

Ways and Means testimony from fraternal organizations on S.221
Sally Cummings, House Corporation Board Member, Tri Delta Sorority
April 16, 2014

My name is Sally Cummings; I'm on the House Corporation Board of Tri Delta. Tri Delta has owned and occupied our house for nearly 80 years. Located on the corner of Main and South Willard, the house was described in an article in the Free Press a couple of years ago as one of the old mansions in Burlington, and we were described as the stewards of the past. The role of stewards of our 164-year-old house is one we take very seriously and with great pride.

Were the tax exempt status to be repealed, we could not bear the financial burden for very long. Therefore, I envision a sequence of two events unfolding. The first is that the house would suffer from deferred maintenance. For example, at the moment, we are completing a \$65,000 window replacement project, which has taken us four years to complete. The yearly tax burden would likely amount to more than we've had available to spend each of the four summers on the windows, meaning under the proposed repeal, the old rope and pulley windows could not have been replaced. If maintenance is deferred, the house will no longer be a well-maintained historic site, but will become an eye sore on the main artery into downtown Burlington.

Secondly, deferred maintenance will likely and eventually result in us having to close our doors and cease operation. This would seem counter-productive to your goals of increased revenue. If past and current practices regarding the purchase and lease of Greek houses in the hill section of Burlington are an indicator of the future, many of the houses in question would likely be bought by the University or Champlain College. To wit Delta Psi fraternity on Summit Street was purchased by UVM, and Sigma Alpha Epsilon across the street, was purchased by Champlain College. Also, Champlain leased Kappa Alpha Theta for 5 years and is currently leasing Sigma Phi Epsilon. If Tri Delta and other houses in the areas near the two campuses were purchased by one of these educational institutions, they would once again become tax exempt, according to Vermont Statute 32 V.S.A 3802 Property Tax, thereby defeating the purpose of the proposed repeal. In addition, closure of the Greek houses in question would result in the addition of 150+ students yearly into the hunt for housing in Burlington, a community that is already struggling to come to terms with the development of housing for its student population.

Were this repeal to pass, it is doubtful we could limp along for 8 more years, let alone another 80. I therefore, respectfully request that the repeal of the tax exempt status not move forward, but that the committee seek an alternative solution in the mutually beneficial interests of all parties. Thank you.