT

March 7, 2024

**Preliminary Code Analysis;**  
Proposed Permanent Accessory Structure  
240 High St.  
Bristol, RI 02809

BRISTOL HISTORIC  
DISTRICT COMMISSION  
EXHIBIT 1  
DATE 3/7/2024

Assumption:

That the existing temporary wood frame structure remain in place permanently or, if the modifications required are too extensive, a new code compliant structure, be constructed in its place.

Building Code review based on the Rhode island Commercial Code (RI SBC-1, 2022). A separate Fire Marshall review will be required. The Fire Code is not always consistent with the Building Code and may lead to more conservative results.

Occupancy: Assembly Section 303.1.2. Small assembly spaces-Classified as Group B.  
Building area 10 ft. x 20 ft. 200sf. Occupant load: 200sf/150 occupants is 1 occupant. If allowed as a Concentrated Business area, 200/50=4 occupants maximum at any given time.  
Risk category 2

1. A foundation is required that extends below frost line. Section 1809.5. It is also probable that there are historic graves below the proposed location and an Archeological investigation may be required prior to excavation for any permanent structure.
2. Permanent accessibility provisions must be provided. This structure does not meet the requirements of any of the exceptions outlined in Section 1103.2. Permanent walkways and ramps will be required. Also, doorways must meet minimum size requirements and have Code compliant hardware. Arrangements will also need to be made for permanent accessible parking.
3. A permanent heating system is required to provide conditioned space per Section 1203.1.
4. The structure must meet the requirements of Section C401 of the RI SBC-8, the Rhode Island Energy Conservation Code.
5. The building framing system must meet the requirements of Chapter 16 of the IBC including provisions for High Wind Design potentially requiring Engineering analysis.

In addition, the Zoning officer did not object to placing the structure on the Town Common as a temporary seasonal use as it was a public use supported by the Town and the Christmas Festival Committee. However, as a permanent structure it is not in keeping with the purpose of the Public Institutional (PI) zoning district as found in the zoning ordinance.

These items represent a quick review provided to give a basic idea of potential code compliance issues. If a formal application is made, a Code Analysis will be required by a licensed RI Design Professional. Once an application is made and denied the applicant may appeal specific issues to the Bristol Building Code of Appeals Board.

Stephen Greenleaf-Building Official

cc Nick Toth, Diane Williamson, Ed Tanner, Eric Dickervitz, Robert Ferguson, Andy Teitz