

READING *Historical Society*



VIA EMAIL ONLY

Reading, Vermont

December 3, 2013

Mr. Gabrielle Marina
Property Tax Exemption Study Committee

Dear Sir,

I understand that the Study Committee will be taking testimony on December 16th in Montpelier on the proposed legislation amend certain statutes relating to exempting certain properties from taxation. Unfortunately, my schedule will not allow me to appear in person to address the committee. However, I would like to strongly urge the committee to include properties owned by local Historical Societies in the list of exempt properties. It could easily be added as 32 V.S.A. § 3832 (a) (4), with the same condition that such exemption needs to be voted on and approved by the voters at a regular or special meeting, duly warned.

Probably most of the Towns and Cities in Vermont have a local Historical Society. I suspect that a vast majority of them own some property in which they have collected and preserved many artifacts that are of great historical significance to the town. Additionally, a great many of the towns and cities probably have other buildings that they have inherited, so to speak, because no one else was in the position to care for them. The Reading Historical Society is probably a good example of this.

We own a relatively small house right in the village of Felchville, on less than one quarter acre, that we use for our extensive collection, for a small town, of artifacts that have been donated to the Society for preservation. We also own the former Universalist Church across the street from the RHS house. The church was given to the Historical Society many years ago. We have been maintaining it, for instance putting on a new roof, foundation work, painting, putting plexiglass over the stained glass windows, etc. Although we are not now actively using it, we do allow the Reading Public Library to use it for excess book storage and an annual book sale. The church sits on a very small parcel of land, less than 1/10th of an acre, does not have a water source or a septic system. If the RHS did not preserve it probably it would just fall into disrepair. Lastly, the RHS owns a parcel of land of less than one-half acre known as the "Stone Chimney Site". As the name implies, there is an old cellar hole on the property with a massive stone fireplace/chimney. It was donated to the RHS many years ago by a family whose roots go back several generations in town. We cannot sell it because if we don't want it the reversionary interest kicks in and it

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goes back to the family of the donors.

Neither the church or the Stone Chimney Site has any monetary value to the Historical Society and we would be hard pressed to pay even minimal taxes on them. The Historical Society house has some value, but only because it is adjacent to the Reading Public Library and we allow them to take water from our well. The lot is too small to support a septic system so it could no longer be used as a residence. Again, we would be hard pressed to justify paying any property tax on the property.

I suspect that the voters who show up at town meeting would support an article on the warning to exempt these properties from both the municipal tax and the education tax. I think they should be given an opportunity to make that decision. I also suspect that a vast majority of the 246 Towns and Cities in this state would feel the same way. If the legislature feels that the small amount of revenue that would be lost because of this exemption it should do something about the vastly inequitable current use program.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jonathan L. Springer, President
Reading Historical Society

cc: Town of Reading Selectboard
Town of Reading Listers